Pastora Pavon, the Last of the Great Flamenco Singers

A story by Cynthia Gooding

Cynthia Gooding was one of the most popular and influential folksingers of the 1950s, a statuesque woman with a gorgeous voice and a unique repertoire of songs from many parts of the world. She was one of Elektra Records' defining stars, along with Josh White, her sometime duet partner Theo Bikel, Oscar Brand, Bob Gibson, and Ed McCurdy.

By the 1960s, the music business was changing. The Kingston Trio had reached the top of the pop charts and spawned hundreds of collegiate folk groups, most of them barely competent on their instruments and recycling the same tiny repertoire of songs. Gooding had no interest in competing with this flock of commercially-oriented amateurs, so turned her interests in other directions. Her daughter Leyla recalls:

"In 1962, my mother wanted to get out of the business. I guess the only way she thought she could do that was to move far away, so we moved to Seville, Spain. She said she wanted to write a biography of a famous singer, Pastora Pavon, known as La Niña de los Peines. When she finally tracked down La Niña, it turned out that La Niña didn't want her biography written. Mom spent the next two years doing what she loved: collecting music, this time flamenco. She considered it the blues of Spain, sung by gypsies, who were outcasts at the time."

Pastora Pavon, with her brother Tomás and Pepe Pinto

Gooding returned to the U.S., hosted a popular folk music radio show in New York, and continued to be a presence on the folk scene. She also turned her attention to writing, producing dozens of short stories and articles, though few were ever published.

This is her story of the attempt to write Pavon's biography, as she typed and corrected it in the early 1960s.

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THE LAST OF THE GREAT FLAMENCO SINGERS

In 1929, The Girl With The Cembs was the greatest weman flamence singer ef them all. In 1941 a recerd album was issued in this ceuntry, eight sides, 78s, cante jende,'deep seng'; even ~~though~~ after it was re-issued as a 10' LP in 1953, black market tapes were selling at $12.50 each. Means and hewls are musical when she sings. A shriek ef anguish can be medulated te a seund se keening and sweet, se bitter with less that even theugh her heavy gipsy accent makes the werds almest incemprehensible, the feeling is clear.

Talk ef art seng. The Girl With The Cembs is ene ef the greatest art singers. There is ne ether singer like her in Spain, Eurepe er America. Breath centrel, phrasing, rhythm, knew-ledge, are all part ef her art and if she didn't learn it at Juilliard er La Scala, she learned it in just as difficult a scheel, that ef flamence traditien as it existed in Seville, Jerez and Cadiz at the beginning ef this century.

But when yeu went leeking fer her everyene said she was dead. In Paris all the flamences said, "Dead." In Madrid there were cenjectures. "I think she is teaching flamence semewhere." "She might be living in Cadiz." Degmatic assertiens. "She is dying ef drepsy." "She is begging en the streets." Opiniens. "An old gipsy like that? Drunk. Or dead."

I first heard this weman (whe is still called a girl) in the pre-LP peried when recerds were few, black and breakable. They lay flat and heavy on your hand and leeked mere valuable intrinsically than any music they ceuld be ceaxed inte rendering. They seunded mushy en eur fluted pillared and carved victrela.

In Minnesota in 1943 there was lieder and epera en the big recerds and Sinatra en the small enes, Sinatra whem everyene praised because he seemed sincere abeut the banal lyrics he sang. A friend played THE GIRL WITH THE COMBS.

One listener said, "She seunds like a cew whe needs a bull."

Anether said ~~quietly~~, "Please change the recerd. It's hurting my ears."

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Later in New York I found a few people who shared my reverence for her singing. None of them had ever met her. None of them believed she was still alive. We listened to her sing and repeated the few myths we had about her. The notes on the original album said that in the streets of Seville"men would toss their hats in her path as the highest possible compliment to her artistic prowess." And "because of civil war she found it necessary to leave her native land for Argentina where she now lives in Buenos Aires." We saw her surrounded by muddy hats and raised glasses, then fleeing the tyrant; to her evident artistic prowess we added bravery, convictions and the heartbreak of exile. But a man who had been to Spain said the records were made in the caves of Granada. Another said authoritatively that the records were made in Madrid at the height of the bombing. "You can hear the bombs bursting on the records," he said.

(Since then I8ve learned she had never come to the Americas, that the records were made in a studio and issued as singles in Spain, gathered quite coincidentally into an album in this country.)

I found a record in 14th Street; it was like an Indian ruby to be added to my store of African diamonds. A friend came back from Spain with newer records. Then she must be alive. Her voice was older, thicker, less flexible but her style was more imaginative, subtler, impeccable.

If she was still alive, how old would she be? Irving Brown published one of the few books about flamenco in 1929. He wrote that she was already middle aged. Say she was 45 - classic middle age- in 1929, she'd be 75 in 1959.

