

Female flamenco artists: brave, transgressive, creative women, masters... essential to understand flamenco history

Summary

From its birth, in the last third of nineteenth century, and during the first decades of the twentieth, flamenco has counted on great female leading figures -singers, dancers and guitar players-, who have made important contributions to that art and who, in many cases, have ended their lives completely forgotten and ruined. On the other hand, in Francoist times, when it was sought to impose the model of the woman as mother and housewife, it is worth emphasizing another range of female figures who have not developed a professional career but have assumed the important role of transmitting their rich artistic family legacy to their descendants. Besides rescuing many of these leading figures, this article highlights the main barriers and difficulties that those artists have had to face because they were women.

Keywords: flamenco history, women, flamenco singers, flamenco dancers, guitar players

1. Introduction

Flamenco is an art in which, from the beginning, there has been an important gender segregation. Traditionally women have been identified with dancing, which favours body exhibition, while men have been related to guitar playing and to those flamenco styles which are considered more solemn, such as *seguiriya*.

Nevertheless, this type of attitudes are based in prejudices without a scientific base. Re-reading flamenco history from gender perspective will allow us to discover the presence of a significant number of women, many of whom have been forgotten, whose contribution has been essential to mold flamenco art as we know it now.

2. Flamenco pioneers

If we look back to the time of *cafés cantantes* (last decades of twentieth century and first ones of twenty-first), which is considered by many as flamenco golden age, we note that many women dedicated themselves professionally to

flamenco singing and dancing, despite negative connotations involved, because those *cafés* were nightlife establishments which offered every kind of vice to a male public. In such places people smoked, drank alcohol, patronized prostitutes, and sometimes there were riots and even crimes⁷⁵.

Thus female flamenco singers and dancers of that time used to lead a free life, far from what was meant respectable. Merely because they were flamenco artists, their reputation was called into question. Proof of this is the following flamenco lyric, referring singer Concha la Peñaranda:

Conchita la Peñaranda,
la que canta en el café,
ha perdido la vergüenza
siendo una mujer de bien.
[“Conchita la Peñaranda
the one who sings in the café
has no shame
despite the fact that she's a good woman”]

Nevertheless, despite all difficulties, we can now identify a considerable number of female pioneers who have played an important role in flamenco history. They are brave, transgressive, creative women, masters... Many of them have been forgotten but, on its own merits, they deserve to be remembered and recognized.

2.1. Brave and transgressive women

This section can include, in general, all those women who have managed to make their way professionally in a hostile environment. However, different types of transgression can be defined:

⁷⁵ Just to mention one example, in 1885 singer Juan Reyes Osuna, known as El Canario de Málaga, was stabbed to death in front of the Nevería del Chino (the summer branch of Café El Burrero from Seville). His murderer was the father of singer La Rubia de Málaga, who used to perform in the same café (Cfr. Bohórquez Casado, 2009).

2.1.1. Transvestite women

Though, nowadays, many female flamenco dancers and singers use to wear pants, in the nineteenth century it was considered an important transgression and only a few brave women were allowed to do it⁷⁶.

Among all of them, special mention should be given to Malaga dancer Trinidad Huertas Cuenca (Cfr. Ortiz Nuevo, Cruzado and Mora 2016), known artistically as *La Cuenca* (Málaga, 1857 - La Habana, 1890), who has gone down in history as the first woman who wore men's clothes and performed a typically male dance. The act that provided her of world fame consisted of miming all bullfighting passes while she performed a *zapateado*. She was also an outstanding guitar player.

A great follower of Trinidad Cuenca was Sevillian dancer Salud Rodríguez Álvarez (b. 1873), known as *La hija del ciego* (the blind man's daughter) (Cfr. Cruzado 2013a). According to singer Pepe el de la Matrona, she was a “superb” artist (Cfr. Ortiz Nuevo 1975), who taught great male dancers, such as Estampio and Lamparilla.

