

MUSICAL NOTATION IN FLAMENCO

Most flamenco music has been written down by non-flamenco musicians or flamenco musicians with little musical training, which means that we may find different ways of writing the same style. I was trained in the old school, i.e., by ear and imitation, and later studied music. This means that I know how flamenco is measured, how it is counted and how to think in flamenco. I learned the rules of music later, rules that were established years ago as a common ground for different musicians to perform a score. This is what we must achieve, a way for any musician to understand a score and be able to perform it correctly. Our point of departure is that the original flamenco rhythm pattern, a meter based on a 12-beat measure in all versions, is a subject that could be endless. It would be easy to write a soleá thinking it has 12-beat measures and the accents always fall on beats 3, 6, 8, 10 and 12. But that is not always so; a soleá can have different types of accentuation — speaking always from the standpoint of the guitar. Things are fairly simple for writing the percussion rhythm alone (clapping, *cajón*, etc.), but the guitarist deals with rhythm plus melody, harmony (*rasqueado*, arpeggio, tremolo, often in three-beat measures) and plays an element we call the *cierre* (closing or break) that we may find on beats 10-11-12 or on 4-5-6, and all this makes it more complicated. If we take only the basic pattern of a soleá measure, the accents are as follows:

(I place beat 12 in parentheses because the break is sometimes played on beat 10 and tied with beats 11 and 12.)

		>			>		>		>		(>)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
									(c i e r r e)		

But also:

		>				>	>		>		(>)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
									(c i e r r e)		

Or this:

		>			>			>			>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
									(c i e r r e)		

Or this, which is common with a tremolo:

>			>			>			>		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
									(c i e r r e)		

If there are two breaks in a measure (as in the old *falsetas*), it is played like this:

>	>		>		(>)	>	>		>		(>)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
			(c i e r r e)						(c i e r r e)		

The harmony pattern is constant, with chord changes every three beats. Using the flamenco cadence:

Am			G			F			E		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

With *rasgueados* in this harmonic sequence:

F			C			F			E		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

Arpeggios in this harmonic sequence:

Am			C			F			E		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

All these forms can be written using combination measures. For example, we could write the basic accents as follows:

2/4			3/4			2/4			2/4			3/4
(>)			>			>			>			(>)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	

Or like this:

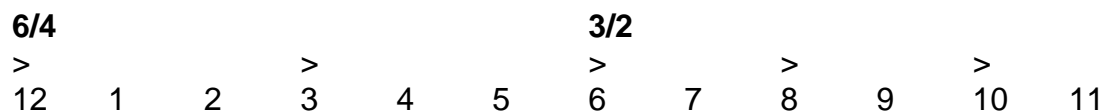
2/4			3/4			4/4			2/4			1/4
(>)			>			>			>			>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	

Beat 1 is accented in these forms, but this does not matter much since it is accented most of the time, and beat 12 is sometimes accented and other times not.

In my opinion this option has two major drawbacks:

- 1) The harmony can sometimes be disorderly.
- 2) We are constantly changing the meter and, depending on the accentuation used, things can get complicated.

This option is also valid:



However, there is another drawback in addition to the above. Now the first beat of the 6/4 measure is the last in the 12-beat measure. This can be somewhat confusing.

I think I have tried every possible form and in the end I opted for the following: Soleá, alegrías and *soleá por bulerías* (soleá with the pace and feel of bulerías) are styles with a 12-beat measure in which the quarter note has one count; therefore, we should obviously write them in 12/4. Then we put in the accents, or use dotted lines to separate the harmony and different accentuations. Bulerías and siguiriyas have twelve beats, and the eighth note has one count; we will therefore write them in 12/8. In the siguiriya we can make separations with dotted lines where the basic 12/8 time is equivalent to 12/8 (2/4 — 6/8 — 1/4). But never as 3/4 + 6/8, as the siguiriya has been written up to now. In my experience I have seen that if you explain to “non-flamenco” musicians that the first beat of the 3/4 group is the last beat of the siguiriya, they are confused. This is normal, since the first beat should be the first beat in the measure, period.

This is how I do it in this book. I also decided to publish the book in landscape view because this way we can display a 12-beat measure on a single system. I think this makes it much easier for the guitarist to view the placement of the different beats.

Best to all.
Oscar HERRERO