



## Paco de Lucía, Made in the USA

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Francisco Sánchez Gomes (Algeciras, Cádiz, 1947/Yucatán, México, 2014) was always deeply and sentimentally Andalusian, but the cosmopolitan dimension of Paco de Lucía would be poorly understood if we do not place him in those long American tours, or in a woven musical map of complicities such as those of Carlos Santana, who knelt before him during a concert in which he was simply supposed to be the opening act. There were also lights and shadows, such as the relationship he had with Al Dimeola or his happy companionship with Chick Corea.

Long before Paco de Lucía played a little role in a western: he appeared as a Mexican guitarist in that British western, “Hanne Caulder”, by Burt Kennedy, filmed in Almería, the guitarist from Algeciras had already toured the United States, from end to end. It was Pepe de Lucía, Paco’s singer brother, who arrived there first, aboard the company of José Greco, the Italian American dancer who trained with La Argentinita.

“I arrived in New York with him and I was amazed. Seeing those skyscrapers, it took me three days without sleep, hallucinating. From the impression, I saw strange things in my head,” Pepe told me thirty years ago (Téllez 1994).

A long North American tour awaited Pepe, but Paco had to continue in Madrid: “After a month, I told Greco in Denver (Nebraska) that if my brother did not come, I would return to Spain. He told me that “It was crazy, there were already two guitarists there, Manolo Barón and Ricardo Modrego” (Téllez 1994).

Ricardo Modrego told José Manuel Gamboa how he met the young genius: “José Greco hired Manolo Barón - Manolo Franco’s uncle - and me as guitarists; Pepe came as singer. We started the tour in New York. Then Greco in the United States was Mister CocaCola was very well known, and they offered him all the best. Paco joined us in Chicago. It is known that the father forced things so that Greco also included him. I don’t know if he threatened to bring Pepe here if Paco didn’t go. “I don’t know, it could have been one of those things because with the two guitars that were going for a show it’s enough. In short, Greco accepted and Paco joined us in Chicago, after a month and a half or two months” (Gamboa 2003).

“Greco, one of the days of the tour, in the hotel cafeteria, patted me on the back and told me “your brother is coming to Chicago. And I jumped for joy. I waited for my brother there. I remember it very chubby, at fourteen years old. I had bangs then. Imagine, two children in New York and in all those cities full of skyscrapers,” Pepe told me (Téllez 1994).

So, Paco arrived in a snowy Chicago and, in one of his first interventions on stage, during a solo in Los Angeles, he was surprised because the audience was whistling at him. The very young

guitarist thought he had done it wrong because in Spain they whistled out of disgust and there he discovered that it was out of enthusiasm.

“In the United States, the public was always very good, an effusive public that continually shows you what it feels, unlike others, very polite, who does not even dare to shout,” he would describe decades later) (Téllez 2015).

His participation in that tour was decisive for the formation of Paco. Until then, he had not appeared in any company. His brother Ramón de Algeciras, yes, in Juanito Valderrama, which was where he learned or performed Niño Ricardo’s falsetas that he transmitted to his younger brother. Here, on that long journey through the United States, he and Ricardo Mondrego exchanged knowledge: “When he came to the company, well, those things that all guitarists do in the dressing room when you pick up the guitar. ‘Hey, I like that falseta’; ‘I’ll give you the falseta’; ‘Hey, what if we make him a second voice? Let’s see how it turns out.’ That’s how we started,” Mondrego told Gamboa (Gamboa 2003).

With Mondrego, Paco de Lucía recorded three albums for Philips: *Two Flamenco Guitars* (1964), 12 songs by García Lorca for guitar and 12 hits for 2 flamenco guitars (both in 1965).

“Paco stayed in the company long enough to learn that a guitarist must know how to accompany dancing or singing. But, above all, you must know how to accompany that inner rhythm enjoyed by all those who know that talent can be a gift of nature, but that it withers if not watered by learning and passion,” Pepe de Lucía tells me (Téllez 2004).

