CHAPTER 3

Flamenco in Focus
An Analysis of a Performance of Soleares

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Ever since the mid-nineteenth century when flamenco emerged as a public entertainment genre, it has meant different things to different people. Depending on audience and context, it has been party music for slumming Andalusian aristocrats, an exotic spectacle for tourists and outsiders, a private fiesta entertainment for gypsies, and, last but not least, an art form cultivated and cherished by serious music-lovers. Today, as before, many people enjoy—at some level—the “passion” and expressivity of flamenco without understanding it in technical terms, or even knowing how to tap their feet properly to it. Although there may be no point in belittling this rather uninformed sort of enjoyment, there is also no doubt that one’s appreciation of flamenco can acquire an added dimension of depth and richness through understanding of some of its basic formal aspects. Furthermore, with its formal complexity, its idiosyncratic combination of European and Middle Eastern–derived features, and its distinctive harmonic, rhythmic, and stylistic conventions, flamenco offers particular interest to a transnational study of such musical parameters. This chapter provides some general background data on flamenco style and structure, and looks in detail at a single song-form called soleares, and a representative performance of it.

Although flamenco draws from traditions many centuries old, it was not until the first half of the nineteenth century that it can be said to have emerged as a distinctive form of Andalusian music.¹ Andalusian music culture was itself an eclectic entity, syncretizing the legacy of the Arabs, Berbers, Jews, Christians, and pagans who cohabitated for several centuries. While most Jews and Moors were expelled by the early 1600s, their musical influence persisted, and the ethnic mix of port towns like Seville and Cádiz was enriched by the presence of African slaves and influences from new forms of creole Latin American music.

¹ Among the many books exploring early flamenco history are Lefranc (2000), Alarcón Caballero (1981), and Schreiner (1985).
Perhaps most important, the sixteenth century saw the arrival of substantial numbers of gypsies (whose communities may have come to accommodate many clandestine Moors and Jews). Although now constituting only around three percent of Spain’s population, gypsies have long played a disproportionately important role as professional musicians. Socioeconomic underdevelopment, relative isolation from mainstream European culture, and the richness of the musical heritage itself together perpetuated the vitality of Andalusian folk music down to the present day.

In the districts of Seville and Cádiz, from the late 1700s references can be found to forms of music, which would subsequently come to be categorized, albeit ambiguously, as “flamenco.” Over the next century, this idiom evolved primarily as a stylized and elaborated adaptation of elements of Andalusian folk music. By the 1830s, most of the cantes, or song-types, of modern flamenco were not only coalescing but being performed publicly in clubs called cafés cantantes. Although many of its leading performers have been nongypsies, flamenco’s core of artists and audiences remained the gypsy-centered subculture, which historically comprised not only ethnic gitano (Romany gypsies whose ancestry and traditional language derived primarily from India) but also other lumpen-proletarian bohemians. In the course of the nineteenth century, as flamenco became a professional entertainment idiom performed in cafés and for the private parties of rich playboys (señoritos), it absorbed elements from other sources, including Latin American (and Afro-Latin) music, regional genres from other parts of Spain, and possibly even Italian opera.

As with other music styles, the effects of commercialization and professionalization have been mixed, often obliging artists to pander to the tastes of ignorant audiences (whether local or non-Andalusian), while at the same time stimulating higher technical standards and expansion of repertoire, increasing the sheer amount of performance, and attracting the attentions of nongypsy musicians. Since the early twentieth century, flamenco’s trajectory has been irregular; it suffered considerably during the culturally stultifying and economically disastrous Franco era (1936–1975), but has enjoyed prodigious vitality in recent decades. Today, as in previous generations, polemics rage between purists and innovators, and traditionalists rant against the effects of commercialization (especially the pop-oriented forms of “nuevo flamenco”), but there is no doubt that the genre is flourishing, both in traditional and new forms.

Despite this vitality, it is well mentioning that flamenco is by no means the most popular music in Spain. Most Spaniards, and even many Andalusers, have no interest in it at all, although the pop flamenco of recent decades has acquired a new sort of trendy mass appeal, and all Spaniards are well aware of flamenco’s international renown. On the whole, flamenco’s popularity is perhaps more akin to that of jazz or blues in the United States, with its primary audience consisting of a mixture of hard-core music lovers, and gypsies and interested Andalusers who grow up thoroughly immersed in the art.

The Musical Elements of Flamenco

Flamenco can be regarded as comprising cante (singing), toque (instrumental accompaniment, primarily on guitar), and baile, or dance. The latter tends to be the focus in specific contexts, whether a private gypsy fiesta, or a formal show put on for tourists in a tablao (the modern successor to the café cantante). For its part, solo flamenco guitar has evolved into a sophisticated idiom in the last half-century; it also has become particularly popular as an international art form, especially because, unlike vocal music, guitar-playing poses no language barriers. Nevertheless, in other senses, flamenco cante, or singing, with guitar accompaniment, remains the quintessential and most basic structural format of the genre, and that which will accordingly be the focus of this essay.