In 1961 Alan Lomax came back from along stay in Europe with the extraordinary news that not only was she alive but he had met her. "She is living quietly in Seville. She has gone bourgeoise," he said. No, he was not joking. "She was dressed in black, very quiet, but still alive."

I wanted to see her plain. So I packed my household and moved to Seville. There I rented a small house in the old quarter behind the cathedral. After a week of searching I found a certain gipsy sword boy suggested to me by a flamenco in Barcelona.

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So here we are in Seville sitting in the leafy patio of my house; Caroso (Bear Face), the gipsy sword boy, a man of fifty who lives by doing errands and being helpful, and I. He is breathing heavily and looking past me at the false well in the center of the patio. I pour a glass of sherry. He looks at the fifty year old ferns that grow from huge majolica pots, set one on each side of the arch. Their fronds have grown up past the the second storey of the house and he looks them up and down. Then he looks at the ivy covering the far wall. "He is ugly but kind, lugubrious but well meaning," said the flamenco in Barcelona. Caroso's huge purple nose is as pock marked as the rest of his face. His tiny blood shot eyes shift from the ivy back to the false well. Upstairs the maid jiggles in the rush bottomed chair where she sits 'guarding me' from the balcony above.

I asked a direct question and Caroso brought out all his information in one stream, still looking past me as he spoke.

"She is about eighty five now. She was born and bred here in Seville. She married late in life and her husband, Pepe Pinto, is at least twenty years younger. She takes good care of herself. She doesn't smoke, doesn't drink, never has. You can see her every night during the summer sitting in front of her husband's bar down on the Campana. She goes there every night for a cup of coffee."

"She was a good singer but her brother Tomás was better. He sang soleá better than she did and she loved him better than anyone in the world. He died many years ago though. So did her other brother."

There was a silence, then he said, "I'll bring them over to your house." I protested that I couldn't afford to pay them as singers, I just wanted to talk. He said money was not important. But I never saw him again until two years later when he was acting as sword boy to an American bull fighter.

He left saying it was indeed hot in Seville. Even for Seville, he said, it was hot. In fact, he said, they were having

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a heat wave.

A heat wave in Seville means 120 degrees F. Or more.

Mornings people moved very slowly along the narrow strips of shadow by the buildings. They stood under trees in the plazas or in the backs of dark bars fanning themselves. In the afternoons they stayed in their houses. In the afternoons nothing was open. Not even the banks and the stores. Not even the bars. The sun rose and rose and everyone stayed still in dark places.

About nine at night a peaceful sunset began to swathe the sky with cyclamen and phlox colors. The street cleaners came out to water the streets. Steam rose from the cobble stones and wove its odor of reminscence with the smell of jasmine. The vise in which the sun had held the city began to loosen. By then the heat had abated to 1o5. The people came out into the streets, languid, close pored, pale, with dark circles under their eyes and smelling of rose water and lavender.

By eleven, the evening breeze had begun to blow and people walked slowly up and down the Sierpes talking softly, waiting for the night to complete its conquest of the heat. Around midnight they began to sit down at the tables outside the restaurants, fanning themselves still and drinking cold wine.

At night the geraniums still give off their acrid odor but the jasmines overpower it with their sweetness. The odor of jasmine is everywhere, mixed with gasoline in the main streets, mixed with horse dung where the carriages park waiting for tourists, mixed with the smell of peanut oil and frying fish, mixed with the smells of cologne and dust.

I walked across the Plaza Nueva in the first dark. The sky was not yet black. Gold and orange still faintly streaked the sky over Triana. I entered Sierpes, the deep narrow main street with an awning pulled across it from roof to roof. There, night had come.

At the foot of Sierpes is the intersection called the Campana. It is of an unclassifiable shape and from it issue so many main streets of Seville that it seems all directions given begin with the words, "Go to the Campana and from there......" ~~The Campana is also the starting point for the great processions of Holy Week.~~

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On the longest sidewalk of the intersection there is a curio-camera shop, a barber, an aluminum American bar, an alley, a fish shop, a bakery and an old style coffee shop. Between the barber and the curio shop is a bar perhaps ten feet across the front and twenty feet deep. It is called Bar Pinto because it belongs to Pepe Pinto. On the sidwalk outside the bar there is a line of tables. I sat down at one and asked the waiter for coffee. He brought the thick strong coffee in a demi tasse and I asked where Pepe Pinto was.

The waiter pointed. "He's sitting at that table down there. And the woman with him is his wife, the famous flamenco singer, The Girl With The Combs."

She sat with her back to the bar, facing the street, her shoulders straight against the back of her chair. The weak street lamp between my table and theirs illuminated a pair of dark glasses above which showed the outer tips of her eyebrows; below them was shadow. Her hair was black. What she wore looked black. There was a glint from several gold bangles and bracelets on one wrist. A diamond ring caught the light as she lifted her demi tasse to drink. She put the cup down and sat very still.