For Paco, as he testified to me, “it was a radical change.” To his daughter Casilda, in an interview published by Telva, he recounted some other details of that trip forty years later: “As I was going alone, I was very scared of the transfer that I had to do in New York to connect with Chicago, but on the plane I made friends with an American couple and I spent the entire trip playing guitar for them. Since they liked it a lot, they then accompanied me to the boarding gate. At the airport I met My brother Pepe and El Greco’s manager, Mr. Nonenbacher, were waiting, an old drunk who looked like a gangster who couldn’t stop wiping the sweat from his face even in the street, with three meters of snow. The best thing about the trip was that Later, at the hotel, I found \$50 in the phone book, half my weekly salary!” (Sánchez Varela 2010).

Paco missed his mother’s custard, but he liked the United States from the first moment: “America is a country without complexes. I came from an Andalusia in which everyone picked on everyone, with some neighbors, Las Boqueronas, who when I passed by said, “look how chubby the Portuguese woman’s son is.” Suddenly I arrived there, where fat people were happily walking down the street with their white thighs in the air without anyone laughing and that liberated me. It was like having spent a season at López Ibor,” he says, referring to the famous Spanish psychiatric clinic (Téllez 2015).

Francisco Sánchez Gomes was chubby at that time. Hence his nickname, “Mambrú”, which was a chubby doll that appeared on the labels of some Portuguese chocolates that, from time to time, his maternal family sent him.

When Paquito Sánchez Gómez arrived in Chicago, it was the last days of 1962 or the first of '63. They had claimed him through the United States consulate, and he had to be taken to the airport by his father and the police, because he was not old enough to boarding alone: "For me," he said, "going to the United States was as exciting as going to the moon."

With Greco, he embarked on two tours, the first, lasting nine months, and the second, in 1966, in which Pepe no longer accompanied him, adding two years between them, between the Kennedy and Johnson presidencies. His road map not only included North America, but also Europe, Africa, the Philippines and Australia, at a rate of one hundred dollars a week, which he religiously sent to his family: "It was more than I had anticipated," he himself confirms. Halfway through the tour, he was promoted, as Paco confirmed to his friend José Luis Marín: "The second guitarist played with the first, with Ricardo Modrego, a dance number with some falsetas already set up. When it got bad, Paco said he could do it and the company gave up (Téllez 1994).

Pepe de Lucía bought a Leika with which he impressed the fragments of that trip: both of them jumped into a pool or made funny faces at their tour companions, posed in airports or in front of the skyline of the big cities through which they were traveling. Paco and Pepe, with a Mexican hat, or exchanging their roles as singer and guitarist, or with designer shoes upon their return to Spain on a packet that made the return route from New York to Gibraltar. It was September 1963, shortly before boarding the train that would take them from Algeciras to Madrid, again with their father, who had come to pick them up.

They will also be photographed at airports, from Sydney – where he ran into an amateur guitarist whom he ended up sending to the town and court to be taught by his father – or to Montevideo. Pepe de Lucía assured me that during his stay in Las Vegas, Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin gave him a few cents to play the slot machines at a Casino. Fantasy of the young singer? I don't know, there must be something about the water when they bless it because on one occasion, I told Chano Lobato that, when he relieved himself by telling anecdotes between songs, he reminded me of the rat-pack: "Have you noticed?" – was surprised – "I saw them perform in Las Vegas." "I told him that he looked like Marlon Brando there," Curro Sánchez jokes in response to his father's pose as if he were a pharaoh of the city (Téllez 2015). Broadway looks like a lonely avenue in another black and white photo. Like the surroundings of the Golden Gate in San Francisco, next to which Paco de Lucía poses as if the rest of the Bay had not yet been discovered by the Franciscans. Manolo Barón, the other player in José Greco's company, was amazed upon his return to Spain that Paco had been able to create a second voice for the guitar in no time, so that they would not have to all three play the same thing: "That child is a demon," Baron concluded.

"Pepe says that the tour had its good and bad moments," writes Donn E. Pohren, "but, being children as they were, they took it all with good pleasure. For example, they were surprised that the two of them, already being little kids, had to sharing a single bed on the train from New York to Las Vegas (about 4,000 km), while Greco had an entire compartment to himself, but they discussed it among themselves and decided that this should be a grown-up thing" (Pohren 1992).