The flamenco repertoire consists of around a dozen basic song-types, themselves generally called cantes (or, more recently, paños), and a dozen or two subsidiary or obscure variants of these. The cantes are distinguished variously in terms of poetic form, characteristic vocal melodies, in some cases a metrical scheme called compás, and a distinctive guitar tonality and conventional accompaniment patterns. The cantes can be classified in several ways. Some of them can be seen as stylized forms of genres of Andalusian folk music, in particular the numerous regional varieties of the fandango family (including malagueñas, granainas, tarantolanas, and the fandango de Huerta). Others, such as soleares and siguiryias, are more strictly associated with gypsy music culture in that they lack counterparts in Andalusian folk music and appear to have been cultivated primarily by gitanos, to some extent in a semiprivate fashion. These cantes, because of their solemn character, are sometimes referred to as cante jondo or “deep song,” as opposed to cantes such as tangos and bulerías, which are fast and festive, and may have evolved in more public, professional contexts. Some, such as granainas, malagueñas, and fandango libre, are rendered in free rhythm, whereas most others are metered, that is, in compás. Among the latter, tangos
and cientos are in duplet meter, and most of the others, including soleares, are in some form of what could be regarded as triple meter. Most of these basic forms, including their conventional guitar accompaniment patterns, were standardized by the early twentieth century. The innovation that abounds today consists primarily of various sorts of elaboration and expansion within these inherited cantes rather than invention of new ones.

Musical Elements: Tonality

Much flamenco, including the soleares focused on in this article, is based not on common-practice Western tonality, but on what musicologists call Andalusian or Phrygian tonality. In this system, the chordal vocabulary derives not from the Western major or minor scales, but primarily from the Phrygian or “E” mode (or transposed variants thereof); however, in contrast to the Gregorian Phrygian mode, the tonic E chord is major rather than minor. This tonality is best regarded as a sort of modal harmony, in the sense that it has clearly evolved as a harmonization based on scale degrees of a modal system rather than a tonal one per se. The modes in question are the Arab maqāms (or vernacular versions thereof) which pervade most forms of art and vernacular music in the Arab and Turkish world, and also appear to have dominated Moorish music. Of particular importance are the modes Bayati and Hijaz, which have been for several centuries among the popular maqāms in Arab urban music. Their scales are roughly as follows, taking E as tonic, with the F+ in Bayati (like the C+ in Hijaz) denoting a neutral, half-sharp second degree, intoned between F and F#:  

Bayati: E F+ G A B C D (E)  
Hijaz: E F G# A B C+ D (E D C B A G# F E)  

In both of these modes, the fourth degree (here, A) functions as a secondary tonic and a temporary resting point.

In Andalusian Phrygian harmony, the chordal vocabulary derives primarily from the pitch resources of these modal resources. Thus, taking E as tonic and “rounding off” Bayati’s neutral second degree (F+) to a lowered second (F) affords minor triads on the fourth and seventh degrees (Am, Dm) and major ones on the second, third, and sixth degrees (F, G, and C). The standard use of a major tonic triad (here, E major) rather than a minor one suggests affinities with the Hijaz mode insofar as it occasions the use of the raised third in some contexts, affording the characteristic (“Oriental”-sounding) augmented second interval between second and third scalar degrees (F and G). A strikingly similar form of modal harmony is common in other music where Arab–Turkish

modes have syntetized with Western chords, such as Turkish, Greek and Balkan urban music, and klezmer. In E Phrygian, the role of the “dominant”—that is, the chord which demands resolution to the tonic—is thus played by a major chord on the lowered second degree—here, F major. The Western dominant chord—a B7—is basically nonexistent in this system (except for often being introduced briefly in the typical final cadential flourish, which shifts to standard Western tonality in the direct major key).

Andalusian Phrygian tonality epitomizes in the common chord progression Am–G–F–E (the “Andalusian cadence”), in which the E functions as the tonic, rather than the dominant of A. The progression should thus be understood as iv–III–bII–I, in the key of E Phrygian, rather than I–VII–VI–V in the key of A minor. This cadence can be regarded as providing the basic structure of most flamenco harmony in Phrygian/Andalusian tonality. Its importance can be understood to that of the IV–V–I progression in Western common-practice harmony, or the ii–V–I progression in mainstream jazz. Depending on context, the progression may occur in a quick and straightforward manner, or in the form of a deliberate semicadence on iv, followed by a leisurely and circuitous descent to I. (Vocal and guitar melodies in flamenco also tend to descend rather than ascend.) Movement by fourths is also common; thus, a movement to Am (iv) might be followed by the progression G7–C–E–F (III–VI–Ih–I) —which could also be seen as a variant of the Andalusian cadence, adding a C (VI) chord between the G (III) and F (Ih) chords. In some contexts, including the soleares examined in this chapter, there may be a temporary cadence on the submediant VI (here, C). This may be regarded as the most characteristic contrasting tonal area, analogous to the relative major of a minor key. In some cantes, such as malagueñas and other forms of the fandango family, Phrygian tonality (e.g., on E) coexists or alternates with simple, common-practice I–IV–V harmonies on this relative major (VI, or in this case, C). Other cantes, such as alegrias and tanguillos, use simple common-practice harmony rather than Andalusian/Phrygian harmony.

Chord voicings in flamenco often include nontradioc tones, which are generally open strings on the guitar (using the standard tuning of EADGBe, or, with the capo as in our transcribed example, GCGBD). Thus, for example, in compás to and many other instances in figure 3.2, the Ab (Ih) chord is enriched with a high G, played on the open string, as is the D7 chord in the final bars. The F in the very beginning passage in the song, also played on the open string, is similarly idiomatic, adding an ambiguous hint of F minor to what is probably better regarded as an Ab major chord.

Musical Elements II: Performance Structure

A typical flamenco recital, with voice and guitar accompaniment, comprises a series of pieces (not exactly "songs"), in different cantos, each lasting around five minutes. (In a private gypsy festa, the festive, collective music-making might consist of endless bulerias or tangos with different amateur singers contributing verses.) Each song consists of a set of verses (called copla, tercio, or letreo), usually from three to five lines each, which are punctuated by guitar interludes called falsetas. The guitarist also provides a short introduction which sets the tonality and, if relevant, the compás and tempo of the cante.

