

# “Con tu voz:” Social Meaning in the Voice of Flamenco *Cantaora* Carmen Linares

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“Ms. Linares’s voice has the gritty quality one hears in blues singing, in Portuguese fado and in some Middle Eastern forms. It is not beautiful in the operatic sense, but its expressive power is extraordinary.”—Allan Kozinn, *New York Times Critic*, 1997 (Kozinn)

Carmen Linares is arguably the most important singer active in the world of flamenco today. Born in 1951 in the town of Linares, in Eastern Andalusia, Carmen Linares (Mari Carmen Pacheco Rodríguez) has been pursuing her career in flamenco *cante* (*singing*) since her childhood. The daughter of a flamenco guitarist, young Linares was often escorted by her father to attend flamenco recitals (Chuse, “Anda Jaleo” 140). In addition to being one of the first flamenco artists to perform at the Lincoln Center (singing de Falla’s “El Amor Brujo” with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra), Linares also currently has eight studio albums to her name. Of particular note is her *Antología de la Mujer en el Cante* (1996), the first album of its kind to compile music composed or sung by *cantaoras* (*female singers*) (Chuse, *Cantaoras* 136). Her newest album, *Raíces y alas* (2008), was awarded “Best Flamenco Album” in the thirteenth edition of the Spanish *Premios de la música* (2009) and was a candidate for the 2009 Latin Grammys (Linares, “Discography”).

Comprised entirely of settings of poetry by Juan Ramón Jiménez, *Raíces y alas* channels together the art forms of poetry and song in the medium of Linares’s voice. When Jiménez’s thought-provoking poetry is yoked with Linares’s expressive vocal power, the resulting creative synthesis justifies Linares’s estimation of *cante* as “la madre del flamenco” (Chuse, *Cantaoras* 31). This general privilege that Linares affords to *cante* is significant for several reasons. Since flamenco music originally consisted of unaccompanied voice, in one sense *cante* is granted a birthright by being the firstborn of the traditional flamenco trio (consisting of *cante*, *toque* [*guitar*] and *baile* [*dance*]). At a deeper level, however, the human tendency to empathize with the sound of the human voice provides the flamenco *cantaor(a)* with an immediate avenue for expressive communication with the audience. While the instrumental *toque* unquestionably plays an important role in flamenco, both generally and in *Raíces y alas* specifically, it is the sound of Linares’s voice which serves as the main transmitter of social meaning in this particular album.

Linares utilizes her vocal expressive capabilities in a unique way on the final track of *Raíces y alas*, “Con tu voz.” Of the ten tracks in *Raíces y alas*, only “Con tu voz” is sung completely unaccompanied, a salute to the roots of *cante* which draws special attention to the track. The text of the song is a juxtaposition of two discrete poems by Jiménez, “Clavo débil, clavo fuerte” and “Cuando esté con las raíces.” In Linares’s song “Con tu voz,” the two poems by Jiménez are placed back-to-back as follows:

Clavo débil, clavo fuerte...  
Alma mía, ¡qué más da!  
Fuera cual fuera la suerte,  
el cuadro se caerá.<sup>1</sup>

Cuando esté con las raíces  
llámame tú con tu voz.  
Me parecerá que entra  
temblando la luz del sol. (quoted in  
Torrón 59)<sup>2</sup>

Of the song “Con tu voz,” Linares believes that “it’s purer, it’s the most traditional, the most flamenco on the album. It’s a very serious note to end [on]” (Castillo, “Track by Track”). At a glance, Linares’s comments on the purity of “Con tu voz” seem to lend the track a credibility of vocal style not attributed to other numbers on the CD. Given the current controversy surrounding authenticity in flamenco in general (and in *cante* in particular), however, a brief overview of the history of flamenco is necessary in order to interpret Linares’s remarks on the “authenticity” of her vocal style in “Con tu voz.”

Flamenco scholar Loren Chuse traces the roots of flamenco song most immediately to the nineteenth century, during which time gypsies in Andalusia would gather together at intimate parties and sing (*Cantaoras* 44). Flamenco truly became an “established” musical style in the

1860s, around which time it served as a public form of entertainment in Andalusia in the *café cantante*. In addition to flamenco performers receiving stable salaries for the first time from wealthy patrons, the *café cantante* era saw the addition of both guitar accompaniment and dance to the originally unaccompanied flamenco *cante*, as well as the participation of non-gypsy performers (Chuse, *Cantaoras* 44-45). Although the popularity of flamenco grew along with its commercialization, the demands of its patrons also necessarily caused flamenco to evolve from its original form as unaccompanied song; increased commercialization in the twentieth century furthered what flamenco purists considered the “adulteration” of the style.