Behind her stood three gipsy men buying cigarrettes from a woman with a basket. Because the fluorescent strip above the bar front fell straight upon them they were garishly visible as they paid for the three cigarettes, leaned back against the wall and lit up. The strip of sidewalk between then and her table was blocked by an old man who had stopped to speak to her. She turned her head toward him, her shoulders still tight to the back of the chair. She smiled slightly. A gold tooth shone. She did not speak and after the man had walked down the street, she turned her face into the shadow again.

Beside her immobility, her husband, facing the light from the bar, talked to her and jabbed one thumb against the palm of the other hand. Diamonds sparkled from his watch band and his ring. His face looked knowing and restless, like an ageing semi-successful wrestler, flat and sly.

I looked away, appalled to find that she really was alive and perfectly normal in appearance except that she looked nearer sixty than eighty five. I thought fleetingly that now I'd seen her and I could go back home.

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Since she was indubitably alive, there were several matters to be taken into account. I had brought a fine tape recorder and a field mike, intending to tape my interviews with her and from them, make a book. But the first thing was to meet her. Or rather to meet someone who knew her. Alan Lomax's sources were scholars in Madrid. Carmen Amaya had given me the name of a marquis who might help me but he was abroad. An English flamenco guitarist had given me the name of another Englishman who lived in Seville but he had just gotten married and was on his honeymoon.

The American Consulate was surprised to hear she was still alive.

Time passed. Itxbeganxtoxrain The hot season, called 'dry' in Seville was finished and it began to rain. The winter of 1962 was a bad winter in Europe and in Seville it rained for three months, day and night. Big rattling thundering rain. Small gentle Irish rain. You carried an umbrella all the time because if your clothes got wet they would mould off your back before they dried. Soon you came to welcome the rain becausethe alternative was a daxmp chill that froze the marrow of your bones.

The house which had been gay with geraniums in August, was sodden and gray in Novexmber. In the patio a foot of water stood around the well until the maid was encouraged to sweep the drain clean. The only heat was a wood stove on the landing of the second floor and an electric brazier in the dining room. We sat around one or the other and drank brandy and listened to tapes of her records.

I met some people. They told tantalizing tales of flamenco parties lasting for days and even weeks during which men sang and danced and ate and drank and hunted and sang and danced; of nights in working mens' bars listening to old time singers; of nights in country taverns off a mule track somewhere, in a flood of guitars, shouts and rhythmic clapping. For the first few months in Seville I had to content myself with these stories which seemed apochryphal since none of these people did such things nowadays "except during the Spring Fair" and none of them knew any guitarists or singers personally.

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I met a woman who was compiling a list of great women born in Seville and still living there. She was surprised to know The Girl With The Combs was still living. In return for this information she set out to find someone to help me. Two weeks later she introduced me to a man who was writing lyrics for Pepe Pinto. He was to deliver some lyrics that night and he said I could accompany him.

Pinto greeted the lyricist - Manolo - as an artiste must greet a lyricist. Condescendingly. He led us down a tiny staircase to an infernally cold, damp, echoing room and sat down at the head of a long deal table set with twenty or so slatted chairs. He gestured to us to sit on either side of him and ordered sherry all around. Then he leaned back and began to tell Manolo about his latest and highly successful recording. But the lyrics had not been written by Manolo. Manolo brought out a sheaf of notes from his overcoat pocket and Pinto stuffed them into his. They turned to me.

This lady is a friend of a dear friend of mine," said Manolo. "She has come all the way to Seville from New York in order to write a biography of Pastora Pavon."

Pinto looked at me. "You know her records then?" When I had answered he turned to Manolo and began to speak very fast. There was a rapid exchange, too idiomatic and Andalusian for my still rusty Spanish. He turned back to me. "Do you know <u>cante jondo</u>?" Before I could answer he asked, "What is it you want to do?"

I had been advised to outline a very ornate scholarly book. I did so and added, "She is a very great artist."

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"One of the greatest," he said.

Manolo said, "You are great too, Pepe."

Pinto said, "I have just made my 165th recording." He began to talk fast again. Manolo nodded after every phrase. Then Pinto began to sing. He sang one verse of seguiriyas and looked at me. I nodded. He said, "That is the wrong way to sing it. That is how commercial singers sing it. Now I'll sing it correctly. With duende" He took a deep breath and sang the same verse louder and with more fioritura. He said, "That is the way a singer of cante jondo sings it. It is necessary to know cante jondo very well to appreciate Pastora's art."

I swallowed and agreed. He looked at me hard, then announced, "I will talk to my wife. But she is difficult. You never know what she wants to do or whether she will do it. She says yes. She says no. She is shy." He looked at me closely again. "We have talked of doing such a book. But who would publish it?"

