

Flamenco Guitar Essentials

for students of [Leah Kruszewski on Lessonface](#)

Flamenco Vocabulary

- cante** – flamenco singing
- baile** – flamenco dance
- guitarra** – flamenco guitar (sometimes referred to as 'toque', which means 'playing')
- palmas** – flamenco hand-clapping, essential to supporting the music and dance, and like an instrument in itself
- compás** – rhythmic cycle, like a 'measure' or 'bar' in written music. Most flamenco palos have a compás of 4 or 12 beats.
- palo** – style of flamenco music. What palo you are playing will determine the compás, key, tempo range, cante melodies, and general mood you must convey. Common palos include Solea, Alegrias, Tangos, Tarantos, Bulerias...

Flamenco Guitar Vocabulary

- falseta** – a guitar solo, more intricate musically and technically than accompaniment to singing and dance
- rasgueo** – rhythmic strumming using the right-hand fingers (aka 'rasgueado')
- pulgar** – Spanish word for 'thumb'. In flamenco we use the thumb to play bold rest strokes (that is, coming to rest on the string below).
- alzapua** – flamenco thumb strumming technique that combines thumb rest stroke with downward and upward strums
- arpeggio** – using the right hand fingers to play the strings one at a time (usually free stroke)
- tremolo** – using the right hand fingers to create the illusion of a sustained melody on a single string (like an arpeggio, but on only one string)
- picado** – strong flamenco rest stroke using the fingers (coming to rest on the string above), usually alternating index and middle
- golpe** – a rhythmic tap on the body of the guitar, often at the same time as a rasgueo or alzapua stroke.

Basic Flamenco History and Culture

- Flamenco music arose from a combination of Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Gypsy, Spanish folklore, and (more recently) South American musical influences.
- While the roots of flamenco extend back much farther, the word 'flamenco' first appeared in the mid-1800s to describe the combination of cante, baile, and guitar.
- Flamenco developed throughout a series of historical eras in a variety of contexts, including music cafes, formal concerts, flamenco clubs ('peñas'), and late-night parties ('juergas')
- Flamenco in its pure and complete form consists of cante, baile, guitar, and palmas. Playing solo flamenco guitar is a good way to get started and learn the technical basics of flamenco. However, to understand the musical context of what you're playing, you must listen to and watch flamenco in its complete form.
- In typical 'tablao'-style flamenco show (the kind you're likely to see in Seville) the performers improvise within a traditional structure. The singer, dancer, and guitarist communicate their intentions and transitions. The singer draws from a repertoire of cante that belongs to the palo. The guitarist may play falsetas that he/she has played before, and the dancer may dance steps that he/she invented earlier. However, these ingredients are put together spontaneously, without choreography or rehearsals.
- A typical flamenco show features at least two palos with dance, one palo with singing and guitar, and one guitar solo. Most performances end with a 'Fin de Fiesta' of the palo 'Bulerias' in a casual, festive atmosphere. Friends of the performers may come to the stage and participate in this final part.

Listening to Flamenco

Listening to flamenco music is critical to understanding the genre and developing your sound as a guitarist. For starters, check out this [Youtube playlist](#) I put together for flamenco newcomers. It features four common flamenco palos (musical styles) that I often start with: Solea, Alegrias, Tarantos, and Bulerias por Solea. Some videos are solo guitar themes, others also feature cante (singing) and baile (dance).

You'll also want to explore flamenco extensively on your own. Below are some flamenco guitarists to start with. When we start learning flamenco, we usually begin with more traditional guitar repertoire. Firstly, because it tends to be technically and musically simpler. Secondly, because it's important to understand the roots of flamenco in order to interpret modern material. Listen to all eras of flamenco music, just keep in mind that it's the earlier players whose sound you'll be emulating during your first couple years of study.

1. Paco de Lucia (1947 - 2014)
2. Sabicas (1912 - 1990)
3. Rafael Riqueni (b. 1962)
4. Moraito Chico (1956 - 2011)
5. Paco Peña (b. 1942)
6. Diego del Gastor (1908-1973)
7. Niño Ricardo (1904 - 1972)
8. Paco Cepero (b. 1942)
9. Manolo Sanlucar (b. 1943)
10. Gerardo Nuñez (b. 1961)
11. Tomatito (b. 1958)
12. Vicente Amigo (b. 1967)