

Rob interviewing Carl Smith on Spanish Folk Music

Music playing.....

Rob: Hello, and welcome back to our short series of talks about folk music, traditional music from all over Europe, and I think from the music we have introduced the program with this time that you can probably guess where we are. I am here with Carl Smith, of course, composer and conductor. Hello, Carl.

Carl: Hello, Rob.

Rob: We are going to talk about Spanish music indeed. So perhaps you could begin by just telling us about Spanish music in general. How come it is such a lively, and diverse form of music?

Carl: It is. I think perhaps Spanish folk music is the most diverse and influential style of folk music in the world. And that is brought about by an incredible melting pot of different peoples existing together. Going back to the Middle Ages something like the eighth century, the Iberian Peninsula was conquered many times by Moorish Muslims, and their Arabian music which they brought with them have its origins in Babylon, ancient Greece, in Persia, ancient Egypt and even India. And so they also brought their traditional instruments and melodies to Spain and this lead later to the development of the guitar which is so typical of Spanish music. And the folk music of Spain was also heavily influenced by the music of north Africa which is very rhythmic and very percussive. The Muslims, the Jews, the Christians, they co-existed, gypsies came from as far away as India, and so many types of folk music emerged.

Rob: It was a stepping stone in a way, wasn't it, Spain? It was so close to another continent.

Carl: Yes.

Rob: It's natural that people should make their way and bring their traditions with them.

Carl: Yes. Yes, absolutely. And as the Spanish empire grew so the music of Spain started to spread to central, southern and much of northern America, and Spanish and Portuguese music, combined with the indigenous music in particular central and southern America, to develop into what we refer to today as Latin-American music.

Rob: Yes, and from Cuba and so on.

Carl: Yes. That all had its origins in Spain and Portugal.

Rob: So, what are the main different types of Spanish music would you say?

Carl: There's a few different important examples. The first I think is flamenco, and this is perhaps the best-known example of Spanish folk music. It dates back to around the ninth century and originally it was mainly sung. The Persian origins of this gradually combined with Indian, Jewish and Muslim styles but modern flamenco, as we know it

today, dates back to the 18th century, and this originated from the gypsy music of southern Spain, so in effect it was the music of the outcasts. Many rhythmic styles, mostly played on the guitar, sung and danced. The song and words are very important in flamenco music. The dancer is interpreting the emotions of the singer through the dance and movement, and the audience takes a very active role. They shout, and they clap, and they encourage the performers. And flamenco, the word flamenco, that roughly translates as *'hell raising'*. Stamping, vigorous clapping, shouting, and this style of music, this flamenco music has also greatly influenced jazz and blues.

Rob: I think we should listen to an example of this.

Carl: Yes, I have put together a clip which you might find interesting.

(Music playing, with singing)

Rob: Okay. So, moving around Spain. That was flamenco. Now where are you taking us next?

Carl: Well, Catalonia was one of the most intellectual and artistic provinces in Spain. The Catalans view themselves as a separate country and the folk music in Catalonia has its own diverse variety. Traditionally, it is home to the gypsy rumba, or rumba Catalana which is a combination of African and Cuban styles which developed in the 19th and early 20th centuries. And the most well-known folk music of Catalonia is the sardana. And the sardana is a type of circle dance accompanied by a group of 11 musicians. And the instruments used are a combination of traditional instruments and more common instruments. Traditional instruments such as the flabiol which is a sort of woodwind pipe, a tonbori which is a small drum, and a fascinating one, a guitar of bones, which is a xylophone-like instrument made of bones or reeds which is suspended from the musician's neck. And in addition to that we also find more common instruments such as trumpets and trombones. Again, very common in Spanish music to have trumpets and trombones.

Rob: Maybe we've got an example of that?

Carl: We do, yes.

Rob: Okay, let's just hear that now.

(Music playing)

Rob: And, as we move around Spain ... we've been in Catalonia, we've been in the flamenco area which I believe is southern Spain.

Carl: Yes.

Rob: And now we are going to the northern Spain area, and the Basque area. That's different again.



Carl: It is. And the Basque region has a variety of folk music and dances, and the most well-known type is called the trikitixa which is also the name for a particular type of button accordion, usually accompanied by a tambourine or castanets. And the most common rhythmic style is the fandango, which is a dance usually in triple-time. And again, there are many traditional instruments used in Basque music such as the alboka which is a reeded wind instrument like a clarinet but it has two pipes. And then there are other pipes and flutes and percussion instruments of all different types.

Rob: Let's hear some of that.

(Music playing, with singing)

Rob: Now, the Iberian Peninsula is more than just Spain. Portugal itself also has its own typical kind of music, fado.

Carl: It does. The root of this traditional music of Portugal dates back to African and Moorish culture and the modern form of fado, or 'fado' music developed in the early 19th century. The translation of fado is 'fate'. The lyrics and theme of fado music is about regret, mourning and a feeling of loss.

Rob: It is very sad, sad music.

Carl: It is. There was a famous singer in the 19th century named Maria Severa who always wore a black shawl. And this garment is still part of the image of that music and the fado singers traditionally have remained female. And the singer is traditionally accompanied by a 12-string guitar named a guitarra portuguesa and a smaller guitar named a violea. And sometimes a violin and flute also accompany the music. And this style of music heavily influenced Brazilian music, and the influence of this music can be traced to the development again of the blues.

(Music playing, with singing)

Rob: So, Spanish music has had an influence in lots of different styles.

Carl: Right across the world.

Rob: And right across the world. It's a fascinating thing and obviously again, a huge variety that we could play. We haven't got the time for that, unfortunately, because we are flying off again for our next talk to another part of Europe. But, for the time being anyway, thank you very much, Carl for your explanation of Spanish music. And, until the next time, thank you.

Carl: Thank you, Rob.

(Music playing, with singing)