I said a publisher in New York was interested.

Pinto relaxed a moment. "My wife was born here in Seville," he said. "Near the Puerta Osario. I was born near the Puerta of the Macarena," he added. "Her brother Tomás was a master singer. He never sang for money but he was a master singer. Pastora only sings for pleasure now. For herself and a few friends. She sang right here only two nights ago. She sang a soleá so beautifully I wept and kissed her. She has sung for the King of Spain and for the King of Italy. She has sung for many famous people. But she is shy and modest." He had begun slowly but as he spoke he speeded up and soon addressed himself only to Manolo. When he turned back to me he was talking about cante jondo (deep song) and I had missed the bridge from Pastora. He slowed down again and said, "There are only four great styles: seguiriyas, soleá, saeta and martinete. All the others are little styles made to pass the time agreeably....." Feet clattering on the stairway, big feet, interrupted him. He explained the feet to me proudly. "It is a tertulia, a group of doctors, very influential men. They come here every afternoon after work to discuss flamenco and listen to singers." A huge pleasant faced man had greeted him and he introduced us. The man gave me his card and spoke in English.

"I am Pastora's doctor," he proclaimed. Confidentially

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almost behind his hand, he added, "She has been quite ill for the past two months. Because of the damp." (Later he told me "Pastora Pavon has the perfect singer's throat. It is the finest singer's throat I've ever seen.") He asked, "Do you know the cante jondo?"

I countered with my interest in Pastora Pavon and then added less cautiously that I loved it.

"Cante jondo is not easy to find. Even here in Seville there is little of it to be heard. A few old singers, that's all. There are men in our tertulia who have spent three fortunes on flamenco waiting to hear lo jondo. They listen to singers, they take troupes of singers, guitarists and dancers out to their road-side inns or to their ranches after the curfew. And if they sing well, you pay them well and you pay all they can drink too. Because you are an Andalusian gentleman and they are only gipsies. You pay them a lot. That is to say, they overcharge you and you pay without murmuring. Men lose fortunes easily following the flamencos"

But the others were standing back waiting for us to finish. I went reluctantly to join Manolo at the foot of the stairs. Pinto shook my hand as he turned to greet another doctor coming down the stairs. Over his shoulder he said, "Come back tomorrow, no day after tomorrow and I'll tell you what my wife has decided."

For all his discourtesy, of which I had often been warned, I was exultant. Pinto would go home and tell his wife what he had said. She would like the idea and we would begin work. I said goodbye to Manolo, whom I never saw again either, and walked home in the rain thinking, 'day after tomorrow it will be all set.' Because I am superstitious I added, 'I hope'.

It was still raining two days later. In the hope that it would let up I waited until five. At Pinto's door I closed my umbrella and pushed the heavy glass doors open. I took one step into the small crowded bar where I towered as always above the small dark men whose black eyes had all turned to look at me. Pinto is so small I heard his voice shouting at me before I could locate his person. He was yelling over the heads of the staring customers, "My wife says no."

You will have to accept my word for it that it is hard to be a woman in Seville anyway. And that the female condition is somewhat mitigated by the courtesy men show, once they have been

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convinced that you are not a whore like all the other foreign women (or at least that if you are, you're discreet about itx). Native women of Seville, none of whom are whores, find relief in the loud assertion of their opinions. Any of them would have had something loud to say about Pinto's mother and Pastora's too, to say nothing of both their grandmothers, their grandfathers, their sisters and the horns on their fathers. But an inarticulate Ango=-Saxon woman used to being treated like a skirted man could only mumble, turn, fumble for the door in front of all those laughing eyes and grope, through silent foolish tears, her way back out into the rain.

The next month was spent collecting some of the many foul and libellous stories about Pinto and collating the negative opinions about his singing and his manners. His manners are supposed to be the worst in Seville and his singing, except for one of the little styles he so disdains, is ludicrous. As for Pastora, one man said, "It was all so long ago and all the principals are dead except for her."

slow it here

Just when it seemed that here in the cradle of flamenco I would never hear anyone sing, the Englishman finally came back from his honeymoon. Immediately he suggested bringing some hired singers to my house. I would furnish the wine and he would bring some other foreigners to help defray the fees.

"We are beginning with the best"he announced after he had roused me one evening late. Along with an assortment of English he had brought Pepe Torre, a gaunt old gipsy with a face carved by wrinkles and sunk around a very few teeth. He was brother to the legendary singer Manuel Torre who died in 1933. Gossip says Pastora Pavon and Manuel Torre were in love for years and that she learned many of her songs from him. But Pepe had nothing to say about her. He sat down and took a drink of Machaco anis brandy, a drink that clears the head almost more than you wanted it cleared. He took another drink and began.