2.1.2. Daring women

Among those free and transgressive artists, there are also some adventurous women, such as Granada dancer and singer Concha Rodríguez (S. XIX – S. XX), known as *Concha la Carbonera* (Cfr. Cruzado 2016a). This charismatic artist, muse of poets and painters, was one of the greatest stars of Sevillian Café El Burrero. She was especially noted for her performance of *tangos*, and also for the comical, transgressive and bold acts that she led, together with singer José León, alias *La Escribana*, whom she called “godmother” (Cfr. Rodríguez Gómez 1935).

2.1.3. Prominent performers of flamenco styles which are supposed to be reserved for men

As indicated, there are those who consider that women can only excel in allegedly lighter flamenco styles, such as *cantes de ida y vuelta*, while more solemn ones, like *seguriya* or *soleá*, would only be appropriated for male throats. Nevertheless, this prejudice turns pale in front of the memory of female artists who

⁷⁶ In 1931, *Mundo Gráfico* magazine published a report titled “Las flamencas con traje de varón” [“Flamenco women with men's clothes”], which remembered some of those women pioneers who dared to wear men's clothes on the stage, such as singers La Robles, La Juanaca and La Águeda or dancer Trinidad Cuenca.

are especially appreciated by their brilliance in those styles which are supposedly forbidden to them.

Without being exhaustive, in the field of *seguriya* singing we can mention María Valencia Rodríguez, *La Serrana* (Jerez de la Frontera, 1863 – Seville 1940); while María Amaya Heredia, *La Andonda* (b. Ronda, 1848) or Mercedes Fernández Vargas, *La Serneta* (Jerez de la Frontera, 1840 – Utrera, 1912), have been undisputed masters in the realm of *soleá* (Cfr. Cruzado 2013b).

In those days, it is also worth mentioning leading figures such as singers Dolores Parrales Moreno (1845?-1915?), *La Parrala*⁷⁷ (Cfr. Cruzado 2013c), from Moguer, or Rita Giménez García (1859-1937), from Jerez de la Frontera, who has gone down to posterity as *Rita la Cantaora*⁷⁸ (Cfr. Cruzado 2013d). These artists have mastered a wide variety of singing styles but, despite this fact, are remembered by the legend attributed to them.

2.1.4. Women who crossed borders and succeeded all over the world

In the second half of nineteenth century, much before TV birth, when overseas journeys were made by ship and took weeks, it has been documented the presence of many female flamenco artists on European and American stages.

Dauntless dancer Trinidad Cuenca spent the last years of her short life in navigating between Paris, Mexico City and Havana; and won applause in those and in many other towns. During her stay in the French capital, she worked with artists such as Dolores la Parrala, Lola Gómez (b. Madrid, 1862) – a great dancer who developed a brilliant artistic career in Europe – or Carmen Dauset Moreno (b. 1868) (Cfr. Cruzado 2014a).

The latter was born in Almería. She was known as *Carmencita* and achieved worldwide fame, especially in the United States, where her dancing was considered highly exotic and original. Furthermore, the name of Carmen Dauset

⁷⁷ According to Fernando el de Triana (Rodríguez García 1935), who had known her personally, Dolores la Parrala stood out especially in supposedly “male songs”.

⁷⁸ The following quote, by Guillermo Núñez de Prado (1904), highlights the fame and prestige of this singer in her best years:

“La popularidad de su nombre es inmensa y generales las simpatías de que goza, y esto lo debe tanto a sus cualidades de artista, como al atractivo de su carácter alegre, comunicativo [...]. Es justamente admirada, y aún más justamente aplaudida, porque dentro de ella hay algo que no pertenece a la generalidad, que no es vulgar, que lleva consigo”.

[“Her name deserves a huge popularity and she enjoys great sympathy, due to her artistic skills and also to her attractive, cheerful and communicative character [...]. She is fairly admired, and even more applauded, because inside her there is something that does not belong to generality, that is not common”].

also deserves a prominent place in the history of cinema, because she was the first woman filmed by Edison's kinetoscope, and the first one who danced in front of his camera.