As the piece consists of an additive series of verses and falsetas, there is no long-term thematic development per se, nor any of the techniques of symmetry, recapitulation, and closure that characterize genres like sonata form or the thirty-two-bar AABA popular song. Hence the term "song," insofar as it implies some sort of coherent, rationalized formal structure, is somewhat misleading. (The only form of closure per se in soleares and bulerias consists of a short final verse—sometimes called cambio or change, or macho—which, as mentioned, uses standard tonic-dominant harmony and quickly accelerates to a close.) Structure and closure are present, but only on the local level of the individual copla, which—as we will see in the case of soleares—generally introduces an emotional tension and intensity, which is then melodically relaxed or resolved. This sort of mini-drama is repeated, with variations, with each copla. Also as discussed later, an even more short-term form of structure is provided by the internal dynamics of the compás, with its internal pattern of tension and release.

In accordance with this fundamentally additive (rather than long-term developmental) musical structure, each short copla section consists of an epigrammatic, condensed statement that is thematically independent from the other coplas in the song. Accordingly, although the lyrics in a given song do not illustrate the overall continuity of a poem per se, many individual flamenco coplas in themselves are minor masterpieces of concise expression, ideally suited to their musical rendering. Although verses often deal with the same topic—especially unrequited love—they often differ in mood and subject matter. Insofar as formal structures seeking development, climax, and closure are distinctively modern bourgeois creations, flamenco, in its essentially additive, sequential structure, is thus typical of many premodern forms, especially those relying on strophic forms using stock melodies.

In soleares, as in some other types of cante, a copla usually consists of three or four lines of verse. Each line is theoretically octosyllabic, but lengths often vary, and vocalists may change words somewhat in singing. The final and third-to-last verses generally rhyme (or are assonant); thus, in a four-line copla, the scheme would be abcb, and in three lines it would be aba. However, the assonance can be quite approximate, and in general, rhyme in soleares is not very important, especially given the loose, melismatic style of rendering.

Flamenco lyrics themselves derive from varied sources. Most are transmitted more or less orally, that is, through families, performances, or, nowadays, recordings. Many, however, are written by literary, nonmusician poets. A singer is free to combine verses from different sources, and on different topics, within a single song. Continuity of subject matter is only expected in poe-oriented songs, from the cuplé popular from the early twentieth century to the varieties of modern "nuevo flamenco" that seek and sometimes achieve true mass popularity. (The titles of most flamenco songs that are listed on CD covers merely consist of the first line of verse, and have no particular relation to the subsequent coplas.)

Flamenco Guitar

Although flamenco guitar has come in some contexts—especially international ones—to outshine flamenco singing, the primary role of the guitar in mainstream flamenco has always been to accompany the vocalist. Given the fact that even until the mid-1900s, guitars and guitarists were somewhat scarce, in informal domestic contexts flamenco cantes were often performed without guitar accompaniment, as purely modal monophonic songs. However, it is also clear that by the late 1700s, if not earlier, the guitar was widely used in Andalusia to accompany various kinds of folk song, including gypsy singing. By the time flamenco emerged as a public art form, guitar had become the standard accompanying instrument for professional contexts, and conventional playing techniques were already established. Traditionally, these consisted primarily of rasgueado (strumming) and melodies plucked especially with the thumb (alzapúa, from alzar: to raise, and púa: plectrum), both supplemented by rhythmic fingernail-strokes (golpes) on the face of the instrument. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Ramón Montoya (1880–1949) and other guitarists—to some extent inspired by classical guitarists—enriched flamenco guitar technique with new or greater use of arpeggio, four-fingered tremolo, and fast picado passages (single-note runs). The idiom of flamenco guitar solos was further cultivated in this period. Also established by this time was a repertoire of conventional guitar patterns and keys associated with particular cantes (e.g., B Phrygian with granainas, and F# Phrygian with tarantas). Subsequent innovators—especially the brilliant Paco de Lucía (b. 1947)—have further extended guitar technique and harmonic vocabulary, while remaining
faithful to the established repertoire of cantes rather than inventing new ones. Although traditional guitarists seldom strayed far from first position (i.e., playing only near the capo), more modern players have come to utilize the entire fretboard, and have explored other idiomatic guitar sonorities by playing in such keys as Eb and Ab Phrygian. In general—speaking of technique per se rather than structure and content—it might be said that classical guitar technique is somewhat richer and more varied than that of flamenco, but few classical guitarist can render the furious rasgueado patterns and machine-gun picado runs that flamenco players cultivate.

In accompanying a singer, the basic requirement of the flamenco guitarist is to provide the correct compás (in the case of metered cantes) and to support and enhance the singing. The guitar introduction to a song serves, on a basic level, to set the pitch and tonality for the singer and establish the mood of the cante. The falsetas in between the verses serve to punctuate them and allow the singer to catch his or her breath. The falsetas are invariably precomposed, and in general, flamenco guitar playing contains little or none of the sort of free improvisation encountered, for instance, in jazz. However, the choice of falsetas, and the ongoing extemporaneous flourishes and variations lend the guitar playing an essential flavor of looseness and spontaneity.

Traditionally, the guitar introduction and falsetas are relatively brief. In recent years, guitarists increasingly indulge in long, elaborate falsetas and introductions which, although pleasing guitar-lovers, might provoke an annoyed singer to rebuke the instrumentalist with a “Corta ya!” (“Cut it, already!”). (However, in most contexts, guitarists and vocalists who perform together are accustomed to working with each other.) The guitarist's primary task is to make the singer sound good, rather than to show off. This goal involves sensitively complementing the vocalist in various ways, by tailoring dynamics, intensity, and even tempo to particular passages, knowing when to be assertive and when to lay back, and generally intensifying the singing.