Ricardo Modrego, for example, claims that Paco's discovery by Sabicas occurred during that first tour with Greco, following a flamenco meeting at the Granada restaurant - Gamboa, who collects

this information, points out that perhaps it was actually the Granados restaurant, better Granados Cafe, at 125 Macdougall Street--, a flamenco stop in the heart of Greenwich Village.

“Sabicas – Modrego recalls – was with the wardrobe lady, an Asturian woman. Diego, Sabas’s brother, also came. They serve us some New York-style tapas and, come on, let’s get out the guitars. Paco played and Sabicas said to himself: ‘What is this?’. His face has already changed. Because the one who was most popular at that time, the one who had fame was Pepito, who sang like angels. He sang like an old man. And that touched Sabicas a lot. But when he saw Paco, he was very impressed” (Gamboa 2003).

It was then that Paco began to speak broken English, rudiments that were passed on to him by his father in Algeciras, and which he perfected later: “I have always had the impression that I chatter in Indian, I don’t get used to it, it seems very strange to me” (Téllez 1994).

Even in 1966, he wrote to his family saying: “You know that I am very good at English. Since I came from Australia, I have made much more progress, but the more I advance the more I realize how difficult it is to speak correctly. I believe that if I were for six or seven more months here I would be able to speak almost well, because as I told you once, Beltrán (referring to one of the assistants in José Greco’s company) speaks it quite well, and when I don’t know something he tells it to me. I ask him and if he doesn’t know it either, we look it up in a very good dictionary that he has. Also, in hotels there is almost always television, and I also learn a lot by watching it.”

Through the letters that Paco writes with careful calligraphy, we can follow the tour, from Alabama to Jacksonville, from Daytona Beach to Fredonia or Tampa, Florida. In them, he tells how El Greco - that’s what he called him, like the painter - paid them religiously even on the days when there was no performance. The money, until he became independent after his wedding, was managed by his father. However, he never lacked to spend or lend. In one of the first interviews he gave, he claimed that money only interested him “in how much I need it to eat and dress.”

Do you earn a lot?

Let’s say that I am better paid than a bricklayer in Spain. But not much more.

On the first American tour, Paco and Pepe bought several pans so that he could make his own food: “He earned 100 dollars a week,” he explained to journalist Sol Alameda, in the pages of ‘El País’, “and if he had to I had nothing left to pay for restaurants. So I went with my brother from hotel to hotel with the pots and pans. And they kicked us out of all the hotels because the smell filled the building and we covered the walls with fried tomatoes. But all the members from the ballet they cooked in the room” (Alameda 1994).

Paco de Lucía’s first solo performance in the United States would take place on an undetermined date in those years, at the Guitar Society in New York. But the United States had other surprises in store for him: “There,” he says, “I discovered Sabicas and Mario Escudero, because in Spain at that time we loved Niño Ricardo, who was the guitarist who taught our entire generation, he was a bit like the teacher of everyone. Sabicas and Escudero were hardly known here, until later

the albums they recorded in America began to arrive. I saw in Sabicas a new way of playing, something new..." (Téllez 2015).

"What do you think of the new flamencos, the young generation?" Sabicas was asked: "There are too many who are good, but I adore Paquito, little Paco de Lucía. He is my true disciple."

"Did he study with you?"

"No. But he studied my recordings," Sabicas declared proudly. "He came to New York younger, on tour with José Greco. And he came to see me. He told me that he had listened to all my recordings. And he played the guitar for me. I watched his hands, how he moved his fingers, and it was then that I realized what he would become" (Téllez 2015).

Paco de Lucía must have known the album that Sabicas had just released in 1961 and on the back cover of which one could read: "Sabicas constantly lives among flamenco artists, whether in New York, during his travels or at his home in Mexico City. He spends the day and the evenings playing, and he likes to receive visits from other guitarists. He does not show at all the traditional suspicion regarding teaching others his original falsetas, but, on the contrary, he spends his hours teaching them. But, as he lamented, a guitarist, after one of these sessions: 'He knows perfectly well that no one but him can play his variations properly'" (Téllez 2015).