Unable as we are to mention all flamenco artists who have exhibited their art on international stage, we will highlight only two more leading figures: singer and guitar player Josefa Moreno (Antequera, 1899 – the seventies), *La Antequerana* (Cfr. Cruzado 2013e), who toured several American countries; and dancer Juana Vargas de las Heras (Jerez de la Frontera, 1870 – Seville, 1947), who has gone down into history as *La Macarrona* (Cfr. Cruzado 2013f; 2016b). The latter conquered Parisian public during Universal Exhibition of 1889 and went back to the capital of France on numerous occasions. She also performed in other European countries, as Russia and Germany.

2.2. Creative women

Transgression and courage are not the only female trace that we can find in that initial stage of flamenco history, a mixed art in which there is room for diverse contributions and where women have played a leading role, as performers and also as creators.

As far as singing is concerned, it is necessary to highlight the important contribution of artists such as *La Andonda* and *La Serneta*, to whom is attributed the creation of different *soleá* styles, and of María Fernández (San Fernando, 1930), alias *María Borrigo*, who has gone down into history for her *seguriya de cambio* (Cfr. Silva 2013).

In *malagueñas* family there have been great creative women too. The most prolific one is Trinidad Navarro Carrillo (nineteenth – twentieth century), known as *La Trini de Málaga*, who is considered to have created several styles. Furthermore, it is worth highlighting the contribution of artists such as Concepción Peñaranda, *La Cartagenera*, or Paca Aguilera Domínguez (Ronda, 1879 - Madrid, 1913) (Cfr. Cruzado 2014b).

With regard to *ida y vuelta* styles, mention must be made of singer and dancer Josefa Díaz Fernández (Cádiz, 1871-1918), artistically known as *Pepa de Oro*. She traveled to America with her father, bullfighter *Paco de Oro*, and there she immersed herself in *milonga* sounds and brought them to flamenco field.

As far as dancing is concerned, female legacy is also noteworthy. We have already emphasized the figure of Trinidad Cuenca, who broke the mould by introducing typically male elements in female dancing. It is also fair to highlight another pioneer's contribution:

Rosario Monje (Cádiz, 1862 - Madrid, 1922), known as *La Mejorana* (Cfr. Cruzado 2013g), can be considered the foremother of *Escuela de Baile Sevillana* [Sevillian Dancing School], which stands out for giving the greater role to the upper part of the body –torso, arms, hands–. She was also a pioneer in the use of long-tailed dress and Manila shawl.

2.3. Cult artists

Due to already mentioned merits and to other ones, many of these women were widely admired by artists and intellectuals of their time. This is the case of Federico García Lorca, one of the organizers of 1922's *Concurso de Cante Jondo de Granada* [Granada Singing Contest]. In the speech (García Lorca, 1922) delivered in *Centro Artístico de Granada* [Granada Artistic Center], the poet showed his admiration for artists such as *Dolores la Parrala* or Ana Amaya Molina (Ronda, 1853-1933), known as *Anilla la de Ronda*⁷⁹ (Cfr. Cruzado 2013h).

On the other side, painters as Ignacio Zuloaga or Julio Romero de Torres also found an important source of inspiration in female flamenco artists. Multitalented *María de Albaicín* (Cfr. Cruzado 2015a)⁸⁰ was immortalized by the former; while singer Pastora Pavón and dancers Julia Borrull and *Pastora Imperio*, among many others, posed for the latter. Sculptor Mariano Benlliure also took *Pastora Imperio* as a model for his “Dancers”.

Beyond our borders, several artists have also succumbed to the charms of artists such as Carmen Dauset, who was portrayed by American painters John Singer Sargent and William Merrit Chase. Furthermore, she posed for photographers and was filmed by Edison. Other great dancer, Antonia Gallardo Rueda (El Puerto de Santa María, 1879 - Madrid, 1942), known as *La Coquinera* (Cfr. Cruzado 2013i), was immortalized by Dutch painter Kies Van Dongen.

