

# Flamenco at Córdoba and on Discs

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**I**N RECENT YEARS most of the festivals of *cante jondo*, or "deep song," and Flamenco singing have have taken place in Córdoba, which rivals Seville, Cadiz, and Granada as a meeting place of the aficionados.

On a sultry Saturday night in May of this year, great crowds gathered in the majestic Plaza de la Corredera, the traditional scene in centuries past of royal joustings, bullfights, and carnivals. For weeks the taverns in the streets off the square had echoed and reechoed with the thrumming of countless guitars, and the melancholy drawn-out *ay!* which the Gypsies chant at the beginning of their rite.

The most remarkable feature of this year's festival of Andalusian song in Córdoba was the emphasis given by the organizers to versions of the Flamenco styles created by the celebrated stars of the past, whom the *cantaoras* of today evoked as they improvised the traditional *soleares* from Triana, Utrera, and Alcalá de Guadaira; *seguidillas* of Manuel Cagancho from the Cava, and Tomás el Nitri from the Monte del Pirolo; *deblas* of Manuel Torres; and *malagueñas* of Enrique, "the Twin," from the *café de chinitas* in Malaga.

On the last day of the festival Antonio, Spain's premier dancer, and his ballet performed before a huge audience in the Alcázar of the Christian Kings as a prelude to the solemn proclamation of the winner of the guerdon of song, and the bestowal of the Prize of 100,000 pesetas and a golden key to the victorious minstrel, Antonio de Mairena. As we listened to the symposium, which concluded the festival, with its jumble of Andalusian song and dance styles that vary from town to town, even from village to village like the *ragas* of Indian music, we remembered the many festivals we had attended up and down Andalusia ever since that greatest of all festivals of "deep song," which was organized by Manuel de Falla and his friends, Ignacio Zuloaga, the Basque painter, and Federico Garcia Lorca, the Granadine poet, in the Alhambra at Granada in 1922.

This year the audience in Córdoba was by comparison drab, and we missed

the poetry of former days. In 1922 the emphasis was on the ancient ritualistic *cante jondo* with its primitive blacksmith's song or *martinetes*, devoid of accompaniments except for the tapping of the style-stick by the singer to imitate the beating of the hammer on the anvil. The Gypsies, according to Falla, brought into Andalusia from the East a new musical style which constitutes *cante jondo*, a term given to a group of Andalusian folk songs whose prototype is the *Siriguiya Gitana*, and from which other forms such as the *polo*, *martinete*, and *soleares* are derived. These must be distinguished from the more modern groups of lighter style called by the name Flamenco, which include *malagueñas*, *granadinas*, and *rondeñas*. The Gypsy, as the Spaniard says, "*tiene la alegría de estar triste*" (rejoices in being sad). It is significant that the Hungarians, who likewise are so susceptible to the improvisation of the *cigany* fiddler, when he plays to their face, say: "*sirva vigad a Magyar*" (the Magyar revels in sadness). The word *jondo* is the strongly aspirated dialect form of *hondo*, meaning "deep" and "profound." *Cante jondo* is thus the song of the tragic sense of life, or as a Spanish writer says, "the song of humanity in chains."

The word *flamenco* expresses an essential element in Andalusia. Some say the word was applied to the Gypsies because, with their physical appearance (slender legs and prominent buttocks) and bright colors, they resembled the flamingo. Another explanation was that the word was derived from the two Arabic words *fellah* (husbandman) and *mangu* (to sing)—hence the singing of the country people or folk song. The word is applied by people in conversation to anything that is bright, vivacious, and roguish. The Gypsies of Andalusia are more lively and roguish than the native Andalusians and are renowned for their repartee and lisp-ing, tripping speech, hence *muy flamencos*. The word became fashionable in Spain in 1875 when the first production of the opera "Carmen" by Bizet made Gypsified fashions the rage.

When we listen to Gypsy singing in Andalusia we must distinguish between "deep song" and Flamenco. The "deep song" style is deeper, more solemn, and more primitive, with metallic tones. It

is also called *cante grande* or "great song": the Flamenco style, which is of lighter texture, is called *cante chico*, or "little song."