"I am the Captain General of flamenco, the fount of knowledge, he proclaimed. "Ask me." But before anyone could set him a question he continued. "The cante grande or cante jondo is soleá, seguiriya and martinete. But it is grande not only in itself but because something in it can become greater. In the throat of a master singer the songs can turn your blood to fire,

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your bowels to water, raise every pore in your skin, every hair on your head. My brother, Manuel, used to do that when he sang well."

Manuel Torre was revered and still is by those who love cante jondo. He was a master of the seguiriya, the most difficult form of all. He loved four things, singing, fighting cocks, racing dogs and women. He would leave his house mounted on a mule in the early afternoon, carrying a fighting cock. He would return a day or two later on foot, with a galgo, a Spanish hound, not having made an equal trade but having fought the cock, sold the mule, bought another cock, bet on both, won or lost, sold the cocks, bet on others, won or lost, gotten drunk, perhaps sung a bit, bought the hound and finally gotten a little tired.

Pepe said, "When we were young, Manuel and I would walk 18, 20, 30 kilometers to hear a good singer. I still will too. I'm 75 but I'll walk anywhere to hear a good singer. But they're all dead or past their prime. Once we stood all night in the rain outside a window listening to Chacón inside. That was afición. We had real afición." He poured some more brandy. "But my brother's records are no good. He didn't like to sing into a microphone on schedule. He sang when he felt like it."

Later Pepe wanted to sing but he had gotten drunk on Machaco and his voice bayed around the tones like a wolf's. His poor old voice was no longer capable of the effort. The evening ended sadly.

After that first evening we hired singers often. Still I never met anyone who knew Pastora Pavón personally. I had given over the idea of a biography. All I wanted was to meet her. Gossip said she wanted nothing to do with me because she thought I wanted to make money out of her. "Someone gave you bad advice," I was told. "You should never have said you wanted to write anything more than a small article about her."

There was evil gossip about my house too because of the flamencos who came there. The neighbors complained every time we listened to a singer past midnight. The police came. There were fines to pay. And it went on raining. But I learned little tidbits here and there and finally was hearing a lot of flamenco.

I met don Enrique, an old man who could be called a semi-aficionado because he claimed that all the good singers

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were dead and there was no one left for him to listen to. We sat together over many a cup of coffee while he reminisced about old Seville and told me stories about flamenco. He thought little of Pepe Pinto. ~~He said this:~~

"Pepe Pinto was a croupier here in Seville at the Military Casino until the casinos were closed. He used to call himself a _señorito_ and often hired singers to perform for him. He hired Pastora more than once. But they were not interested in each other then.

"Pastora was very much in love with a friend in Cádiz. He was an _aficionado_ of flamenco, very knowledgeable, sang well. But he also gambled. Some of the most spectacular scenes in Cádiz took place when Pastora came to the casino to tell him to stop gambling and come home. That man was a _señorito_ but a real one. He came of a good family and he had never worked with his hands. He could not sing professionally, of course, because that was some thing no _señorito_ would do. Singing for money was left to the riff raff and the gipsies. It is still true, you know....." And don Enrique reminded me of a man I'd heard a few days before, a good singer who sold portraits to people he'd sung for and called him self an artist. He could not take money for singing because his family would die of the shame, although they could have used the money.

Don Enrique said, "The señoritos feel a general contempt for the gipsies except for their music. The gipsies return the contempt and take the money. They understand each other well though on the subject of _cante_." He laughed his laugh of a fresh faced boy, an odd laugh to come from that bitter brooding old face.

"When the casinos were closed Pinto went to Tangiers to work in the casinos there. He and Pastora met at a time when they were both lonely. Malicious people say that since Pinto could never sing _cante jondo_ himself, he married someone who could. But the fact is that Pepe Pinto is probably the most whole hearted _aficionado_ in all of Spain.

"Pastora was always considered ugly. She was called La Mona, The Ape of Seville. But no one ever said it to her face. She has the vilest, bitterest, dirtiest tongue of any gipsy in

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Seville. Some say it as an insult but I think it is a compliment because no women in the world think so fast or express themselves so succinctly as gipsy women."

I remembered the dressmaker who had told me as she was fitting a muslin, "Yes, I did some work for Pastora. But I had to stop. She used such vile language all my other customers were leaving me. For instance, once I offered her a cane-bottomed chair that was a little broken. She jumped up off it in the middle of the waiting room and yelled, 'This (blasphemous) chair is worming its way into every hole in my ass.' Three ladies walked out. Once a dress didn't fit and she shouted, 'I defecate on the death of the grandparents of the woman who made this whoreson dress.' And that was my grandmother and grandfather! It could not continue.