At least, Manuel Cano - who considered Sabicas as a bridge between the traditional guitar and "a new virtuoso, vibrant, sonorous and flamenco guitar" - must have spoken to the boy Paco, whom he heard in Algeciras, at the cork factory of Reyes Benítez, of that Navarrese guitarist surrounded by skyscrapers. Paco insists that he had enormous respect for Sabicas and it made him cringe to play in front of him: "I played, but not with the tuberculous guitar that he wanted to give me in front of many artists, but with his, which was enormous" (Téllez 2015).

From The Pick-Bankhead hotel, between Fifth North and Thirty-Third, in Birmingham, Alabama, the young Paco de Lucía, now 19 years old, draws his pen to tell his impressions to his family, on March 3, year 66: "We have been in New York for three days standing still, as you already know, but Sabicas was not there, however there is an Argentine guitarist there who is a very good friend of Sabicas and he told Rafael El Negro and his wife that Sabicas is crazy about to hear me play and that when we return to New York, which will be at the beginning of April, they are going to organize a party in which Sabicas and all his friends will be there, just to hear me play, so I am "shit", because I don't know if I will look good or not" (Téllez 1994).

Rafael El Negro's wife was, naturally, the dancer Matilde Coral, who assured me that Antonio Sánchez Pecino had been asked to take care of Paco, since he was traveling alone and without Pepe. They accompanied him to the supermarket and tried to prevent the young guitarist from surreptitiously drinking the cartons of milk or juice there so as not to have to pay for them. Or they paid for it themselves, later, so that there would be no problems.

"Paco attaches tremendous importance to that first acquaintance with Sabicas," says his friend José Luis Marín. "Sabicas, in New York, systematically went to see every flamenco artist who came there. He always asked who came and who didn't. Sabicas He didn't know Paco, but he arrived at the hotel asking which flamencos were coming on tour. Paco was sleeping and they woke him up.

Sabicas was listening to him for a while. It was then that he told him, very good, Paquito, but a flamenco shouldn't play the things of another but to create his own things. Paco interpreted things by Niño Ricardo but from that moment on, he spent the tour playing the only two or three falsetas that he himself had created" (Téllez 1994).

At this point, the musician from Algeciras does not know why Sabicas advised him that: "I don't know if he really said it to help me or a little out of arrogance, because I only played the music of Niño Ricardo. I don't know exactly why he told me that, "But what I do know is that he influenced me a lot. He told me that a guitarist should play his own music, that he didn't have to copy anyone," Paco told me, knowing that if he had played falsetas by Sabicas that night, maybe he wouldn't. I would have told him the same (Téllez 1994).

The truth is that it was the same advice that he received at that time from Mario Escudero, whom he met in 1963: "That each guitarist should make his own music," Paco confessed to Javier Robes, in an interview published in 1990 by the magazine "Panorama." "I was aware that I played well but that I was greatly influenced by El Niño Ricardo. Then I began to compose" (Robes 1990). After those first meetings, the Big Apple would bring them together again: "In 1970 or 1971, Paco de Lucía played in the small auditorium of the Spanish Institute in New York. Then, Sabicas went to the dressing room to talk to Paco, alone. Maybe I was assuming too much, but I felt like I was witnessing the passing of the torch, although that didn't mean that Sabicas at that time liked what Paco was doing, wise music," writes Brook Zern on his blog, who remembers that the the star of that evening was Andy Warhol, who arrived there accompanied by some of the members of the Velvet Underground.

Zern remembers him impeccably dressed in black, "but I couldn't say if I was impressed by Paco's way of playing or by his person."

"Young Paco might seem almost hauntingly beautiful, I thought. I took photographs of both, but they didn't turn out well," adds Zern, knowing that at least one image of that meeting with Warhol exists, which the Sánchez family, as is often the case, has lost (Zern).

