

Flamenco

An introduction



For our special acoustic issue **Bridget Mermikides** has prepared an excellent flamenco primer to introduce you a much loved Spanish style that's also a serious art form.

ABILITY RATING



Moderate/Advanced

INFO	WILL IMPROVE YOUR
KEY: Various	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Understanding of flamenco
TEMPO: Various	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chord knowledge
CD: Tracks 12-18	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fingerstyle techniques

FLAMENCO IS AN art form encompassing music, dance and poetry, which originated in Andalucía, an area in the South of Spain. It has evolved over four centuries, absorbing cultural elements from the Gypsy, Moorish and Jewish communities - each of whom were persecuted and outlawed by the Inquisition of 16th century Spain. This fusion of diverse styles, infused with a defiant emotional depth - might explain how flamenco has now become so popular and identifiable all around the world. Flamenco music is an extremely sophisticated art form, and its components may be broken into three highly demanding disciplines: Dance (Baile), song (Cante) and, of course, guitar-playing (Toque). Flamenco music is deeply linked to the guitar and an entire instrumental discipline - worthy of a lifetime's study - including specialised techniques, rhythms, harmony, tone projection and a long heritage of master guitarists is now firmly established.

This article is intended as a primer into the wonderful world of the flamenco guitar, and will introduce you to many of the fundamental

techniques and rhythmic patterns as well as providing you with some enjoyable short pieces to add to your repertoire. The flamenco guitar discipline requires many years of study, but much can be gained with some work on its basics, including rhythmic awareness, fingerstyle technique and a deeper appreciation of this extensive style.

Flamenco technique requires a huge amount of dedication, and is often taught from a very young age. Similarly, a proper understanding of flamenco music forms, rhythmic patterns and stylistic conventions, could fill several volumes. What I've done here is present some fundamental and extremely useful techniques in the context of some popular flamenco forms. In this way you can start to learn both the technical and

structural aspects of flamenco and some approachable and satisfying short pieces. Techniques will include rasgueado (strumming techniques and rhythmic patterns), falsetas (melodic interludes including thumb stroke, arpeggio and tremolo techniques), llamadas (closing phrases) as well as picado and ligado (scale and legato techniques, respectively). These will be approached within the

context of authentic flamenco rhythmic forms known as compás, including farruca, soleares, alegrías, tangos and malagueñas.

While these and other associated flamenco guitar techniques require considerable dedicated practice, the most important

feature to have in this style is what's called duende - the deeply affecting soulfulness and emotion that makes this music form so beguiling, influential and admired. I hope you enjoy this lesson and good luck! **T**

“The flamenco guitar discipline requires many years of study, but much can be gained from its basics, including rhythmic awareness and fingerstyle technique.”



GET THE TONE

Many of flamenco's musical features can be adapted to any type of guitar, tone or playing technique. However, for an authentic flamenco tone you will need a nylon-string guitar, and properly shaped plucking hand fingernails. While any decent nylon-string guitar can work well, flamenco players prefer brighter sounding guitars (made from rosewood, or cypress), a lower action and higher tension strings than their classical counterparts. This brighter tone is able to penetrate acoustically, and create a sharp rhythmic ensemble when playing with dancers. The addition of a 'tap plate' (golpeador) to protect the soundboard from the knocking (golpe) technique is also advised. Flamenco guitar is usually played with the guitar resting on the same side leg as the plucking hand, and often with that leg crossed over the other. However, standard classical guitar posture is both common and perfectly workable.



TRACK RECORD *Sabicas – El Rey Del Flamenco* (2011): A great collection of solo performances from this legend of the flamenco guitar. *Paco Peña – Flamenco Guitar* (2008): I've had the terrifying pleasure of performing with Paco and this double CD on Nimbus Records shows why he is considered one of the modern masters. *Paco De Lucia – Gold* (2005): A double CD full of staggering performances by this extraordinary virtuoso (including some tracks from his fusion project with John McLaughlin and Al DiMeola).



