

"SABICAS IN LONDON"

by Ivor Mairants

TO see and hear Sabicas on the concert platform is to experience icy clear perfection of technique played by a cool calm master of his art.

I have seen and heard flamenco players who are generally accepted as the best in their profession ranging from the ages of over 60 to under 20, and I would say that in my 13 years or so of interest and study of flamenco guitar, I have not seen or heard the equal of Sabicas' perfection of technical co-ordination.

This includes "picados" (runs), tremolo and rasgueados (four finger rolls), and by four finger rasgueados I mean a continuous uninterrupted roll across the strings by a repetition of movement of the fingers from the little to the forefinger, unaided by the thumb or a twist from the wrist.

Emotionally, however, the opening cadenzas of "Granadinas" left me disappointed because of the thin guitar sound and the somewhat untraditional form. On disc his tone is fuller and the top strings have a thicker dimension and one had to attune oneself in the concert hall to the smaller all-round dimension of sound.

The Farruca, which was very elaborate and somewhat removed from the traditional form, explored the higher reaches of the fingerboard in many novel *falsetas* but left me unmoved, and it was not until the Soleares which followed that I began to warm

up to some familiar flamenco melodies. Then followed a medley which included a Sorongo and "Los Cuatros Muleros", the latter in almost classical form, but an excellent arrangement.

The "Tientos" was rather light and the last piece of the first set, "Inspiration—New Form of Flamenco Expression", turned out to be a cross between a Colombiana and a rumba flamenco, which was very exciting.

The second set opened with a Rondeña style composition although the programme said "Taranto", followed by an Alegrías which was a sparkling delightful exposition—a sort of "all things bright and beautiful".

I think the "Malagueña, the next offering, was a commercial sop to the masses who expect to hear the familiar E, G#, B/E, G#, B/A, C, B/A, G, F/ and so on, but the "Fandango de Huelva" which followed was an absolutely masterly piece of flamenco music played with the calm ease of technical co-ordination. Beautiful to watch as well as exciting to hear.

The "Danza Mora" (Arabia) contained everything it should have done and I think that even "Ziryab" (the founder and teacher of Arabian music, said to have played for Haroun el Raschid) would have been satisfied. The last selection before the main interval was the "Siguirillas y Saetas".

The "Siguirillas" or "Seguiriyas" was not quite traditional and rather fast but had so many wonderful

falsetas and opened such new roads for ideas that, for me, and I am sure for flamenco players in the audience, it was something to soak in for future consideration.

Although there were only four pieces mentioned in the set after the interval, Sabicas played five encores including a really suitable and terrific arrangement of Lecuona's "Malagueña".

He played a Zapateado which was both tasteful and sophisticated. Let me explain that usually when the vamp is played it can sound very corny. The type of vamp that makes me think of the music-hall comedian saying "A funny thing happened to me on the way to the theatre", but in this instance no such thought entered my mind.

Sophisticated

The non-flamenco pieces such as the Inca Dance and the Spanish Military March were acceptable because they were not overdone and when he announced the "Garrotin" both my wife and daughter were thrilled because they love the opening melody of descending semitones of A/A \flat , G, G \flat , F/ landing on to E with a chord of C continuing with G/G \flat , F, E, E \flat / landing on D followed by a chord of G.7 etc.

This melody never did emerge. The arrangement was extremely sophisticated and, of course, there was no doubt about it being a Garrotin, but in my opinion the basic melodic introduction and ending should not have been excluded.

Sabicas had a wonderful ovation and well deserved it. He played a Ramirez guitar although two other makes of guitar were mentioned in the programme.

Speaking to Sabicas in London he told me that one of his most grateful memories is that Segovia, who is in no way an *aficionado* of the flamenco guitar, enjoyed his performance when he played for him. It is typical of this modest flamenco genius that Segovia's opinion means so much to him.

Sabicas, who now lives in New York, claims he is completely self-taught and by self-taught he also means self-critical and self-disciplined.

He is in his prime of technical perfection, makes the guitar not only sound brilliant but his hand movements look beautifully co-ordinated.



PACO PEÑA,
SABICAS and
IVOR MAIRANTS.

