

## **Homage to Macama Jonda: “Flamenco as a tool for interculturalism”** **(Matthew Machin-Autenrieth)**

**Peña la Platería (7th February 2020)**

### **Introduction**

Before I begin, I would like to extend my gratitude to a number of people for helping in the realisation of this event. First, to the Platería itself for hosting, to the president, to Álvaro Gallego for his support and patience in organising the event, and to Carlos Giménez for his unwavering support, enthusiasm and friendship. My relationship with the peña goes back to 2010 and 2012, when I was doing research for my doctorate – it is now a pleasure to be able to stand here today and give something back to the peña and to Granada’s flamenco scene. I would also like to thank the family of José Heredia Maya for allowing me to show the film recording of Macama jonda and to the Centro de Documentación Musical de Andalucía for digitising the film for me. Finally, and by no means least, I would like to thank the musicians who will be performing for us tomorrow – most notably Suhail Serghini and Jalal Chekara for taking part in the event.

My name is Matthew Machin-Autenrieth, I am currently the principal investigator for a European Research Council funded project at the University of Cambridge called ‘Past and Present Musical Encounters across the Strait of Gibraltar’. My research focuses on musical encounters between Spaniards and Moroccans, above all in projects that mix together flamenco and Arab-Andalusian music. And it is from this research that I became interested in Macama jonda, which was the first musical-theatrical production that brought together flamenco and Arab-Andalusian music. But Macama jonda was not only an important representation of interculturalism, but also a production rooted in the flamenco culture of Granada and the Andalusian culture of Tétouan. Therefore, I am delighted to be able to host this event as way of paying homage to Macama Jonda, to its author, to its artists and to the connections between two shared cultures and musics.

In 2016, the Centro de Documentación Musical de Andalucía provided me with a copy of Macama jonda recorded in Seville in 1983. This complete recording isn’t available to the public and so I am delighted to have the opportunity to do this public projection in this ‘palace’ of flamenco. Moreover, I also want to put this production into dialogue with the present. The interculturalism that Macama jonda represents didn’t end in 1983 but continues in the present. And so tomorrow we will celebrate a double concert of fusion with two Moroccan musicians: Suhail Serghini and Jalal Chekara, the nephew of Abdessadaq who performed in Macama jonda

itself. And finally, 2020 is an important year in which to present this project given that it is the tenth anniversary of the death of José Heredia Maya and the tenth anniversary of flamenco's declaration as ICH.

### **Context to the production**

With this presentation, I would like to do three things: first to consider why *Macama jonda* was such a special work, why it was 'one of a kind' particularly at an artistic level. Second, I want to explore *Macama jonda* as a product of its time and the social/political events both within Spain and across the Strait of Gibraltar. And finally, I want to consider the legacy of *Macama jonda* – how it still serves as a reference point for musical exchanges between flamenco and Arab-Andalusian music. Now I'm aware that many of you here will know a great deal about this work (probably far more than me!) and may well have even attended the original performance. But I hope my interpretation of the work might encourage you to view it in a slightly different light, and to contemplate both its artistic and its cultural significance.

But first a little context. *Macama jonda* was a long-time coming – it had been a long-term ambition of Heredia to combine the musics that straddle the Strait of Gibraltar. According to the authors Agustín Molina, Alfredo Sánchez and Antonio Zapata in their book *Pepe Heredia y Almería*, Heredia had visited Morocco during the 1970s and made connections with the Arab-Andalusian orchestra based at the conservatoire of music in Tetouan, which at the time was directed by Mohamed Temsamani. It was here that Heredia met the violin virtuoso and singer Abdessadaq Chekara, subsequently organising concerts for him and members of the orchestra in Spain. According to Molina, in 1980 Heredia organised a concert in Almería that featured the first collaborative encounter between flamenco musicians and the Tetouan orchestra. In Molina's words: "The combination of Lebrijano, Chekara, Enrique de Melchor and the orchestra directed by Tensamani—with only minutes of previous contact, as they didn't know each other—was short, little more than seven minutes, but tremendous" (p. 14). From this event, Heredia and Chekara continued to work closely leading towards the creation of *Macama jonda*. But, Heredia faced a number of problems that almost derailed the project, amongst them the illness of Enrique Morente that left him bed ridden all the way up to the performance and financing issues and the delay or lack of funding from certain institutions. Yet, against all the odds *Macama jonda* was eventually premiered at the Auditorio Municipal de 'Manuel de Falla', on the 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> February 1983.

