

Crying Across the Ocean: Considering the Origins of Farruca in Argentina

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The flamenco song form farruca is popularly said to be of Celtic origin, with links to cultural traditions in the northern Spanish regions of Galicia and Asturias. However, a closer look at the song's traits and its development points to another region of origin: Argentina. The theory is supported by an analysis of the song and its interpreters, as well as Spanish society at the time that the song was invented.

Various authors agree that the song's traditional lyrics, shown in Table 1, exhibit the most obvious evidence of the song's Celtic origin. While the author of the lyrics is not known, the word choice gives some clues about the person who wrote them. The lyrics include the words farruco and a farruca, commonly used outside of Galicia to refer to a person who is from that region of Spain. The use of the word farruco/a indicates that the author was not in Galicia at the time the song was written.

Letra tradicional de farruca

Una Farruca en Galicia
amargamente lloraba
porque a la farruca
se le había muerto el Farruco
que la gaita le tocaba

Table 1: Farruca song lyrics

Sources say the poetry likely expresses nostalgia for Galicia more than the perspective of a person in Galicia (Ortiz). A large wave of Spanish immigrants settled in what is now called the Southern Cone of South America, including Argentina and Uruguay, during the late 19th century, when the flamenco song farruca was first documented as a sung form of flamenco. It is very likely that this anonymous author was a former resident of Galicia living in Argentina or Uruguay, writing about the home and people whom he loved.

Aside from the lyrics, farruca's Celtic roots are said to lie in the song "alborada gallega", an orchestral piece that includes bagpipes. It is true, that in the last one minute of the song there is an arpeggiated phrase that runs the length of a musical scale. This run is similar to one that is

commonly heard in *farruca* interpretations of the mid-20th century. Aside from this link to Celtic music, there is no musical evidence tying *farruca* to Galicia or Asturias.

Many historic texts reference the connection of the words *treiro* and *tran*, sung in the introduction of the song, to Celtic music of Galicia. However, these words are not documented in song books or recordings of popular or traditional Spanish Celtic music nor are they part of the dialects of the northern regions of Spain.

While *farruca* appears to have little in common with the Celtic music of Galicia and Asturias, it bears strong resemblance to music of the Southern Cone of South America, where *tangos orilleros* were said to have developed (Linares 249). *Farruca* has a 4/4 time signature, with rhythmic and melodic accents that follow the pattern of tangos from Argentina and Uruguay.

Most of the music in the flamenco canon is played in a 12-count measure, based on the musical concept hemiola, which refers to the layering of two rhythms: 3/4 and 6/8 in one measure. This rhythmic idea is tied to the ration of 2:3, and dates the ancient cultures of Greece, the Middle-East and India (Brandel 106). It is also widely used in African music traditions. Of over 100 forms of songs in the flamenco canon, only seven of them have a four-beat cycle: *rumba*, *tangos*, *tientos*, *farruca*, *garrotín*, *milonga*, and *vidalita*. The four-beat cycle is traced to West African influence, which arrived in the New World via the Atlantic Slave Trade. *Rumba*, *tangos*, *tientos*, *milonga*, and *vidalita* are commonly believed to have developed from South American and Caribbean music that arrived via the port of Cádiz. Logically, *farruca* would have developed in a similar manner, given its similarities to *tangos orilleros*.

One of the first performers of *farruca* was Spanish flamenco guitarist Sabicas, who lived in Uruguay in the late 19th century before performing his version of *farruca*, one that has been widely studied and copied by other flamenco guitarists. In particular, Sabicas recorded his own flamenco guitar composition of the tangos “La Cumparsita” prior to recording his own version of *farruca*. His cover of “La Cumparsita” is strikingly similar to his style of *farruca*.

Historians point to another possible origin of *farruca*, which is the theater, most likely a *tonadilla* or *zarzuela*. In his 1907 *sainete* (short play) “Alma de Dios”, José Serrano composed a song with a melody that is heard in contemporary interpretations of *farruca*. In “Escena y *Farruca*” the time signature changes from 3/4 to 4/4 just before the singer begins her line that refer to a crying *farruca*, lyrics similar to the traditional *letra* of the flamenco song *farruca*. Prior to composing “Alma de Dios,” Serrano worked as a secretary to Manuel Fernández Caballero, who left Spain in the late 1800s to form a company in Cuba. This is yet another possible entry of Caribbean and South American influence of *farruca* (Ortiz). Though influences such as *zarzuela* and tangos *orilleros* clearly influenced *farruca* as it evolved, it should be noted that the first records of live performances of *farruca* inside the flamenco canon are from the early 20th century, and many of them happened before or at the same time that influencing music was created.

Farruca was first interpreted by guitarist Ramón Montoya in the early 1900s. Influenced by classical players, Montoya searched for a more dominant role for the flamenco guitarist, which normally played as a supporting accompanist to dancers and singers in the spotlight. Following Montoya, Sabicas and a slew of other guitarists advanced the evolution of the song and developed their own signature styles of playing it. *Farruca* was first sung by Manuel Lobato El Loli and Antonio Pozo El Mochuelo just after the turn of the 20th century. Understanding the

origins of farruca will depend on further analysis of the musical influences of guitarists Montoya and Sabicas, singers El Loli and El Mochuelo. Most important will be finding the roots of the song lyrics, now attributed to an anonymous author, as well as the presumed *gallego* word *trero*, converted to *treiro* in modern lyrics.

Video samples of songs referenced

Farruca, danced by Antonio Gades, 1969

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBefsNiLrhg>

Farruca, danced by the Company of Sara Baras, 2005

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z9DyXigL-LU>

“La Cumparsita”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LkfzK_nX-QM

Sabicas “La Cumparsita”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvli_ZNqybc

Sabicas Farruca

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-rtnw424uw>

Ramon Montoya, farruca

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0CT8HmiuWE>

Video: José Serrano: Escena y Farruca de "Alma de Dios" (1907), at 2:51

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6Dcxo4fvhw>

Works Cited

Brandel, Rose. "The African Hemiola Style," *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 3, no.3, 1959, pp. 106-117.

Linares, María Teresa and Faustino Núñez, *La música entre Cuba y España*, Fundación Autor, 1998.

Ortiz, Miguel. "Farruca" <http://www.flamencoviejo.com/farruca.html>, March 16, 2010; Viewed September 1, 2014.