2.4. Masters

In addition to being creative and great artists, female singers, dancers and guitarists have played an important role as transmitters of flamenco art. For instance, we can mention *Dolores la Parrala*, who taught Silverio Franconetti's

⁷⁹ Ana Amaya Molina was a very singular artist. Besides singing, she accompanied herself with the guitar. She proved a great success in the Universal Exhibition of Barcelona (1930).

⁸⁰ María de Albaicín is the artistic name of dancer Josefa García Escudero (Chindallón, 1898 – France, 1931). She started her professional career in Pastora Imperio's company. She performed in London and Paris with Serge Diaghilev's *Russian Ballets* and succeeded as an actress.

singing to her disciple Antonio Silva, *El Portugués*, or *Merced la Serneta*, who gave guitar and singing lessons to Madrid high society families.

In the realm of dancing, it is also worth mentioning the work of Salud Rodríguez -Some renowned flamenco dancers attended her school in Madrid-; *Juana la Macarrona*, who gave lessons in Sevillian Alameda de Hércules; or Francisca González (Seville, 1905 - Madrid, 1967), known as *La Quica* (Cfr. Cruzado 2015b), who developed a fruitful career in teaching, first in Seville and then in Madrid⁸¹.

2.5. The dark side of fame

Despite the important contribution of these artists and their great success, many of them are completely unknown nowadays. Some retired prematurely for love, as it is the case of *Rosario la Mejorana* and Gabriela Ortega Feria (Cadiz, 1862 – Seville, 1919) (Cruzado 2013j)⁸². The former joined bullfighters' tailor Víctor Rojas and the latter married bullfighter Fernando Gómez, *El Gallo*.

There are also those who ended their days tragically, such as singer *Concha la Cartagenera*, who was murdered in a Valencian café, or dancer Juana Antúnez (b. Jerez de la Frontera, 1875 ?), who committed suicide by jumping from the rooftop of the retirement home where she lived.

Many others, after having experienced the sweet smell of success, both in Spain and abroad, and after having earned huge amounts of money, died in oblivion and poverty. It is evidenced by a report titled “El final de los flamencos” [“The end of flamencos”], published by *Estampa* magazine in 1935. It compiles some interviews and photographs of artists such as *Rita la Cantaora*, *Antonia la Coquinera*, *La Nona* and *La Paloma*, who had reached a quite high artistic and economic level some decades ago. At that time, the former lived a modest life with her husband in Carabanchel; the second one run a café in Cuatro Vientos; and the last ones sold flowers in Madrid cafés.

These are not isolated cases, since many other artists from that period suffered the same fate. Without any pretensions to being exhaustive, one can mention great dancers such as Fernanda Antúnez (Jerez de la Frontera, 1870 ? – Seville, 1935) or Antonia Torres (Cadiz, S. XIX – S. XX), *La Gamba*, who ended their days in Sevillian Alameda. The former used to sell jasmine bouquets and

⁸¹ La Quica began her artistic career together with her husband, dancer and master Frasquillo. After his death, in 1940, she performed in London and North America, and became very popular in Madrid, as dancing teacher.

⁸² Gabriela Ortega Feria was born in Cadiz and succeeded in Sevillian cafés.

lottery tickets, while the latter used to perform in rich men's sprees. Something similar happened to singer María Valencia, *La Serrana*.

La Trini de Málaga and *Juana la Macarrona* also had serious difficulties at the end of their lives. Their colleagues organized some events in order to raise funds for them. Another great dancer, Magdalena Seda Loreto (Jerez de la Frontera, 1877 – Seville, 1956), *La Malena* (Cfr. Cruzado 2013k), survived by selling sunflower seeds; and *Josefa la Antequerana* ended her days wandering in the streets of Madrid.

3. The greatest one and a bridge between two periods

If there is an artist that has marked a before and after in flamenco history and can be undoubtedly considered the greatest singer of all time, that artist is Pastora Pavón Cruz (Seville, 1890 – 1969), known as *La Niña de los Peines*. She began her professional career at a very young age and remained in business for decades, what enabled her to live different periods.

