

In the traditional flamenco guitar world, there are melodic lines created or arranged by guitarists that are used as accompaniment or interludes during a cante or dance. As flamenco guitar solos developed in the evolution of flamenco music, the falsetas became the melodic lines of the guitar solo. The falsetas of the real geniuses survive to become the repertoire of the flamenco world. Falsetas of the lesser but nonetheless competent guitarists may survive as individual repertoire, or perhaps within a family tradition or neighborhood 'school,' as in the 'Jerez' school, or 'Cano Roto' school, etc.

Nowadays, however, many young (or new-to-flamenco) guitarists are trying to create their own falsetas, or 'do their own thing' with flamenco, but unfortunately, they are not well-prepared by the flamenco tradition. The result is that their falsetas are not well-formed. What many aspiring guitarists play may sound fine to their own ears, but to ears like mine, with forty years experience in the art, the falsetas may sound disjointed and unconnected. This has led to the concept that I call the "well-formed falseta."

So what is a well-formed falseta? I have been studying flamenco for a very long time. My ears have been tempered by listening to great flamenco masters for over forty years. Sabicas, Ramon Montoya, Nino Ricardo, and my own #1 influence, Mario Escudero. More contemporary masters, like Manolo Sanlucar, Serranito, and Paco de Lucia. Post-Paco masters like Tomatito, Canizares, Gerardo Nunez. Distilled down, a well-formed falseta follows the musical traditions of the craft of flamenco, as developed over the course of, let's say, the last 110 years (1900-today). These traditions or unwritten rules are today based on flamenco's version of the so-called Andalusian Cadence, which in turn, is based on Greek modal scales.

Some of today's beginning flamencos are trying to put the cart before the horse; that is, trying to develop falsetas without the necessary knowledge of the flamenco craft. The result is mal-formed falsetas. These are guitarists who may be studying on their own, and in a cultural vacuum. Worse yet are beginning flamenco guitarists trying to accompany beginner dancers. The blind leading the blind. Bottom line: It just doesn't work! Sorry to sound like an old geyser, but in my generation's day, one played 2nd guitar next to a seasoned veteran long before one became 1st guitarist. Beginners were not allowed in a studio if not accompanied by a competent guitarist. And I remember stories of dance teachers turning around and slapping guitarists who screwed up.

So what makes a well-formed falseta? It's a very difficult thing to put in words, but for now, let's start with these ideas.

1. The palo should be obvious. Is it an alegrías or a tangos? What is it? Sounds obvious, but I've heard recent recordings where it's impossible to tell.
2. What is the root key? In today's flamenco, any palo can be played in any key. In the old days, certain palos were universally played in the same keys, mostly from accompanying singers. But still, even in today's flamenco, if one can't hear the key, there's a problem.

3. Is it a modal palo or tonal palo? Like solea or alegria? What's the compas? 3, 6, 8, 12? Is the 8 counted as 2 4s? Is the 6 counted as 2 3s? What is it?

4. According to the answers to 1-3, do all of the falsetas fall on the right notes of the scales, and in the right compas (syncopated or not)? Are passing chords related to the key of the falseta?

These are important issues in today's flamenco. Flamenco is a very complicated art. It has to be learned through experience, and the best experience is by sitting next to a competent musician. Fortunately, indeed, are those of you who have those opportunities! For those of you who have not yet had such opportunities, seek them out. It's worth it.