

That Fourth Finger

HOW many mandolinists have said: "I won't use it if I can help it! What's the use after all, when the third finger will do just as well!" And often they will go on to excuse themselves by adding: "As a matter of fact, it's better because it's easier!"

So thinks the average mandolinist until he comes to position playing. Then it is that the lack of fourth-finger training becomes apparent. The player simply has to use the little finger of the left hand or else play nothing more ambitious than simple first position solos.

Yet the fourth finger of the left hand is necessary even in first position playing; that is, if the player intends to play at all easily and with at least a fair technique.

If the mandolinist will play Ex. 1 on this page with the fingering shown and then try any other fingering, the use of the fourth finger is at once seen to be correct.

The fourth finger is, of course, rather difficult to use in the beginning because when the left hand is in position holding the neck of the mandolin the extension of the fourth finger sideways is an unnatural position. It should, therefore, be constantly practised from the beginning of one's studies.

Many beginners on the mandolin, on trying to use the left-hand little finger, give up too easily and decide it is not worth the necessary practice. In point of fact, few hands are so formed that this finger cannot be made useful if the player will but try for a fair length of time.

Another point concerning the use of the left-hand fourth finger is the advisability of never using it without another finger (preferably the first) being in its proper place on the fingerboard. As it is advisable for the student not to look at his instrument more than is necessary in the beginning of his studies—and never afterwards—the experience

gained in this way of measurement, or judging the distance from one fret to another, is most valuable.

Ex. 2—the scale in sixths—will be found helpful for strengthening the fourth finger of the left hand and the tyro mandolinist is advised to include this in his daily practice.

Hawaiian Rendezvous

THE Queen Anne" in Walworth's Dawes Street will surely become the Mecca of all interested in Hawaiian music for at this public house Ralph Makino and His Hawaiian Echoes play every weekend night from Friday to Sunday.

This hostelry boasts a public bar called the "Aloha Bar" where mine host will serve you with the favourite *lauau* drinks bearing such fascinating names as Wahine, Hibiscus, Aku Aku, Honolulu, Maui Fizz, Scorpion, Kona Swizzle, Waikiki, Kamaaina and Equator Fizz in authentic South Sea Island settings.

There are 8ft. tall palm trees, stuffed crocodiles and Hawaiian scenes framed and illuminated with coloured lighting; head carvings in wood of warriors etc. In addition, there are nets covering almost the whole of the public bar ceiling, festooned with ornamental fish, sea shells, etc.

The music of Ralph Makino and his Hawaiian Echoes includes traditional Polynesian melodies as well as popular tunes of the day and, dressed in their Hawaiian shirts and traditional leis, the quartet will surely attract all interested in the music of Hawaii.

The instrumentalists are: Ralph Makino (Hawaiian guitar, doubling plectrum guitar and ukulele), Kevin Condon (solo and rhythm guitar), Jim Collier (ukulele, vocalist and compère) and Benny Nonis (drums).

Pedro Soler

By IVOR MAIRANTS

PEDRO Soler, who gave a concert of flamenco music at the Wigmore Hall, London, on Feb. 15th, is a good guitar player. Actually, he is more than a good guitar player.

He played with warmth of feeling, charm and sincerity. Occasionally there were flashes of brilliance and some of his thumb picking reminded me of Perico el del Lunar. Sometimes, however, in the middle of a long intense bass-string passage, the thumb missed and the spell was broken!

At times, the notes of the arpeggios and cascading runs sounded suspended like a sustained echo and there was magic in the air; but when the agile left hand and the firm delicate right-hand arpeggios did not connect with perfect co-ordination, the strings snapped back at the fingers plucking them.

These criticisms apart, this young flamenco guitarist had something to say—and said it without using superficial artifices.

TRADITIONAL

His flamenco style is of the traditional school but at times his *tempi* are too *rubato*; a licence not to be taken with Mirabra, Petanera, Guajiras and Sevillanas.

The Soleares contained well executed melodies in sixths and tenths and intense thumb passages.

The rhythm of the Tientos had the right amount of suspension and attack although there could have been more melodic development. The Fandango started off with a good introduction and continued with clear runs and a crescendo from *pianissimo* to a strong *sforzando* followed by a tense silence.

The Caracoles, similar to an Alegrias in C, played in a high position with the *cejilla* at the 5th position, was well played despite a couple of movements of slight loss of co-ordination but the appreciative audience loved it and showed it by loud sustained applause.

One does not often hear a *Rondeñas* and this was played with great feeling, slightly marred by an out-of-tune string. The Granadinas sounded fresh and contained some nice melodic lines.

The opening number after the interval was a gay Alegrias followed by a Tarantas, a Farruca and a good



Malagueña. The following Guajiras was not sufficiently rhythmic and I thought the Bulerias lacked excitement. The Seguiriyas had intensity and the last piece, a Zapateado, was played with panache.

