

LAND OF LIGHT for Choir and Guitar/Small Ensemble
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The idea for this piece came from David Temple who suggested a subject with a Spanish theme.

I play the Spanish Guitar and have for many years been interested in Spanish music, specifically Flamenco, and related areas of culture. From the starting point of Flamenco Guitar I soon began to listen to Flamenco singing and gradually discovered more about the history of the region and the various influences upon it.

The home of Flamenco is the Southern Spanish region Andalucia from the Arabic name for the region: Al-Andaluz.

This name has been variously translated as “The Land of the Vandals” (after the Germanic tribes of Vandals and Visigoths who entered Spain following the collapse of the Roman Empire); or “The Land of Light”. The latter is clearly the more poetic version and surely more appropriate - in any case, it is the name I have chosen to call my work.

The starting point for the work is Spain in the Middle Ages during the Moorish occupation.

The Moors were North African Muslims who invaded Spain in 711 and for a while they controlled most of Spain.

Gradually - over a period of 500 years - their control was weakened and lost through a mixture of wars and political intrigue, until they were finally defeated at Granada in 1492. The date is lent extra significance as it was the year Columbus set sail from Andalucia on his (accidental) voyage to the Americas and a new chapter in World history began.

The most important city in Muslim Spain was Cordoba - home to the famous Mosque - and it was here that for a brief period the various peoples lived side by side in peace. These peoples were the Sephardic (North African/Spanish) Jews, who had been a significant population from before the arrival of the Moors, the Christians, and the Muslims.

An unprecedented period of peace known as “Convivencia” (Living together peacefully) took place in Cordoba with the different faiths even worshipping in the same buildings. Cordoba became a centre of learning - science and the arts flourished here - and it became the second most important city in the Muslim world. In particular Cordoba gained a reputation for the finest poetry and music (the Cordoban Poet/Musician Zyryab was celebrated as recently as the 1980s

by the great Flamenco guitarist Paco de Lucia) and its influence was felt throughout the Muslim world.

The Andalusian Orchestras were so admired that 1000 years later they continue their tradition in modern day Morocco.

Of particular importance to me was the Arab role in the evolution of the guitar. The Moors brought with them the Oud

- a stringed instrument which became the European Lute. The "D" at the end of words is usually pronounced by Spaniards as

a "T" sound, and the definite article in Arabic is Al, thus "Al-Oud" sounded like "Al-Oot" and became "Lute". From

the Lute the Spaniards developed the Viheula, a Lute-type instrument but pear-shaped and using 6 courses of strings

with a tuning similar* to that of the modern-day guitar. (*The Viheula tuning is still used in some Flamenco pieces).

From the viheula developed the guitar which became popular throughout Europe but remains associated with Spain as its

National Instrument.

Other musical elements from the Moorish era also include the melodies of "Saetas" - a religious chant with its roots in

Arab and Sephardic melodies; the Fandango and its many variants; the Zambra (Arab Dance); the style of singing in

certain Flamenco numbers, particularly those from the area known as Levant (itself a reference to the Arab region across

the narrow Straits of Gibraltar); and many verses of poetry and song which became absorbed into the folk-music of the region.

Flamenco itself probably arose from the period after 1492 when Moors, Jews, and Christian dissidents banded together in

the mountains to escape the brutal Spanish Inquisition. The source of the name Flamenco is obscure but one theory, which,

despite any proof, fits our present theme well, is that it is derived from the Arab "Felang Mengu" meaning 'Fugitive Peasant'.

Another crucial element in the development of Flamenco was the Gypsy contribution. The Gypsies may have come from North

India although the name originally meant "Egyptians" and they themselves believed Egypt to be their ancestral home. The

Gypsies of present-day Andalusia are by and large the custodians of Flamenco and they are also a more integrated

community than Gypsies in other regions of Spain (though the modern-age blurs such differences. For example, Madrid has an

important Flamenco scene largely due to the Migration of Andalusian Gypsies to the Spanish capital for work).

The Gipsies are first recorded as entering Spain just as the Inquisition was expelling the Jew and Muslims. But there is also a theory that the Andalucian Gipsies entered Spain in the 8th Century with the Moors.

In any case, the Gipsies were also added to the list of "Fugitive Peasants" who banded together for mutual support and defence against the authorities, eventually giving rise to the culture of Flamenco.

Ironically it was the Spaniards Imperial ambitions which also led to a further musical element within Flamenco: the music of the Americas, which continue to influence trends within Flamenco to this day.

So Flamenco, which traditionally is an Andalucian art form (most non-Andalucian Spaniards do not regard Flamenco as part of their culture and even reject it entirely) was created from a mixture of styles and cultures. It is the concept of shared heritage which is at the centre of my piece. This is how I regard all our cultures: we are all connected in some way or other; we depend on each other and our lives are enriched through the positive interaction and cross-fertilisation of ideas.

My weak pun on **light** is actually a key to how I work. I tend to avoid a literal approach to my use of words.

