

# [A blues of the southern united states](https://assignbuster.com/a-blues-of-the-southern-united-states/)

A LIVING HISTORY Flamenco is not merely a style of music, song or dance from Spain but rather a way of life thatinfluences the daily activities of many individuals. The art of flamenco was intended to be an outwardexpression of an individuals most profound emotions and the flamenco way of life. It was never intendedto be a technical art performed with stoic precision yet without duende (a passion/feeling for flamenco). The main components and styles of flamenco will be discussed briefly while an in depth presentation ofthe characteristics of flamenco dance (baile) and its evolution shall emerge subsequently.

Present day flamenco consists of singing (cante), dancing (baile) and guitar playing (toque); eachof which is a distinctive art. Those only vaguely introduced to flamenco may be surprised to learn thatthe cante was and is the centerpiece of the flamenco art form. In contemporary times singers perform inthe background and their singing is usually perceived as musical accompaniment to the dancers. Throughout history, however, flamenco has been based on the art of singing and the cantaor (singer) oftenprovided his own rhythmic accompaniment with rapping of the knuckles or a stick (figure 1).

Various styles of flamenco permeate yet the art is divided into four specific categories includingdeep/profound flamenco (jondo or grande), intermediate flamenco (intermedio), light flamenco (chico) andpopular flamenco. Jondo or grande flamenco is the serious flamenco and is comparable with the blues of the southernUnited States (The Art of Flamenco, p. 47).

Of all forms of flamenco this is the most difficult tounderstand and interpret properly. The artists who explore this style are considered the nobility in theworld of flamenco. In order to grasp this style an artist must have a true feeling of flamenco (duende)that he is able to pass on to his audience. Jondo flamenco is an emotional art and the artist mustpossess only enough technical proficiency to allow him/her to communicate with spectators his emotionsand passion for flamenco. Jondo flamenco is not concerned with a mastering of technique for improvedtechnique does not mean an increased ability to relate emotions to the public. If an artist becomes tooinvolved with the difficulty or complexity of his art he loses the ability to impart duende for hisenergy is focused specifically on technique. Flamenco intermedio consists of styles that tend toward flamenco grande but the intermedio is notas difficult to perform properly and not as moving. Flamenco chico is sensuous, tender and poetic and is usually not intensely moving.

This style offlamenco usually consists of shouting, stomping and fast movements. Popular flamenco is the collaboration of all three above forms and does not resemble pure flamenco. It is the commercialization of flamenco and is aimed at the general public who like a good show but seekno emotional involvement. The contrast between flamenco juerga and popular flamenco is best surmised in the words of anartist, “ primitivism versus polish, warmth versus anonymity, creation versus rigidity, emotion versusintellect, instinct versus schooling, fun versus formality.”(The Art of Flamenco, p. 51). The professional flamenco artist must follow either the commercial route in which the art issacrificed to some extent to money or the private route in which money is sacrificed, to some extent, forpurity of expression. True flamencos are purists who will in no way compromise the art and if they mustgo hungry in the process it is just one of the hazards of the trade.

The contrast between popularflamenco and flamenco juerga is most evident in the flamenco baile due to its extroverted nature. Often an amateur to the art of flamenco will appreciate the baile most while paying negligibleattention to the cante and toque. This occurs mainly because as a beginner one is not able to grasp thesoul searing intensity of the song or accompaniment. But one will always be able to appreciate the graceand sensuality of the dancers movements. Unlike the other forms of flamenco, flamenco baile requiresthat the body be the means of expression. Flamenco dancers (bailaores) use movement to dig into their emotional selves and express their mostunutterable emotions through their bodys movement. A true flamenco bailaore will elicit emotionalresponse without analysis.

The dance of the arms, hands, shoulders and fingertips is the very essence of the feminine dance(figure 2). The female dancer (bailaora) uses various arm movements, “ rhythmically linked, flowing oneinto the other, forming continuous spirals that culminate in curving, meandering, sinuous fingers. Thehands and fingers receive the emotions articulated by the arms framing a slightly arched body.”(Flamenco, Body and Soul p. 116). She dances, “ with a bending, undulating waist designed by nature itselfto express her voluptuous imagination, with her curving shoulders and undulating seeking arms slenderpromising fingertips begging for sanctuary. With her head and her eyes, and her flashing teeth and hervery heart.” (Flamenco, Body and Soul, p.

116) (figure 3). Hands and fingers may also be incorporatedfor rhythm by finger snapping, hand clapping or the use of castanets. It has been suggested, however, that the use of these instruments occurs due to inability to work t! he upper torso. The bailaor uses his feet to create the zapateado (figure 4), a rhythmic coordinated heel and toemovement which produces a syncopated staccato sound. The bailaor digs deep into himself during his danceto ultimately release his distress. The male dancer concentrates all movement to the feet and develops abeat dependent upon inner rhythms.

