

GHOST GUITARS: MY JOURNEY TO GRENADA, ANDALUISA

By

Emily L Quint Freeman

I rented a mini-Fiat at the Madrid airport. Armed with a map, I drove off on my own to Andalusia in the southernmost part of Spain. First destination, Granada. Even before the quintessential Muslim paradise garden, the Alhambra, my first day in Granada was earmarked for the homes of two preeminent creative geniuses, Federico Garcia Lorca, and Manuel de Falla.

They shared a love of flamenco, which is deeply embedded in Lorca's poetry and plays, as well as de Falla's music. Listen to de Falla's "El Amor Brujo" (The Bewitched Love) or "Nights in the Gardens of Spain" and hear his flamenco-inspired, vibrant sound world.

Flamenco is a unique genre combining dance, virtuoso guitar, and songs of passion and sorrow. It was created by the *gitanos* (gypsies) who migrated to Spain in the 15th century. However, flamenco echoes with the cadences and sounds of Islamic Spain from even earlier centuries.

My late night in Granada was spent at a smoky flamenco cabaret called a *tablao*, sipping a local sherry, avoiding places where the tourist buses go. With shouts and rhythmic clapping, the audience and performers become one with the drama, wild improvisation, and storytelling of the flamenco art form.

The *cante jondo* or deep songs are visceral wails, accusations, and pleas, drawing out of me such emotions and recollections, the *cante jondo* of love, struggle, and loss in my own life story. I know Lorca's poem, "The Guitar" in my skin.

*"The weeping of the guitar begins.
The goblets of dawn are smashed.
The weeping of the guitar begins.
Useless to silence it.
Impossible to silence it.
It weeps monotonously as water weeps,*

*as the wind weeps over snowfields.
Impossible to silence it."*

I was the only visitor at Manuel de Falla's modest house the next morning, down the hill from the Alhambra. The guard was asleep on a folding chair by the entrance. Just an unremarkable Spanish house with white-washed plaster walls, adobe tile roof, iron railings, tile floor. I went upstairs to his modest bedroom. I glanced around—a gramophone, a crucifix, single bed, and a shelf full of medicinal products. I heard footsteps and turned around. A young man smiled at me, the museum guide.

He said, "Since you're the only one here, do you want to see his clothes?" Not waiting for my answer, he opened a wooden dresser drawer. Inside were de Falla's stiff collars, blue and white striped shirts, studs, nightgowns, all neatly folded. "He thought he wouldn't be gone long." My eyes burned, as he closed the drawer.

De Falla fled the Franco regime, which crushed Spanish democracy in 1939. He didn't think to take everything. General Franco couldn't last. No, de Falla was to spend the rest of his life in exile, but safe in Argentina.

On the outskirts of Granada is the Huerta de San Vicente, Lorca's family summer home. I looked absently at the period furniture, lace tablecloth, and sentimental details. Nothing about Lorca himself, except old photos, his upright piano with two branched candlesticks, and his bedroom desk, above which hung the original poster for his travelling theatre company, with whom he brought the joy of the stage to small villages. I tried to imagine him writing *Blood Wedding* in this room.

Unlike de Falla, Lorca was not lucky enough to leave Spain. He was arrested in 1936 by orders of Franco's fascist authorities in Grenada, who hated that he was queer and a socialist. He was shot on a remote hillside outside town, his remains never found.

Creative people are dangerous to any dictatorship, whatever its ideology. Artists and musicians are escapists, not subjects. They create beauty, and beauty is the enemy. Since beauty cannot be controlled, they try to ban or destroy it. The *cante jondo*, the weeping guitars cannot be silenced.

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