In order to illustrate some of these essential characteristics of "deep song" and Flamenco, let us consider the recordings of songs and dances performed by the distinguished Spanish dancer Lutys de Luz and her partners Pablitos and Niño de Ecija, the *cantaor*, and Pepe Tovar, the guitarist (Monitor, MF 357). Lutys de Luz, following in the footsteps of the great dancer Antonia Mercé, La Argentina, gives dance recitals involving the intervention of serious music such as the works of Falla, Granados, and Albéniz, but unlike La Argentina she does not neglect the Flamenco rhythms, and in this record she strings together *tientos*, *zapateado* (an acrobatic step dance), and *tanguillo* to form a rhapsodic dance. And Niño de Ecija sings a *malagueña* with so much religious feeling that his singing has a touch of *cante jondo* quality.

**S**O intimate is the relationship existing between the *cantaor* and his guitarist that the guitar has been called "the conscience of Andalusia." It is the guitarist in Flamenco who creates the atmosphere for the singer and the background which enables the singer to find scope for his inspiration. He can produce both melody and harmony from his instrument, and being a Gypsy he accentuates its harsh metallic tone.

Another attempt at adapting Flamenco technique and rhythms to serious music has been made by the virtuoso guitarist and composer Vicente Gomez in "Concierto Flamenco" (Decca Stereo 74088). His concerto is in three movements: *Amanecer* (Dawn in Seville); *Crepúsculo* (sunset in Córdoba), and *Fiesta* (Fiesta in Granada). It exploits all the gamut of Flamenco motifs in pleasant and colorful fashion, for Vicente Gomez is a consummate master of rhythmic effects, and in the third movement he conjures up with great skill the atmosphere of the night fiestas in the Gypsy caves of the Albaicin. The concerto is followed by a "Calypso fantasy." He has been fortunate in having as partner Dorothy McManus, whose piano accompaniments add a sparkling quality to the record.

# Recordings in Review

## Two by Britten

BRITTEN: "Noye's Fludde." Owen Brannigan, Sheila Rex, Trevor Anthony, etc., with the English Chamber Orchestra, a children's orchestra and chorus conducted by Norman Del Mar. London OS 25331, \$5.98. *Sonata, Opus 65.* SCHUMANN: "Fünf Stücke im Volkston." DEBUSSY: *Sonata.* Mstislav Rostropovich, cello, with Benjamin Britten, piano. London CS 6237, \$5.98.

One near certainty about any new work of Britten these days is that it is not likely to stretch the mental faculties of the listener or challenge him to comprehend an unfamiliar idiom. In the years between forty-five and fifty (which he will reach next year), when some composers have made impressive forward steps in striking power and diversity of idiom, Britten continues to write much the same music as he has for the past fifteen years or so.

Nevertheless, Rostropovich's suavely articulate performance provides strong reason to believe that "Britten, Opus 65" will be a familiar inscription for some time to come on programs of cello recitals. In this work of 1960-61, Britten has written considerably for the cello, and thoughtfully for it in combination with the piano. All the amenities of range, balance, and mutual advantage are accounted for by plan, with little left to mischance.

My basic complaint with the five movements ("Dialogo," "Scherzo-pizzicato," "Elegia," "Marcia," and "Moto perpetuo") is that they are palatable rather than nourishing. That is, the sound comes pleasantly to the ear, satisfying immediate aesthetic sensitivities, but provides little to sustain or stimulate the attention on a second or third hearing. This, certainly, is a formula for ready acceptance, but it does not promise much in durability.

"Noye's Fludde," being the setting of the Chester Miracle Play of the Middle Ages, is clearly a special case, providing for the participation of a children's orchestra (strings plus recorders, percussion, bugles, and handbells) and chorus to augment the adult principals and chamber musicians. Some of its details—such as the Chaucerian English—suggest that it may have influenced the plan of the recent Stravinsky work on the same subject (which it antedates by several years), but it inhabits another intellectual world altogether. This is one of simulated naïveté and realistic depiction of the animals (punctuated by a "Kyrie eleison" and an "Alleluia!"), but it sorely wants the visual elements for total effect. Or, perhaps, like toffee and water biscuits, this is a taste that is best acquired by birth.

