

Interview with Tomatito

Why are you called Tomatito?

Tomatito [little tomato] comes from my grandfather who was called Miguel «Tomate» and my father «El Tomate». I'm called «Tomatito» and my daughters «Las Tomatillas», it kind of runs in the family.

But why «Tomatito»?

Well, I'm afraid I don't know. I've never given it much thought why our family is named like that. In Andalucía it's quite common to have nicknames, especially among gypsies. It's the case for example with «Habichuela» [=kidney bean, e.g. Pepe Habichuela, flamenco guitarist] or other artists.

How old were you when you started playing the guitar and who were your teachers?

I was 10 or 11 years old. I was using a cardboard box – I still remember it very well, it was a box for light bulbs which was coarse and wavy – well, I practised the first rumba strokes, *rasgueos* etc. I then tried to accompany records of Paco and Camarón, artists who aroused my own and the interest of the other youngsters in modern flamenco. Later on my father, also a guitar player, took me to Málaga; because in our home town Almería there were no teachers at that time. I started working at the *tablaó* «La Taberna Gitana» where I met my first guitar teacher, Pedro Blanco. He taught me everything he knew. There were other guitarists such as Pedro Escalona or Enrique Naranjo. I learned a little from all of them, that's how I started playing the guitar.

You must have practised a lot then?

Yes, for hours and hours, every day. I had the kind of «guitar fever» you only catch when you're young.

Every day?

Yes, every single day. I started in the morning. My mother always had to call me for meals. I locked myself in my room with my guitar and only came out when I was really tired out from playing. I didn't practise in the sense of playing scales and études, no, but I played very, very much.

What about these days, do you still play a lot when you're at home?

Yes, whenever I can I play, but I have to work, give concerts and of course I travel a lot. When you come home you're tired and so you don't play for seven hours anymore but perhaps only for three. Nevertheless, you still have to practise a lot.

When and how did you meet Camarón?

It was in Málaga, as I mentioned before. I was working at the «Taberna Gitana», a *tablaó* which was frequented by all the flamenco stars, Camarón went there too. One day Camarón had to sing at the «Deportivo Carranque» but he didn't have a guitarist. «...get me the lad who plays at the tavern», he said. From that moment he started calling me. It was a great pleasure for me to know that I could be together with the – for me – best flamenco singer in the world. It was simply wonderful to be accompanying this «monster».

And the two of you stayed together for a very long time, didn't you?

Yes, we stayed together until he died. We will always be together.

Do you have children?

I've got five daughters.

Do they like flamenco?

At home we listen to flamenco music; we listen to other music too, but mostly it's flamenco. My daughters sing, they are great *aficionadas*, they enjoy it and they have a good sense of rhythm. The most difficult thing is to develop a good feeling for rhythm. One of my daughters, María Angeles, is seven years old and already a very good singer. The others – Rocío, Tamara, María José and Rosa Alba – are good too.

Modern music: what kind of music do you like apart from flamenco?

Apart from Paco's music and what he played together with Chick Corea and John McLaughlin, I like George Benson. I like guitarists who play with feeling. I like every music as long as I understand it.

So you're open for other kinds of music?

Yes, if it's good, if it's got quality. A beautiful melody can be fascinating even if it's not «flamenco»; it can touch you emotionally and inspire you for your further work.

Have you got many guitars?

Yes, I've got 14 or 15. I've got a bit of everything: guitars by Gerundino Fernández, a great luthier from Almería, by Manuel Reyes from Córdoba but also from Ramírez, Conde Hermanos [Madrid] and Manuel Bellido from Granada. I'm quite a guitar collector, actually.

Which guitar do you play at the moment?

I play one by Conde Hermanos. Apart from the fact that Paco made them very popular, they sound very good. They respond very well. They are «macho» guitars, as I like to call them. Nowadays a lot of flamenco guitarists play guitars made by Conde Hermanos.

There are people who claim that a foreigner can't learn to play flamenco: What's your opinion?