Sabicas, with certain ups and downs of course, maintained a clear affection for that child for a long time: "Paquito came to New York when he was fifteen years old," he declared to Jaleo magazine, from San Diego, California. It reminded me of myself when I was starting out. I used to like that very much; a good boy, very well educated and plays very well. He's spent some time here with me. At that time, he was learning but he already played very, very, very well, and he will always play well, because for him it is something natural (Chileno 1981).

Over time, Sabicas - perhaps out of envy of his fame? - moderated his praise for Paco and even incurred criticism. He even said that only the fingers had evolved on the guitar. He also did not like one bit that Paco ended up incorporating into his shows instruments that he considered inappropriate for flamenco, such as the electric bass, the flute or the cajon: "Yes, but I don't get angry," Francisco Sánchez admitted to Paco Espíola, in the magazine. *Tiempo* - I was in front and he said it for me, he attacked me while I threw flowers at him all the time, because I think it is my obligation. He has been sitting in the easy chair his entire life and suddenly He sees that his way of playing is no longer done, although he still has followers. The new generations follow another way

of playing and Sabicas cannot admit it because that would be saying that what he does is no longer worth it. It is logical that everything he says is justifying himself” (Espinola 1989).

“Until I discovered Sabicas, I thought that God was Niño Ricardo, and in some way I learned from his school and his style, but when I met Sabicas I realized that there was something more in the guitar. With Sabicas, I discovered a clean sound that I had never heard, a speed that I was also unaware of until that moment and, in short, a different way of playing. From here on, it is not that I forgot Ricardo, but I was able to add the way to my learning. of playing by Sabicas and I transformed it to make it my own” (Espinola 1989).

Born in Alicante, Mario Escudero, who had been a direct disciple of Ramón Montoya, belonged to the Spanish exile in the United States and, in fact, died there, in Miami, at the beginning of 2004. In the Big Apple he became the pygmalion of Paco de Lucía, who was influenced by Niño Ricardo in his first stage. In fact, younger generations began to know Mario Escudero for the bulería “Impetu” from the version that the Algeciras musician recorded at the beginning of his career, in a tribute that Gerardo Núñez would repeat decades later.

“Of course, Paco had much more of a relationship with Mario than with Sabicas,” says the American singer and researcher Estela Zatanía, who knew him closely.

At that time, Mario was respected, but he did not have the magnitude of Sabicas, far from it. Mario treated Paco as half discovery, half protected, and was in charge of introducing him to the flamenco artists of New York” (Zatanía 2014).

Estela Zatanía still remembers when she heard him for the first time in Mario Escudero’s studio: “We were ten or twelve people invited by Mario, all standing, there was no room for chairs. There were no introductions, no good afternoon, or anything... Only Paco, sitting in a corner, dressed in a suit and tie, serious and quiet. Mario gave him a sign, and the young man began to play. He did not cross his legs, nor did he throw his head back, that gesture that everyone now makes imitating the man who would become the greatest master of the guitar” (Zatanía 2014).

And she added: “He only played two pieces, a free-tempo song, maybe rondeña, I don’t remember well, and bulerías. Some asked each other in a low voice, “Who is he?”, “Where does this kid come from?” “What’s his name?” ...others told them to be quiet so they could listen. That day, I knew I was witnessing something important. “I didn’t know the future had been born” (Zatanía 2014).

“I remember that Escudero – Estela would later refer to me – if someone asked him about Paquito, he would say something like: “ugh, he is stingier than a chicken.” Paco respected Mario a lot, and treated him like you. Although Mario never taught him directly (as far as I know), at Mario’s house on paella day, the two of them sat together with the guitars... “look at this... and this chord.” “Things like that to each other, although Mario was very proud and would never have been able to ask young Paco to teach him anything” (Zatanía 2014).

It is striking, on the other hand, that two of the main books on Paco de Lucía came from the United States. “The master plan”, by Donn Pohren, that gringo who settled in Morón de la Frontera

to the greater glory of Diego el del Gaster and Paco Sevilla, who published in California “Paco de Lucía, A new tradition for the flamenco guitar”, an essential work that surprisingly is not translated into Spanish, although Manuel Alonso Escacena, one of Paco’s new biographers, has assured me that he is trying.