Beginning in the 1920s, flamenco found a voice in the theater in what became known as *opera flamenca*, in which traditional flamenco song styles were mixed with popular songs from Spain and Latin America (Chuse, *Cantaoras* 46). At the same time, Spanish intellectuals sought to counteract the “prostitution” of flamenco to commercialization through a return to the “true” roots of *cante jondo* (“deep song,” the most serious and profound type of *cante*), a movement typified in the *Concurso de cante jondo*, held in Granada in 1922. This movement towards flamenco “purism” was spearheaded by such notable figures as composer Manuel de Falla (1876-1946) and poet Federico García Lorca (1898-1936), who sought to portray a romanticized *cante jondo* as the essence of Andalusia (Chuse, *Cantaoras* 46).

The question of “authenticity” in flamenco singing becomes significantly more complex during the reign of the right-winged dictator Francisco Franco (1892-1975; in power 1939-1975). Following the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), Franco ideologically assented to the conservative and purist approach to flamenco

initiated by Spanish intellectuals in the early 1920s, although Franco's concern for flamenco was far from being rooted in aesthetics. In an attempt to portray Spain as a culturally unified and homogenous nation, Franco constructed a new Spanish identity solely around Castilian and Andalusian culture (Pérez-Villalba 151). Thus, the Andalusian-born flamenco was chosen to become the "music of Spain" (Chuse, *Cantaoras* 46). Ironically, although Franco's means of portraying flamenco as the voice of ancient Spain aligned with the means of flamenco purists, Franco's end of increasing tourism stood in stark relief to the purists' desires of achieving an authentic musical voice.

At the same time that Franco sought to export flamenco to tourists, the (theoretical) importance that Franco placed on Catholicism and traditional family values resulted in the marginalized role of women in flamenco. Although women had figured somewhat prominently as singers, dancers, and guitarists since the era of the *café cantante* (Chuse, *Cantaoras* 45), they were virtually excluded from flamenco during Franco's reign under the ideological premise that it was shameful for women to be active in the public sphere. Those women who did participate in flamenco during the Franco regime were often presented as matriarchal figures, devoid of any traces of threatening sexual power (Chuse, *Cantaoras* 108). The role of women in flamenco during Franco's rule thus represents a conflict of political ideology: although a lascivious *gitana* figure (as depicted in Bizet's 1875 opera *Carmen*) would have portrayed Spain as an exotic destination for tourists, this image simultaneously conflicted with the conservative Spanish ideal of the woman as the *angel del hogar*.

Amidst the ideological frictions that arose between commercialism and conservative

images of femininity, however, a trend towards flamenco purism began germinating anew in the late 1950s. In particular, the reinstatement of the *cante jondo* contest/festival at Córdoba in 1956 and the creation of the first flamencology chair in 1957 in Jerez resulted in a new generation of flamenco performers and "purist" connoisseurs (Katz). Importantly, the purist aesthetic of early "flamencology" still exhibits of a degree of hegemony today over more liberal styles, particularly those catering to tourists.

The strand of purism persisting in the flamenco discourse today would imaginably be at odds with numerous elements of Linares's album *Raíces y alas*. Manuel Moraga raises this issue in his 2008 interview with Linares by asking her how she managed the inherent risk of doing justice to neither Jiménez's poetry nor the "flamenco-like" music through the merging of the two. Linares candidly responds that the intention of Juan Carlos Romero (guitarist for and composer of the album's music) was not to force Jiménez's poetry into preconceived flamenco frameworks, but rather to allow the demands of each individual poem to dictate the musical flavor of each song. On the deferment of music to text in *Raíces y alas*, Linares remarks that the album is

made by a professional who loves flamenco and loves poetry, and he [Juan Carlos Romero] went over to Juan Ramón [Jiménez]'s territory, never thinking Juan Ramón would come to flamenco.... I'm very satisfied with this work. If the purists don't like it, I'm terribly sorry, but what I want is when people hear the record they see it has coherence, feeling and concept. (Moraga)