This is true only to a certain extent. Non-Spaniards work very hard and practise very much. I was in Tokyo, on the other side of the world, very far away from Spain and there you find lots of *afición* for the flamenco guitar. They occupy themselves very intensively with flamenco; they buy records and practise each day for hours and hours until they finally learn it. Personally, I think that Andalucía has got a special kind of energy. It's the cradle of flamenco: singing, dancing and the guitar; but also of bullfighting and horses. The sun is nearly always shining which gives the whole a special kind of energy and warmth; I think you can hear the difference. Nevertheless, I think that a foreigner can learn to play the flamenco guitar. Singing is more difficult but the guitar is kind of «universal».

Who do you perform with nowadays?

I've got a band consisting of the following people: Potito, a young singer from Sevilla of the «Camarón school». Juan Carmona plays the second guitar and sometimes we've got Ramón Porrina on percussion. The dancer Antonio Canales has performed with us a few times.

What kind of advice would you give to people who are eager to learn to play the flamenco guitar?

Well, I advise them to pay attention to the way flamenco guitarists play today, practise a lot and, most important, listen to the *cante* flamenco. It's very important to be able to accompany the *cante*. It's a useful basis if you want to develop your own music and learn the rhythm. They should learn the various techniques used on the flamenco guitar and, I say it again, practise a lot. Besides that it also helps to learn to read music. Apart from all the hard work that is involved, today there are didactical flamenco videos; on some of them you can hear and see some of my colleagues. Today there are many possibilities to learn to play flamenco, all these things didn't exist when I started. Nowadays there are records, CDs and videos. Above all, one must have *afición* and endurance because it's far from being easy; with a lot of practice you can surely learn it.

Well, let's get started!

Video comments

Bulerías

- Falseta 1** I'm going to play this *falseta* a bit slower so that you can better see what happens.
- Falseta 2** Now I play a *falseta* that is recorded on Camarón's LP «Yo Soy Gitano».
- Falseta 3** The following *falseta* is recorded on «La Leyenda del Tiempo».
- Compás** As far as I'm concerned the rhythm of the *bulería* is one of the most difficult *palos* in flamenco music. We're going to show you the basic rhythm I usually work with, adding some variations and *contratiempos*.

Minera

- I usually open my concerts with the *minera* I'm going to play now.
- Lento 1** Next I'm going to show you some parts of the *minera* a bit slower so that you can better see the different techniques I'm using in this *toque*.
- I'm going to play some *arpeggios*; they're not very difficult but it's worthwhile to have a closer look at them.
- Lento 2** Next I'm going to show you some *ligados* that are more or less in the middle of the *minera*; I play them slowly.
- Lento 3** To conclude, I'm playing this last part slowly so that you can observe more easily.

Soleá por Bulería

This *soleá por bulería* is from my LP «Rosas del Amor» and is called «La Andonda».

- Introducción** Let's turn to the slow part of the *soleá por bulería* and have a good look at each *falseta*.

I perform the *rasgueado* without the little finger. I only use i, m and a.

- Falseta 2** You can also conclude this *falseta* as follows [see *remate* p. 59].

Alegrías

- Falseta 1** And now the slow version which I dedicate to «Bruno Peperoni».

Taranta

The *taranta* I'm going to play now is recorded on «Barrio Negro». It is one of my favourites and that's why I've dedicated it to my hometown Almería. The title is «Callejón de las Canteras». It's got a special tuning [see p. 75].

Tangos

The following *tango*, «Caminillo viejo», is also recorded on «Barrio Negro». The guitar is again «out of tune» as we *flamencos* say. [see p. 84].

I hope you have enjoyed yourselves and I would like to thank you all with a *fin de fiesta*.

Flamenco Glossary

Abanico	<i>Fan.</i> > Rasgueado en abanico. Rasgueado where the wrist performs a movement that resembles the movement of a fan.
Aficionado	Amateur, fan.
Alzapúa	<i>Alzar = rise, púa = plectrum.</i> Thumb technique, where the thumb of the right hand functions like a plectrum, i.e. is moved up and down.
Apagado	<i>Apagar = to damp.</i> In this technique, chords are damped either with the right hand or the fourth finger of the left hand.
Arpeggio	The playing of the tones of a chord in (rapid) succession rather than simultaneously.
Baile	Flamenco dance.
Cante	Flamenco singing.
Cejilla	Capo.
Compás	Time, measure; rhythm.
Contratiempo	Off-beat, syncopation.
Entrada	<i>Entrance, beginning.</i> The moment in the basic rhythm in which the falseta or the singing starts.
Estríbillo	<i>Refrain, chorus.</i> Recurrent theme.
Falseta	Melodic phrase, played as introduction and between the verses of the cante.
Golpe	<i>Tap.</i> Rhythmical accents are placed by tapping with the ring finger (sometimes both middle and ring finger) of the right hand on the golpeador, bringing both nail and flesh into contact with it.
Golpeador	Piece of plastic to protect the guitar top.
Ida y vuelta	<i>Round trip, return.</i> Flamenco forms that were brought to South America from where they returned slightly changed.

