

DANCE STYLE LOCATOR

Spanish: Flamenco



Flamenco is a dance form that arose in Spain, influenced by various populations passing through or living in the southern region of Andalusia. Beginning in the third century BC, Gypsies, Sephardic Jews, Christians, and Moors all contributed to Andalusian culture. The Moorish civilization was founded by Arabs and Berbers of North Africa, in the 8th century. Like the Indian Mughals, the Moors cultivated and transformed the arts, by bringing them into their lavish courts as entertainment. As a result, Andalusia flourished and came to be regarded as a major cultural center from the 9th to the 15th century.

The Gypsies migrated from India to Spain in various waves, being influenced by the customs of peoples whose land they passed through, and incorporating elements of these customs into their own already unique customs, language and way of life. A nomadic people, the Gypsies were most often met by extreme persecution and condemnation wherever they went, and were often forced to survive under the most adverse conditions.

Beginning in the 15th century, Christian monarchs in the north of Spain demanded adherence to Christianity, and during the Spanish inquisition, Muslims, Jews, and Gypsies were forced to convert or leave Spain. Many people were tortured, persecuted and even killed if they refused to conform to the accepted standard of Spanish society. Poverty and persecution were widespread and affected Gypsies and non-Gypsies alike, and the once vigorous separation that existed between them faded away as a result of their shared struggles.

Despite being persecuted by the Spanish Monarchy, the Gypsies continued to defend and assert cultural identity and ethnic pride, and maintain their own customs. The interplay between the Andalusian folk forms and Gypsy traditions forged the beginnings of flamenco dance and music. The first contexts of flamenco performance appeared to have been private, deeply emotional events that were kept hidden in close Gypsy familial gatherings. Early urban flamenco events took place in secluded rooms in bars, or in the patios of Gypsy dwellings. The suppressed passions and long-felt emotions of the Andalusian Gypsies were vocalized through flamenco in the *cante* (song), the primary element of flamenco.

DANCE STYLE LOCATOR

(Flamenco, continued)

In the 19th century, flamenco shifted from an intimate, ritualistic art form to a public entertainment form, developing the virtuosic footwork and an expansion of styles within the form. Performed by non-Gypsy and Gypsies alike, flamenco began to achieve legitimacy and public acclaim. The 20th century technological growth and mass media further bolstered flamenco's popularity, as it came to be recognized nationally and internationally and moved into theatrical settings.

Although the Gypsies were not honored for their contribution to the art form until many years later, they have always been considered among the best interpreters of the flamenco arts. In recent years flamenco has continued to develop, incorporating sophisticated musical stylistic elements from other mediums, however it still maintains a core of traditional styles and techniques.

Canto (song) is the core of flamenco, and like *baile* (dance), it has three forms: *grande* or *hondo* (meaning grand or deep), intense, profound songs, tragic in tone, and imbued with *duende*, the transformation of the musician by the depth of the emotion; *intermedio* (intermediate), moderately serious; and *pequeño* (small), light songs of exuberance, love, and nature. Among these forms, several individual genres exist, including the light *bulerías*, the more serious *soleares* and its lighter descendant, the *alegrías*, among others.

Both text and melody of these songs, like the flamenco dance, are improvised within traditional structures such as characteristic rhythms and chords. *Zapateado*, intricate toe- and heel-clicking steps, characterizes the men's dance; the traditional women's dance is based more on grace of body and hand movements. The *baile grande*, especially, is believed to retain elements of the dance of North India, where the Gypsies originated. Castanets come from the influence of Andalusian dance. *Jaleo*, rhythmic finger snapping, hand clapping, and shouting often accompanies the song and dance. In the 19th century, guitar accompaniment became common for many genres, and guitar solos also developed as a part of the song/dance cycle.