

Module 1

1.1 THE FEMININE ROOT OF FLAMENCO SINGING

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From the foundational stage of flamenco, different sources testify to the existence of cantaoras (female Flamenco singers), although at that time there was already an imbalance with respect to the number of male singers, due, among other factors, to the traditional division of roles that mostly associated women to the field of dance. In the *Escenas Andaluzas* (1847) by Serafín Estébanez Calderón, we find María de las Nieves, who sings the Sevillian tunes in "Un Baile en Triana", and Dolores, who performs "la Malagueña por el estilo de la Jabera" and "Ciertas coplillas a quienes los aficionados llaman *Perteneras*", in "Asamblea General".

The list of singers, dictated by Juanelo de Jerez, which Antonio Machado Álvarez (Demófilo) incorporates in his *Colección de Cantes Flamencos* (1881; 1975), also includes several women, such as the Jerez-born Tía María la Jaca, Mercedes la "Cerneta", Curra la Sandita, María la Regalá, la Junquera, a specialist in tonás and livianas, and Tía Salvaora, creator of a light toná style; the trianaeras la Josefa and la Gómez; the Sanlúcar sisters María la Mica and La Bochoca, and their fellow countrywoman La Cagilona; the Cadiz singer María la Cantoral, Juana la Sandita, La Pilí, La Jacoba and La Lola, or the seguiriyera singer María Borrigo, from San Fernando.

Machado and Álvarez also mention the mythical solearera (soleá singer) María Amaya Heredia, known as "La Andonda", whom they place in Morón. However, later researches tell us that she was born in Ronda and spent part of her life in Triana (Vázquez Morillas, 2017). These researches have also attributed three soleá styles to her (Soler, 1992).

Without ignoring these first cantaoras, it is important to highlight that, according to Cristina Cruces (2003), flamenco as an artistic code was born on stage, as a result of the personal contributions of different figures to those forms originating from the popular style, which were becoming larger and more diversified. This phenomenon took place in what is known as the Golden Age of flamenco, which began in the 1860s. It is then when the art of flamenco became professionalized and began to be exhibited in singing cafés.

In contrast to the great boom experienced by Andalusian dances in the first half of the 19th century, with great choreographic stars of the Escuela Bolera triumphing on the stages in the cafés, the

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focus shifted towards singing for listening, which acquired greater prestige. On the one hand, women were relegated to the background, as they were reserved for dancing, due to their connection with the body and, subsequently, its high level of sensuality. On the other hand, female singers were in the minority.

Far from being based on artistic or technical reasons, this exclusion of women from professional singing had to do with their social stigmatization, due to the fact that they work in singing cafés, where riots and even murders often took place, and where all kinds of vices were present:

"[Singing cafés are] ... disgusting centers, refined models of bad taste, a shelter for vice, a school of prostitution, living pictures of idleness and pestilent lights of degradation, where one discovers nothing but lewdness, misery and ignorance of the dignity and respect that man owes to himself...

There, one observes the most insolent acts among a multitude of wretched women and the most procuring elements" (*El Derecho*, 16-10-1886).

Flamenco artists of the time tended to live a life that was quite free and far from what was understood as respectable, because, by dedicating themselves to this profession, their reputation was in question. In an article published in 1873, Eduardo de Palacio characterizes the flamenco cantaora as a bohemian and independent woman, who does not fit into the standards considered 'normal' by society:

"The cantaora is always single, free; she may love a man who has sung her four truths, but she loves him without commitment; that is, without danger of marriage. A cantaora with offspring would be unlikely. The freshness of her voice is in direct proportion to her freshness in practical life. [She is a woman with] a spirit of independence, who hardly bends, and marriage represents for her an unbearable bond.[...]

The lover of the cantaora is usually a winter bullfighter, that is to say, from the last layer of bullfighting, or a bum by trade, or a trouble maker, or an advantage gambler in a quarter-circle game [...]

... the cantaora when she finishes her mission at the café, she dedicates herself to have dinner and drink, and to live with her lover, for whom she gives the best notes.

Poor girl! When she loses her voice, what will she do for living?" (*El Periódico para Todos*, 21-2-1873).

It is also important to mention another factor of devaluation of female cantaoras, based on the stereotype that associates women with the lighter styles of cantes and reserves for men those styles that are more solemn and difficult to perform, since they were believed to be more suited to male voices and talent. Fernando de Triana (1935; 1978) referred to these last styles which, in turn, would be the most prestigious, as the *seguiriya*- with the appellation of "cantes machunos".

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Despite all the difficulties aforementioned, in the first decades of flamenco there were great female singers who contributed to the forging of the new art, some as performers and others as creators of styles.