Pastora was a very complete singer who mastered a wide range of singing styles, and in some of them she made interesting innovations. She enhanced and spread *petenera*, she created *bambera* and played an important role in the configuration of what we know nowadays as *bulería*.

As far as her personal life is concerned, she was a quite modern woman for her time, although she retired at the request of her husband, singer *Pepe Pinto*.

4. Female flamenco artists of the beginning of the twentieth century:

After the decline of *café*s, flamenco searched for new channels to approach the public. Variety genre was born at the beginning of the twentieth century and reached its peak during the 1910s. In that time a new model of artist was imposed: a more refined and multifaceted woman, who conquered the public not only with her singing, dancing and actress skills, but also with her physical aspect, her costumes and *mise-en-scène*.

*Pastora Imperio*⁸³, Amalia Molina (Cfr. Cruzado 2014c)⁸⁴, *La Argentinita*⁸⁵, Teresita España (Cfr. Cruzado 2014d)⁸⁶ or Isabelita Ruiz (Cfr. Cruzado 2015c)⁸⁷ are some of those artists who succeeded in variety theaters. Without leaving aside flamenco, they were able to adapt to the new times and become real stars. It is also worth mentioning guitar player Adela Cubas (Cfr. Cruzado 2013l)⁸⁸, who built a successful career in the realm of variety acts, despite not being physically attractive, according to the leading model of beauty.

Some of the aforementioned artists acquired great reputation some years later, due to the development of flamenco ballet. *Pastora Imperio*⁸⁹ can be considered its forerunner, though the one who gave this genre its maximum splendour was dancer Antonia Mercé Luque⁹⁰, *La Argentina*.

⁸³ Pastora Rojas Monje (Seville, 1884 – Madrid, 1979) was a very complete artist. She inherited the style of her mother, Rosario la Mejorana, and thus is considered the forerunner of Escuela Sevillana de Baile [Sevillian School of Dancing]. She was also singer, actress and businesswoman. She spent a long time in Latin America, where she became very popular.

⁸⁴ Amalia Molina Pérez (Seville, 1884 – Barcelona, 1956) was also a great artist. She stood out as singer, dancer and actress. Besides her outstanding skills, she had her own hallmark. She had an exclusive repertoire and took maximum care of every detail of her shows (set design, scenery, costumes...). She became very popular in America, where she spent several years.

⁸⁵ Encarnación López Júlvez (Buenos Aires, 1897 – New York, 1945), artistically known as *La Argentinita*, was an excellent artist. She stood out as singer, dancer and choreographer. She founded her *Compañía de Bailes Españoles* [Company of Spanish Dances]. In the thirties and forties, she succeeded in Spain and America. Her sister, Pilar López (San Sebastián, 1912 – Madrid, 2008), received and continued her legacy.

⁸⁶ Teresa España (Seville, nineteenth – twentieth century) was a guitarist, singer and dancer. She developed an intense activity in Spanish theaters and, at the beginning of the thirties, she moved to America.

⁸⁷ Isabelita Ruiz (Jerez de la Frontera, 1902-1996) was a dancer, actress and teacher. Her grandmother was flamenco dancer and teacher Isabel Santos. She started her professional career together with her sister María. She became very popular in Brazil, where she spent several years. She dedicated the last years of her life to the teaching of flamenco in Jerez de la Frontera.

⁸⁸ Guitar player Adela Martín Cubas (Madrid, 1886-1923), artistically known as Adela Cubas, developed an intense activity as guitarist during the first decades of the twentieth century. She won a great prestige as soloist and also as backing guitarist.

⁸⁹ In 1915 Pastora Imperio premiered *El amor brujo*, which had been composed expressly for her by Manuel de Falla, with the inspiration of *Rosario la Mejorana*. Thus, Pastora can be considered the forerunner of flamenco ballet.