**Soleares**

Soleares enjoys a certain preeminence among flamenco cantes. It is sometimes referred to as the "mother of cantes," and it does appear to have been a primary evolutionary source for certain cantes (especially alegrias and bulerias). However, it is not as old as some cantes, such as siguiriyas, and its development has no particular relation to that of cantes like fandangos (which derive from Andalusian folk music) and tangos and guajiras, which derive in part from Latin America. In general, its "maternal" status would appear to rest on its inclusion in almost every formal flamenco performance, on the way it seems to epitomize the structural features of the distinctively gypsy-associated cantes (including alegrias and bulerias), and on its essentially obligatory role in the repertoire of any aspiring flamenco singer, regardless of regional or stylistic background.

Soleares (or soleá) appears to have evolved from diverse sources, predominantly among which were Andalusian styles of singing romance (pronounced “ro-MAHN-say”), Spanish romances are long narrative ballads, with octosyllabic verse lines, sung in strophic style, often with simple stock melodies. Romances would be traditionally sung in informal rather than concert-style contexts. However, Andalusian gypsies had long cultivated their own forms of singing romances, often using text fragments rather than long epic passages, and singing them in lively, rhythmic fashion with dance at weddings, other festivities, and even street shows. Cervantes describes one such public performance of a gypsy romance in his 1608 story, “La Gitanilla.” By the 1850s, as performed in private fiestas and public café cantantes in the towns in the Seville and Cádiz area, some of these styles had acquired distinctive forms and rhythms and had come to be designated as “soleares.” In the subsequent decades they came to enjoy wide popularity, especially via the café cantantes, leading to the publication of booklets of lyrics, and at the end of the century, a number of gramophone and cylinder recordings revealing a cante basically cognate with that of today.

The most distinctive and basic structural feature of soleá is its compás, which in flamenco implies a structure that is somewhat more complex than a simple meter. Flamenco pedagogues (whether dancers, guitarists, or some singers) generally describe the soleares compás as comprising twelve beats, with accents on 3, 6, 8, and 10, as shown here:

\[
\begin{array}{ccccccccccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 & 9 & 10 & 11 & 12 \\
> & > & > & > & & & & & & & & \\
\end{array}
\]

Essentially the same compás, and the same moderate tempo (MM100–160) are used in alegrias, which, however, is in major rather than Phrygian tonality; the bulerías compás is also similar, but its ater (tempo, spirit) is fast and festive, unlike soleares, which is prevailing serious, although not necessarily so unmitigatedly tragic as siguiriyas. In the compás of soleares and alegrias—and even more so in bulerías—the first beat does not have the same sort of structural emphasis and importance that it might in a Western meter, or, for that matter, in an Indian \textit{tala}; rather, the most important beats are three and ten.

As we shall see later, guitar patterns themselves tend to reinforce the internal accents of the soleares compás, in which tension is typically introduced at beat three and resolves at ten, with beats eleven and twelve being inactive.
Thus, the harmonic rhythm in solea (and bulerías) typically tends to consist of a loose ostinato moving to bll on beat 3 and cadencing on the tonic at beat 10, roughly as shown here:

beats: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
chords: (1 1) bll --- (1 1 bll) I ---

Furthermore, the guitarist, aside from playing on the strings, often executes a fingernail tap (golpe) on the wooden face of the instrument on the accented beats 3, 6, 8, and 10. Someone providing palmas or hand-clapping accompaniment, also would usually render a variant of this structure, which is represented well in English as follows (clapping “seven” as two eighth-notes): one two THREE four five SIX SEV EN EI GHT NIN E TEN (eleven twelve). 4

There are various ways of conceiving or analyzing this structure. To begin with, it constitutes a twelve-beat scheme with internal accents. More specifically, it could be regarded as a syncopated variant of the familiar horizontal hemiola or sesquialtera, literally, “six that alters,” that is, from 6/8 to 3/4, in the sense of being 3 + 3 + 2 + 2 + 2. The distinctive syncopation lies in the accentuation of the final, rather than initial beat of each grouping. The 6/8–3/4 hemiola is, of course, a cliché of various Spanish and Latin American musics; in the form of yulechte v illanecio, the Latin-American-derived z araband a (sara- bande), and other genres, it was well established in Spain from the sixteenth century. The 3 + 3 + 2 + 2 + 2 pattern emerges in a somewhat different manner when soleares (or alegrias) markedly accelerates, as often happens in dance, in which case its compás becomes like that of the lively bulerías. At that tempo, beat one effectively disappears, and beat twelve emerges as a sort of syncopated anacrusis to three. The 3–3–2–2–2 syncopation is quite clear at this tempo, but beginning from beat 12, not one:

12 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 (12)
> > > > >
(3 + 3 + 2 + 2 + 2)

In many ways, it is better to regard this compás merely as a cycle, with internal tensions and resolutions, rather than a meter in which the first beat has a special preeminence as a starting or finishing point. Further, such a compás, with its internal patterns of tension and resolution, is more complex than a meter per se. and is akin to a rhythmic ostinato. One also might point out, as suggested earlier, that this sort of pattern, along with the dynamics of the internal copla, provides a form of expressive local structure and dynamism that, in flamenco, is more important than any sort of extended formal structure.

Given its rhythmic ambiguities, soleares could be notated in various ways, for example, in 12/4, in alternating bars of 6/8 and 3/4, or—as is most common—in 3/4. In this chapter, it is notated (somewhat idiosyncratically) in 12/4, with a dotted bar line every three beats to suggest the 3/4 subdivision.