Stereotypes aside, in the field of *seguriya* the figure of María Fernández Fernández stands out. Born in San Fernando (Cádiz) in 1830 and known as María Borrigo, she was the first of a great lineage of flamenco artists. Her brother Perico Piña and her sister Agustina la Bizca were also great *seguriyeros*. In 1853, the newspaper *El Observador* announced her being hired in Madrid, to perform in the Salones de Vensano together with the mythical cantaor El Planeta.

María Borrigo has been consecrated in history as the creator of the *macho* or *seguriya de cambio* that bears her name, a style halfway between the primitive and the modern *seguriya*. Even, one of the greatest figures in Flamenco singing of the 19th century, Silverio Franconetti, included it in his repertoire and made it popular. María Borrigo's *cambio* has traditionally been sung as a finale to the *cantes por serrana*, *liviana* or *seguriya*.

In the same style, artists such as La Serrana, La Lora Mateo also stood out. The first of them, María Valencia Rodríguez, was born in Jerez de la Frontera in 1863. She was the daughter of the legendary *seguriyero* Paco la Luz and together with her sister, the dancer Juana la Sordita, she worked in different cafés and salons in Seville, such as The Burrero, The Novedades or The Filarmónico. A worthy interpreter of her father's *cantes*, she also shone in other *palos*, such as *soleá*.

Cádiz-born Antonia Fernández, known as "La Lora", or Loro's daughter (*la hija del Loro*), was "an impressive *seguriyera*", who "was more adapted to the *cantes de los Puertos*", according to Fernando el de Triana (1935; 1978), but also excelled in *soleá*. The Jerez-born María de la Hera, known as "Loca Mateo", perfectly interpreted the *seguriya cantes* of her brother, Loco Mateo. In 1879, she performed at the Café de la Bolsa in Madrid, where she also danced *alegrías*, and at a party held at the Paris Hippodrome to benefit the victims of the floods in Murcia.

Unlike the *seguriya flamenco* style, the *soleá* and the *malagueña* retain the imprint of different creators, whose songs are still part of the repertoire of many artists. The Triana styles of *soleá* from La Andonda, those of La Jilica de Marchena, La Roesna de Alcalá de Guadaíra or the portuense Teresita Mazzantini are still alive, despite the obscurity that hovers over the biography of their authors.

However, who deserves to be considered as the mother of this style is, without a doubt, the Jerez-born Mercedes Fernández Vargas, La Serneta, born in 1840 in the Albarizuela neighborhood. Her singing was mainly enjoyed in private gatherings, although she also performed in the most famous singing cafés of Seville, Jerez and Madrid.

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She cultivated palos such as malagueñas, martinetes, polos or serranas, but the name Merced la Serneta is synonymous with soleá. Luis and Ramón Soler (1992) attribute to her a total of seven styles, which they place between Triana, 2 styles, and Utrera, 5 styles. However, other researchers, such as José Manuel Martín Barbadillo, highlights the Jerez style of Mercedes's cante, since she lived in her hometown almost until the end of her life and settled in Utrera well into the 20th century. Although she never recorded them, her cantes are still relevant today, as well as her lyrics, in which the sensitivity of a feminine soul shines.

Ana Amaya Molina, born in 1853 and known as "Anilla la de Ronda", is also credited with her own soleá style. She was a very charismatic artist, who accompanied herself on the guitar. In a conference given on the Granada Cante Jondo Competition in 1922, Federico García Lorca referred to her as one of the great solearera of her time. In 1930, she was one of the stars of the Andalusian Week celebrated during the Universal Exposition of Barcelona.

In his famous book *Arte y Artistas Flamencos* (1935; 1978), Fernando el de Triana also remembers other women who made soleá singing great, such as La Bilbá, who with her "clear and easy voice" embroidered the styles of her Triana neighborhood; the malagueña Juana Escalona Bernal, known as "La Juanaca", who made an authentic creation of the cantes of Lorente and was also extraordinary in the cantiñas for her dancing; Carmen, la Rubia de Cádiz, excellent interpreter of the styles of Paquirri el Guanté; Luisa la del Puerto, who also excelled in the seguiriya and tanguillos; Juana Ruca, Soleá de Juanelo or Manuela Carpio, "La Bizca".

The throne of the malagueñas is rightfully occupied by Trinidad Navarro Carrillo, born in 1866 and known as Trini de Málaga. According to Fernando el de Triana (1935; 1978), "she had a great voice, a good and clear timbre". Although it is difficult to know exactly, between four and six personal styles of malagueñas are attributed to her, since she did not record them and, therefore, they have come down to us through other artists.