In the other works of the Rostropovich disc, Britten's performances are of a quality to make Gerald Moore's reference to him (in his forthcoming "Am

I Too Loud?"), as "the world's greatest accompanist" more than a mere pleasantry. He and Rostropovich clearly have a communion of feeling which, like love at first sight, can be neither manufactured nor denied.

## Bach by Dart

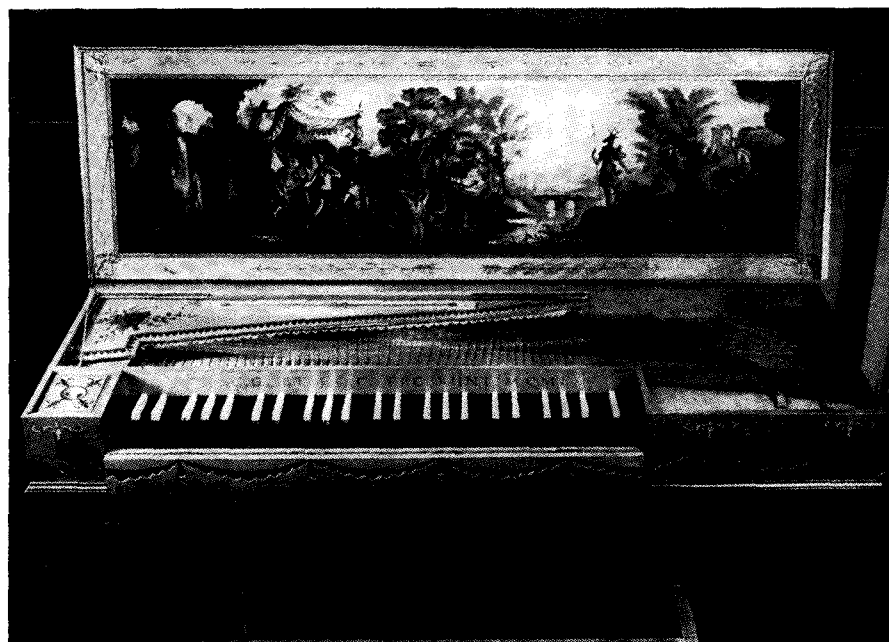
BACH: *French Suites (Nos. 1-6).* Thurston Dart, clavichord. L'Oiseau Lyre SOL 60039, \$5.98.

Quantitatively, the sound produced by Dart on his instrument is hardly greater than the guitar's, and, being not quite so easily manipulated, even harder to reproduce. But, with all the problems, performer and technicians have made a brilliant success of demonstrating its suitability to these particular works. Whether it would serve as well for the English or German (partitas) suites must wait for future determination, but in terms of the characteristic movements (Courante, Sarabande, Gavotte, Gigue, etc.) which come and go in these six works, it flourishes famously.

More than a little of this is due to the masterful craftsmanship of Thomas Goff, the celebrated English contemporary instrument builder. Now (by the evidence of the fifth edition of Grove's Dictionary) in his mid-sixties, he has spent over half his life blending contemporary refinements in *matériel* and design with the specifications of the eighteenth-century instrument, with results that must be heard to be appreciated fully.

Among distinctive features of the Goff clavichord are a relatively rich bass whose twangy resonance gives much more character and distinction to the lower contrapuntal line than is possible, for example, on the piano. Also, because of the clavichord's direct response to the touch of the individual player, trills and other ornaments can be shaped to the volume and intensity that the performer's taste—and digital skill—dictate. In his commentary, Dart directs attention to the "nuances of expression, intonation, and vibrato" which are unique properties of his preferred instrument, and the reproduced results do not mock his words.

Finally, and most important in the final results, Dart is a musician of profound knowledge and fastidious taste whose Bach-playing is comparable to any now being heard, and not unworthy of the hallowed company of Harold Samuel and James Friskin. The fast movements are informed with high vitality despite the seemingly fragile characteristics of the instrument, and the slow movements shaped with the infinite gradations of pressure and dynamics



Dart's clavichord—"masterful craftsmanship of Thomas Goff."