

## FLAMENCO

Flamenco is a type of song and dance, often accompanied by the guitar. It can be performed by a single person, a couple or a larger group. Most flamenco music is improvised. This means that performers decide exactly how they are going to sing, dance and play as they go along. If a singer, dancer and guitarist are working together, they have to listen very carefully so that they can blend in with each other's performance.

Flamenco is a very expressive and energetic type of music. Dancing involves elaborate and skilful footwork with much toe and heel clicking to complicated rhythms. This is particularly true of the male dancers. The women tend to concentrate on flowing hand, arm and body movements.

As the flamenco piece progresses the listeners encourage the performers with loud and energetic hand clapping, finger snapping and shouting. Excitement grows, the pace increases and the whole performance comes together in a breathtakingly fast and thrilling finish.



*Flamenco Dancer*

Illustration by kind permission of Just Europe Picture Library

Flamenco music is often divided into two basic types - the *cante hondo* and the *cante chico*. The *cante hondo* deals with serious and painful themes such as anger, death, betrayal and despair. These songs are delivered in an intense and moving style often combined with sobs and expressive hand movements.

The *cante chico* deals with happier and more light hearted themes. It is generally a more commercialised type of music which is popular with tourists. It is usually played in bars, theatres and night clubs. Hand held castanets are often used. Showbiz clothes such as frilly shirts for the men and long trained dress for the women are popular. These are cut high at the front to show their fast moving ankles and feet.

Flamenco first developed amongst the gypsy families of Andalusia, in southern Spain. These people originally came from India and traces of Hindu dance can be seen in the hand, arm and body movements of flamenco. Arab influences can also be seen in the music. The guitar itself was developed from an Arab lute. Many flamenco pieces use a number of rhythms during their performance and much of the singing has a certain nasal quality to it. Both these features probably come from Arab music.

### Exercises

1. What is flamenco?
2. Finish these 2 sentences: Male dancers ..... Female dancers .....
3. Use these key words in a paragraph about flamenco dancing: hand and feet movements, shouts, fast and exciting.
4. Describe the difference between the *cante hondo* and the *cante chico* in one or two sentences.
5. Write a list of topics from your life which could be covered by *cante hondo* songs.
6. Write a similar list for *cante chico* songs.
7. Use these key words in a paragraph about the *cante chico*: clothes, castanets, played, tourists.
8. What Hindu and Arab influences can be found in flamenco music?
9. Describe the differences between flamenco music and your favourite pop group. Which do you prefer? Give reasons for your choice.