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Rocío Márquez, flamenco cantaora. Interview

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"Contributing something new to flamenco might take you a lifetime, but you have to try"

Silvia Calado. Jerez, March 2009
Translation: Joseph Kopec

Rocío Márquez is 'Aquí y ahora' ('Here and Now'). The Huelva-born cantaora does a self-portrait after winning the coveted Lámpara Minera Award. And she doesn't do so with an album, but with an audiovisual recorded without cuts and without an audience. The video captures the variety of cantes she masters, all her influences, her intention to create a trademark of her own, and above all, her affection for cante. "I'm sure that what I feel the most on stage, what I identify the most with and the cante which gets across the most to me is flamenco", the young artist explains... for the time being.



Rocío Márquez (Photo Luis Gaspar)

Where does Rocío Márquez come from?

I was born in the city of Huelva in '85. At the age of nine, I got up on stage for the first time to sing at a peña. It was very decisive for me to study at the Cristina Heeren Foundation; I learned a great deal there. I had maestros such as José de la Tomasa, Paco Taranto and young people I really learned a lot from too like Sonia Miranda, Virginia Gámez, Vicente Gelo and Javi Rivera. We have the idea that you have to learn from older people, but I've been taught a great deal by these people and they were only a few years older than me. I'm very grateful to them.

Three or four years later I started entering contests. And I was lucky to have done recitals beforehand. It helped me to gain experience but in a calmer way than in a contest, where you're always more nervous. The contests have been a good experience; it's true that I've been really lucky. I've done really well in all the contests I've entered. Calasparra, Alhaurín de la Torre, Jumilla, Marchena... It was a great experience and then the last ones, which were the 'Lámpara Minera' and three first prizes at La Unión, the truth is that they're opening a lot of doors for me. Without that, it's a little bit more complicated.

Do you think it's necessary to be endorsed by some prize in order to make a place for yourself in the world of cante?

Before having it I was also doing stuff, but the truth is that the doors a prize opens for you are hard to reach without them. There are a great many people who sing, who are active and yes, in a way, you need it.

How do you remember the experience at the La Unión Contest?

Marvelous. The kind of thing I say you have to live in order to be able to explain it. They're really strong emotions concentrated in very little time. You don't have time to take them in. I remember an interview I had the same day I won the Lámpara. I was asked how I felt and the thing is I still hadn't taken it in. But the thing is now, a few months have gone by and I still don't think I have. It's something you dream about; I'd visualized



Video

Rocío Márquez. DVD
'Aquí y ahora'
DVD. Rocío Márquez, 'Aquí y ahora' (DVD PAL)

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and dreamed about it millions of times, but until you're named you can't believe it. When I recall that moment, my hairs still stand up on end. It was something really nice for me.

Is having precedents such as Miguel Poveda and Mayte Martín a burden?

Just the opposite. That encourages you. Knowing there are maestros like them and look at where they are and they have the Lámpara, encourages you a lot to make an effort and try to give it the best you've got. I think each thing comes in time; this is a long-distance race. Of course, I love making a living at this and I do want to achieve that and I'm going to make an effort to do so. But I want things to come about little by little, because when the foundation isn't well settled afterwards the house falls down and I don't intend for that to happen to me.



Rocío Márquez (Photo Luis Gaspar)

What references influence you?

I love the old-timers singing. In order to study them, I really enjoy listening to Vallejo, Pastora, I really like Gabriel Moreno, Tomás. Of the new ones, I think there's a bunch right now to drive you crazy, to listen to a record and another and another and listen to them again. There are really complete, wonderful artists who manage to get across plenty of emotions. Listening to them makes you feel happy for I don't know how many hours. I love Poveda, I have him up on a pedestal because I think he's a maestro, I love Mayte, Arcángel who is from my native land... There are a lot of young people but I also think that they already have their personality and now those of us who are trying to move forward have to bring out our own personality, not the one which they have already achieved in a fantastic way and I admire them. I like listening to them for enjoyment; to study, I prefer the old-timers. Within how hard it is not to have influences from your contemporaries – unless you're in a bubble, it's impossible -, you have to try not to be a copy because they already exist, they have their own life, they're wonderful. You have to manage to contribute something new to flamenco. It might take you a lifetime, but it's worthwhile to try.



