

# CARLOS MONTOYA and the "SUITE FLAMENCA"

by Douglas Peel

**A**S I write this article, the snow is steadily piling up outside my windows reminding me that Old Winter is still on the rostrum.

But my blood runs warm, thrilled by the music from my gramophone which has barely stopped turning. What music it is—such as would have been acclaimed by Manuel de Falla himself—something more than music; the realisation of a man's lifetime dream.

Listening to the *Suite Flamenca* I felt that this was a gypsy marriage—as though the soloist and the orchestra had slashed wrists and mingled the bloods. I first heard of this recording when the soloist, the world-famous Carlos Montoya visited the Portsmouth Guildhall in November, 1968.

After his performance he kindly received me in his dressing room, where I also met his charming American wife.

## Tradition

Carlos Montoya, who has a warm and engaging stage manner, is an equally friendly person to speak to. He has all of the true dignity of the Spanish gypsy, and one senses the tradition that is part of the very soul of this great flamenco artist, whose uncle was the legendary Ramon Montoya.

A *gitano por los cuatro costados*—a gypsy on all four sides—he was born in Madrid, where at the age of eight he started to play the guitar, his first teacher being his mother, "La Tula".

Then followed a year's tuition under "Pepe el Barbero", a Madrid barber and guitar teacher. When the young Carlos had learned all he could, he began to seek out the great flamenco players of the time, adding to his already advanced technique.

In the Madrid of those days, even as now, was to be found the cream of guitarists, either in resident employment or passing through. By the time he was fourteen, Carlos was playing in the "Cuadros Flamencos", accompanying such famed artists as Antonio de Bilbao, Juan el Estampio, La Camisona and La Maccarona.

Eventually a real "break" came with the visit to Madrid of the famous dancer, "La Argentina", who was seeking a worthy accompanist. With her, Carlos Montoya left Spain to tour Europe for some three years. This tour was the first of many that have taken him all over the world.

He has accompanied and played solo for all the great names in Spanish dancing and singing—"La Argentina", Antonio, Vicente Escudero, Teresino and Carmen Amaya; to mention but a few.

## Innovator

As long ago as 1948, Carlos, always an innovator, decided to give a full concert recital of flamenco guitar music. It was a tremendous success, and he followed it up with similar recitals throughout the United States, Canada and Europe.

At his first New York solo recital, the Town Hall was packed to capacity and extra seats had to be provided on stage for an audience that would not be denied.

The same has happened at each New York appearance since then, as well as in other engagements.

All through those years, Carlos cherished his dream—to combine the art of the flamenco guitarist with the sounds of a great orchestra.

While still appearing with "La Argentina" in 1942, he was heard playing a *Tarantas* in his dressing room by famous conductor-pianist José Iturbi. After listening intently for a while, the great pianist remarked: "I wish we had time to work together and write a real flamenco suite". But time was to deny Carlos the fulfilment of his dream for a long while.

## Collaboration

Not reading or writing music himself, he sought the collaboration of several composers; but they did not understand the nature and the soul of flamenco. Few composers are capable of such a union; and it was not until Carlos Montoya met Julio Esteban that the *Suite Flamenca* was able to be

worked on.

Julio Esteban, an old acquaintance of Carlos', had, as long ago as the 1930s, discussed with him (in Manila), the possibilities of the spontaneous improvisations of the true flamenco guitarist being used as a concert solo with the backing of a properly scored orchestral accompaniment.

In January, 1966, the life's dream of Carlos Montoya became reality with the world premiere of *Suite Flamenca* with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra.

## Masterpiece

The suite is based on four traditional flamenco dance forms—*Minera*, *Aires del Puente*, *Generalife* and *Jaleo*. The recording—a 12 in. 33 r.p.m.—is a masterpiece that should be in the collection of every lover of the guitar, classical or flamenco.

The suite takes up one whole side, while on the reverse are four solos by Carlos Montoya, unaccompanied.

Here is true flamenco at its best, with all the effects, played by one of the world's greatest masters of the art. It is sad—and it is gay. It will make you want to get up and dance. Most of all—it is an inspiration.

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