



Statement on the occasion of the International Flamenco Day (November 16, 2021)

Today, November 16, the International Flamenco Day is celebrated. It has been 11 years since it was declared Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO, after an arduous and continuous effort by different entities and institutions.

In 2001, our association published a **Manifiesto for the launch of the International Campaign, addressed to UNESCO, in favor of the Declaration of Flamenco as Cultural Heritage of Humanity**. That campaign was led by two exceptional supporters: Her Royal Highness Princess María Teresa de Borbón-Parma Borbón (RIP), full member of Presencia Gitana, and Federico Mayor Zaragoza, former Director General of UNESCO, President of the Fundación Cultura de Paz and member of the Advisory Council of our Association.

In that 2001 manifesto, we affirmed that Flamenco is a universal musical and choreographic art that comes from encounter and suffering. Flamenco was born in Andalusia, after a long diaspora of Roma people which began when they left India for Iran, where they have been professional musicians since the beginning of the 5th century. After a long stay in this axis of oriental music, they continued their journey to the Arab countries, where they spread musical instruments and fashions, and to the West, crossing the Caucasus and Anatolia, to reach the Balkans in the 14th century. Later, at the beginning of the 15th century, they continued their itinerary throughout Western Europe and will reach Spain in 1425. In Andalusia, they found a very rich folklore, heir to very diverse traditions, both autochthonous and Visigoth, Arab, Jewish, African, etc. His interpretive genius did the rest, and this is how Flamenco turns out not to be the fruit of an isolated encounter, but of a multitude of encounters. An important difference from the other so-called “Romani” music lies in the fact that Andalusians identified with this new music from the beginning, and prestigious interpreters abound.

Why Flamenco? Because when, in the 19th century, this name was applied for the first time to a musical and choreographic art which name will soon go around the world, it has long been synonymous with “Gitano”. There is no need to dwell here on the reasons for this equivalence, still harshly discussed today. Suffice it to remember that many Andalusian Gitanos obtained royal privileges by virtue of the services rendered by their parents in the Flemish army; that, in 1639, veteran Gitanos of the Flanders Tercios proposed to form companies with 200 of their people, to put them at the service of the King, and that the laws officially prohibited the name “Gitano” from 1633 until the end of the 18th century.

Born from the encounter, Flamenco is also born from suffering: the persecutions suffered by the Gitano people in Spain, at the mercy of the laws that were determined to eliminate them, from the

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*Premio Populares 1979 • Premio Nacional de Derechos Humanos 1999 • Premio Evens 1999 •
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Catholic Monarchs to the general raid of 1749, because of many would be interned in the arsenals or condemned to row in the galleys, "for merely being Gitanos". The laws never hid that it was about "destroying", "exterminating" an undesirable "nation". For this reason, Flamenco is also the fruit of a failed genocide. Their first voices are those of anonymous inmates. Only when, little by little, it becomes a public spectacle, the names of some of the author-artists will pass to posterity. Others will remain in anonymity but inside the collective memory of the Gitano People, as their music, their rhythmic feeling, their dance will remain as an immaterial legacy ... From that moment on, Flamenco will cease to be a pure family tradition to become an Andalusian artistic expression, prelude to its national and international evolution.

Today, Flamenco gains new followers every day and is recognized and appreciated worldwide, not only in specialized circles. The "peñas" appear all over the world, and more and more foreigners dedicate themselves to the investigation or the artistic practice of Flamenco. What is most impressive about this unique art is its incredible richness and infinite complexity. With its structure (around fifty cante groups, or "palos", of which some, such as the Siguiriyas and the Soleares, are subdivided into as many styles), the diversity of its musical characteristics, at the same time rhythmic (with long twelve beats sequences following oriental rhythmic schemes, but also with three-beat measures frequently found in the Andalusian folklore, or four-beats from Afro-American origin) and melodic. And thanks to an unprecedented conjunction of sources and musical influences, Flamenco is an exceptional artistic phenomenon, certainly one of a kind.

The Asociación Nacional Presencia Gitana regularly organizes activities related to the promotion and dissemination of Flamenco, such as concerts / celebrations, conferences, meetings, and publications in different formats, through our audio-videographic label RoMaNó SòNoR / SoNiDo Gitano. Likewise, and since 2004, we have been developing the pioneering transnational research project "**The Romany/Gypsy Presence in European Music**" (financed in its first stage, until 2007, by the European Commission and maintained since then by the resources of the Association), aimed at the recovery, cataloging, evaluation and dissemination of music inspired by the Roma and that generated by the Roma / Gypsies of each country, as an indispensable and transcendental part of the European cultural identity.

Commission for Culture and the Arts of ASOCIACIÓN NACIONAL PRESENCIA GITANA