Some of the surface elements of *Raíces y alas* that flamenco “purists” might not care for could include a prevalence of the major and minor musical scales over the traditional Phrygian scale,<sup>3</sup> a general lack of *jaleo* (shouts of encouragement from the audience), and a relatively constant use of percussion and occasional uses of other non-traditional flamenco instruments (flute, oboe, bassoon, cello, and contrabass). While some of the formal parameters of the album’s tracks may be slightly unconventional, one of the main anchors that keeps *Raíces y alas* rooted in the flamenco tradition is the sound of Linares’s voice. As musicologist and sociologist John Shepherd suggests,

It is the tactile core of sound, timbre, that reminds us that the gaps and silences between the delineations of structures, whether social, cultural or musical, are not gaps or silences, but directionally charged fields of meaning and experience that speak to our sense of identity and existence. If it is the syntax of music, the relationship of individual sonic events as deployed in time and space, that speaks to the socially structured context of existence, then it is timbre, the essence of individual sonic events, that speaks to the core of existence. (Shepherd 90-91)

What is it about the sound of Linares’s voice that keeps one foot of her music rooted in tradition as the other wanders off towards experimentation? Clearly, much is necessarily lost in the process of translating a vocal timbre from the medium of sound to the medium of written prose. Despite Roland Barthes’s lament of the reliance upon the adjective in the description of timbre (Barthes 181), a verbal description of Linares’s vocal qualities nevertheless provides an initial

understanding of how meaning and identity are created in and conveyed through Linares’s voice.

Linares’s voice would be best classified as a *voz afillá*,<sup>4</sup> one of the most common voice types in the flamenco voice classification system.<sup>5</sup> Popularized by the famous *cantaor* Camarón and currently considered to be the most “*gitano*” voice type, a *voz afillá* is typically characterized as “rough,” “unpolished,” or “hoarse” (Chuse, *Cantaoras* 40). Contributing to the perception of roughness in Linares’s voice is her relatively low vocal range; Linares would be considered an alto according to the common Western system of voice classification.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the popularity of her *afillá* voice type, many of Linares’s vocal gestures conform to the basic principles of the flamenco *cante* aesthetic, some elements of which are delineated in Francisca Merchán Higuera’s study of expression in flamenco *cante*. According to Higuera, common expressive techniques in flamenco *cante* include the use of *quejíos* and *salidas*,<sup>7</sup> glottal attacks,<sup>8</sup> and melisma (multiple pitches sung on the same syllable). Other common techniques include an alternation between vibrato and “straight” tone (often within a single phrase), the treatment of vibrato as a musical ornament or “micromelisma,” and the creation of a diphthong on the final vowel of a phrase (even if the final vowel is part of a word that does not contain a diphthong when spoken) (16-19). Perhaps unsurprisingly, all of these elements appear to some extent in Linares’s voice in “Con tu voz.” Although the text of the song contains few phrases that begin with a vowel, and even in these instances the opportunity for a glottal attack may be exchanged for combining two phrases in one breath, a notable glottal attack occurs on a *quejío* near the end of the track.

While Linares relies heavily upon melisma in “Con tu voz,” melisma is nonetheless balanced with syllabic singing, in which one note is sung per syllable. Linares typically sets the text syllabically at the beginning of a phrase, increases melismatic ornamentation towards the middle and end, and finishes the phrase with a sustained tone, ornamented with vibrato (“micromelisma”). The ending of the final sung phrase on the track (“llámame tú con tu voz”) provides a subtle yet clear example of the addition of a diphthong; specifically, as the word “voz” is sustained, the “o” sound quickly and subtly shifts to “ah,” and finally to “ooh” before the tone dies out.<sup>9</sup> The effect is described nicely by Bernard Lortat-Jacob, who, in noting the general “importance of the treatment of the vowels by [a flamenco] singer,” suggests that “one might speak, at times, of a ‘melody of timbres’” (144). Linares adds further interest to her “melody of timbres” with her use of vibrato. A typical vibrato rate on a sustained, unornamented tone often falls around 5 fluctuations per second, a vibrato rate just slow enough that, according to voice specialist Phillipe Dejonckeres, a listener will perceive the periodicity of pitch change (4). Linares varies her song style, however, by frequently singing with a “straight” tone.