A typical formal rendering of soleares might comprise four or five coplas punctuated by guitar falsetas. The basic melodies to which the coplas are sung are not improvised, but are chosen from a finite set of stock tunes familiar to the singer. Flamencologists have described around fifty of these soleá tunes, some of which are quite distinct, but most of which are fairly similar, constituting slight variants of each other. Thus, in the piece analyzed later, the different coplas represent five different soleá tunes, with distinct names and pedigrees; however, with the exception of the last, they are quite similar to each other. The tune variants are generally named after the towns or neighborhoods where they evolved (e.g., Triana—formerly the gypsy barrio of Seville—or Alcalá, or the individuals who fashioned or popularized them. These designated names of melodies might not be known to all vocalists but, rather, only to musicians or flamencologists who take an interest in such matters. Most of the melodies and guitar accompaniment patterns, including those in the song discussed here, tend to follow a few relatively standard patterns.

Before examining the recorded song in detail, it may be useful to look at a very schematic rendering of the most typical opening pattern, which also forms the basis of that in the recording. An explanation of the notation of key signature is also noted here. Flamenco cantes like soleares are most typically notated in the key of E Phyrgian, as that accords with the “white-key” piano mode and with the fingerings conceived of by guitarists; hence, this chapter has up to this point used that convention. The actual concert pitch of a song, however, is usually different, as guitarists generally use a capo (rejilla) to match the comfortable range of the singer. Thus, for example, in the recording discussed in this essay, the guitarist has put the capo at the third fret, such that the actual tonic is G Phyrgian rather than E Phyrgian. Because this chapter is intended as an analytical study rather than a guitar accompaniment manual, the extended transcription later (figure 3.2) indicates the actual (“concert”) pitches, in the key of G Phyrgian (with three flats—not to be confused with E major). However, to ease the transition and to assist guitarists, the schematic guide to basic

4. If one finds verbal mnemonics useful, instead of “I like to live in Ameri-ca,” the accentuation could be rendered (in moderate tempo) as “I want TO live on A CHICK-EN FARM in SPAIN (pause-pause)” (rendering “chicken,” like “seven,” as two eighth-notes).

5. For thorough classifications and descriptions of soleares singing styles, see Lefranc (2000: ch. 6), Soler Guevara and Soler Díaz (1992), and—based on the latter—Norman Kliman’s fine Web site: http://perso.wanadoo.es/figuriya/soleares.htm, which contains sound examples of all the styles.
sola style shown as figure 3.1 also provides the guitar-oriented E Phrygian chords in parentheses. (Flamenco guitarists refer to the E-major chord fingering as por arrida, or "above"; however, soleras is often played in the fingering of A Phrygian, using as tonic the A major chord—called por medio or "in the middle"—with the "Andalusian" cadence thus comprising Dm–C–B–A.)

The pattern shown as figure 3.1 basically consists of two melodic lines (A and B), each rendered twice, and each with a standard guitar chordal accompaniment; since each melody line accommodates two lines of verse, each melody line can be divided into two sections, notated A(1–2) and B(1–2). As will be shown more clearly in the discussion of the recorded example, the melodic lines are typically rendered: A1–A2–(guitar break)–A3–A4–B3–B4–B5–B6. The pattern thus lasts nine compáses. The vocal lines typically begin on or (in A2 and B2) slightly before the first beat of the compás, which generally is preceded by a guitar cadence on beat 10. However, the vocal melody, rather than overtly stressing the compás, is loosely free-rhythmic in style, offering no particular emphasis on strong beats of the compás. Melodies A and B are quite similar, each consisting of a rise from the tonic (G) to the fourth or fifth scale degree, and returning to the tonic. This contour—a quick initial ascent, followed by a somewhat more extended descent to the tonic—is typical of most soleras verse-line melodies. In melody A, the guitar oscillates between chords on the tonic and flat second degree (A♭); more specifically, in keeping with the compás of sola, it tends to move to A♭ on beat 3, and cadence back on G at beat 10. Melody B, by contrast, after moving on beat 3 to A♭ (b♭), has a dramatic internal III–I, VI (B♭–G) cadence on the submedian (which functions as a "relative tonic"), on beat 10. Guitarists use the all-purpose term cambia (change) to describe this distinctive chordal cadence. In soleras, the cambia constitutes the climactic point in a copla, coming at the end of the penultimate line in the three- or four-line verse.

The first three beats of the next and final compás feature a clear rhythmic IV–III–II (Cm–B♭–A) progression, drifting to the tonic on beat 7, and resolving more definitively there on beat 10. The first rendition of the second melodic line (B), with its distinctive chord progression, and coinciding with verses 3–4, constitutes the dramatic climax of the copla, after which the melody subsides to rest on the tonic note. Note that the verse lines do not correspond exactly to the melodic lines; the typical format can be shown as follows:

Melodic lines: A1–A2–(guitar break)–A3–A4–B3–B4–B5–B6
Verse lines: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

A second type of common soleras pattern or style (which, like the entities mentioned above, is also called cambia), is typically sung after the first one. The main difference is that during the first melody line, the guitar, instead of oscillating between tonic and flat second-degree chords, starts with a tonic seventh chord (or IV7 of IV) and on beat 10 of the compás resolves temporarily to the minor iv chord (figure 3.2, C minor). The vocal melody during this section heightens the tension by stressing the seventh scalar degree over the G7 chord (here, F). The subsequent compás generally resembles the melody B

6. As Lefranc (2000:47–49) points out, it is also typical of and perhaps at least indirectly influenced by Arabic melodic contours such as that of the adhan or call to prayer, and by the aforementioned gypsy forms of singing romances.