LIONEL FLUSIN / GAMMA-RAPHO / GETTY IMAGES

Paco de Lucia:
master of the
flamenco art

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EXAMPLE 1 STRUMMING ETUDE IN FARRUCA FORM

CD TRACK 13

Flamenco strumming is a highly evolved art, but here we will focus on a few fundamental techniques, and show how effective they are in combination and in the context of flamenco forms. Rest thumb (p) on the sixth string throughout the exercise, so as to focus on finger rather than arm movement. Find a balance between relaxation and strength of attack. Play through very slowly at first ensuring the correct stroke, as well as chord voicing, is used. These 16 bars are an example of the medium paced and powerful farruca - a dramatic, masculine dance and vocal form of northern Spain.

[Bar 1] A first finger (i) downward flicking 'sabutteo' action.

[Bar 2] An even down-up-down first finger motion that forms the pulse.

[Bar 3] A sharp flicking strike with third (a) and second (m) finger as one.

[Bar 4] Here is an example of a rasgueado strum. Fourth (c), third, second and first fingers flick out from the palm and strike the strings in quick and even succession. If you have trouble involving the fourth finger (maybe it seems too short!) then leave it out and use just the other three fingers - although not strictly correct the effect is almost as good!

EXAMPLE 2 SOLEARES COMPÁS

CD TRACK 14

EXAMPLE 2 SOLEARES COMPÁS ...CONTINUED

CD TRACK 14

With these strumming and accenting techniques in place, it is time to learn a fundamental flamenco rhythmic structure known as the soleares compás. The soleares is one of the oldest and most recognisable flamenco forms and has a deep and profound vibe. Underlying the soleares is a particular rhythmic pattern (compás) consisting of 12 beats, with a stress on beats 3, 6,

8, 10 and 12. This accent pattern (sometimes in a displaced variation where the accent falls on a different beat each time) is used in several dance forms, so it's really worth memorising it. It's a tricky rhythm, not always played clearly but always felt deeply by players, so spend some time absorbing it until it's second nature. Note that our 12-beat pattern ends on beat 10.

Fmaj7 C C7 Fmaj7 Fmaj7 add6 Fmaj7 add#6 1 E E 2 E
9, 13 10 11 12 rasg rasg
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 10 11 12

EXAMPLE 3 RHYTHMIC EMBELLISHMENT IN TANGOS FORM

CD TRACK 15

By omitting some downbeats, using chordal embellishments and fretting-hand slurs, some very effective rhythmic patterns can now be made. The following is an example of a tangos - a driving and atmospheric flamenco

form in 4/4, here in the key of A Phrygian dominant (A Bb C# D E F G) and A Phrygian (A Bb C D E F G). Once learned, be emotive - flamenco rhythm is incredibly precise but also expressive, flexible and sensitive.

$\text{J} = 114$ A A(9) A A(9) A A(9) A A(9) A A(9) A A(9) A Bbadd#11/F Bb/F Bbadd#11/F
E 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
B 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2
G 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2
D 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2
A 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
E 1 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
1 i i i i i i i i i i i i i i
 am am
4 i i i i i i i i i i i i i i
 am am
7 c a m i i i i i i i i i i i
 am am

EXAMPLE 3 RHYTHMIC EMBELLISHMENT IN TANGOS FORM ...CONTINUED

CD TRACK 15

F6

C7 C7add11 C7

Bbadd#11

C9

Bbadd#11

A

rasg

E B G D A E

11	c a m i m	v a m i i	m i v i i	v i i i i	v i i i i	v i i i i	v i i i i
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EXAMPLE 4 FALSETA STUDY IN MALAGUEÑA FORM

Now that some strumming ideas have been established, it's time to look at some single-note lines and polyphonic ideas. The thumb is very important in flamenco and often melodies are played in the bass with harmonic elaborations with the fingers. The following arrangement of malagueña

- a free-form flamenco form from Malaga - shows a number of ways that a melody played with the thumb can be arranged into a set of melodic variations (falsetas). It builds in subdivisions of notes reaching a four-note then characteristic five-note tremolo.