Two other vocal gestures common in Linares’s singing bear mentioning here. The first is a vocalized grunt that accompanies the end of each of the eight major phrases in “Con tu voz.” After having sustained the final pitch of a phrase with vibrato for several seconds, Linares initiates a vocalized grunt that causes the pitch of her voice to drop nearly an octave as her voice fades into silence; the time interval between the onset of the grunt and total silence is usually slightly less than half a second. Another important gesture is a vibrato-like effect consisting of a fluctuation in the amplitude (loudness) of the tone. This vocal

instability is most likely achieved through rapid periodic fluctuations in breath support, which produces an overall effect similar to that of a sobbing or weeping gesture.

When Linares’s use of *quejíos*, glottal attacks, melisma, variable vibrato rate, changing vowels mid-syllable, grunts, and fluctuations of breath support are considered all together, it may appear to the listener that Linares is not always in control of her voice. By comparison, consider some of the physical and vocal actions that might be entailed in an outburst of weeping or sobbing: for one, the act of retching creates fluctuations in breath support, resulting in an amplitude fluctuation of a melismatic cry; also, involuntary grunts might also punctuate the vocalization. If a comparison is made between the characteristics of Linares’s singing style and the act of retching that accompanies sobbing, a natural conclusion would be that Linares’s voice is expressing some type of pain, suffering, or lament. Such an interpretation is at least partially validated if “Con tu voz” is approached as a *siguiriya* (a sub-genre of *cante jondo*). An apt description of the ethos of the *siguiriya* is provided by Hispanic studies scholar Timothy Mitchell:

Two early synonyms for the *siguiriya*, *playera* and *plañera*, are deformations of *plañidera* (from *plañir*, “to wail”). The *siguiriya* is considered the deepest and saddest flamenco style, and it was among the first folk forms to undergo underclass reelaboration. Death and grieving, moreover, are the most common themes of *siguiriyas* (127).

The link between the *siguiriya* and suffering is further strengthened in light of ties to the upper-class funereal practices in eighteenth-century Andalusia. José Antonio Rivas Álvarez

notes the former tradition in Andalusia for the wealthy to have grandiose funeral processions with as many in attendance as possible. These processions often provided a source of income for lower-class female professional mourners (called *endecheras*, *plañideras*, or *lloronas*) (142-43, cited in Mitchell 127); Spanish musicologist Manuel García Matos has further suggested that the flamenco *siguiriya* might have grown from this tradition of professional mourning in Andalusia (79-80, cited in Mitchell 127).

The common interpretation of flamenco *cante* as a “cry of pain” also seeks its justification in the historical hardships in Andalusia, and of Andalusian gypsies in particular (Manuel 48). As flamenco specialist Peter Manuel notes, Andalusia had experienced religious tolerance and economic prosperity under the Moorish rule (711-1492). Under the subsequent Spanish rule, however, all non-Christians were expelled from Spain, and the economic and agricultural processes in Andalusia were neglected by the central Madrid government. The effects were particularly hard on the gypsies, who occupied the lowest class strata in Spain. Even into the twentieth century industrialization and development took place on a smaller scale in Andalusia than in other parts of the country (49-50). Although in relatively recent years Andalusia has come to enjoy its highest standard of living in several centuries, Manuel notes that the perception of Andalusia as an impoverished and politically discontented province (including gypsies and non-gypsies alike) has persisted, continually generating the conception of “its” music, flamenco, as a means of expressing suffering (63).

The interpretation of Linares’s voice in “Con tu voz” as conveying lament is further validated by the singer herself, who, when interviewed by Manuel Moraga, suggested that the two poems

together formed a set of *coplas* suitable for a *siguiriya*:

We [Linares and Juan Carlos] saw [“Con tu voz”] as a kind of *siguiriya* from the very first moment.... What a great piece of poetry. You could sing it as if it were tonás, *siguiriyas*, it was just begging for it! So yes, that last piece is a toná because that poem was meant for it (Moraga).<sup>10</sup>

As Linares suggests, both “Clavo débil, clavo fuerte” and “Cuando esté con las raíces” evoke an atmosphere that exemplifies the traditional *siguiriya* theme of human mortality. In “Clavo débil, clavo fuerte,” Jiménez’s image of a hung picture (for which even the strongest of nails only delays the inevitable fall to the floor) cultivates a sense of fatalism that refers to the impending death of every living being. Despair gives way to sober acceptance in the subsequent setting of “Cuando esté con las raíces,” as the speaker muses about a possible metaphysical existence after death. Jiménez vivifies this resigned meditation by exploring the word “roots” (“raíces”) and its various meanings: when the speaker’s corpse is overtaken by the roots of the grass and trees, he will finally have met the same fate as his ancestors, thus portraying death as the ultimate connection to one’s roots.