7. Often, perhaps because they are singing at the top of their range, vocalists sing a major sixth-degree rather than a seventh, giving the impression that they are unable to quite reach the higher degree. (In other contexts, some vocalists, especially from Jerez, sometimes sing a bit sharp, as if through an excess of emotion.)
pattern of figure 3.1 in returning to the tonic by means of a iv–III–II (Cm–B♭–Am) progression, and thence to I. Because the third copla in the recorded example (from compás 27, henceforth "c. 27") exhibits this second type of pattern quite clearly, a schematic model is not shown here. The remaining coplas generally adhere to one of these two patterns, with the exception of the concluding verse (the cambio/macho), which modulates to major-key tonality.

The common tradition of singing soleares and other cantos a palo seco, that is, without guitar accompaniment, raises the question of to what extent, or in what way, the guitar's role is structural and essential. For modern listeners who are accustomed to hearing flamenco with guitar, the instrument's chordal harmonies may certainly affect melodic consonances and dissonances, determining, for example, whether a given pitch is perceived as restful or demands resolution. However, for those immersed in traditional flamenco and well familiar with the palo seco sound, it is more likely that a cante like soleá is essentially modal, such that the guitar chords are basically decorative rather than essential. When a soleá is sung without guitar, such listeners and the performer need not necessarily imagine the chordal accompaniment in their heads. Thus, when the guitar oscillates between tonic and flat second chords, it can be seen as basically reiterating a modal tonic; the movement to the minor iv chord es-
sentient reinforces the clear melodic movement to the fourth degree. And, finally, the climactic “cambio” moment in the penultimate verse line is best seen as being intensified, rather than determined by, the salient III–VI guitar semicadence. However, the way in which listeners hear and internalize chordal harmonies in flamenco may be far from simple and evident.

"A Quién le Contaré Yo," Sung by Juan Talega

Let us now turn to the recording included in the CD (track 5), which derives from a well-known and influential 1962 five-LP anthology. This set of recordings was the first to document, in a systematic and extensive form, the extant corpus of flamenco cantes, and is regarded as having played a substantial role in the general revival of flamenco in the following decade. This soledá, aside from being a fine performance, nicely illustrates the features discussed so far in this chapter. It is also cited as a model by a number of flamencologists (e.g., Lefranc [2000:179, 181], and Kliman [n.d.]), partly because the vocalist, Juan Talega (or Talegas), was the creator or popularizer of some of the influential soledades styles performed here. Talega himself (1891–1971) was an influential performer of his era. His father and uncle were well-known singers from the gypsy community of Alcalá de Guadaíra, a town east of Seville. The musical styles of these families, although closely related to those of Seville’s gypsy quarter, Triana, were more directly linked by personal and musical ties to the influential flamenco singers in Marchena, some thirty miles further east. The styles of soledades that these singers created and codified— including three of the copla renderings here—are referred to by experts as soledades of Alcalá and Marchena. Although Talega performed mostly in domestic contexts, he traveled and sang extensively in Andalusia, and served as a mentor of sorts to Antonio Mairena (1909–1983), one of the most influential singers of the next generation. He is accompanied in this recording by guitarist Eduardo el de la Malena (Eduardo de Malena, 1925–1988).

This soledá comprises five coplas. As is standard, these constitute concise, thematically independent verses, which do not exhibit or require any particular sense of continuity or development, whether literary or musical. Hence, as may be noted, the first is tragic and fatalistic, and the third seems to express the singer’s indifference to his former beloved, and the final verse is an affirmation of his love.

(A note regarding the guitar notation: As mentioned, the transcription reflects the performer’s use of a capo on the third fret. The singer often drones out the guitarist, and where the guitar is too soft to transcribe rests are shown in the guitar staff. Also not shown are frequent golpes (fingertip-taps) on the face of the instrument, generally on beats 3, 6, 8, and 10 as well as many of the routine chordal oscillations between Ab and G.)

The recording commences with ten introductory coplas. In the first two, Malena plays standard opening soledad patterns, outlining the progression Ab–E–Ab–G (II–VI–II–I, or fa–do–fa–mi), cadencing in conventional fashion on the tonic G on beat ten. The II and VI harmonies are colored with non-harmonic tones: B♭, F, and G in the first case and F in the second. In coplas 3–8, Talega sings the templo (“tem-play”), which consists of introductory, warming-up phrases, sung to the syllables “ayayay . . .” and generally ascending to the fifth degree and back to the tonic. Note that Talega sings in Phrygian mode, with B♭ as its third degree, whereas Malena plays a G major tonic chord, with B natural. Following the templo, Malena plays two coplas of very conventional falseta material (c. 9–10), the first of which constitutes a proper guitaristic rendition of the model falseta shown schematically in example 1.

The first copla, of four lines, is a characteristic flamenco lament, in which the singer hyperbolically relates his anguish, leaving its causes to the listener’s imagination. The second and fourth lines rhyme, but the general tendency in

The soledas of Alcalá have great originality. Their complete and definitive character, and the classicism and austere respect for the past they manifest, constitute a
romances and many soleás toward an octosyllabic count of each line is clearly not adhered to here.

A quien le cantaré yo
la fatiga [las fatiguitas] que estoy pasando
se la voy a contar a la tierra
Cuando me estén enterrando

To whom will I tell my sufferings? I'll tell the earth when they are burying me.