### **Macama jonda: one of a kind**

What is it about *Macama jonda* that makes it such an enduring work, one of the ‘jewels’ of the flamenco repertoire? Of course, the answer to this question is highly subjective – people will respond in different ways to the artistic and cultural merits of this work. But, there are a number of characteristics that stand out that are worth considering. First, the production had a star cast of flamenco performers investing it with a high level of skill, experience and passion. From the vocal talents of Enrique Morente, Jaime Parrón and Antonia ‘La Negra’, to the *baile* of Manolete and Mariquilla, and Paco Cortes and Miguel Ochando’s mastery of the *toque* – *Macama jonda* paraded some of the flamenco world’s most formidable talent. But also, the production was an ode to Granada and to the integral role the city has played in flamenco’s development. But in recognising the *flamenco* stars of this production, we must not forget the *Moroccan* ones. As mentioned, *Macama jonda* featured the Orchestra of Andalusian Music of Tétouan, directed at the time by the violinist and singer Abdessadaq Chekara – and in understanding the importance of *Macama jonda*, it is vital to recognise the importance of Chekara. He was one of the leading Arab-Andalusians musicians of his age and responsible for popularising Arab-Andalusian music (or *al-Ala* as it is known in Morocco – that is normally a very elite tradition), as well as being renowned as an innovator in related genres such as *chaabi*. Moreover, Abdessadaq and the Chekara family in general were (and still are) central to the musical heritage of the city of Tétouan. And here lies one of the beautiful elements of *Macama jonda*: the production was not only testimony to the talent of its artists, but also to the musical prestige of the so-called ‘sister’ cities of Tétouan and Granada.

But in recognising the star performers, we must also pay homage to the production’s star creator – Pepe Heredia Maya. Heredia was, arguably, one of the flamenco world’s most formidable innovators and *Macama jonda* (like his 1976 work *Camelamos naquerar*) was unique in terms of its artistic production. After months of rehearsals and intense dialogue with the musicians, Heredia Maya created a work that was both theatrical and musical. Indeed, as Heredia Maya said himself in an interview with Paco Espinola (*Diario* 24<sup>th</sup> February 1983): ‘Yes it is theatrical, because it tells a story, and at the same time it is musical, because it is the music that links and develops this story. It’s a story that is told through the music, song, dance and the staging, but it isn’t theatre in the strictest sense’. The combination of the narrative of a wedding between a Moroccan girl from Tétouan and a Gypsy from Granada with stage props, highly choreographed dances (most notably the dance between the ‘novio’ and the ‘novia’) and lyrics written by Heredia that underpinned the story, was highly innovative at the time. In so doing, Heredia had created a sub-genre of ‘flamenco theatre’ – an innovative step in an art that

sometimes reacts uneasily to modernisation and change. The production's innovation also stretched into the technological domain. The live album (produced by Fernando Miranda and distributed by Ariola Eurodisc) was recorded live at the Auditorio Municipal de 'Manuel de Falla'. According to *Ideal* (in an article and interview with Miranda published on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1983), this was to be the most expensive recording in flamenco history at 3 million pesetas. This was because the recording was one of the most technologically advanced of its time. In the article, Miranda lays out some of the technological advancements including the use of 24 microphone channels (in order to edit later on) and the live recording of acoustic instruments.