Sometimes I use no words but instead employ syllabic sounds or vocal sounds with no language attached to them. When I do use words I am interested in finding their root-meanings - the etymology of words often reveals layers of meaning that gives me a new insight into the associated culture. If all this sounds a little academic let me give you one very simple but important example. The Spanish word for "Hello" is "Hola", a word derived from the Arabic for God: "Allah" (also the root of Ole). There are many more examples like this and the point is that once we recognise the origin and "hidden meanings" of a word we begin to understand more about the culture in which they exist. Whilst some Spaniards may not always have been fully aware of their heritage (due largely to centuries of denial and censorship) once they do know the links between their perceived culture and that of the Moors they can no longer dismiss the importance and value of their Southern neighbours. Music too is a language which has been enriched through sharing and borrowing between its many branches.

Throughout "**Land of Light**" I am constantly exploring and playing with these sorts of connections. My intention is both

to present a celebration of Spain and a statement on the positive, peaceful universality of art and culture.

LANGUAGE IN “LAND OF LIGHT”

I have used various languages in my work. They include Castilian (Official Standard Spanish), Arabic, Ladino (Sephardic Jewish) and Caló (Spanish Gipsy). I considered using some Latin - which would have been relevant - but in the end I decided I had sufficient words for my needs; I didn't want to force the inclusion of Latin just to be “academically” correct.

There are sections of my work where languages are combined, sometimes simultaneously, sometimes within the same phrase, and sometimes in entirely corrupted forms. There are also words without any obvious literal meaning which I have extracted from “proper” words and used as purely musical sounds. However, even when syllabic sounds are used for a passage with no obvious literal interpretation they are usually derived from a word with a specific meaning relevant to the overall text. A good example of this is to be found in the movement “Aljbra” where the sounds of Arabic numbers form the basis of the text. (There will be more about this in the notes on each movement).

THE MUSICAL LANGUAGE

First and foremost this work **must not** be regarded as Flamenco music. It is music influenced by Flamenco, but also other musical elements related to the overall theme of the work - Arabic, Sephardic, South American (though less so), Gipsy, - but also classical and contemporary “avant-garde” techniques. It seems obvious of course but somehow I feel we need to remind ourselves that this is a contemporary work by an English composer. It should therefore be regarded as English Music!

How the times change... but not always in a clear linear way. When I was 18 I first listened to David Munrow's Early Music Consort recording “Music of the Crusades”. Although the music was supposedly European it sounded very Middle Eastern to me and I was surprised that the Crusades had at least one useful outcome through the musical experience. But the Arabic influence on our culture - science, arts, crafts, language, philosophy, education (we owe our knowledge of the Ancient Greeks to Arabic and Jewish translators based in Toledo) was then buried and largely forgotten or denied

for many centuries.

Now we are living in a world in which our relationships with each other are impossible to avoid

and it is time to celebrate our common heritage.

THE WORK

“Land of Light” is divided into 13 movements.* The choir are mostly divided into the usual Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass sections, but sometimes I have used alternative combinations.

There are several instrumental sections in which the band must improvise within a given structure and on given themes, and there are a few sections where members of the choir must improvise in a similar way.

* Not all the movements are used in every performance.

The full text and translation is shown later.

1: Al-Andaluz

A guitar introduction is followed by the choir singing the name Al-Andaluz as the

only text. The music here is intended to suggest some of the mystery of Spain in the 8th Century when the Moors arrived. I

have avoided any depiction of invasion, battles etc. Instead I have chosen to write a short piece which acts as a sort of

“awe-struck” choral fanfare: symbolic of the sun rising, of a new dawn, of a new age.

2: Chant

The words here refer to many different aspects of Arabic, Jewish and Spanish culture in general . The most significant

of these is “Taraba” which is Arabic for “to entertain with music”. Another important element here are the religious

references: “Inshalah” is Arabic for “God Willing”, whilst “Ojala” (pronounced: OhKhalah”) is the Spanish equivalent:

their similarity is obvious and I have used these sorts of words and phrases - searching for links between the different

cultures - throughout the work. The word “Ole” is also used here and this is a word derived from the Arabic for God,

Allah. Ole is a much misunderstood word, regarded by many people as a crass cliché. But in Flamenco circles it is a

word used with respect when an artist is deemed worthy of it. In the context of a performance it is more or less like

shouting “Bravo”. However, when used in the most serious Flamenco gatherings

the word “Ole” has semi-religious overtones. The point of the text in this movement is provide some of the background to the peoples involved: their religions being amongst their most important defining characteristics.

The rhythm in “Chant” varies quite a lot and I have aimed at a very lively but slightly volatile feel. It should sound like the chant of devoted people without it being necessarily religious. This kind of chanting is something I enjoy for its exuberance and energy.

3: Taraba

This word has already been explained and now we have an entire movement named after it.

After the introduction the text is literally welcoming the listeners:

“Hola, venvenido” (Sp: Hello, welcome). This is the only movement where I come anywhere near actually telling you much about the history of the subject in a formal way. The words refer to the various races and cultures that have gone into making Andalucia (and Spain as a whole, although that would need the inclusion of many races and cultures omitted here).