⁹⁰ Antonia Mercé (Buenos Aires, 1888 – Bayonne, 1936) had a complete artistic training, both in classic and flamenco dance. She was an educated, cosmopolitan and avant-garde artist. She developed a type of stylized art and pioneered the creation of flamenco ballets whose choreography follows a storyline. After premiering a new version of *El amor brujo* (1925), she founded the *Ballets Españoles* [Spanish Ballets], inspired by Diaghilev's *Russian Ballets*.

On the other side, in the 1920s came the *ópera flamenca*, in an attempt to transform flamenco singing in a mass phenomenon and make it accessible to all audiences. To this end, great artistic companies traveled all around Spain, from village to village and from town to town, in order to exhibit their art in theaters and bullrings, with priority given to those singing styles which were supposed to be lighter and easier to understand. In this realm, it is worth to highlight the great figure of singer Dolores Jiménez Alcántara⁹¹, *La Niña de La Puebla*, and that of guitar player Victoria de Miguel (Cfr. Cruzado 2014e)⁹².

During the twenties and thirties, it can also be mentioned the great boom of flamenco in Barcelona. In clubs such as Juanito Eldorado's or Villa Rosa, singers like Manuela Domínguez⁹³, *La Ciega de Jerez* (Cfr. Cruzado 2016c), and dancers as Rafaela Valverde⁹⁴, *La Tanguera* (Cfr. Cruzado 2013m); sisters Julia (Cfr. Cruzado 2015d) and Concha Borrull (Cfr. Cruzado 2015e)⁹⁵, and a very young Carmen Amaya⁹⁶ reached great popularity.

5. Post-war flamenco artists

After Spanish Civil War, and especially during the first decades of Francoism, the model of woman sought to be imposed in Spain was that of mother and housewife, which was not compatible with the artist's life. In this context, there were a significant number of women who had to give up their vocation,

⁹¹ La Niña de la Puebla (La Puebla de Cazalla, 1908 – Malaga, 1999) was a very complete singer, though she specialized in those flamenco styles which were more in fashion in her time. She founded her own company and developed an intense activity all over Spain. She remained at work till the end of her long life.

⁹² Victoria de Miguel (Madrid, 1900 – S. XXI) reconciled her profession of guitar player with that of dressmaker. For several decades, she accompanied several singers, especially her husband, Pedro Sánchez Langa, known as *El Canario de Madrid*. She also stood out as soloist and teacher.

⁹³ Singer Manuela Domínguez, from Jerez de la Frontera, experienced her most splendid times during the twenties and thirties, where she became very popular in Madrid and Barcelona.

⁹⁴ Rafaela Valverde Díaz (Ciudad Real, 1896 ? - Barcelona, 1940) stood out specially for her *farruca* and *garrotín*, that she used to perform wearing pants. She succeeded all over Spain, though she spent the main years of her career in Barcelona.

⁹⁵ Julia (b. Valencia, 1895 ?) and Concha Borrull Giménez (b. 1902 ?) were early artists. Their father was guitarist Miguel Borrull Castelló, and their siblings Miguel, Lola and Isabel also were flamenco artists. In 1912 they conquered Paris and afterward they settled in Barcelona, where they were very linked to their family's *tablaó*, *Villa Rosa*.

⁹⁶ Carmen Amaya (Barcelona, 1917 ? – Bagur, 1963) is undoubtedly one of the most prominent flamenco dancers of the history. Following in the footsteps of leading figures like *La Cuenca*, she imposed a typically male way of dancing, based on *zapateado*, and popularized the use of pants. She started her career at an early age in Barcelona. She spent several years in Latin America and the United States, where she became a celebrity. She also stood out as a good actress.

despite being skilled enough. In some cases, their husbands forbid them to become artists, while other women left their careers to look after their families.

Once the initial obstacles had faded, some of these frustrated singers and dancers had the opportunity to become professional at a later age. However, those and many other women's contribution to flamenco history goes much further. In a time when TV didn't yet exist, and music recordings were not affordable for all, people used to learn flamenco in their closest environment. Thus, the mothers used to assume the important role of transmitting their rich family legacy – the singing and dancing of their ancestors – to their descendants.