"But there were times when she was charming. Once she brought in a dress that didn't fit right and she laid it tenderly over a chair. She stood in front of it and waggled her finger at it while she spoke in a sad voice. 'Every time I wore you, you made me suffer. You pulled at me and twisted around me. Now, you will suffer. This lady will cut you up. So' and she slashed at it with her hand. 'She will rip you to pieces. So. And so. And so.' Then she turned kindly again and added, 'Then she will sew you all up again and send you back to me.' But I had to tell her I was sick, too sick to work. What could I do with all the complaints?"

A woman who lived next door to me was ready to make some allowances for me because there is a tradition in Seville regarding mad foreigners who come to hear the music. But she said pityingly, "You don't know the flamencos. You don't know what they are really like."

And she would not enter my house. "No, thank you," she would say with a distant smile.

To her flamenco was not an art. It was not really music. It was just a dirty way of living. It was a world of gipsies, unemployed scoundrels, communists, wastrels, homosexuals, whores, foreigners, pimps and a few dissolute aristocrats who no longer went to church. "I'm a Sevillana, born and bred here," she said proudly. "I'm an Andalusian and they are gipsies."

To clarify that statement let us review the facts.

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Spain is a country, Andalusia is a province, Seville is a city, the gipsies are a race. Flamencos are a group of people who earn their living singing, dancing and playing the guitar. Señoritos are men who do not work with their hands.

To Pastora and to my neighbor, anyone who was not born in Seville is a stranger. While both of them believe it is better to be a Spaniard than a foreigner, still, a Spaniard from Madrid is as much a stranger as any German, Swiss, American or Chinese. All non-Sevillanos are strangers.

Pastora and the gipsies have a word for those strangers who are not gipsies; payo (or gachó).

But my neighbor's word for non-gipsies is Andalusian.

You may ask, but what if the gipsies were born in Andalusia? They are not Andalusians because they are gipsies.

In Pastora's circles it is best to be a gipsy, all right to be flamenco, bad to be Andalusian or a señorito, terrible to be payo.

However to be Sevillano is always good. One is then a non-stranger.

That is true for my neighbor too. Next to being Sevillano, it is best to be Andalusian, good to be a señorito, within limits and so long as he isn't flamenco, bad to be flamenco, worse to be gipsy.

Gipsy, Andalusian, Señorito, Flamenco. In Seville sides are taken on all subjects. It was hard not to take sides in the eternal contention between Andalusians and gipsies. I took the gipsies' side partly because Andalusians are so arrogant, partly because gipsy singing is more touching, more powerful. Since I could not seem to meet Pastora, I set out to learn as much as I could about gipsy singing. In case I ever met her......

Miguel, a young writer and aficionado promised to introduce me to Antonio Mairena, who is considered the best and most complete male singer of jondo styles. He is a great friend and admirer of Pastora Pavon, also.

Miguel promised for three months, then one afternoon in early February he came to the house to announce that it was all arranged for that very moment.

We drove out to the meeting place, which was a drug store owned by Mairena in one of the new suburbs which make the outskirts

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of Seville indistinguishable from any other expanding southern city. The road on which the store stood was so new it was not yet paved. We tromped through the red mud puddles in the rain and found Mairena waiting for us behind the counter. He wore a brown hat, a brown suede jacket, a brown scarf and brown trousers. He looked natty, as if he had just come in from overseeing his acres. We shook hands. He had the hard hands of a man who drove or rode horses continually. He is a large man with brown eyes and a face so like other faces of slightly mournful men that no feature can be singled out and described.

Beside the drugstore he owns a house in Mairena, his home town, and another in Carmona. All three properties were bought with money won in the lottery. He won the Big Prize the same year he won the Golden Key as the best flamenco singer in a national competition.

Women holding babies had crowded in from the back room of the store to look at us. We shook hands all around, patted the babies and then followed Mairena down to the bar at the corner where he conducts his business. He seated me at a table facing the wall, sat facing the room and left Miguel to find his own place. Cigarrettes were offered and drinks ordered before he began to talk but he came straight to the point.

"Flamenco is everything you hear with rhythm and cantillation. It is Andalusian music gipsified plus real gipsy music. Jondo is the music of the gipsies. There are four gipsy root styles and they are the jondo styles: seguiriyas, solea, tona'a and tiento. Everything else is gipsified Andalusian folk music but it's called flamenco.

"Lo jondo means a lot to gipsies. It is our escape valve. It is not necessary to sing with physical force. No. It is not physically difficult to sing jondo, it is emotionally difficult. It is hard to sing, hard to listen to, hard to accept, hard to understand.

"To be a good singer, one needs the instrument, the schooling, the love of it and duende. You may be in good voice, singing well and have no duende. Then it is flat. When you have it, you feel it in you when you first try your voice. It comes like a spirit within you."

Mairena is only half gipsy. Malicious gipsies say that

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is why he always wears his hat - to hide his balding head: if he were a real gipsy, all gipsy, he would not be bald, they say. He adjusted his hat, which he had not taken off, took a sip of his lemonade and began to talk about the gipsies' past.