In light of the “purity” that Carmen Linares attributes to “Con tu voz,” it is interesting that she and composer Romero chose for *Raíces y alas* the poetry of Jiménez. At a glance, a more logical choice of poetry might have been that of Federico García Lorca, whose frequent treatment of Andalusian and gypsy culture would have fit nicely with the Andalusian and gypsy roots of flamenco *cante* (Paredes Mendez, et al 569). By contrast, Jiménez’s “pure” and more abstract poetry (ibid. 539) paints the music of “Con tu

voz” in a less obvious and less pictorial manner.<sup>11</sup> While Jiménez’s fertile poetry unquestionably adds another rich layer of meaning to Linares’s song of lament, some scholars argue that the linguistic content of a *cante* text (particularly if its meaning is abstract, as with Jiménez) is necessarily second to the sound of the voice itself. For flamenco scholar William Washabaugh, overemphasis of the text of flamenco *cante* reflects an overly intellectual (i.e., Westernized) framework of approaching song contemplatively as a spiritually transcendent force. In the specific case of flamenco *cante*, Washabaugh links this approach to two different yet related sub-categories within this Western aesthetic framework: communal song and competitive song. Whether a flamenco singer is perceived as downplaying his individuality to emphasize a connection to musical tradition (communal song) or downplaying tradition to assert his individual creativity (competitive song), both approaches place “a special emphasis [ ...] on spiritual ties and gifts,” the intangible nature of which ultimately cultivates a “marginalisation of the singer’s body” (85).<sup>12</sup>

Naturally, the communal- and competitive-song approaches need not be set up as diametrically opposed to one another, and in one sense Linares’s voice may be seen as a combination of both. While Linares freely admits her grounding in tradition, stating that “if you don’t have deep roots and a strong base in flamenco[,] you get lost” (Castillo, “Deep Roots”), at the same time her impressive career as a *cantaora* undeniably casts her as a soloist whose creativity has thrust her to the top of her profession. Even the very language that Linares uses to describe her relationship to tradition, however, in its ethereal ambiguity, may encourage the listener to interpret the mournful sound of her voice in “Con tu voz” as merely the

outward expression of a primarily spiritual and intangible phenomenon.

Regarding the expression of pain and suffering in flamenco *cante*, Washabaugh argues for a more body-centric approach, one rooted in the concept that the expression of pain is not intended to convey meaning at all but is rather non-functional. Following philosopher David Leder’s concept of a body in pain turning its attention inward, Washabaugh notes that

[i]n their uselessness, the expressions of bodies-in-pain are exceptional. They deviate from the institutionally established channels which recommend that expressions serve as “conduits of meaning” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lee 1992: 80), that they be directed to a listener, and that they transfer some useful information or sentiment from the speaker to the listener. [...] individuals in pain are often oblivious to listeners as they focus inward and direct their attentions to their own bodies. (“Flamenco Body” 86)

If one accepts Washabaugh’s proposition, then it logically follows that “the singer’s words and intentions suddenly become secondary, and the singer’s body, sounding itself, obtrudes into the musical event” (“Flamenco Body” 89). While Jiménez’s profound poetry may provide intellectual food for thought after “Con tu voz” has finished, during the temporal performance of the song itself the text hides in the wings while the singer’s body, performed through the voice, takes the spotlight.

It is not a new concept to theorize the human voice as a transformation and projection of the physical body into sonic form. Popularized by Roland Barthes in his influential essay “The Grain of the Voice,” the idea that “the ‘grain’ is

the body in the voice as it sings” (188) suggests that the voice serves as a sonic realization of the body and its various processes. While undoubtedly true at some level, it nevertheless seems unreasonable to extrapolate that the voice is not in some way diminished through the process of disembodiment, the state in which Linares’s voice exists in the CD medium of *Raíces y alas*. Regarding the expression of pain, the disembodiment of Linares’s voice is particularly critical because it deprives the perceiver of experiencing the body gestures that accompany the song. For flamenco *cante*, Chuse notes that

