

FLAMENCO IMPROVISATION:

**MODAL
IMPROVISATION
AND
MELODIC
CONSTRUCTION
IN THE
FLAMENCO
ENVIRONMENT**

VOLUME

2

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PREFACE

Many books have been written about modal improvisation from a theoretical perspective. However, no effort has been made to apply this theoretical knowledge to the practical specifics of flamenco music, with its modal, harmonic and rhythmical peculiarities.

In the last 30 years, the modal and harmonic language of flamenco has become increasingly sophisticated due to constant interaction between flamencos and musicians of other genres. Scales such as superlocrian, diminished, and whole tone have become an integral part of the modal expression of flamenco. In terms of harmony, the repertoire of chords and chord progressions in contemporary flamenco is no less sophisticated than in jazz. The use of harmonic substitutions (such as direct, indirect, tritonal, modal, and imaginary) has become an intrinsic part of the modern flamenco musician's musical lexicon, even if it is only intuitively understood.

The new generation of flamenco guitar aficionados have a deeper knowledge of music than the previous generation, and are hungry for well-structured, well-presented, thoroughly-explained teaching material that covers all of the theoretical and practical aspects of modal improvisation in the flamenco environment.

This course covers a wide variety of issues related to modal improvisation in flamenco, including the seven basic modes, the flamenco modes that originated in Arabic modal system called *Maqam*, and the use of the pentatonic, heptatonic and octatonic scales, both internal and external. It offers a detailed analysis of modal harmony, both basic and harmony that is specific to flamenco, as well as a compendium of permutational patterns and modal licks. The practical part of this course is presented in both notation and *tab*, which makes it useful for guitarists as well as musicians from other genres interested in using modal improvisation in flamenco.

Enrique Vargas, Madrid, 2014

THE ORIGIN OF THE MODAL LANGUAGE OF FLAMENCO

In the previous book of this course, we analyzed the melodic and harmonic aspects of the basic modes that, while they don't form the main part of flamenco's modal language, are necessary to understand its complex oriental modalities. From this point on, we will deal specifically with the expressive tools of flamenco: modal, rhythmic, and harmonic.

Without getting into the details of historico-musicological aspects of this musical genre, I consider it necessary to do a brief synopsis of the origins and evolution of flamenco's modal and harmonic language in order to explain its characteristics and particularities.

Flamenco emerged from the rich modalities of Al-Andalus, whose modal language contained a substantial number of scalar components. However, it lacked harmony, something that is common for oriental music in general. After the Reconquista, musicians educated in occidental music began to arrive. Andalusia became a melting pot where oriental modalities and occidental harmony began to fuse, creating the basis for the art form that is known today as flamenco.

In order to understand in depth the nature of the flamenco modalities, it would be necessary to analyze the basic concepts of the Arabic modal system called *Maqam*, which underlies all the modal language of the Orient and forms the essence of the flamenco sound peculiarities. Unlike European music, which is based on 12 semitones, *Maqam* divides the scale into 24 quarter tones. Upon their fusion with European harmony, the oriental modes became adapted to the 12-tone system of equal temperament used in occidental music, therefore losing the quarter tones. The *Maqam* consists of 72 heptatonic scales, and these scales are divided into shorter segments called *jins* (*ajna* in plural), which means "a type" or "a kind" in Arabic. These segments are mostly tetrachordal, although trichordal and pentachordal *ajna* also exist. The *ajna* are used to construct different heptatonic scales, combining these segments in order to create a multitude of textures and sonorities. The denominations and classifications of *ajna* differ depending on the schools and branches of the *Maqam*. Each oriental country has its own modal system: *maqâm*, *nagham*, *naghma*, *tab*, *sana* in Arabic countries; *âvâz*, *dastgâh* o *naghmè* in Iran; *makam* in Turkey; *mugam* in Azerbaijan, and *makom* in Central Asia.

We will analyze the *ajna* that are in the origin and essence of the flamenco modal language, namely: *Hijaz*, *Ajam*, *Nahawand*, *Nikriz*, *Kurd*, and *Zamzama*. These *ajna*, combined in different ways, produce different types of heptatonic and sometimes octatonic scales. Since this manual is mainly for guitarists, all of the scales and melodic patterns will be written in the tonalities most common for the guitar.

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E *MAQAM ZANJARAN*

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F# *MAQAM SHAHNAZ*

F# *MAQAM KURD* b5

F# *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM*

F# *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM* EXTENDED

F# *MAQAM ZANJARAN*

F# *MAQAM ZANJARAN* b5

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210

B *MAQAM HIJAZ*

B *MAQAM SHAHNAZ*

B *MAQAM KURD* b5

B *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM*

B *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM* EXTENDED

B *MAQAM ZANJARAN*

B *MAQAM ZANJARAN* b5

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233

G# *MAQAM HIJAZ*

G# *MAQAM SHAHNAZ*

G# *MAQAM KURD* b5

G# *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM*

G# *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM* EXTENDED

G# *MAQAM ZANJARAN*

G# *MAQAM ZANJARAN* b5

THE SCALES OF THE *HIJAZ* AND *KURD* FAMILIES IN D#
IN VERTICAL FINGERINGS

258

D# *MAQAM HIJAZ*

D# *MAQAM SHAHNAZ*

D# *MAQAM KURD* b5

D# *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM*

D# *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM* EXTENDED

D# *MAQAM ZANJARAN*

D# *MAQAM ZANJARAN* b5

THE SCALES OF THE *HIJAZ* AND *KURD* FAMILIES IN C#
IN VERTICAL FINGERINGS

280

C# *MAQAM HIJAZ*

C# *MAQAM SHAHNAZ*

C# *MAQAM KURD* b5

C# *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM*

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C# *MAQAM ZANJARAN*

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E *MAQAM KURD*

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E *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM* EXTENDED