But the most unique element of this production was the musical fusion of flamenco and Arab-Andalusian music. As stated in an article in *Diario*, 'It is the first time in five centuries in which the musics from both sides of the Strait are reunited'. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, flamencologists and musicologists have debated whether the relationship between Arab or Arab-Andalusian music and flamenco is historically accurate. While it is important to keep in mind that flamenco and Arab-Andalusian music are in many respects very distinct musical systems that have developed in different ways and with distinct histories, there are still undeniable similarities and confluences between them. It is the idea of cultural confluence, of a shared heritage, of a shared musical sensibility that Macama jonda aimed to capture. And, for the first time, in the history of Spanish-Moroccan relations these two related genres were brought into productive, artistic dialogue in a large-scale production. When watching the film, one notices that the fusions are actually relatively limited – for the most part, the andalusi and flamenco components are separate. But there are some defining moments in the production such as the intertwining of vocal styles between Chekara and Morente in the 'Cante de Unión', and the festivity the 'Encuentro final' (combining the chaabi song 'Bent bladi' and 'la Tarara' with lyrics by Heredia) that exhibit the melding together of these two sister musics. As Miguel Ángel González so eloquently says in his review in *Diario* (27<sup>th</sup> February 1983), 'Duende and tarab were merged in close embrace, to the point in which they blended into a single, collective emotion [...] One feels, in many respects, surprised at "not having realised before" quite how close our cultures are'.

### **Macama jonda: a product of its time**

In many respects, Macama jonda was a timeless work of art that spoke to universal messages of cultural dialogue and fraternity. Yet, it was also a product of its time – an artistic response, however subconscious, to social and political events in the early 1980s. At this point, it might be worth elaborating on the academic discipline that I come from – ethnomusicology.

Ethnomusicologists believe that music of any kind cannot be viewed independent of its social, cultural and political contexts. Therefore, we are interested not only in the music itself, but how music is intertwined with culture and society. I like to think: what was going on when this production took place? What social and political events were its artists and audiences experiencing? *Macama jonda* appeared at a defining moment in Spanish history, following the landslide victory for PSOE in 1982 that reshaped Spanish politics and the devolution of powers to the 17 autonomous communities. Significantly, *Macama jonda* was premiered right before the 28 February celebrations three years after the referendum on Andalusian autonomy. A cursory glance through newspapers at the time reveal numerous articles and opinion pieces about the 28-F celebrations and recognition of Andalusian ‘patria’. While I do not want to suggest that *Macama jonda* was explicitly regionalist, the production cannot be separated from a wider sense of regional pride and Andalusian cultural symbolism circulating at the time.

As I’ve been told by people who witnessed the premiere, *Macama jonda* emerged in a generally optimistic social and political climate as the final throes of the Franco regime were dismantled. For musicians and artists this was a particularly pivotal moment as they could foreground their own identity and innovations without fear of cultural censorship or reprisals. As the music scholar Esther Pérez-Villalba states: ‘artists may have felt confident that the process of democratization that had already started in Spain was going in the right direction. Thus, they could “relax” and give more prominence to apparently less political issues’ (2007: 235). Indeed, this was apparent in Heredia’s interpretation of the production – in many interviews he said that the show was about happiness, about fraternity and a departure from the politics and social message of *Camelamos naquerar* that sought to raise awareness of the marginalisation of the Gitano community.

Yet, we might still observe traces of politics in *Macama jonda*. As Pérez-Villalba tells us, many popular music artists during and following the Spanish transition sought to rewrite social norms around marriage, love, sexuality that were entrenched during the regime. *Macama jonda* depicts the martial union of two cultural ‘Others’ (Gitanos and Moroccans), both minority groups in Spain that had faced significant discrimination during the Franco regime. The marriage of Gitano and Moroccan was a stark departure from the stringent social norms around marriage that were prevalent only a decade earlier – such a display of ethnic union would not have been thinkable. Therefore, while *Macama jonda* does not possess the political clout of *Camelamos Naquerar*, there is still an underlying message of social freedom and the promotion of Gitano and Moroccan identity.