[t]he anguish expressed in facial tension, tense upper body movements, intense eye contact, and very expressive hand gestures that emphasize, punctuate, [or] implore despair, give the *cante* a high degree of emotionality. [...] It often seems that the *cante* is practically being pulled, or forced out of the singer, almost against his or her will. (*Cantaoras* 40)

Chuse’s account of the *cantaor(a)*’s body gestures aptly describes the movements that Carmen Linares makes when performing in public. In a video of a 1997 concert at the Teatro Monumental in Madrid,<sup>13</sup> for example, Linares’s performance of the song “Soleares de Tía Jílica de Marchena y la Roesna de Alcalá” (from her 1996 album *Antología de la Mujer en el Cante*) is filled with impassioned gestures that match the timbre and gestures of her voice. Linares alternates between clenching her fists, grabbing at her clothing, and throwing her hands at her chest, all the while keeping her eyes tightly shut; during particularly passionate outcries, her entire upper body even begins to shake.

As Linares’s style of singing in “Soleares de Tía Jílica de Marchena y la Roesna de Alcalá” is comparable to that in “Con tu voz,” the perceiver can infer that similar body gestures to those accompanying “Soleares de Tía Jílica” would have accompanied Linares’s recording of “Con tu voz.” Nevertheless, the mental reconstruction of body gestures for “Con tu voz” will only be as vivid (or as realistic) as the imagination and acuity of the perceiver will allow. As John Shepherd notes, “the articulation of social and cultural realities involves *all* the senses, and we are continually reminded [...] of the way in which the world rubs up against us and continually stimulates us to active participation” (90). Although Washabaugh bemoans the fact that the reproduction of flamenco on television and video (and, by extrapolation, the internet) “reframes *cante* as conventional song” (“Flamenco Body” 88) and thus forces the perceiver into a Westernized intellectual aesthetic framework, these media at least partially preserve the intimate ties between voice and body (albeit a visual reproduction of the body). In the purely sonic CD medium of *Raíces y alas*, however, any traces of Linares’s physical body vanish, and the acute listener is left with only the grain of Linares’s voice to reconstruct her misplaced anguished body gestures.

Following Washabaugh’s line of thought, it may be tempting to decry the institutional constraints of the CD or MP3 file that result in the disembodiment of Linares’s voice in “Con tu voz.” Yet in doing so, one teeters over the same pit into which many have fallen before, from Lorca and de Falla to contemporary flamencology “purists.” Specifically, by overemphasizing the traditional elements of lament in *cante*, flamenco purism asserts that the past traditions of the flamenco culture

should be preserved in static form, an ideology that denies flamenco the right to exist and evolve organically in time. Furthermore, if flamenco *cante* is forced to derive its identity solely from its past instead of allowing tradition to be viewed as a means of creating culturally relevant flamenco in the present, the musical style will be prevented from tapping deeper levels of social meaning. As ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman suggests, if unchecked, such a purist approach is in danger of gradually replacing the “observed and collected tradition with the system that has purported to define it. In other words, the classification system becomes the surrogate for the tradition itself[, and t]he emergence of a surrogate tradition is the most extreme and insidious product of canon formation” (50, quoted in Mitchell 217-18).

While flamencology purists may seek out “traditional” and “authentic” forms of flamenco with a relatively high level of sophistication, the same may be said at a lower level of sophistication for tourists. For purposes of tourism, however, the role of dance in flamenco is often emphasized at the expense of song (Manuel 56). This tourist preference for flamenco dance over song is perhaps unsurprising in light of the myriad of levels at which the flamenco voice conveys pain; tourists in search of an “authentic” Spanish musical experience may not have bargained for the complex sonic image that results from a metaphorical polyphony of pained voices within the *cantaora*’s song.