Evidence of this is the fact that many late singers and dancers gave birth to leading figures of flamenco. For instance, this is the case of María Fernández Granados⁹⁷, *La Perrata*, mother of Juan Peña, *El Lebrijano*; and Tomasa Soto⁹⁸, mother of *José el de la Tomasa*. Among those artists who in their youth were forced to give up their flamenco vocation, without being exhaustive, it is also worth to mention dancer Juana de los Reyes Valencia⁹⁹, *Tía Juana la del Pipa*; and singers Ana Blanco Soto¹⁰⁰, *Tía Anica la Periñaca* (Cfr. Ortiz Nuevo 2013); María Fernández Monje¹⁰¹, *María Soleá*; or Encarnación Marín Sallago¹⁰², *La Sallago*.

In contrast, in the fifties, artists like *Fernanda* and *Bernarda de Utrera*¹⁰³, *Pepa de Utrera*¹⁰⁴ or *La Paquera de Jerez*¹⁰⁵ started their professional careers and

⁹⁷ María Fernández Granados (Utrera, 1922 – Lebrija, 2005) grew up in a flamenco family. She appeared on the stage for the first time when her sons, Pedro and Juan Peña, were already consolidated artists.

⁹⁸ Tomasa Soto (Seville, 1926-2013) was the daughter of flamenco singer Pepe Torres. She sang in public for the first time during one of her grandchildren' christening.

⁹⁹ Juana de los Reyes Valencia (Jerez de la Frontera, 1905-1987) started her professional career at a late age, after her husband's death. Though she only danced *bulerías*, it was enough for her to become very popular in Madrid *tablaos*.

¹⁰⁰ Ana Blanco Soto (Jerez de la Frontera, 1889-1987) also became a professional artist after being widowed. Singing allowed her to survive and bring up her family.

¹⁰¹ María Fernández Monje (Jerez de la Frontera, 1932-2005) comes from Terremoto singing family. After a brief career as a singer, she retired at her husband's request, and came back to the stage in the eighties.

¹⁰² Encarnación Marín Sallago (Sanlúcar de Barrameda, 1919-2015) became a professional singer at a late age, after being widowed. She was a very complete artist and remained in work till the end of her life.

¹⁰³ Fernanda (Utrera, 1923-2006) and Bernarda Jiménez Peña (Utrera, 1927-2009) had to overcome their father's resistance, in order to start a professional career as flamenco singers. In the fifties they moved to Madrid. In the following decades they performed in Paris and New York.

¹⁰⁴ Josefa Loreto Peña (Utrera, 1926-2009) was cousin of Fernanda and Bernarda. She started her career in a Sevillian *tablaos* and afterward she moved to Madrid. She stood out especially as a festive singer and is considered a pioneer of *rumba flamenca*.

soon became leading figures of flamenco, both in Spain and abroad. It probably has something to do with the fact that all of them stayed single.

6. The long way towards gender equality

In the last decades of the twentieth century, it is also possible to mention some striking cases such as that of singer María Vargas¹⁰⁶, who retired in the eighties, after having achieved great success and recognition, in order to care for her family; or that of *Inés Bacán*¹⁰⁷, who performed for the first time on a stage when she was almost forty years old.

Currently, many barriers have been broken down. Nevertheless, we still have a long way to go. As it happens in other realms of society, women continue to be the ones who have more difficulties to reconcile professional and family life. To all this, we must add the old prejudices and stereotypes which remain in place in flamenco world. A good way to fight against them consists in emphasizing the figures of so many women whose contribution has played a fundamental role in the configuration of flamenco in the way we know it nowadays.

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¹⁰⁵ Francisca Méndez Garrido (Jerez de la Frontera, 1934-2004) was one of the leading figures of her time. She succeeded in Madrid *tablaos* and toured different countries.

¹⁰⁶ María Vargas Fernández (Sanlúcar de Barrameda, 1947) was a leading figure of Madrid *tablaos* during the sixties and seventies.

¹⁰⁷ Inés Peña Peña comes from Pinini singing family. She was born in Lebrija in 1952.

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