

A few years ago, I put out an article entitled The Flamenco Kit, in which I outlined the increasing problem of flamenco students, be they guitarists, dancers, or singers, attempting to put "their stuff" in front of the public before they are ready. Flamenco venues, once occupied by flamenco professionals, with years of experience and expertise, were being taken over by student and community groups. The public, uninformed about flamenco to begin with, was being exposed to a very low level of flamenco performance, however unintended it may be.

Another article, "Flamenco-Not Nouveau" addressed non-flamenco guitarists calling themselves flamenco in order to get a gig.

The situation has gotten much worse!

The Nouveau syndrome is especially acute among guitarists. Go to any Spanish restaurant in the States these days, and look at who is performing as a so-called flamenco guitarist. You are not likely to see any flamenco at all, in spite of what the venue says. Jazz, pop, and classical guitarists, salsa musicians, latin jazz players, most of whom have absolutely no understanding of flamenco outside of some rudimentary rumba, are appearing more frequently in public venues as "flamenco" guitarists.

This is a world-wide problem. It has even hit Spain. It may lead to flamenco's extinction. Do you think I'm paranoid, or exaggerating?

Look at this. These are the words of Moraito Chico, one of flamenco's legendary Jerez guitarists, with scores of years and experience in the flamenco trenches. Performances, CDs, videos, etc. Here's what he said:

<http://www.flamenco-world.com/artists/moraito/moraito28032005-1.htm>

"...since we're talking about flamenco, we're defending flamenco. If you make out you're a flamenco artist and you're taking work away from flamenco artists, then make sure it is flamenco. And if it isn't, move over and make a little room for the real flamenco guys. Plenty of people are jumping on the bandwagon, calling what they do flamenco. And I think it should be given a different name: "fame-enco", perhaps?

Silvia Calado. Jerez, March 2005

Translation: Gary Cook

Here in Houston, Tx, where I am based, there are very few venues for flamenco. There's are probably a thousand places where you can go to hear country western or rock. Ditto for R & B. Jazz has fewer, but there are still places offering what they call jazz. But in flamenco, the field is almost non-existent. We worked at a tapas restaurant for over 5 years. This place became the hotspot of flamenco, not because it

was necessarily the best, but because it was practically the only one. Houston now has maybe three or four Spanish or tapas-type restaurants, most offering what they call "flamenco."

On the way home from an out-of-town gig recently, we happened to drive right by one of the newer tapas places. We decided to stop and check it out. We were greeted by a friendly waiter, and we asked if there was a show. The waiter sat us next to where there was a small sound system set up, but no musician in sight. The waiter said the flamenco guitarist was on his break, but that he was the best flamenco guitarist in town and he also had a group that was the best flamenco group in town. Well, we've been performing here since the early 1980's and we know who all the other flamencos are, so obviously we were very curious. After a short while, out came the flamenco guitarist, with an F-hole, steel string guitar, who proceeded to play "Smoke Gets in your Eyes," and similar standards in a jazz style. The waiter eventually came over and asked how we liked the flamenco guitarist. When we quite bluntly told him the guy was playing jazz, not flamenco, he gave us a funny look and insisted the guitarist was the best flamenco guitarist in Houston, and that his flamenco group would be performing on another night. This we had to see!

We went back on the other night. Now there were two guitarists, a string bass, and a conga player. The guitars were still steel strings, played with picks. The same jazz standards, and an Ottmar Liebert rumba thrown in as a 'representation' of flamenco. The waiters still called them their 'flamenco' group.

These guys are not unique. There are many musicians out there calling themselves flamenco guitarists. Most of them are competent guitarists in one genre or other. But that is not the issue. They are not flamenco guitarists and what they have been doing to date (3/2005) has not been flamenco. It may be salsa, pop, jazz, or a fusiony mix of something with something, but it's not flamenco.

And you may ask, "So What?"

Well, the next time I hear of a restaurant looking for a classical guitarist, I'm going to raise my hand, and say "Me, Me. I play classical." If I get the gig, I'll just put on a CD track of some classical stuff (edited in advance in my studio, of course), and I'll strum some chords behind it. I'll just 'do my own classical thing.' If they ask for a jazz guitarist, I'll say "Me, Me. I play jazz." If I get the gig, I'll just play some Django-type tracks, and strum some chords behind it. Voilá, I'm a jazz guitarist. R&B? Even easier. Three chords repeated a million times. Play some scales over it, and there you go, instant R&B. Just change key from time to time so they think it's different. And in between the tracked stuff, I'll play some real flamenco, such as soleares, bulerias, and tangos. If they ask me what that stuff is, I'll just say it's my own 'noveau whatever.' Jazz, classical, R & B. So what?

So what if I don't know who the real R&B players are. So what if I wouldn't have a clue as to how to sit in in a session of real jazz pros (who've paid years of dues in sweat and tears.) So what if I don't care who the top classical people are today. I got the gig and that's all that matters!

Maybe the day will come when all music is fused into a 'flamenco latino clasico jazzito worldito.' It will all sound the same. Doesn't matter who you're listening to, or where, or when. Doesn't matter what the

venue calls it either. It will all be jazzito worldito. Nouveau jazz. Nouveau R&B. Nouveau clasico. Nouveau Nou-Faux.

But you want to hear the real thing, the original? Better dig out those old recordings you haven't listened to for years. That's the only place you'll find it. The real thing will be long-gone!