Each baile (dance), or danceable compas (rhythm/beat) does not have traditional characteristics thathave to be adhered to. The rhythm largely determines the dance, and between bailes with very similarrhythms and moods there will be no inherent differences in the dance. Traditionally the bailaoras (female dancer) main concentration was from the hips up and thebailaors (male dancer) from the waist down. However, flamenco dance was revolutionized by twoincomparable figures; Antonio el de Bilbao and Carmen Amaya (figure 5).

These two individuals alteredthe trend of flamenco dance by incorporating both feminine and masculine aspects into their dances. Theytransformed flamenco baile from non-technical, simple and direct to difficult, complex and extremelytechnical. Although their style incorporated more technical precision these artists were capable ofrelaying duende and thus remained true to flamencos original purpose – personal expression. It is strictly up to the dancer to use whatever technique he wishes in whatever manner he wishes, within certain limits, as long as they help him express what he feels and is striving to communicate withthe audience.

However, only certain movements and techniques are accepted as being truly flamenco. Theinner passion of the dancer must be released through his movement. When precision becomes the focus allenergy is centered on the technical aspect of the dance. The dancer no longer focuses on emotionalexpression or duende and the essence of flamenco has been lost. The origins and development of flamenco baile are obscure and murky yet can be pieced togetherthrough historical facts and contemporary similarities in the dance of various cultures.

Baile flamencois believed to be descended from ancient religious dances of the Indian Hindus including the BharataNatyam, Kathak and Kathakali (figure 6). These sacred dances involve story telling and spontaneity; although not as openly as in flamenco. Arm gestures, hand movements and footwork bear a strikingsimilarity yet this is where the resemblance ends. Through its evolution flamenco has lost manytraditional elements of Indian dance; flamenco dance is not symbolic or religious and does not utilizethe various eye and facial movements of classical Indian dance. It is postulated that lay personsadopted the highly civilized religious dances of the Indian Hindus and shed many of the highly stylizedgestures, returning to a more basic art form concerned mainly with the expression ! of oneself and ones emotions. The development of specific Indian dances into flamenco, within Spain, still poses a mystery for therecorded history of flamenco baile does not begin until the caf cantante period in 1842. However, ahistory has been surmised through available facts and postulation.

Traditionally performed in temples during religious rites the sacred Indian dances eventually beganto be performed outside the temples in India. As the dances were performed publicly more often, laypersons adopted and modified the movements. Through caravans and trading vessels different cultureswitnessed the simplified dances and returned home with a new and exhilarating form of movement dedicatedto personal expression. The more simplified dances also dispersed throughout Spain when Indian gypsiesfollowed Moorish armies during their conquest of Spains southernmost province, Andalusia, during the 6thcentury. The modified Indian dances arrived with these unique cultures and a distinct dance style wasestablished in Spain.

A subsequent event in the development of flamenco was the second influx of gypsies to Spain. Bandsof gypsies began an exodus from India during the 9th century due to oppression. They roamed across Asia, Africa and Europe aimlessly searching for a new homeland. During their trek the bands of gypsiesdwindled as tribes were left along the way until a few remaining gypsies filtered through the Spanishpeninsula.

Eventually they settled at Andalusia, a multi-ethnic province in which Jews, Christians andArabs lived side by side, in the 15th century. Andalusia was currently the center of Moorishcivilization. The cultural coexistence in Andalusia was destroyed, however, when Spanish Christians completedtheir re-conquest of the last Moorish stronghold in 1492.

With the momentum of this defeat theoverly-impassioned Christians decided to purge Spain of all undesirable elements and passed laws orderingthe expulsion of Moors, Jews and gypsies who had no useful profession. These laws were followed by areign of terror against those cultures who refused to comply (Art of Flamenco, p. 44).

It was due to these events that persecuted cultures (Jews, Arabs and Gypsies) who shared no commonbonds united against oppressive Christians. They grouped together into tribes/bands and went undergroundhiding in uninhabited regions, living in caves and foraging for food; soon after their banishment theoppressed cultures were joined by Christian fugitives and dissenters. Because of the forced coexistenceof the Jews, Christians, Arabs and Indians various folk and religious styles of music, song and danceblended with gypsy abandonment and improvisation. Controversy often arises about cultural contribution to the art of flamenco. Andalusians contestthat flamenco was an established art form within their province. They argue that gypsies brought nostyle of song or dance of their own but simply adopted the culture of each land where they roamed.