E *MAQAM ZANJARAN*

E *MAQAM ZANJARAN* b5

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IN HORIZONTAL FINGERING

327

A *MAQAM HIJAZ*

A *MAQAM SHAHNAZ*

A *MAQAM KURD*

A *MAQAM KURD* b5

A *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM*

A *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM* EXTENDED

A *MAQAM ZANJARAN*

A *MAQAM ZANJARAN* b5

THE SCALES OF THE *HIJAZ* AND *KURD* FAMILIES IN F# (*POR TARANTA*)
IN HORIZONTAL FINGERING 335

- F# *MAQAM HIJAZ*
- F# *MAQAM SHAHNAZ*
- F# *MAQAM KURD*
- F# *MAQAM KURD* b5
- F# *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM*
- F# *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM* EXTENDED
- F# *MAQAM ZANJARAN*
- F# *MAQAM ZANJARAN* b5

THE SCALES OF THE *HIJAZ* AND *KURD* FAMILIES IN B (*POR GRANAÍNA*)
IN HORIZONTAL FINGERING 343

- B *MAQAM HIJAZ*
- B *MAQAM SHAHNAZ*
- B *MAQAM KURD*
- B *MAQAM KURD* b5
- B *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM*
- B *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM* EXTENDED
- B *MAQAM ZANJARAN*
- B *MAQAM ZANJARAN* b5

THE SCALES OF THE *HIJAZ* AND *KURD* FAMILIES IN G# (*POR MINERA*)
IN HORIZONTAL FINGERING 351

- G# *MAQAM HIJAZ*
- G# *MAQAM SHAHNAZ*
- G# *MAQAM KURD*
- G# *MAQAM KURD* b5
- G# *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM*
- G# *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM* EXTENDED
- G# *MAQAM ZANJARAN*
- G# *MAQAM ZANJARAN* b5

THE SCALES OF THE *HIJAZ* AND *KURD* FAMILIES IN C#
IN HORIZONTAL FINGERING 359

- C# *MAQAM HIJAZ*
- C# *MAQAM SHAHNAZ*
- C# *MAQAM KURD*
- C# *MAQAM KURD* b5
- C# *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM*
- C# *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM* EXTENDED
- C# *MAQAM ZANJARAN*
- C# *MAQAM ZANJARAN* b5

THE SCALES OF THE *HIJAZ* AND *KURD* FAMILIES IN D#
IN HORIZONTAL FINGERING 367

- D# *MAQAM HIJAZ*
- D# *MAQAM SHAHNAZ*
- D# *MAQAM KURD*
- D# *MAQAM KURD* b5

D# *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM*

D# *MAQAM SABA ZAMZAM EXTENDED*

D# *MAQAM ZANJARAN*

D# *MAQAM ZANJARAN b5*

THE SCALES OF THE AJAM FAMILY (IONIAN ENVIRONMENT)
IN C MAJOR IN HORIZONTAL FINGERING

374

C *MAQAM AJAM*

C *MAQAM SHAWQ AFZA*

THE SCALES OF THE AJAM FAMILY (IONIAN ENVIRONMENT)
IN A MAJOR IN HORIZONTAL FINGERING

376

A *MAQAM AJAM*

A *MAQAM SHAWQ AFZA*

THE SCALES OF THE AJAM FAMILY (IONIAN ENVIRONMENT)
IN E MAJOR IN HORIZONTAL FINGERING

378

E *MAQAM AJAM*

E *MAQAM SHAWQ AFZA*

GLOSSARY OF FLAMENCO TERMS



AJNA AND THE HEPTATONIC SCALES BASED ON THEM

The following *ajna* are the main components of the flamenco modes:

KURD (tetrachord)

1/2 step 1 step 1 step

T
A
B
D
G
E

2 3 0 2

AJAM (trichord)

1 step 1 step

T
A
B
D
G
E

3 0 2

NAHAWAND (tetrachord)

1 step 1/2 step 1 step

T
A
B
D
G
E

2 0 1 3

These *letras*, as you can see, are harmonized in a traditional way, just with the tonic and the dominant¹, as follows²:

Beats	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
compás 1	-	-	V7	-	-	-	-	-	-	I	-	-	
compás 2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	V7	-	-	
compás 3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	I	-	-	
compás 4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	V7	-	-	
compás 5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	I	-	-	
compás 6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	V7	-	-	
compás 7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	I	-	-	

Recently, these substitutions have become popular in these *letras*:

Beats	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
compás 1	-	-	V7	-	-	-	-	-	-	I	-	-	
compás 2	-	-	VI7	-	-	-	-	-	-	IIm7	-	-	
compás 3	-	-	V7	-	-	-	-	-	-	I	-	-	
compás 4	-	-	VI7	-	-	-	-	-	-	IIm7	-	-	
compás 5	-	-	V7	-	-	-	-	-	-	I	-	-	
compás 6	-	-	VI7	-	-	-	-	-	-	IIm7	-	-	
compás 7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	I	-	-	

1 In addition to the harmonic symbols in these *letras*, the roman numerals of the degrees are included to facilitate transposition into other keys.

2 The harmonic changes in a flamenco 12-beat *compás* occur in places that are somewhat unusual for a Western ear, namely, on the beats 3, 6, 8, 10 and 12. Therefore, in order to avoid confusion, the beat numbers are indicated above the chord symbols to which they correspond. If there is no chord symbol below one or any of the other numbers, it means that the previous chord is still valid, until another chord symbol appears. A double bar marks the end of the 12-beat *compás*.