"The persecutions of the gipsies here in Spain lasted from the end of the fifteenth to the end of the seventeenth centuries. Thousands were killed. They hid in the hills and Spaniards went out to hunt them like animals. When it finally ended those who were left came down from the mountains and settled in the Cava in Triana. The Cava is the home of cante. Cadiz and Jerez, two other places where they settled, are the two other points that form a triangle. Within that triangle is the birthplace and home of cante. Outside the triangle it is all false and commercialized." He stopped and looked around the cafe, greeting friends and returning salutations. I asked about Pastora finally.

"She was the only one who commercialized and pleased all audiences, gipsy and Andalusian, knowledgeable and ignorant. It is true she is avoiding you. She doesn't want her life story told yet. She has lived a great deal and she doesn't want the details known. She is a savage gipsy. I am related to her in two ways. My grandfather wanted to marry her mother and my mother was her father's cousin. But she does not want to tell about the past."

When I recounted this to the English guitarist he said it was part of the 'gipsy mystique' which he despised. He said, "The only reason Pastora Pavon has a following is that nobody has heard her sing for the last thirty years . She has become a legend."

He preferred the voice of honey which sings prettily. He and his camp listened for proficiency and versatility. We, of the 'gipsy mystique' listened for a moment of ravishing emotion. He scoffed at 'duende': "Mysticism", he called it. And I found the singers he liked cold and boring.

After a year of listening to singers and stories, arguments and opinions, I had learned something about cante jondo and felt strong enough to return to the task of meeting Pastora.

Summer had returned and my friend, don Enrique decided to act as go-between. He took to having his evening coffee in front of Pinto's bar. He enjoys sitting in the same place

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at the same time of day to watch life repeat itself. Seville encourages this because among her constant beauties, the smallest details engage the attention. Don Enrique sits there and remembers his youth with pleasure. But when Pinto comes to his table he is amazed at Pinto's pomposity and repetition. "He says he has made 167 records and his wife has made 150. Night after night he tells me that. And if he doesn't stop telling me his wife sang a soleá last night so beautifully he wept and kissed her, I shall storm away shouting foul words as I go."

Soothingly I asked, "How do you suppose they came to marry?"

"When she ceased to be with her friend from Cádiz, when she saw they couldn't marry because he was a señorito and she was only a gipsy singer, she was already in her forties. You know the lot of a Spanish woman who doesn't marry. Even an artist like Pastora, unmarried, is an object of scorn. She met Pinto again. She married him."

"Do they have children?"

"They married too late for that, I'm told. But she has an adopted daughter." He changed the subject. "She and Pinto had a bar in Tetuán Street during the war. You could hear good singing there. They were not here but the bar was. She and Pinto got caught in Madrid during the war.....I said 'caught'..... if they could have come back, they didn't."

I couldn't ask what he meant. Seville was one of the first towns taken by Franco and his Moors. Many Republicans fled at the time. Many thousands of Sevillano citizens were slaughtered at the walls. But I could not discuss politics in a public place and it seemed best not to discuss don Enrique's opinion of Pastora's politics at all.

"She does not see why you should make money out of her life. She wants it," he finally told me. We decided to offer her the royalties on a Spanish version of the book if she would pay for the translation. Don Enrique told this to Pinto who seemed interested. An appointment was made. I was to come to the bar at 10:30 for one last try.

I arrived on the dot and sat down with don Enrique at one end of the line of tables. Pastora Pavón sat at the other end with Antonio Mairena. Don Enrique beckoned to Pinto who was standing near us waiting to see how we would approach the matter.

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He and I greeted each other with restraint. He shook hands with don Enrique and began the spiel don Enrique had heard so often.

"We must make records. The anthology. Three LPs we have to make. I make four and four and four and she makes eight and eight and eight. I've made 167 records now. My latest is a seguiriya which came out magnificently. And a Malagueña de Mellizo. Pure pure feeling." He swelled his chest and twinkled his diamonds. "They are not out in Seville yet but they are out in Granada and selling well." A pause. "About your affair. Let's talk about it tomorrow."

"Don't you like to talk business at night?" I asked.

"I've got to make this anthology. So does she. There is no more difficult woman in the world. She says yes. She says no. She has a cold. She doesn't feel like singing. She is not in voice." His head wagged as he imitated her excuses. "But we must finish it. 167 records I've made. And now we must make these new ones.

"And photographs," he exclaimed. "You would need illustrations. I have no photographs of her. She won't go to the photographer. Romero Ressende wanted to paint her. But she said no. Julio Romero de Torres did a portrait of her but it is somewhere in Buenos Aires. I have photographs of myself but none of her. She won't go. But she has made good records. I know the difference between good singing and bad. I've made good records too. And pop records. I saw the sales sheet for the seguiriyas; sales of 100, 200, 300. And the pop records, sales of 4,000, 6,000....."