One may legitimately wonder at the underlying causes of the lament expressed in Carmen Linares’s voice in “Con tu voz.” Is Linares mimicking the (perceived) time-honored vocal aesthetic of *cante jondo*? Could Linares be heard as lamenting the oppression of the Spanish gypsies and the historic economic

suffering in Andalusia? Is Linares trying to create a sonic tapestry to accompany Jiménez’s mournful poetry? Could the vocal timbre of Linares be tied to an excerpt from the Jiménez poem used in track seven of *Raíces y alas* (“Canción de Madre”):

Las palabras de las madres  
tienen fragancias y ritmos  
de llanto, que nadie sabe  
dónde los han aprendido[?] (Muñoz  
Ramírez)

Or, finally, as Washabaugh suggests, should the listener refrain entirely from searching for the cause and meaning of the suffering in Linares’s inward-focused and non-functional voice? While in one sense the answer to all of these questions is “yes,” these are by no means the exclusive phenomena that are channeled through Linares’s voice, a multifaceted site for the reflection and reinscription of social meaning. As musicologist Richard Taruskin notes about the nature of musical discourse, “as contexts change, subtext accumulates,” and “the price of certainty [regarding these subtexts] is always reduction—reduction not only in meaning but in interest and value” (475-76). That the defining borders of the *cante* discourse are in constant flux is further emphasized by flamenco scholar Parvati Nair, who suggests that “flamenco becomes doubly performative: a musical performance that shows cultural identity [...] to be an experiential—that is, performative—process” (53).

A final insight into the meaning (or lack thereof) of the perceived vocal lament in “Con tu voz” is found in the phrase “raíces y alas,” the name of the album itself. As Linares notes, the title is derived from an aphorism of Juan Ramón Jiménez, “alas que arraigan y raíces que vuelan” (Castillo, “Deep Roots”). Regarding

future vocal style in *cante*, Linares interprets the aphorism as meaning “if you have roots you can fly to where you want, and if you have wings you can always return to your beautiful nest” (Castillo, “Deep Roots”). As the beautiful nest of the *cante* tradition becomes reinforced with increasingly varied and eclectic materials, flamenco aficionados can look forward to the ways in which *cantaoras* such as Linares reflect on the past while weaving new layers of social meaning into flamenco song.

## Notes

1 “Clavo débil, clavo fuerte” was written by Jiménez on January 20, 1916. See Juan Ramón Jiménez, *Diary of a Newlywed: A Bilingual Edition of Diario de un recién casado*, trans. Hugh A. Hartner (Cranbury, NJ: Rosemont, 2004) 93.

2 “Cuando esté con las raíces” was written between 1951-1954 and published in *De ríos que se van*, a book that Jiménez dedicated to his dying wife (Torrón 59).

3 Whereas the major and minor musical scales are by far the most common in the art music of Western Europe, the Phrygian scale is one of the more commonly used scales in traditional flamenco music. It is characterized by the interval of a semitone above the fundamental pitch, which distinguishes it from both the major and minor scales.

4 The term *afillá* is derived from “El Fillo,” the nickname of nineteenth-century cantaor Francisco Ortega (Higuera 19).

5 The two other common voice classifications in flamenco *cante* are the *voz redonda* (literally, a “round voice,” described as “sonorous and full, with a wide dynamic range”) and the *voz naturá* (literally, a “natural voice,” described as “flexible and relaxed with a wide vocal range”) (Chuse, *Cantaoras* 40).

6 While most of the literature on the flamenco voice emphasizes issues of timbre over issues of range, a comparison of the ranges and tessituras of a variety of male and female flamenco singers could be of interest.

7 *Quejíos* (literally, “cries”) and *salidas* (“departures”) refer to the melismatic vocalization of the syllable “ay” before the cantaor begins the actual lyrics

(*coplas*, or “couplets”) of the song; *quejíos* may also be interjected in the middle of the text (Higuera 17)

8 A glottal attack is characterized by a rapid and sudden burst of air across the vocal folds, resulting immediately in a vowel sound that is not preceded by a consonant.

9 The word-final “s” in “voz” is omitted here.

10 Not unlike the *siguiriya*, the *toná* is among the oldest forms of *cante jondo* (Grove Music Online, s.v. “Toná,” [www.oxfordmusiconline.com](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com) [accessed May 4, 2010]).

11 Linares has dealt with Lorca’s material (though not necessarily his poetry) in the past; most notably, her 1994 album *Canciones populares antiguas* is a flamenco setting of Spanish folk songs that Lorca set for piano (Chuse, *Cantaoras* 136).

12 The importance of the body to flamenco *cante* (as suggested by Washabaugh) is echoed in the realm of gender studies by feminist musicologist Suzanne Cusick, who argues that “musical performance...is partly...the culturally intelligible performance of bodies” (27).

13 This video was accessed under the “Video” section of Carmen Linares’s website, [www.CarmenLinares.org](http://www.CarmenLinares.org).

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