For me, however, the significance of *Macama jonda* is most interesting when we consider Spanish-Moroccan relations at the time. In an interview with Paco Espinola (*Diario* 24<sup>th</sup> February 1983), Heredia said that *Macama jonda*: ‘this cultural encounter has become a reality as an invitation to fraternity and happiness, which couldn’t be more appropriate or necessary as it is today’. He doesn’t expand on why this encounter couldn’t be more necessary as it is today – but when considering Spanish-Moroccan diplomatic relations at the time, we might see how *Macama jonda* was more than just an artistic work; it was also a form of cultural rapprochement. Following the independence of Morocco from French and Spanish colonial rule in 1956, relations with its neighbour across the strait had been difficult particularly given the continued presence of Spanish troops and longstanding debates around the sovereignty of Ceuta and Melilla. Indeed, as is apparent in newspaper articles at the time of *Macama jonda*, there were very high tensions between Spain and Morocco around the question of territorial sovereignty. The Arab Parliamentary Union that had held its congress in Rabat just weeks before *Macama jonda*, supported Morocco in putting forward proposals for negotiations to begin around the sovereignty of Ceuta and Melilla. The Spanish Government refused to negotiate, and the crisis generated negative press in the country.

Yet parallel to these tensions, the historian Jonathan Stenner argues that from the late 1970s ‘the countries embarked upon an ambitious programme of scientific and cultural cooperation’ (2018: 5). *Macama jonda* might be understood as an example of this increasing emphasis on cultural cooperation, as a way of overcoming borders and recognising a shared cultural heritage, at a time of tension at a political level. And, in the aftermath of the Franco regime, Spain wanted to expand its diplomatic relations with other Arab States and circulation of wealth and power (through petro-dollars) in the Persian Gulf. As historians of this period argue, Spanish relations with the Arab world were (and still are) to a certain extent predicated on Spain’s relations with Morocco. In the summer of 1983, *Macama jonda* was performed to celebrate the end of Ramadan at the luxurious Puento Romano hotel complex in Marbella – a city described at the time by one journalist (*ABC*) as the ‘colony of the petrodollars’ due to the high level of Arab investment. Alongside celebrating the end of Ramadan, the performance was part of an introduction to the Imperial Falcon Club: an exclusive membership circle that offered advice to Arab tycoons on foreign investment and travel arrangements in Europe. *Macama jonda*, therefore, was not just an artistic encounter, but fundamentally a cultural encounter and a form of rapprochement and diplomacy between two cultures that have not always seen eye to eye. Following a performance of *Macama jonda* in Barcelona, one journalist wrote in *La Vanguardia* (15<sup>th</sup> September 1983): ‘If many years ago a French king was able to say that the

Pyrenees no longer exist, then performances like Macama jonda lead us to say, with much more reason, that the Strait of Gibraltar no longer exists’.

### **Macama jonda: echoes in the present**

Close to 30 years on from the original performance, it is worth reflecting on the legacy of Macama jonda. At one level, this legacy can be keenly felt in the continued performance of set pieces from the production. Songs such as ‘La Novia’ and ‘Encuentro final’ continue to be performed by Spanish and Moroccan artists. Last November, I was pleased (and somewhat surprised!) to hear Encuentro final performed by the Granada-based group CusCus Flamenco (led by the Moroccan musician Hamid Ajbar) at a concert in London. But beyond set pieces from the production, Heredia’s experimentation with musical fusion has left a lasting imprint to this day. For many musicians on both sides of the Strait, Macama jonda is more than simply a moment in time, but a process – a source of inspiration for a generation of Spanish and Moroccan artists who continue to experiment with the links and affinities between flamenco and Arab-Andalusian music.

I also believe that the production demonstrates the legacy of an often-forgotten influence on flamenco – that of Moroccans. A number of Moroccan musicians are deeply involved in the art of flamenco, an art form that has become an intrinsic part of their own musical and cultural being, and a way of reconciling their own cultural identity with that of Andalusian identity. And, it is above all in the city of Granada that Moroccan musicians have made a space for themselves in the annals of flamenco history – a city that stands as testimony to intercultural dialogue. From Mohammed Fadeh Benyaich, who was one of the early members of this peña, to the musical innovations of Abdessadaq Chekara and his orchestra in Macama jonda, to the present-day collaborations of artists such as Suhail Serghini and Jalal Chekara amongst others, Moroccan musicians have left an indelible mark on the flamenco scene of this city. But ultimately, the most important legacy of Macama jonda is its promotion of interculturalism and of dialogue across the Strait of Gibraltar. In an age where division, intolerance and populism are on the rise, Macama jonda’s message of tolerance is, arguably, more relevant and powerful today than it was in 1983.