

Ray Mitchell

Foundations of Flamenco



Pericon de Cadiz and Monolo de Huelav. Madrid 1964.

Elsewhere in the magazine this month you will read of 'free music' and jazz improvisation. I should like to take the opportunity to remind you that the ability to freely improvise is a fundamental requirement in the technical equipment of the flamenco guitarist. Flamenco possesses certain melodic features and rhythmic/chordal structures which are both a limitation and an advantage. Before proceeding any further I must qualify the word limitation. The apparently limited chord vocabulary in toques such as Solea or Alegrias are given a

variety of rhythmic treatment and decoration so that the attention is focused on the intrinsic artistic truth of a centuries old ethnic form. Furthermore, certain toques, Rondena, Granadinas and Guajiras for example, offer as much scope as any musical genre. It is certainly possible to introduce 'exotic' chords in any flamenco toque, but this extravagance carries with it the danger of losing the intrinsic truth. I remember Paco de Lucia ruefully remarking to me that whilst technique was no problem, (obviously!) to make new variations for a Siguiryas

and still keep it flamenco . . . Ah, that was a problem! Still, all the forms of music seem to grow closer as time goes by and flamenco is part of this scene too. My practical help this month is in the form of Alegrias por Rosas, in E. First I show the three main chords (Tonic, Sub-dominant and Dominant) in various position on the fretboard. Then, the tonic scale is shown, firstly as two octaves and a half, which do not rise higher than second position, and secondly, an octave and a half which stays in fourth position. Lines two and three show the a characteristic tune in a basic form, (figures in brackets are for those who are unable to stretch to fret four on string six) whilst lines four and five show a variation which makes use of some of the 'building material' in the top line. The numbers in the squares are put there to show which chords or scale passages have been used. The spontaneous art of flamencos such as Diego del Gastor Manolo de Huelva, Nino Ricardo or Melchor de Marchena depended on a total and instant recall of all of the chords and scale positions. As a rule, flamencos do not practise scales in their basic straight up and down form, but will play with them, flexing them like a sensuous whip, that is always at the service of a chosen rhythm.

The musical notation consists of several systems. The top system is a guitar tablature with six lines of fret numbers. Below it are systems of rhythmic notation, including a 3/4 time signature and various symbols like squares and numbers. The notation is organized into several systems, each starting with a boxed number (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7). The notation includes various symbols like squares and numbers, and some are enclosed in boxes. The notation is organized into several systems, each starting with a boxed number (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7). The notation includes various symbols like squares and numbers, and some are enclosed in boxes.