

JUAN MARTÍN

FLAMENCO MAESTRO

by

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JUAN MARTÍN celebrated the release of his first record *The Exciting Sound of Flamenco* with a reverberating success at his Queen Elizabeth Hall recital on June 16th. In a wide-ranging concert of flamenco solos, Juan Martín explored every possible Spanish mood, from the deeply sad to the wildly abandoned, from the plaintive to the exuberant.

Classical guitarists often shy away from the flamenco guitar for one reason or another; they fear perhaps that the predominant image of flamenco as a background for tourists will prove too much for their delicate sensibilities. Their doubts will surely be dispelled by the sheer magical artistry of Maestro Martín, a performer whose dedication to the guitar as an expressive and vital medium is matched by his maturity of interpretation and by a virtuoso technique.

Within each solo Juan Martín seeks out the widest possible range of tonalities, dynamics, colourings and emotions. In the Queen Elizabeth Hall recital Juan played fourteen flamenco pieces in all, demonstrating amazing inventive powers as well as a master's stamina and resourcefulness. His music demands a concentrated attention, and this the audience gave him with an unusual rapt and enthusiastic atmosphere offering a superb ambiente for the artist.

Flamenco offers, in the right hands, a vast tapestry of moods; the *soleares*, the profound *siguiriya*, the *tarantas*, *zambra mora*, *alegrías*, *zapateado*, *granadinas*, *rondena*, *guajiras* and *bulerías*—each of these expresses its own identity and often a specific Spanish area. Juan Martín makes each flamenco form take on vividly its own innate characteristics, but as well endows each dance with his personal sympathetic hall marks. In the slower forms, the *siguiriya*, the *granadinas* and the *rondena*, Maestro Martín injects a

brooding mysticism into the music, a totally self-effacing inward passionate-ness in which the flamenco becomes a life-force itself, expressing a tradition through the player and yet taking on a quality of long-inherited voice, the true impersonality of great art. At this kind of happening, the true *duende* of flamenco manifests itself.

As Lorca, the great Spanish poet put it:

"To help us seek the duende there is neither map nor discipline. All one knows is that it burns the blood like powdered glass, that it exhausts, that it rejects all the sweet geometry one has learned . . . the great artists of Southern Spain, gypsy or flamenco, whether they sing, dance or play, know that no real emotion is possible unless there is duende . . . the appearance of the duende always presupposes a radical change of all forms based on old structures. It gives a sensation of freshness wholly unknown, having the quality of a newly created rose, of miracle, and produces in the end an almost religious enthusiasm."

Juan Martín at full stretch in the *soleares* or the *tarantas* is a great artist of Southern Spain; he has the ability to achieve in performance, time after time, the *duende*, the true soul of art and flamenco. What a rare gift it is and how seldom realised on the concert platform. It is an ability which transcends technique even, the literal spirit which informs the music.

In the livelier dances Maestro Martín is a demon of delight, a magician, a fire-fly; and often smiles to himself subtly with a real, but inward, *alegría*, as some particularly fine example of harmony or counter-rhythm pleases him. A brilliant *guajiras*, a little lyric poem torn from Cuba and transformed by the

Spanish language of music; a *Zapateado* straight from the dancing academy in Madrid which conjures up the spectacle of intricate footwork and the precise steps of the bull-ring with its life-and-death rhythms.

Finally, the *Bulerías* where *duende* and a wonderful spontaneous virtuosity meet in a wild dance of flying fingers, *golpes*, and the perfect marriage of mind and passion.

Juan Martín's record, just issued by Argo, is one of the most brilliant of its kind. The charisma of live performance is almost impossible to achieve on record with flamenco, but here Juan captures the essential magic of his ability as guitarist, musician and artist and the record will repay a prolonged and concentrated listening, offering more at each sitting.

To match the disc, United Music offer the score of two tracks from the record the *Zambra Mora* and *Guajiras* (called *Brisas Habaneras*); these have been transcribed into *cifra* (tablature) and notation. They come as near as possible to getting down on paper the elusive mysteries of flamenco, and also offer considerable insights into the flamenco guitarist's thinking about fingering, rhythm and general technical standards. It is hoped that classical players will tackle these pieces and absorb them into recitals; Juan Martín reveals his remarkable compositional gifts in this book (as elsewhere on the record) and must surely in the *Guajiras* have written one of the most beautiful solos ever to have been produced by a Spanish composer.

Juan Martín has a remarkable career before him. He could well develop as one of the greatest players of concert flamenco, a worthy successor to his great mentor Nino Ricardo, who would have been proud of the musical developments and the guitaristic achievement of his pupil's Queen Elizabeth Hall concert.