Theyassert that if the gypsies who emigrated from India brought a folk style similar to flamenco then gypsiesin other cultures would practice flamenco styles also. This argument is quickly refuted since startling similarities between the music and dance of theSpanish gypsies and gypsies of other countries are present. Vicente Escudero in his work, “ Mi Baile” states that a Russian gypsy dance is very similar to the famuca in its compas (footwork) and movements ofthe arms plus upper torso; Nevertheless, the dance there has developed much more acrobatically (Lives andLegends of Flamenco, p.

176). In addition, the many falsettos of Hungarian gypsy violin and flamencoguitar are nearly identical as much in feeling as in structure (Lives and Legends of Flamenco, p. 178). Additional accounts of similarities between Spanish gypsy style and gypsies from other countries existyet will not be explored in depth here. The Moors ruled in Andalusia for eight centuries and it is thus impossible to deny their influencein the development of flamenco dance. The movements of the upper torso, arms and hands remained inexistence due to Moorish approval.

However, there was discouragement of feminine footwork due to aruling in the Koran – women would not utilize footwork in order to not show their legs (Lives and Legendsof Flamenco, p. 144). This ruling and the fact that gypsy dancers were not technically trained are themain reasons why feminine footwork was nearly non-existent in flamenco baile until this century.

Throughout all of the debates about the evolution of flamenco it is clear that the art of flamencohad been brewing for many centuries in Andalusia. During the time of the Moors flamenco dance waspopular and still somewhat religious yet after their expulsion from Spain all religious affiliation waslost. It was then that the baile along with cante and toque went underground and became the art of apersecuted people. Consequently, the mingling of the various cultural styles of these persecuted peoplecan be cited as the creation of an art form we today call flamenco.

The recorded history of flamenco dance does not begin until the start of the caf cantante period in1842 and the majority of flamenco dancers, at that time, were gypsies with fundamental technique andsparse repertoires. The footwork of the men was relatively simple and primitive while women, with veryfew exceptions, used almost no footwork and concentrated on the arms, hands and upper torso. In gypsy orprimitive flamenco dance neither men nor women used castanets but relied on movement of the upper torsoand their own personalities (gracia) (figure 7). It was a completely spontaneous dance and provides alook at what flamenco was intended to be. Dance found itself on stage during the caf cantate period, however, and it began to expand in theamount of space it utilized. The arm movements once motivated by inner feelings now became repetitive, concentric movements made by a number of dancers and the syncopated rhythms of the zapateado (danceconcentrating on footwork) became the protocol for male dancers. The larger space of the caf cantanteperiod demanded a company of dancers and choreography became a vital component of flamenco. During the cafe cantante period choreography dominated flamenco dancing.

The possibilities inchoreographing flamenco dance were numerous yet the dance became delightful, festive and jovial but alsoboring and routine. The essence of flamenco was lost and no longer were dancers exploring theiremotional selves on stage. Then in 1915, Serge Diaghlievs Ballet Russe came to Spain and changed the tide of many art formsincluding flamenco dance. Diaghliev demonstrated how to utilize space and all the qualities a dancerpossessed. Flamenco dancers suddenly re-evaluated their profession once confronted with Diaghlievsintegrity. Three paths were unexpectedly available to flamenco dancers; please the public with routinedances, return to their origins as individual bailaores, or enlarge their companies with more brilliantchoreography to present pure flamenco dancing on a large scale. A return to pure flamenco dancing, as it was originally performed by individual dancers, and thedevelopment of large professional companies dedicated to authentic flamenco baile were the two newdirections in which flamenco dance moved. Unlike in Indian religious dances the various movements of flamenco do not have specific meaningsand the dance is not attempting to convey a story.

The techniques and movements in flamenco are notsymbolic and in a solo dance no actual story is being told. The dancer utilizes the techniques andmovements of the dance to help express the inner self and also utilizes whichever passions or moods areaffecting him at the time of dancing. The same movement can denote love or hate, tragedy or happinessdepending on the mood of the dancer. “ Dancing is such like an abstract painting in that two individualswill be moved differently by the same dance and the same viewer may be affected differently if viewed onseparate occasions.

” (The Art of Flamenco, P. 70) The passionate dancer, when he feels himself moved during the course of a flamenco session, respondswith creation of movement and a release of passion and emotions beyond rehearsed arrangements andmemories (figure 8). The technique helps him achieve the release and the arrangement help solidify thetechnique but his inner passion is his motivating force. Flamenco baile is a wonderfully moving art form which lost its focus for some years but has regainedits integrity. It is an art form which relies mainly on the passions of the performer and not ontechnical precision. Flamenco baile was intended to be a spontaneous art and has returned to itsoriginal purpose through the efforts of many dedicated and pure flamencos; both performers andspectators.

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