Among the followers of Trini, it is worth mentioning María La Chilanga, who recreated one of her styles, to which she gave her own personality; Águeda, who also shone in soleá and festive songs; or Francisca Aguilera Domínguez, considered the most faithful transmitter of Trinidad's songs. Born in Ronda in 1877, she started in the artistic world thanks to her sister María, who accompanied her on the guitar. She triumphed in the cafés cantantes of Seville, Malaga and Madrid, and shared the bill with Trini on numerous occasions. She even created her own malagueña style based on those of her teacher.

However, Paca Aguilera was much more than a simple copyist. The records she left behind have allowed us to appreciate her great talent and artistic personality. In addition to the cantes from her Ronda homeland, she mastered many other palos, such as soleares, seguiriyas, tangos, peteneras, granaínas, tarantas or guajiras.

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Among the creators of malagueñas also Concha Peñaranda stands out, known as "La Cartagenera". She was an extraordinary interpreter of the cantes of Levante, from the school of El Rojo el Alpargatero, which she performed "with a clear, clean and admirably administered voice", according to Fernando el de Triana (1935; 1978). She is also credited with a style of malagueña, which she also failed to record.

Likewise, according to the Sevillian artist, another great malagueñas were María Bocanegra, who admirably performed the cantes of Canario and also shone in styles such as soleá or petenera; and La Rubia de Málaga, a cantaora with excellent vocal qualities who triumphed in the Sevillian cafés, until the murder of El Canario made her lose the public's favor and emigrate to Madrid.

Among the cantaoras who shone in that golden age of flamenco, the Granada-born África Vázquez and the Cadiz-born Josefa Díaz Fernández also deserve to be mentioned. The former, born in the town of La Peza, was known as La Peceña. She began her career at a very young age at the Café de la Mariana in Granada and later moved to cities such as Malaga, Almeria, Cartagena, Barcelona, Madrid and Seville. With her sweet and crystalline voice, her refined style and full of feeling, she drew attention by singing granaínas, malagueñas and cartageneras. According to Antonio Conde (2018), she is credited with creating an early Granada fandango.

The second, born in 1871 and better known as Pepa de Oro, was the daughter of Agustina "la Bizca" and niece of María Borrigo. She triumphed as a singer and dancer in the cafés of Seville, among other cities. She is credited with the creation of the flamenco milonga, when she put the rhythms she learned during a tour of Latin America with her father, the bullfighter Paco de Oro, into a tango rhythm.

Without detracting from any of those mentioned, one of the most complete and excellent singers of the last third of the 19th century, according to Fernando el de Triana, was Dolores Parrales Moreno, born in Moguer (Huelva) and nicknamed "La Parrala". She was a specialist in those supposedly masculine cantes, and mastered those of Silverio Franconetti, which she transmitted to her disciple Antonio Silva, "El Portugués". "As she was gifted with an astonishing ease, she sang for serranas, seguiriyas, livianas, cañas, polos and all the great cantes of soleares" (Triana, 1935; 1978).

In addition to working in the singing cafés of Seville and Madrid, among other cities, in 1880, she toured several European capitals, such as Paris, Berlin, Vienna and Brussels, where she achieved great fame singing malagueñas and singing her famous pregones: "La canción del sereno" and "La canción del pescadero". Without reaching that level, her sister Trinidad was also an outstanding interpreter of these songs. Also, in that initial stage of flamenco, when there was not yet so much specialization among the artists, it is necessary to mention the contributions of different bailaoras (female dancers), who used to sing a few "letrillas" while dancing. Some have

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even gone down in history for their creations, as it is the case of Rosario "la Mejorana", famous for her cantiñas and for having inspired Manuel de Falla with her singing for the composition of *El amor brujo*.

Fernando el de Triana (1935; 1978) also highlights the singing facet of artists such as Concha la Carbonera and Pastora la del Malé, who sang tangos while dancing; Enriqueta "La Macaca", "a great enthusiast of cantes grandes"; Geroma Loreto, who sang soleá with great flair; or María "La Macarrona", an excellent interpreter of alegrías for dancing.

With the new century came the singer who has been undoubtedly the greatest and most complete singer of all times, Pastora Pavón Cruz, "La Niña de los Peines" who born in Seville in 1890. She began her professional career at a very young age, which allowed her to experience different stages, from that of the singing cafés to that of the flamenco opera, and to build a bridge between the flamenco of the 19th century, which was still in its codification phase, and that of the 20th century, already in the midst of modernity.

She dared to try all types of singing, and in all of them she achieved excellence. In some of them she contributed interesting innovations, as in the case of the petenera, that she spread and enhanced. She did the same with the bamberas. Besides, her contribution was fundamental to configure what is known today as bulerías. She has bequeathed us more than 250 sound recordings of extraordinary quality and very diverse styles.

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