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**The influence of flamenco on 20th century
spanish guitar music**

DLA Dissertation - Theses

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1. The subject, hypotheses and goals of the dissertation

The dissertation examines the relationship between 20th century classical spanish guitar music and flamenco, from the perspective of the classical guitar. In addition to classical guitar playing, flamenco plays a significant role in my art, therefore I started thinking about whether the significantly different musical and instrumental background of flamenco has aspects that can be used on classical guitar for a more authentic performance of a certain segment of the repertoire.

Among today's musical instruments, the guitar is undoubtedly very popular. It has a place in almost all of the different musical genres that exist today, and in some cases it is almost mandatory – such as jazz, country, blues, pop, the various trends of European and Latin American folk music, or classical music. Although they are different genres, which by definition follow different musical, and therefore different technical principles, their influence on each other can still be discovered. In my thesis, I would like to highlight a small part of this network, specifically the relationship between classical guitar playing and flamenco, focusing on the last 120-150 years. The reason for this emphasis is the importance of selected works of the classical guitar repertoire composed by Spanish composers, whose art was influenced by flamenco, in the 20th century.

According to my hypothesis, the works mentioned clearly have flamenco roots, and a certain degree of knowledge of the genre can be decisive for their most authentic performance. Although the roots of flamenco and classical guitar playing are common, over the past two centuries the principles have become quite different, so practitioners of one side rarely start studying the other. Based on my experiences, there are very few classical guitarists who are also proficient in flamenco, even on a theoretical level. The goal of my thesis is to provide the reader with information that can help in understanding and performing works inspired by flamenco. The writing is a summation of knowledge from more than a decade of study, research and practice – knowledge that few classical guitarists have, due to the difference between the

two styles – and combining it with twenty years of knowledge of the classical guitar. This dissertation explains the important similarities and differences between the flamenco and classical guitar, their characteristic technical elements, and compares the two musical styles, while also focusing on the application of flamenco techniques on the classical guitar.

2. Aspects and process of the research

Due to the practical nature of the topic, I consider it important that my own conclusions and suggestions be preceded by thorough, diverse research. Due to flamenco being an art form in which deepening the knowledge is not based on written sources. Being folklore, the customs, musical and technical characteristics may differ from region to region. Therefore it is impossible to find a writing that explains all the characteristics of flamenco culture in great detail. In addition, the lack of literature dealing with the relationship between classical music and flamenco, as well as classical and flamenco guitar, leads the research in a mostly practical direction.

I had the opportunity to read a few works on the history and musical characteristics of flamenco, and to extract a sufficient amount of basic information from them. There are also several books and collections focusing on flamenco guitar (e.g. *Manuel Granados*, *Paco Peña*, *Juan Serrano*, *Juan Martín*, *Gerhard Graf-Marzinez*), but most of them only briefly explain basic techniques and contain a few exercises, and then emphasize the study of simpler pieces or fragments, rather than understanding the style's fundamental musical thinking. So, after reading and studying them, I started deepening my flamenco knowledge by experiences – I actively participated in hungarian flamenco communities, went to concerts and performances, participated in masterclasses and flamenco camps of artists from Hungary and abroad, as well as study trips to Spain (János Illés, Marc Ruiz Portella, Melisa Picón Rivero , María “La Manzanilla”, Samuelito, Leandro Bianchi). Everything described in the dissertation is based on the sum of these experiences, supplemented and

further thought through with own thoughts, ideas, and adaptations for classical guitar.

3. The structure of the dissertation

After the table of contents and the introduction, I divide the thesis into three large chapters, which are further divided into subsections. The three main chapters logically and gradually take the information necessary for understanding and approach the conclusion of the dissertation. I will approach the thesis from the direction of flamenco, then I will focus more and more on combining it with the technical and musical aspects of the classical guitar, and finally by analyzing a few selected works, I will provide concrete examples and suggestions for adaptation.