Ligado	<i>Ligar = to bind, tie together.</i> Slurs. In this technique, the tone is produced exclusively with the left hand.
Palo	<i>Stick, cane.</i> Flamenco style.
Picado	<i>Staccato.</i> Alternate striking of a string by i and m (sometimes by i and a, or even i, m and a).
Pulgar	<i>Thumb.</i> Thumb technique. In flamenco, entire melodies are played with the thumb, even up to the highest strings.
Rasgueado	<i>To touch the strings.</i> Consists of running the fingers of the right hand over the strings individually, but in a continuous motion.
Remate	<i>Closing turn.</i> End of rhythm.
Tablao	Flamenco club.
Toque	<i>Tocar = to touch, to play.</i> Generally, the flamenco played on the guitar.
Toque libre	Rhythmically free form.
Trémolo	Special arpeggio composed by a bass and four notes (flamenco), or three notes (classical) on one string.

Glosario Flamenco

Abanico	Rasgueado en abanico. Se mueve la muñeca como si estuviera abanicando.
Alzapúa	Técnica de pulgar. El pulgar de la mano derecha se utiliza como púa, es decir, se mueve hacia arriba y hacia abajo.
Apagado	Se apagan las cuerdas con la mano derecha o con el cuarto dedo de la mano izquierda.
Arpegio	Serie de los sonidos de un acorde tocados sucesivamente.
Baile	Baile flamenco.
Cante	Cante flamenco.
Compás	Tiempo, ritmo.
Contratiempo	Síncopa.
Entrada	Momento dentro del compás básico en el cual empieza la falseta o el cante.
Estrillo	Tema repetido a lo largo de una pieza.
Falseta	Frase melódica que se intercala entre las coplas del cante.
Golpe	Se acentúa el ritmo golpeando el golpeador con la yema y la uña del anular (a veces dedos anular y medio juntos).
Golpeador	Protector de plástico de la tapa armónica.
Ida y vuelta	Toques y cantes flamencos que fueron a Sudamérica y volvieron un poco cambiados.
Ligado	En esta técnica se produce el sonido exclusivamente con la mano izquierda.
Palo	Estilo flamenco.
Picado	Staccato. Se pulsan las cuerdas alternativamente con los dedos i e m (a veces i e a, o incluso i, m y a).

Pulgar	Técnica de pulgar. En el flamenco se tocan melodías enteras con el pulgar, incluso en los agudos.
Rasgueado	Se rasguean las cuerdas con los dedos de la mano derecha.
Toque	Acción y efecto de tocar la guitarra flamenca.
Toque libre	Estilo flamenco sin ritmo.
Trémolo	Arpegio especial, compuesto por un bajo y cuatro notas (flamenco) o tres notas (clásico) en una sola cuerda.

JUAN MARTÍN

LA GUITARRA FLAMENCA

PART TWO: LESSON 2 and LESSON 5
Produced and Directed by Juan Martín and Patrick Campbell
FLAMENCOVISION

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Introduction to Part Two

Welcome to the second videotape of *La Guitarra Flamenca!*

This tape contains Lessons 2 and 5. As explained in the introduction to the first tape, the lessons are paired in this way in order to make the music booklets approximately equal in size. It also ensures that each tape contains music for players of varying ability. Beginners would be best advised to follow the progressive sequence of lessons in the order 1 to 6.

Lesson 2 starts with the opening theme of *Bulerías* heard at the very beginning of Lesson 1. It is transcribed again here for more advanced players because the later part of the solo is different from the previous version. Lesson 2 is mainly devoted to the *Alegrías*, to which the beginner is introduced on page 22, with the demonstration of the 5-stroke *rasgueo*. Before this there are transcriptions of the music which introduces the *toque* of *Alegrías* and the use of the *cejilla*.

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