In 1968, when Paco was announced in New York as “The Paganini of the flamenco guitar”, he had already ventured into jazz for the first time, at the suggestion of Pedro Iturralde, but it was at the Berlin Festival and the album titled “Flamenco Jazz “, in which Francisco Sánchez Gomes, who appears as Paco de Algeciras, replaced Paco de Antequera, who had recorded a previous one under the same title: “Pedro Iturralde - Paco added - looked for me for that album but, in reality , it was not a fusion experiment, but rather interspersing my guitar between jazz performances. That’s how I went to Berlin, and, at that time, I didn’t know who Miles Davis was” (Téllez 2015).

And Miles Davis —“Sketches of Spain” — also performed there.

By the way, the Flamenco-Jazz album by Pedro Iturralde Quintet was not published in Spain, due to legal problems, until 1974. In 1978, Paco de Lucía joined the group Dolores, by Pedro Ruy Blas and in which Jorge Pardo appeared, to his album about Manuel de Falla. And that is the germ of the quintet or sextet that the guitarist would rehearse for the rest of his life, combining flamenco and jazz players like Pardo or Carles Benavent, with the Brazilian percussionist Rubem Dantas, who was the one who introduced the Peruvian cajon to the group and to flamenco, or some bluesman like the harmonica player Antonio Serrano. When Paco dissolves his first sextet after almost twenty years together, he replaces Benavent with a Cuban bassist, Alain Pérez. The first tour of this new group that would accompany him in the last years of his life also took place in the United States and Paco had to turn to Loyola de Palacio, then Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, to provide Pérez with an entry visa because They had problems doing so, precisely because of their nationality.

Perhaps the presence of electric basses in their group was inspired by the American virtuoso Jaco Pastorius, whom they admired and who died of his bad life and a beating at the age of 35.

The path to success, however, was not easy for young Paco. In fact, it took him a while to find massive recognition in Spain, even though he already had it in New York. The press of the time, in 1972, wondered how after having performed successfully that year at Carnegie Hall in New York, he barely managed to gather a few dozen spectators at the Teatro Romea in Barcelona: “Why was there no audience for him?” in Barcelona and on the other hand there is one there?”, we can read in Fotogramas.

“Technically speaking, he is probably one of the most elegant flamenco artists,” said Raymond Ericson in the pages of The New York Times, regarding that memorable performance of his in the Big Apple (Ericson 1972).

He arrived at Carnegie Hall on November 2, 1972, with the help of businessman Sol – Solomon – Hudok, ready to take him from coast to coast: “Hudok interests me because he can promote me in the United States, which is very difficult, and which at this time constitutes the goal of every important artist. But my goal is not to become more or less known, but to always do what I feel and

evolve within the guitar although without leaving what flamenco represents,” he declared then (Torres 1973).

The press presented him with great characters, announcing it as “For the first time in America”, although the publicity ignored his previous tours with José Greco. For that only recital in New York, the propaganda used a quote from the German newspaper Suttgarter Nachrichten, which identified him as “The Greatest Flamenco guitarist of our time”, or that, “the greatest flamenco guitarist of our time.”

However, there were also negative reviews. Paco always gave as an example a review of that concert that, despite the reproaches he gave him, taught him to improve as a guitarist and also, why not? as a person.

In the magazine “Fotogramas”, a young journalist named Maruja Torres echoed her American success: “When someone succeeds in the United States, someone of ours,” she wrote, “at the level of criticism in the New York Times and recitals in the most important coliseums, almost always inaccessible to those who come from outside? Paco de Lucía has performed at Carnegie Hall, presented by one of the best American businessmen, S. Hurok. Paco de Lucía has triumphed there – cuts are loves –, presented as “the greatest flamenco guitarist of all time”. Paco de Lucía is better known in Europe and Japan than in Spain. Paco de Lucía has a tour of Germany, Switzerland, Austria, France, Italy, Japan, Australia and the USA coming up. And the sad thing is that many must be wondering: “But, well, at the end of the day, who the hell is Paco de Lucía?” (Torres 1973).