In the first chapter, I will briefly describe the history of flamenco, and I will discuss the role and importance of the guitar in this culture. I will present the defining features of the musical style born from the coexistence of different cultures, discussing the musical and instrumental aspects separately. I will discuss the guiding principles of melodies, the use of ornamentations, accentuation and rhythmical structures, as well as special technical elements. Although their existence not being unknown to classical guitarists, their application is different or relegated to the background according to the needs of the repertoire, which is why they are almost never practiced by many.

In the second chapter, I would like to show solutions to the flamenco technical elements listed in the first part, which I base on my flamenco knowledge and practice acquired in recent years, and classical guitar knowledge. It is important that the application of these solutions come with as few modifications to the classical guitarist technique as possible. I put emphasis on bridging the differences of two radically different guitar postures, and then by offering several alternatives for the implementation of special techniques (e.g. thumb, rasgueado), the application of which can make our performance more authentic. At the end of each subsection, I list some

exercises for developing the techniques discussed. In order to make it easier to understand, I also include explanatory diagrams for the different position changes and less clear technical solutions.

In the third chapter, I map the important compositions that became a defining part of the guitar repertoire in the 20th and 21st century and clearly possess the mentioned features, and then I will analyze the ones I consider the most important separately, in the light of the musical and technical features of flamenco. I will specifically point out these marks, accurately mapping their origin wherever possible, and based on my own experiences, I will offer solutions to both technical and musical problems for the sake of a more authentic presentation of the works and other works containing similar elements.

This is followed by the conclusion of my thesis, in which I briefly summarize the conclusions of the chapters. Since the discussed topic affects several specific areas, and their own conclusions can be read at the end of their respective chapters, I think there is no need for an all-encompassing, detailed conclusion.

4. Conclusions of the dissertation

One of the main questions for me during the research period was how deep it is necessary to go into the study of flamenco in order to make the performance of the works inspired by it more authentic. Naturally the more information someone has about the subject, the more original they can interpret these works, but I think it is natural if a classical guitarist does not devote years to learning flamenco due to the radical difference between the two styles. Thus, in my dissertation I summarized the experiences of the past years, which I believe on the one hand, help the presentation of spanish works in my own career, and on the other hand, they articulate them in a comprehensible and essential way for the reader. For achieving the goals of the thesis, I formulated the following essential conclusions:

1. Understanding the differences between classical and flamenco music – it is important to be able to shift the focus from perfect tone production and flexible phrasing to explosiveness, pulsation, and rhythmic punctuality in certain works, as well as to know the place and the connections between the functions of the frequently used phrygian mode.
2. The importance of detecting, identifying and interpreting flamenco features in flamenco-inspired works – we should determine the source of these musical and technical features as accurately as possible in order to find the appropriate solution for them (e.g. use of phrygian mode, accentuation, fingerings of different rasgueados).
3. The importance of deviating from the standard position of the strumming arm and hand – the basic classical guitarist posture requires a stable wrist and hand, but certain flamenco techniques performed in this way only work to an extent. Practicing the different hand positions of the different techniques and the flexibility of the arm can be decisive in the implementation of these techniques.
4. Understanding the use of the thumb in flamenco, adapting certain movements – emphasis on the usage of the thumb, the use of rest strokes and the movement of the wrist and arm to help the attack, where necessary.
5. Practicing and refining the rasgueado technique – we should practice rasgueados with different fingerings, in different rhythmic combinations. The development of rasgueado movements is not only important in the performance of the segment of the repertoire highlighted here. Since its' practice forces the fingers to move outward much more than usual, it indirectly affects the development of basic classical guitar techniques such as alternate picking or arpeggio.

The suggestions for guitar posture, hand positions, flamenco techniques listed in the dissertation, and their adaptations to classical guitar are of course not rules set in stone, but are suggestions that can be flexibly adapted based on the

performers' individual technical levels, anatomical differences (e.g. height, arm length, relative length of fingers) or musical preferences.

5. Bibliography

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