CD TRACK 16

The sheet music displays a 12-bar blues progression in E major. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The progression consists of four measures in Am, followed by four in E, four in Am, and four in G6/Fmaj7/E. The time signature is common time (indicated by '4'). The tempo is 120 BPM. The guitar tab shows the left hand's fretting and the right hand's picking pattern (down-up-down-up). The strings are labeled E, B, G, D, A, E from top to bottom. The tab indicates specific fingerings and picking directions.

The image shows a musical score for a six-string guitar. The top part displays a staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bottom part shows a six-string guitar neck with fret markings. The score consists of five measures. Each measure starts with an 'Am' chord (three eighth-note strokes) followed by an 'E' chord (three eighth-note strokes). This pattern repeats three times. The strings are muted with the 'm' finger. The first measure's fingering is p m i p m i. The second measure's fingering is p m i p m i. The third measure's fingering is p m i p m i. The fourth measure's fingering is p m i p m i. The fifth measure's fingering is p m i p m i.

EXAMPLE 4 FALSETA STUDY IN MALAGUEÑA FORM ...CONTINUED

CD TRACK 16

EXAMPLE 5 LIGADO & LLAMADA STUDY IN SOLEARES FORM

CD TRACK 17

By combining the strumming techniques from Examples 1-3, falseta concepts from Example 4 and some slurs (ligado in flamenco terminology), it is possible to create a convincing arrangement in a flamenco style. Here's an arrangement in a soleares form. You should be able to hear the 12-beat cycle through most of the sections. All of the melodic and harmonic material is

derived from an augmented version of E Spanish Phrygian - an eight-note scale that adds a b3rd (G) to E Spanish Phrygian/E Phrygian dominant (E, F, G#, A, B, C, D). The closing phrases in bars 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12, common in the soleares and other forms, are known as llamada - a call or break at the close of phrases setting up the next phrase. Play them with a secure and even rhythm.

Sheet music for Example 5, Part 1, showing a 12-beat cycle of E Spanish Phrygian. The music is in 3/4 time with a treble clef. The guitar strings are labeled E, B, G, D, A, E. The first section consists of six measures of eighth-note patterns followed by a measure of rests. The second section starts with a single note 'E'.

Sheet music for Example 5, Part 2, showing a transition to F major. It includes a measure of rests, followed by measures in F major (F, E, D, C) and E major (E, D, C, B). The guitar strings are labeled E, B, G, D, A, E. The section ends with a measure of rests.

Sheet music for Example 5, Part 3, showing a section in Am, C, F6, and E. The guitar strings are labeled E, B, G, D, A, E. The section ends with a measure of rests.

Sheet music for Example 5, Part 4, showing a sequence of chords: Am, Am7, Am6, Am, G13, G7, G13, Fmaj7#11, G6/9, Fmaj7#11, and E. The guitar strings are labeled E, B, G, D, A, E. The section ends with a measure of rests.

EXAMPLE 6 PICADO STUDY IN ALEGRIAS FORM

CD TRACK 18

We'll add one more technique to the mix, and that's scale playing using 'i m' (known as picado). Flamenco players have ferocious scale playing techniques using i m rest stroke, perhaps due to their built-up extensor muscles from rhythm playing. This short piece uses a capo at the 2nd fret for a brighter tone. The tab considers the capo as a zero fret, with fret numbers

related to that, so 4th fret now becomes 2nd fret. Without a capo the tab can be used literally - so 2nd fret is 2nd fret. Aim for a relaxed technique but with a biting, projecting tone. Not all flamenco is sombre, and here alegrías is a lively dance form in a major key which should have a light and playful character. I do hope you enjoy this flamenco introduction - hasta pronto!

N.C.

F#9 (E9) F# (E) N.C.

B6 (A6) B N.C.

F#9 (E9) F#7 (E7) N.C.

B6 (A6) B (A) E (D) Esus#4 (Dsus#4) (D) B (A) B6 (A6) B (A) F#9 (E9) F# (E) N.C.

F#9 (E9) F# (E) N.C. B (A)