This verse is rendered here with a melody attributed to Talega's uncle, Joaquín El de La Paula (1875–1933). It has become a standard and popular melody, often used for the opening copla. It roughly follows the model presented schematically as figure 3.1, and allows us to examine more closely this style of rendering. The chart shows how the four-line verse is adapted to the melodic lines. The melodies can be regarded as comprising two pairs of lines listed as A1(1), A1(2), B1(1), and B1(2). Each pair is sung twice; verse line 2 of the copla is sung thrice, and the final pair of verse lines, 3–4, is sung twice, although it also could only be sung once. However, slight variations occur in the repetitions of both text lines and melodies. Each melody line lasts roughly one twelve-beat compás. The entire pattern could be represented as A1(1), A1(2), A1(3), A1(2), B1(1), B1(2), B1(3), B1(2), B1(3), B1(2), or more simply as A1–2, A2–2, B3–4 (in which B can repeat).10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>verse line</th>
<th>melody</th>
<th>compás</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A quien le cantaré yo</td>
<td>A(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>la fatiga (las fatiguitas) que estoy pasando</td>
<td>A(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>se la voy a contar (a) la tierra</td>
<td>B(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Cuando me estén enterrando</td>
<td>B(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>se lo (sic) voy a contar a la tierra</td>
<td>B(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Cuando me estén enterrando</td>
<td>B(4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although loosely conforming to the model of Figure 3.1, the rendering of this copla also illustrates the sort of variation that can occur. The most notable departure occurs from the start of the line “Se la voy a contar...” in compás 16. Normally, as in Figure 3.1, after finishing the third rendition of the second verse line, the singer would promptly begin singing at the start of the next compás. Here, however, Talega pauses, and starts halfway through the compás. This obliges Malena, who adheres like a rock to the compás, to adjust some of the standard chord accents to fit Talega's melody. In particular, he performs the climax II–VI “cambio” on beats 3–4, instead of the usual 7–8 and 9–10. Talega's evident readiness to truncate the compás illustrates the sort of flexibility that is tolerated in certain situations in flamenco. (In bulerías in fast tempo, the tendency to conceive of phrases in six rather than twelve beats makes such irregularities more common.) Talega starts the final rendition of the last text line in more standard fashion, at the beginning of the compás, such that it more closely conforms to the model shown in Figure 3.1. Because of his leisurely entrance in compás 16, the copla takes up ten rather than the more typical nine compáses.

Aside from such adjustments, Malena's chordal accompanying largely follows the pattern of the schematic model above, oscillating between I and IIb (G and A) during the first melody lines (c. 11–16), climaxing at the III–VI (B7–E5) cadence in the third melody line (c. 17, repeated at c. 19), and returning to the tonic via the “Andalusian cadence” of iv–III–II–I (Cm–B–A–G) at the fourth melody line (c. 20). As indicated by the chord names above the staff, the guitar progressions tend to stress the third and tenth beats of the compás. The guitar falseta following the copla, lasting one compás (c. 22), is highly conventional in its arpeggiated C–B–A–G descent cadencing on beat 10 of the compás.

Note that Talega sings with standard Andalusian Spanish pronunciation, which (like most Caribbean Spanish) often drops “s” before a consonant, and “d” between vowels. A distinctive flamenco singing nuance is the addition of a concluding “o” on extended renderings of final syllables ending in “a.” Hence, in c. 24, “el sentido te esvarías” is sung as “el senti'to te varia'o,” and in c. 35, “escritura” becomes “escritu'a.” Another mannerism, heard in the second copla, is the occasional omission of entire words, which the listener is evidently expected to fill in.

The second copla (c. 23–25) is of three verse lines, with a loose rhyme between the first and third lines, and an even looser adherence to the standard octosyllabic line. This verse's melody is identified with Juan Talega himself (in the broader category of soleás of Marchena and Alcalá). It adheres basically to the second type of common soleá pattern described above, in that the first compás establishes a G7 (V7 of iv) chord, and cadences dramatically on Cm (iv), before proceeding to a B7–E5 cadence, and thence to the G Phyrgian tonic. There is no repetition of text lines, such that the entire copla is rendered
in only three compáses. This pattern would not be sung at the beginning of a
soleá.

[Dices] que no me querías
y cuando [d']elante tu me tienes
el sintió [d']cvaría[s]

[You say] you don't love me
but when you've got me in front of you
you get all flustered.

After one compás (c. 26) of standard guitar, Malena plays a short falseta
(c. 27), outlining a typical descent from iv to I.

Talega then proceeds to sing the third copla (c. 28–35), in which the poet
asserts his indifference to the fact that his former lover no longer loves him,
since he never had any reason to expect constancy from her in the first place.

Dices que tu a mi no me quieres
pren yo no tengo ninguna
porque yo con tu querer
no tenía hecha escritura

You tell me you don't love me
but I don't feel any pain
because in regards to your love
I never had any written document.

Talega sings this verse in a style associated with Triana rather than Alcalá
and Marchena; oral tradition attributes it to a nineteenth-century female singer
named La Andonda (Kliman [n.d.]; Lefranc [2000:145–146]). Its melody does
not differ dramatically from the previous ones. In terms of the relation
between poetic and melodic lines, it resembles the model shown as figure 3.1 in
its threefold repetition of the second line of the verse. However, unlike in figure
3.1, the final two verses are not repeated, such that the entire copla rendering
takes eight rather than nine or ten compáses.

Meanwhile, in its movement from a tonic seventh chord to the minor
chord on the fourth degree (Cm), this third copla more closely resembles the
second copla of this recording. Here, the first melodic line (which is here repeated)
starts on F, the seventh degree of the tonic chord (cuing the guitarist
to play G7), half-cadences around the fourth degree, and then descends to the
tonic. (The degree to which Talega sings in a fixed, rather than improvised man-
er, can be appreciated from his essentially identical rendering of this verse in
a 1959 recording, audible on Kliman [n.d.])

Following this verse Malena plays a three-compás guitar falseta (c. 36–38).
This is a fine example of a traditional falseta; it follows the well-worn pattern
schematized in figure 3.1. and involves no flashy display of technique, but builds
in its second compás (c. 37) to a driving and exciting climax. The final compás is
harmonically stable postcadential filler, that ameliorates the expressive ten-
sion of the previous passage.