Grappling all my courage in one bunch I said, "I'd like to meet your wife."

As if it had never been suggested before he said, "Come along then. Come along." I jumped up and followed him down the line of tables to where she sat. Mairena stood when I arrived. I spoke to him but he seemed unsure whether to remember me or not. She stood up. Pinto introduced us and she shook hands cordially. She invited me to sit down.

Pinto said to me, "Talk to Mairena. I have discussed the matter with him."

But I was telling Pastora how I had loved her records, how long I'd waited to meet her. I tried to express my love for her singing.

She said, "Yes, everyone loves my singing." She was

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smiling and her teeth blazed white as a whale's except for the gold one. Her hair was black-red, the color of night in a city, and she wore a modish suit of black and brown silk with a large brooch at the breast, a portrait surrounded by diamonds. She was much thinner than she had been the summer before and she looked more elegant for it. She looked finer than any photograph but slightly sunken. Her eyebrows were painted up almost to the hairline and she wore dark glasses. Her smile was sweet and motherly. She was gracious and dandled her purse in her lap as if in her modesty she needed the strap to twist in her fingers.

"I began singing at the age of eight," she said. "At twelve I was singing in private parties and they took me to Madrid where I sang the verse that gave me my name. The verse had tremendous success and since no one knew my name, they called me The Girl With The Combs."

We had supposed she always wore side combs, as so many gipsy singers did. She recited the verse which is a tientos: "Comb your hair with my comb, comb of cinammon and honey. He who uses my comb will never use another's."

"I have been married thirty three years. I have grand children and I'm sick of singing. I've sung too long. I made a lot of money. Money is nice. Everyone likes to earn it. Now they want me to make another records but I don't know." She looked down at the purse which she was dangling over her knees and replaced it in her lap. "I only sing for pleasure now."

Mairena had left the table with Pinto but now he came back to say, "There's a man in Madrid who has every record you've ever made. Even the one with a blank on the other side." She did not answer and he returned to Pinto.

"Mairena says I'm the greatest of them all," she said.

"Would you let me come and listen to your reminiscences?"

"In the afternoon. Not in the morning."

"Whenever you say."

"Some things would have to be left out," she said vaguely and added, "Come to the house. Call me." I had left my bag at don Enrique's table so I wrote the address and the phone number on a match box. Mairena and Pinto came back and to bridge the silence their arrival caused I asked Mairena what he thought of

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the idea.

"What idea?" he asked.

"Pepe talked to you about it."

"Pepe mentioned that he wanted to talk about it. The discography sounds good."

Pinto said, "She means the biography." To me he said, "Mairena is the only one she trusts."

Maairena said, "Pepe is the only one...."

I said to her, "You are the only one....."

She said, "They decide these things."

The two men left the table again and she said, "Call me and come over. It'll only take two days. Maybe only one. My life has been very short. Very long but very short. I supported my mother and father. I went on tour with my aunt as chaperone. But she died. I married."

"You were very generous," I said, remembering Irving Brown's statement that she was the most generous of all the singers.

"In those days it wasn't as it is now. Now everybody makes money. And it is all bad singing. Then, few made money. I made many records for many companies. Pepe keeps them all. I haven't got them.....

"I can't sing when I'm unhappy. When my father died, when my brother Tomás died, I went on singing because I had to in order to earn my living. But I can't sing unless I'm happy. I sing better now because I'm older and I know what I'm doing. My voice is better now than it was on the early records. But I'm tired. Pepe does everything now. He makes me sing. So I do it. He makes me sing without getting paid. I like to get paid but he insists I sing without money. I must do as he says. There is no choice. He didn't want me to talk to you. He said no at first but now he has changed his mind. I have many things to do. Sometimes I feel like talking. Sometimes no. Everybody asks me questions." Her head was shaking back and forth as if the requests and questions she mentioned were gnats . "I don't like questions. Sometimes my throat is good. Sometimes it is bad. It depends on whether I want to sing."

Pinto and Mairena came back and again she was silent. I sat a moment in the dark waiting for someone to speak, then said an effusive goodbye and left.

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It was hard to decide to call. I put it off a day or so, not wanting to know her decision. Three days later, I called and a voice answered, sounding like hers. It said, "Just a minute." Another woman's voice came on the line and said she was not at home. I asked when she would be in and was told to call in the afternoon. I did not call until the next afternoon. I was told she was not in. I called the next day and was told to call at seven. I called at seven and was told she was not in. I called the next day and was told to call in the afternoon. I called in the afternoon and was told she was not in. Then, I think, I heard the words - spoken very quickly - "and she never will be when you call."

I was content.

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