Folk Music of Spain

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Foreword by Abel Pellen

With all of Spain's provincialisms, there is a marked universality to her culture. Indeed, it would be difficult to find her equals in this respect among the other peoples of the earth. This is as true of the cultures of those regions in the middle of the country, like Castile, as it is of Andalusia in the south separated from Moorish Africa only by a narrow strait, or of Catalonia and the Basque country which border on Europe.

Unquestionably, Spain is still a land of regions, of provinces and sub-provinces within those regions, above all of individuals passionate in their attachment to the tillable though worn soil from which most of the Spanish population struggles to eke out a bare subsistence.

Although Spain is that paradox, a land of many worlds -- "Each man's head is a world," says an old Spanish proverb -- she is also the possessor of a profound and extensive folk heritage which constitutes the real core of all her different cultures. Out of this core Spain has been able to generate a great and powerful expression of music and dancing rooted in her hard and age-old agrarian way of life, and revealing the rich influences of earlier Moorish culture-patterns as well as the later modifying effects of a distinctly Spanish form of Christianity interwoven with many pagan attributes.

Spain has a way of defying its traditions while, at the same time, it holds the best that is in them close to itself. Catalonia still has its own language, rooted in old provenal, and its own music: its stately choral music that stems from the Gregorian chants, its provenal songs, and especially its orchestral sardanas which originated in the Ampurista when that area was a colony of Ancient Greece. And so with the other regions -- Valencia, Asturias, Cordoba and Granada. But just as the sardana subjects its Early Greek pattern to an energy and an affirmation that are peculiarly Catalan, so the music of Valencia, for instance, superimposes a positive, triumphant mood, by means of a swift-moving background of instruments, on the Moorish lament in the foreground.

Even when the origins are not so apparent, the deeper meanings and feelings are sensed. The words in a Jota of Navarre or a fandango of Andalusia may be simply those of a peasant complaining of the soil's toughness, of love come to an end, or of brothers separated by the demands of forced military service. But in the wild burst and the breathtaking range and control of the melody there is the unmistakable note of suffering -- and also of awareness of a whole people.

Introduction and Notes

By Emilio de Torre

Throughout the world there exists a belief, as widely spread is it is inaccurate, that Spanish folk music consists almost exclusively of dances.

From ancient times the Spanish dancers have enjoyed great popularity, not only in Spain, but also beyond her boundaries. Historians tell us that dancers from Cadiz, accompanied by their castanets, entertained the Roman Emperors and patricians with their typical dances. As time went by, some of the traditional Spanish dances spread throughout the world and entered the domain of cultured music. Good examples of this are, for instance, the Saraband, the Chaconne, the Pavan, the Bolero and, more recently, the Jota. In our times the avalanche of Spanish dances has occasionally acquired the characteristics of a true invasion; just a few years ago there were more schools of Spanish dancing in the United States than in Spain itself.
Among the great Spanish dancers who have toured the world during the last thirty or forty years, -- including such artists as Antonio Bilbao, "Faico", Antonia Merce "La Argentina", Vicente Escudero, Encarnacion Lopez "Argentinita", and others -- there were some whose performances were truly genuine, especially in the field of Andalusian dances.

Similar has been the case of the great native and foreign composers, who were attracted mainly by the rhythmical, melodic and harmonic wealth of the folk dances and by the unlimited possibilities these dances offered to orchestration. They looked to the dances rather than to the songs for their inspiration. They leaned heavily on Andalusian dance themes although we find among the works of these composers beautiful samples derived from other regional styles of Spain, such as the Basque Zorcico, the Catalanon Sardana, the Seguidilla from La Mancha, and, above all, the Navarrese and Aragonese Jotas, dance airs all of them.

Although Spain has given the world such singers as Manuel Garcia, Julián Gayarre, María Barrientos, Miguel Fleta and Lucrecia Bori, to mention only a few, these artists devoted themselves mostly to opera and concert work. Only on rare occasions, as in the case of Manuel García, did they present characteristically Spanish songs. As for the true folk singers, only a few ever left Spain, and the majority of those who did went to Ibero-America.

All this, plus the fact that dance music is more easily spread, accounts in some measure for the fact that it is not the songs, but the dances which gained universal popularity. The abundance of songs in Spain, is however, really extraordinary and their number is infinitely greater than that of the dances, taking also into account the fact that most of these dances are songs as well.

Spain is an old country, through which have passed, with the centuries, peoples of widely different origins and cultures; various civilizations reached their summit on Spanish soil after long centuries of gestation; and Spain has also been the scene of violent clashes between men and between ideas. It was only natural that it should become the possession of a very rich folklore treasure.

On a fundamentally Celtic and Iberian foundation, this folklore treasure was taking form and enriching itself with the successive contributions of the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians, the Romans and the Goths.

The adoption by the Catholic Church of the Byzantine Liturgical music contributed heavily. And there were, of course the precious sediments left by the Moslems from North Africa, the Jews, and the Gypsies, all of whom played their important part in the drama of Spanish acculturation.

These many elements, interacting upon one another in a vigorous and vital environment, gradually came to produce the varied and unique forms, full of the universal and the indigenous, that are called Spanish folk music.

SIDE I, Band 1: JOTAS MALLORQUINAS.
Mallorca, or Majorca, is the largest of the Balearic Islands, which lie in the middle of the Mediterranean between Spain and Italy. The Majorcans usually get together once a week to enjoy themselves and sing and dance. In contrast with other Spanish dances, the Jota Mallorquina (Majorcan Jota) is rather simple, strong and dignified. As a rule, it is sung in the Majorcan dialect -- a variation of the Catalan language spoken in the Balearic Islands -- and the Instruments used for accompaniment are, generally, the violin, the guitar and castanets, to which, as in the case of the Jota Navarra (Navarrese Jota) already mentioned, various others occasionally are added.

