**Guitar:** *How long have you been in England?*
**Paco Peña:** I came to England about nine years ago. I stayed only for a while, then I went back many times to Spain — came back again, went back again — and then finally I came back about four and a half years ago. Since then I've stayed.
*You've played in the Royal Albert Hall, the Festival Hall, the Queen Elizabeth Hall — everywhere. You must be used to playing in front of British audiences. When you play in Spain, do you find that the audiences get more involved?*

**PP:** It depends what you mean by involved. If I play in the same circumstances, the audience will react exactly the same, except that there might be a higher percentage of the audience who know what is happening. But even that percentage doesn't account for all the audience because only a few people in Spain know about flamenco. So, unless you go to a club where people really know, they might be much more involved and inspire the artist much more. But then it's a very small and a very different thing, and normally it's not only for the guitar but for the whole — you know, the whole atmosphere.
*So it can affect your performance if you've got aficionados in the audience?*

**PP:** It can, yes. But as I say, a guitar recital is not normally done in that kind of atmosphere. Flamenco is performed — you know, accompanying singing and dancing, with the odd guitar solo. But really, when you do a concert, you are in exactly the same position as you would be here. Exactly the same.
*The audience is part and parcel of the whole spirit of Flamenco. There's a certain rapport which is immediate between the flamenco singer and the audience. And the guitarist as well.*

**PP:** This is an interesting subject. It is not as if — how shall I put it? The audience is not expected to do anything while the artist is performing. The artist is trying to sing for all of them, to play for all of them. To put it another way, he is transmitting their emotions through his voice, through his performance. They communicate spiritually, if you like — if that word is good enough. They communicate, but there is nothing physical. If there was I'm sure the artist would be slightly put off, because the standard of the audience — at doing what he is doing — is necessarily lower than his. So he is put off, and his standards must come down to the standards of the audience if they are joining in, if they are actually participating. If you go to Spain, you see these *tablaos* — there's no need for any of us to participate, because there are so many people on the stage doing it.

**Long warm-up**
*What is the difference between 'cante jondo' and 'cante chico'?*
**PP:** Well, that is a distinction that has been made by some people. As far as I'm concerned the distinction is not necessarily black and white. *Cante jondo* is in fact synonymous with *cante flamenco; cante jondo* means Flamenco. Now the fact that *jondo* is a kind of development of the word *hondo,* which means deep, has given these people a chance to think that *cante jondo* means deep song, and *cante chico* the lighter type. As far as I'm concerned Flamenco includes *cante jondo* and *cante chico* all in the same category, except that some styles are of a more tragic mood. They're normally performed in a more tragic way, of course; the singer is expressing tragic emotions more than in other styles. But it can happen that in so-called *cante chico* the singer at a particular moment may be feeling in a particular mood, and bring it out as really much more tragic than another one of the deeper style. Therefore a *cante chico* could be made into a *cante jondo* by a good singer, and a *cante jondo* could be made light by a bad singer.
*You're talking about singing, but the guitarist also has to express all these sentiments.*
**PP:** That is true. The same thing applies.
*How much is improvised during a performance?*
**PP:** It depends on how inspired you are, and how good your technique happens to be at the time. So, if you feel really good, then you can forget yourself, and forget the difficulties of playing. And in that moment the ability of your mind will come up to its best, and you can do things that you've never done before — you know, because the rhythm gets very complicated and you can't really follow for a long time. But you could do completely new things. The most important factor of this improvisation is that you can play around with each piece and play it just as you like, as you feel at that moment.
*Is the framework of each piece arranged before the performance?*
**PP:** You mean the framework of the piece as a piece? Well, in my own experience I tend to study the piece and really get to know in my mind what that piece means. I'm not going to arrange the framework as much, but I know what the moods of that piece can involve. This is experience, and when I'm playing this experience is at the back of my head.

# Paco Peña

*Born in Cordoba in 1942, Paco Peña started playing when he was 10. He had no teacher after his early training in basic chords and accompaniments in school groups, and taught himself Flamenco by listening to radio, records and other guitarists. He is now undoubtedly one of the best Flamenco players in the world.*