Three encores followed, including a Sevillanas and sensitively played Milongas.

It always amazes me that flamenco music, played on a solo guitar, can hold a concert audience. Therefore, I have included the details of the programme matter.

This is Pedro Soler's second successful concert in London, where before his first visit he was completely unknown.

I find it difficult to accept flamenco music as a solo vehicle for the guitar on a concert platform. Pedro Soler agrees with me. He prefers to work with a good *cantaor* (singer) and *bailaora* (dancer).

He is a Catalan, born in 1938 in Perpignan, Southern France, of a French father and a Spanish mother. He began his musical career at the age of 9 by studying the violin, although there were keen guitarists in the family. At the age of 13 he found an old guitar in the house, put strings on it and produced what he called "interior resonances".

CHANGED

It decided him to change to guitar and he began by studying classical guitar with a Spanish teacher in Toulouse. After two years, he changed to flamenco and has stayed with it.

He toured Spain for about 8 years and during this time played second guitar to both Pepe Badajoz and Pepe Martinez. He very much values this experience and has great admiration for both players.

He loves flamenco music and aims to defend its traditions by means of studying its roots and developing it in his own way. He feels he has the knowledge and feeling for it but not yet sufficient technique to play what he wants to. He illustrated this by touching his head, heart and sweeping his right hand down to the tips of his left-hand fingers.

"The kernel of flamenco", he said, "the essentials, are pure, but too many flamenco artists are content to use traditional themes out of context. Everyone knows, for instance, everything Ramon Montoya played was in perfect taste but when his themes are

repeated, using a Soleares theme for an Alegrias and so on, it is in bad taste. I am less interested in the guitar as an instrument than in flamenco music as a whole and the guitar is my means of projecting the music".

Perico el del Lunar is one of his favourite flamenco guitarists. He thinks Niño Ricardo is a great player but does not like his work. Ideally he likes to play with a good singer and dancer as he has done in the Teatro de Comedia in Madrid with Jacinto (Nino de) Almaden (born 1905) and Pepe el de la Matrona (born 1887), two really great exponents of flamenco song. He prefers this to playing with large troupes of lesser standing.

He lives mostly in Paris but each year tours Spain with a group in order to study.

I asked what he thought of *Flamenco Evolucionar* as played by Mario Escudero. He considered Mario Escudero a true disciple of Ramon Montoya and had nothing against Mario's development of flamenco.

ESSENTIALS

Pedro said if he has anything to give, he would like to profess it through flamenco; but before thinking about developing, it was essential to absorb the original and he repeated: "I have nothing against the *flamenco evolucionar* of Mario Escudero but I must first absorb the essentials. The wealth (richness) of flamenco has not yet been exploited".

He has made three L.P.s: R.C.A. Victor 430.196S, Le Chant du Monde LAM.4214 with La Joselito—and another.

Because the recent appearance of Manitas de Plata on B.B.C. T.V. was still fresh in my mind, I asked Pedro Soler if he knew him and if so what did he think of him.

The answer was he did know him and had, in fact, played alongside him at Les Saintes Maries de la Mer. In his opinion, Manitas de Plata was a symbol of the gipsy temperament (perhaps almost amounting to genius) but a disaster as far as flamenco is concerned. He tries to portray people in his music but what kind of music that is, Pedro Soler does not understand.

It was nice to have met Pedro, a man of sincerity and talent who has direction and an aim in life.

Guitar Technique

By JAMES O'BRIEN

(Continued from last month's issue)

THIS month we are going to look at the question of tuning and, in particular, tuning by harmonics. A recent enquiry on the matter showed there must be many players who do not understand this method of putting their instruments in tune.

Let us deal first with harmonics; what they are and how we make them.

When a string is struck it vibrates along its whole length from the nut to the bridge.

For example purposes we will use the 6th string.

If you strike this string hard you will be able to see the actual vibrations—especially if you look at the string against the dark background of the soundhole.

The string, in fact, appears to be *two* strings and, as the vibrations become less, the "two" gradually merge into one.

Now, if you place a left-hand fingertip very lightly on the string at (directly over) the 12th fret and strike the string again, the sound produced is called a harmonic.

TWO PARTS

It will be exactly one octave higher than the open string and it is exactly in the centre of the string.

Thus, the string is now vibrating in two equal parts; you now really have two strings because there is no vibration at the 12th fret.

You can prove this quite simply. While the sound is still strong, replace the fingertip lightly at the 12th. You will find it does not stop the sound; replace it, however, at the 11th or 13th and all sound ceases immediately.

The 12th fret is the nodal point—the point of no vibration.

If we were to be absolutely correct we would call this harmonic at the twelfth fret the *second* harmonic (the first is the open string). This is rather confusing so we will be *incorrect* and refer to it as the first harmonic—and thereby make ourselves better understood!

The first harmonic on all strings, therefore, is at the twelfth fret and the note produced is an octave above the open string.