The fourth copla (c. 39–43), as sung, is somewhat ambiguous in meaning.
It appears that the verse is normally sung with two additional words, rendered
here in brackets, which clarify it.11

[Cuando] a ti nadic te quiera
[ven,] que yo a ti te querré
que aquello que me hiciste
yo te lo recompensaré

When no one loves you, come, I'll love you
and repay you for what you've done for me.

This melody is also attributed to Talega. He sings the verse straight through,
with no textual repetitions, and with each line of text corresponding to a single
melody line and compás. Aside from the lack of repetitions and the quick pro-
gression to Cm in the first line, it loosely conforms to the model of figure 3.1.
Note the clearly audible iv–III–II–I (Cm–B♭–A–G) “Andalusian” progression in
c. 40.

At c. 44, almost immediately after finishing the fourth copla, Talega again
sings the second copla (“Que no me que quieras . . .”). In doing so, he illus-
trates a number of points. First, his repetition shows how a flamenco piece is
not a closely, precisely structured formal composition, like a pop song or a clas-
sical composition. Rather, it is a typical product of an oral tradition in being
a loose, informal entity, in which fragments may be freely inserted, verses re-
peated or altered, and overall length and structure treated with flexibility.
Furthermore, his second rendition of this copla offers a revealing comparison with the
first. The melodic contour is largely the same. However, as with his rendering
of the third verse of the first copla, Talega here begins the copla not at the start
of the compás, but halfway through it. Again, Malena, rather than breaking
the compás to fit this irregularity, adheres firmly to it, while being obliged to

11. The bracketed words are included in the rendering of the verse in the booklet
accompanying the Westminster recording; this booklet, unlike some flamenco liner notes,
is clearly compiled by an authority, who has perhaps edited such verses to conform to
their more customary forms.
Afterword: Is There an Indigenous Flamenco “Theory”?

In a study such as this, the question may naturally arise as to the extent to which we have been employing analytical terminology and concepts that cohere with those used by flamenco musicians themselves. In other words, do flamenco musicians “have theory,” in the narrow sense of the word “theory” as implying an explicitly articulated set of terms and concepts describing abstract entities like mode, harmony, and meter? Before attempting to answer this question, it should be clarified that the extent to which such an “emic” theory is lacking should not be taken as a deficiency. Whether or not a flamenco artist is able to verbalize such concepts has little or no bearing on that musician’s ability to perform a variety of different cantos, each with their distinctive formal complexities and characteristics. “Theory,” in this sense, is something that is primarily of use to outsiders studying the art (such as readers of this chapter), or helpful in particular sorts of communication between performers.

In general, it may be said that for at least a century there has been something of a continuum in terms of level of theoretical articulation among flamenco performers. At one end of this spectrum would lie the many performers—especially gypsies—who would be essentially innocent of formal theoretical knowledge, having learned their art as a domestic inherited tradition. Singers are particularly likely to fall in this category, as well as almost all musicians before the twentieth century. (For that matter, even today quite a few gypsies, including younger generations, have avoided school and remained illiterate.) We may picture, for example, a gypsy vocalist who has solid command of all the major cantos, and who perhaps is able to identify and sing many specific substyes by name, but who is unaware that siguiyas could be counted in twelve beats.

At the other extreme, we may take an educated, Spanish, middle-class, amateur flamenco guitarist, who also may have studied a bit of classical music; aside from avidly copying recordings of performers like that just described, he makes abundant use of pedagogical books and Web sites that describe and discuss cantos in abstract analytical terms, and that provide transcriptions, in staff notation, of guitar falsetas (some of them, of course, created by gypsies with no knowledge of theory). Such educated amateur performers are not an entirely recent phenomenon; in 1902 one Rafael Marín published a guitar manual for such players, complete with theoretical descriptions of basic cantos and pedagogical exercises to develop technique.

In modern times, most flamenco musicians might fall somewhere between these extremes. On the whole, it can be generalized that theory, in the narrow sense defined here, is not extensively developed in flamenco. (In this sense flamenco contrasts markedly with a genre like jazz.) Singers, despite their command of cante, are especially unlikely to be able to verbalize theory, such as harmonic and rhythmic concepts, in comparison to guitarists. In general, there might be little need for such verbalizations, except perhaps to instruct accompanying guitarists.12

What is important is that the singer be able to tell the guitarist where to put the capo, in order to accord with the singer’s range; otherwise they may flounder about trying to match pitches, and the vocalist can end up singing

12. Thus, for example, if a vocalist performing bulerías switches from Phrygian to major tonality, singing a major scale with a prominent sixth degree, the guitarist is expected to follow along; if for some reason he fails to do so, the singer might be unable to tell him anything more specific than “Cambialo, por Dios” (Change it!).
argue that the notion of such an “implicit theory” is oxymoronic and that it extends the scope of the word “theory” to the extent that it is meaningless. Rather, according to this perspective, “theory,” in order to be a meaningful concept, should be defined precisely as the conscious and explicit use of abstract concepts such as meter and mode to describe music. In this view, the singer in question would not have a theoretical understanding of his art per se, but rather a clear intuitive and operational understanding of it. Ideally, of course, theoretical descriptions of such music, whether fashioned by “insiders” or others, accurately reflect and describe the operational concepts of performers without forcing them into alien modes of analysis.

References


13. Thus, siguiriyas, of twelve beats in the pattern 2+2+3+3+3+2, is counted something like “one-and-two-and-three—ccc-four-ccc-five-ee.” Fandango de Huelva, in six beats, is usually counted “one-two-three-four-five (pause).”

14. I am grateful to John Moore and Estela Zatania for some of this information.