# Paco Peña

*Do you need a long warm-up before a concert?*
**PP:** Yes I do. Unfortunately.
*Apart from being a physical thing — because you've got to warm your hands up — is it also a feeling connected with tension?*
**PP:** There is tension, oh yes. But my hands tend to get cold, because I have dry hands, and they tend to be rough if I haven't played for a while before. I like to produce a good tone, so I have to practise before. And even when you go to a party, where people who know you expect a certain thing — of course, I could just play, but if I can be better, I'd rather be better, and come up to expectations.
*You always produce a good tone. How important is it to you?*
**PP:** It's very important really, because I haven't found many flamenco guitarists in my life who produce a good tone. I am lucky to have met many musicians all over the world, and especially in this country; many good guitarists in the classical field and in other fields. I have taken a lot of ideas and opinions from different people. And I've come to the conclusion that if you can get a good tone when you want it, then you are better off. I tend to do what I want with the guitar and not be limited by the fact that if you just strum the guitar in the flamenco way, it sounds flamenco. That's not good enough. So I want to produce good tone when I want, and rough tone when I want.
*You were talking about the influence of classical technique. Has it influenced you, apart from the question of tone?*
**PP:** Very greatly, in the way of understanding music. If you analyse a piece of classical music you see an idea very clearly, and of course the more you see the more you widen your mind, your scope. In this way it has influenced me for Flamenco. But apart from that, the actual way of playing classical music has helped me, especially for the left hand. I've realised possibilities which I never imagined before when I played Flamenco by ear.
*Whatever it is you play, there's a certain form about it. It's almost like a miniature sonata form in some ways.*
**PP:** As I said before, I tend to analyse the pieces and put them in my mind, and with this experience I play. I must say again that this has helped me — also the fact that I have mixed with so many musicians, so many classical guitarists.

**Tough work**
*What do you do about your fingernails? How do you reconcile getting a nice tone with the tough work they've got to do?*
**PP:** It's a very difficult thing. I'm very unlucky with my nails, because they're very flat and weak. The fact that they're weak I don't mind so much, because I cover them very well with glue, with *Pagamento* (a Spanish glue). But it means a long time of preparation every night. When I'm working I have to do them every night, taking off the old glue and putting on the new. Every night. It's a very complicated thing. Because my nails are just not good enough. I have to make an artificial kind of solid thing, which I can only do with glue. But I play rather hard, and after one day that glue gets loose. So I've got to do it new.
*The glue has a sort of resilience. What about Araldite, which is as hard as glass?*
**PP:** Yes, but you can't take it off easily.
*So you could spend up to half an hour a day on your nails.*
**PP:** I'm afraid I spend much more than that. About an hour and a half.
*As well as practice?*
**PP:** Yes.
*When you're working, how much practice do you do?*
**PP:** Oh, plenty. Sometimes for about two to two and a half hours, and then another stretch the same. Five or six hours altogether.
*Regularly?*
**PP:** When I'm working, yes. I have to keep on top of the guitar.
*Do you practise scales, or runs in flamenco contexts, or arpeggios?*
**PP:** I tend to separate Flamenco from the exercises. I don't know why, I just feel it's better. Then I come into Flamenco when I'm prepared technically, and then study Flamenco. I warm up with exercises that I make myself or that I've learned from friends — they're great fun.
*Do you ever practise with the cejilla in position?*
**PP:** If you mean exercising and practising, no, I don't. Sometimes I study the pieces with a capo, because I want to get a special sound.

**Tense Guitar**
*What kind of action do you like on a guitar?*
**PP:** Rather higher than you normally find on a flamenco guitar. I like a rather tense guitar, and one that won't die when you play hard — the sound, I mean. Sometimes a flamenco guitar sounds very beautiful, but if you press a bit hard you find that the sound is gone, because the action is too low. I need to have a combination of a flamenco sound and an action that is resistant to no matter how hard you play. It's very difficult to find them.
*Do you use different tension strings?*
**PP:** I use a normal tension string for the bass, and a very high tension for the treble. It tends to compensate.
*When you were younger and learning to play the guitar, who was your favourite? Was he a flamenco player?*
**PP:** Oh yes. Nino Ricardo.
*And who's your favourite now?*
**PP:** Nino Ricardo. I respect him immensely. By the way, he died a few weeks ago. He was an institution. He did so much for the guitar.

**So much potential**
*For somebody who wants to take up Flamenco, how important do you think it is for them to listen to the singing?*
**PP:** It depends how they want to learn Flamenco. It depends what they like. I mean, if you like Flamenco as a kind of music, it is essential that you listen to the singing. Because the singing *is* Flamenco. The singing is of music that you like; the rest of it surrounds the singing. So, if you like that particular kind of music, that's what you have to listen to. Everything, including the singing. If you just like to play the guitar and you are prepared to accept the fact that you're not ever going to be a connoisseur of Flamenco music, then just play the guitar and do your technique, your bit on the guitar, and listen to it. But I'd say that anybody who respects Flamenco and wants to get a knowledge of it must listen to the singing.
*Would that be your advice to non-Spaniards as well as Spaniards?*
**PP:** Oh yes. Anyone. Absolutely.
*Finally, what would you like to see in the future of the flamenco guitar?*
**PP:** Well, I think it is developing greatly. I think the music has so much potential, because it is so alive. And the more people become interested in it, the more it can develop, so that new styles annd new ideas can come.
*Do you see it ever being divorced from the singing? Do you see the singing part of it becoming a history thing? Or would it run parallel?*
**PP:** If it is a kind of history thing, it would develop in a different way to what I'm thinking. I wouldn't like to say that it's not going to happen, but I think the excellence of Flamenco is the singing, and if it is to remain Flamenco music, pure, the singing must be present.