SIDE I, Band 2: TENO UN HERMANO EN EL TERCIO, and Y VOY POR LA CARRETERA (Navarrese Jotas). Of the genuine Spanish types of song and dance, the Jota is one of the most popular, not only in the Iberian Peninsula, but also throughout the lands of Ibero-America. The rhythm of the Jota is ternary and its movement lively and gay. It seems to have originated on the banks of the Ebro River in Navarre and Aragon. Besides the Navarrese and Aragonese types there are Jotas from Asturias, both Castile, Murcia, Valencia, Majorca, etc. the Jota went beyond the limits of folklore and invaded the theatre and concert fields, becoming a source of inspiration for a number of great composers, both Spanish and foreign, such as De Falla, Albeniz, Granados, Turina, Larregla, Saraste, Breton, Massenet, Chabrier, Ginka, etc. Many of the zarzuelas (typical Spanish operettas) composed toward the end of the last century and the beginning of the present had Jotas. Who does not remember, for instance, "La Bruja", "La Alegria de la Huerta", "El Guitarrico", "El Trust De Los Tenorios", not to mention the famous opera "La Dolores"?

The basic group of instruments that form a rondalla consists of guitars and bandurrias, to
which, occasionally, are added panderetas, castanets, triangles and sometimes violins and flutes.

SIDE I, Band 3: FOLIADA DE ENTRIMO. This number belongs to a type of song and dance very characteristic of the Galician region in northwestern Spain. In 3/4 or 3/8 time and with a lively and gay movement, this music is generally accompanied by the gaita, the tamboril and the pandereta. The gaita (bagpipe), brought westward by the Romans, became the favorite instrument of Scotland, and it remains very popular in lower Brittany; today, as it has been for many centuries, it is the typical instrument of Galicia and Asturias, in Spain. The tamboril is a small drum which, hung from the left arm, is played with a single drumstick. The pandereta is a small drum with jingles in its rim.

SIDE I, Band 4: ALALA D'AS RIAS BAIXAS. The alala is a type of song widely spread through some of Spain's northern provinces. As its title suggests, this "Alala D'as Rias Baixas" (Alala of the Low Estuaries) comes from the region of that name, which borders the Atlantic Coast in Pontevedra, one of the four Galician provinces. The time in these songs varies, being first slow and free and then lively and danceable. The accompaniment is generally provided by the gaita (bagpipe), which in turn is accompanied in the introduction, in the danceable portions, and in the ritornelles by the tamboril and the pandereta.

SIDE II, Band 1: LOS ALLERANOS. In spite of its slow, broad, solemn movement, the lyrics of the first part of this song, from which the title derives, are in a light and humorous vein. These lyrics tell us of four hearty, hungry alleranos (aldeanos, peasants) who arrive at a village known as Santullano and ask for beans, bacon and sausages -- a typical Asturian dish called fabada. And the singer goes on to relate: "The beans were none too many, the sausages I didn't see, and the bacon was still on the hoof," after which he exclaims: "Good God, what a banquet!" In sharp contrast with these lyrics, those of the following part are dedicated to the Virgin of Covadonga, so greatly revered in Asturias, and the song finishes with a short and lively refrain.

SIDE II, Band 2: LOS MINEROS DEL FONDON. Asturias, one of the oldest regions of Spain, is also the cradle of one of the strongest, most democratic and most freedom-loving peoples of the world. The history of Spain is full of memorable acts of devotion and bravery by the people of this region. Their role in the Spanish Civil War, for instance, is not likely to be soon forgotten. As a rule, the Asturian songs are sung in Bable, which is the dialect spoken in that region, and the accompaniment is generally provided by the gaita. "Los Mineros del Fondon" (The Miners of El Fondo) consists of two parts. The first, slow, sustained vibrant, carries the words from which the title derives:

"The miners of El Fondo
We all wear berets
With a legend that reads:
'We have just finished at the mine.'"

The second part is a danceable refrain, playful and humorous, the lyrics of which have no connection whatsoever with the words of the first portion.

SIDE II, Band 3: QUE EL AGUA TE NEGARE, NO TE QUIERO, and NO TE PUEDO PERDONAR. The fandango is an ancient Spanish dance air in triple time. It is one of the most popular types of song throughout the Iberian Peninsula. Fandangos are sung in Asturias, both Castiles, Murcia, Andalusia, etc., the interpretation varying slightly in the different regions according to local styles. There are other diverse variants of fandango known under such names as Murcianas, Granadinas, Malagueñas, Rondelñas, and so on. At the turn of the century, in Andalusia, near the Portuguese border and in a small village called Aloano, the fandango acquired certain special characteristics that contributed to create still another type. This form, born among the smugglers who infested the region and among the customs officers who were in continuous conflict with them, came to be called fandanguillo. Later on this fandanguillo entered the domains of flamenco. With the passing of time the diminutive fandanguillo was dropped for the more familiar fandango.

SIDE II, Band 4: LAS HOJAS SECAS. The sardana is a very characteristic folk dance of Catalonia, similar to our square dances. It is preceded by what is known as the contrapunto, a sort of call played solo by the flaviol. Cohla is the name given to the popular musical groups of Catalonia which, with various instrumental combinations, still use the typical flaviol and tamborino of the medieval minstrels, and play the sardanas, the contrapas and other folk dances of this region. The flaviol is a small flute which is blown at one end and played with the left hand; while the tamborino is an instrument similar to the tamboril.

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