Rocío Márquez (Photo Luis Gaspar)

In the recital at Festival de Jerez 2009 you opted for a varied repertoire. Do you have any favorite cante in particular?

I like varied recitals. Instead of doing soleá for half an hour, do it for five minutes and in those remaining twenty-five minutes you have time to sing others. I prefer variety, although if on a given day you feel at ease with a cante, well, you spread out. But I prefer shorter cantes and greater variety. Everybody has cantes he feels more comfortable with, but it also depends a lot on the day, on how you get up or what you've lived.

In interviews a few years ago, you pointed out your attachment to other musical styles...

The truth is that I've sung a bit of everything. I sang lyrical, before that copla, a little bit of modern... There was a time when I used to lower my head when I was asked about that because it was like yes, I did it, that was me. But the truth is that now I'm happy to say it because thanks to having tried all that, I'm sure that what I feel the most with on stage and what I identify the most with is with flamenco. The singing which gets the most across to me is flamenco. I admire other kinds of music, I love them, but for the time being I can't see myself singing anything but flamenco. I've surrendered to it.

But do you rule it out?

That's why the title of the DVD is 'Aquí y ahora' ('Here and Now'). I know what I think right now. Two years from now I don't know what I'll be breathing, what I'll have lived and how that'll have conditioned me. Right now I know what I feel today.

What does that DVD 'Aquí y ahora' offer?

I think it's a rather nice idea and recording live without cuts or an audience has quite a bit of essence. We also considered the possibility of doing it with an audience, but it seemed too sensationalist to us. I wanted to do something like that, the way it came out. It has its good side and its bad side. When you listen to yourself you might see things that you would have repeated at another moment or

you would have done better, but then it would have lost the sense we wanted to give to it. I'm quite content with what we've done.

What repertoire did you record?

There are a lot of songs of mine. It gave me great joy to do songs composed by me; the music and the lyrics. They're the tangos 'Miro tus ojos' and the song 'Como se pasa la vida' which at first went por bulerías and afterwards I started to stick in a lute, I started to lose my head, it turned into a song and it had a lot of Arab melismas. The lyrics are an adaptation of Jorge Manrique, of 'Coplas a la muerte de su padre', in old Spanish. It's a nice story. I'm really happy because I feel it's really mine. It might not be a commercial recording, but it is what I feel right now and what I can give up on stage, without adding anything or taking anything away either.



Rocío Márquez (Photo Luis Gaspar)

What accompaniment do you use?

There's guitar, percussion, clapping and the song has lute and Arab percussion, and I play the hurdy-gurdy. It was funny because I tried to improvise and I come out in the video looking to see what note I was playing.

Have you studied music?

Yes, I studied piano at the conservatory, I gave it up at the intermediate level. And afterwards I did a Music Teacher's degree. It's helped me above all when composing.

Although it might sound frivolous, your wardrobe is eye-catching. Do you think esthetics is important for a cantaora?

Art comes in through the five senses. You go to see someone and it all reaches you; the lighting, the sound, and of course, how you sing, but also the presentation, the way you are. There are people who might not sing so much, but you love to go and see them just for what they're like on stage. And you have to play with that a little bit. Look, I dreamed of reaching the final at La Unión. I knew it was hard but I used to tell my mother that nothing was impossible. It was the first year I was entering and people told me not to be discouraged if I didn't win, for I had a lot of years ahead of me. And I responded to them not to put a "no" in front of me, that I was going to try. One day I called up my sister to tell her that I'd seen a lovely white dress for the final. And she laughed, telling me how great, that I hadn't even been called for the semifinals and I was already thinking about the dress for the final. I think it's positive energy, mind power. *Ha ha ha ha*.

Further information

- ▣ Festival de Jerez 2009. Rocío Márquez. Review and photos
- ▣ Interview with María José Pérez, cantaora
- ▣ Interview with Encarna Anillo, cantaora
- ▣ Special Feature. Listening guide. Young Cante

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