There are references to the Phoenicians, the Moors, the Gipsies, and the tourists! There isn't much about the Romans although I do use the original Roman name for Malaga (which was Malaka; not actually much different).

4: Martinette

A Martinette is a Flamenco song traditionally sung by Gipsy blacksmiths. It is a solo song usually accompanied by the sound of an anvil being beaten. Here I use a traditional melody as the basis of what is essentially contemporary music.

The tune becomes submerged in a deluge of voices struggling towards something intangible: a frenzy of passion that may seem hysterical but is none the less inspiring.

This movement is joined - literally as there is no pause, the two movements seem as one - to

5: Hola

The word, as we already know, is derived from the Arabic word for God “Allah”.

6: Sufren del Amor

Here for the first time in this work I use what might be regarded as “proper” text. The words are from an actual song in Ladino (Sephardic Jewish) which is concerned with “the suffering of those in love”. I have treated it as a fairly light hearted song and the music is quite cheery although it has a brooding undertone.

7: Band Interlude which acts as a transition between 6 and 8.

8: Ba Tu Ta

Ibn Battutah was a Moroccan traveller whose expeditions were far more extensive than those of Marco Polo. You may wonder how a Moroccan gets to have such a central role in this work, even if he did visit Spain that is not what he's remembered for. The reason is simple: Spain in the Middle Ages, during the height of the Islamic era there, was part of a larger picture in which the different races interacted and learnt from each other in a positive way (not always, of course). I have used Battutah's name as the basis for a chant because the sound lends itself perfectly to this.

9: Al-jbra

Mathematics were an Arabic speciality and during the period with which we are concerned many of the most fundamental developments in mathematics took place in the Arab/Muslim world (including Spain).

The text uses Algebra as a rhythmic sound, and the name of the Arab mathematician Al-Qarizmi whose name gave us the word **algorithm**.

Another aspect of the use of maths in Andalusian culture is the employment of abstract geometric designs, used in favour of representations of the natural world. Almost anywhere in Andalusia, in buildings ancient and modern, you will see these designs adorning walls and patios in the form of ceramic tiles. Similarly, the architectural style was influenced by mathematical considerations beyond the purely functional. So common are the designs and style of Moorish architecture and decor that they are more or less synonymous with that of southern Spain.

The best examples of Islamic art/architecture/style is surely the Alhambra (from the Arabic Al-jamra, meaning Red Fort) in Granada, possibly the most Moorish of all Spanish cities.

Also impressive and equally important is the mosque in Cordoba, built to a plan in which one's perspective constantly changes and confounds should you try to find perfect symmetry; a sort of proto-OpArt in which the eyes, and consequently the senses, are just so slightly disoriented: both "Ba Tu Ta" and "Al-jbra" deliberately use ideas and techniques analogous to this.

10: Band interlude

11: Yaa Ayoohan

This is the most important part of the piece in terms of the underlying theme. The text is a quote from the Koran which seems to say that we - the different peoples of the earth - should get to know one another.

I have used Arabic here as it is the language in which the Qu'ran should ideally be read. I have also used a Spanish translation.

12: Compas

Compas is the Spanish word for rhythmic structure. In Flamenco the most typical compass consists of 12 beats and I have used that in this movement. I also use nonsensical words which are typical of some flamenco songs and which are, by myself and in the flamenco songs, for their rhythmic sound. The piece actually begins with the Arabic for Good Luck "Baraka", but mostly the words used are "Tirri Tan" and have no literal meaning.

13: Potaje

A potaje is a stew common amongst Gypsies and also a gathering, in which the stew is served, where flamenco takes place. The idea of a stew is used symbolically here: put the ingredients of various cultures in the pot, cook them, and what you get is something different (and hopefully something good) made from the combination. Andalucia is a product of such mixing of ingredients. And so too is Britain and most other countries (all? I'm not sure about Japan for example).

"Potaje" is a celebration; a mini-Fiesta to conclude the work as a whole.

Musically "Potaje" is similar to a traditional flamenco Bulerias (a fast and usually light-hearted song), and I have included a snippet of actual Bulerias just before the very end.

Some listeners may wonder why I set word in a way that makes them difficult to understand. I enjoy listening to music from all over the world and usually I can't understand what is being sung about; it never bothers me and I sometimes prefer not to know what the words mean. Music can communicate without relying on a literal approach and I often find that the sound of words and phrases, plus the way in which they are expressed, can often communicate more - in an emotional or intuitive way - than when things are spelled out.

If you want to know the exact meanings of everything in the text I have used then you can of course read the translation below. But I suspect it might be better to not know too much just yet - perhaps after you've heard the piece might be better. I certainly don't like the idea of following the printed text as it is being sung, nor of trying to fix a precise meaning to each passing moment in the piece. It is not a work which tells a story in the narrative sense. Instead it is a series of images and ideas which all relate to the larger theme. If I have to say what that theme is in so many words then it this: It is better that we respect one another and live in peace and harmony, ojala.