He would return to Carnegie Hall, one of his favorite theaters, on other occasions, the penultimate one, also in February, but in 2007, with Miguel Marín and the USA Flamenco Festival: “I no longer intend to be more famous. The only thing I intend to do is to make known the culture of my people,” he added then. His daughter, Lucía Sánchez, assured me, days ago, that her last performance there took place in 2011.

At the end of 1976, Paco traveled to the United States to collaborate on the album *Elegant Gipsy*, by Al Dimeola, in his famous song *Mediterranean Sundance*. Dimeola had just recorded, the previous year, a jazz fusion album titled *Land of the Midnight Sun*. His guitar was powerful and critics greeted him with enthusiasm: “Al Dimeola has a very beautiful guitar sound, a technique, a rhythm. He is a great guitarist,” Paco said at the end of the 80s.

As was usual, Paco was not satisfied with the experience: “With Al Di Meola it happened that we barely rehearsed and although he was very satisfied with the song we recorded, I was not,” he declared to José Manuel Costa in an interview published by *El País* in September of that year (Costa 1976).

That trip, however, influenced him greatly. In fact, he was willing to reside in the United States for a long time: “He is going to settle in the United States - probably in California - as soon as he gets married and fulfills some musical commitments that he has in Spain in January. The American singer Santana really liked the Spaniard’s latest album - *Almoraima* - and wants them to do something together. “I want to go to that country as long as I want,” Paco de Lucía told Villarejo, in *Informaciones*. “I want to learn many things. For now, music. There, any guitarist knows more music

than the best of them all here. Then, the thing about genius, inspiration, etc. It's different," he added (Costa 1976).

Their relationships –Paco and Al– were not going to be easy. After that first meeting, they would complete a trio with John McLaughlin, from which a legendary live album would result, *Friday Night in San Francisco*, from 1980, expanded to the second day of the concert, *Saturday Night*, in 2023. They shared a studio again to impress “*Passion, Grace & Fire*”, a song from the album “*Electric Rendezvous*” (1982), in which Al Dimeola pays tribute to flamenco.

But his link with Paco de Lucía was ended up badly, after they reunited with McLaughlin for The Guitar Trio tour in 1996, after thirteen years without playing together: “The first time, it was a new world full of stimuli. The second was a repetition and did not give me anything. Neither humanly nor professionally. It was quite unpleasant. Because human relations, not with John, but with Al Di Meola, were not very pleasant. When I was young, we said ‘Al is very young, he is capricious, when he grows up he will change’. But I have discovered that people, when they grow up, get worse. We don't learn. You are what you are, from the moment you are born. And as you grow up, it becomes more unbearable than it was,” he told me (Télez 2015).

After Paco's death, Al Dimeola wrote on his Facebook page, not without some laconicism: “My dear friend has passed away, and we will never forget his important legacy. My years with Paco were surprising and unforgettable... I will miss him very much.”

Al Dimeola's perspective towards Paco de Lucía was always more accommodating than vice versa. In the mid-70s of the last century, Al Di Meola was already considered a giant of the guitar despite his youth, but his international tour with John McLaughlin and Paco de Lucía established him to tour the world with such a risky tour. In the commercial as well as incommensurable in its artistic dimension. An adventure that produced “*Friday Night in San Francisco*”, an album recorded live on December 5, 1980, which, against all odds, sold seven million copies and went down in history as the “cathedral of guitars.” The record release of the concert the next day, in 2023, did not bring as many sales or profits. Their mutual collaboration continued with “*Passion, Grace and Fire*” in 1983. “A healthy competition developed between us in which we tried to outdo each other no matter what. It was not just a show for the audience; it was also a power play between the three. Who can play a solo better? Who is faster? Who is more articulate? That was what made it so special,” says the Italian American, who learned a lot from Paco's “impeccable sense of rhythm.” And what did he learn from you? They asked Al Dimeola. And he answered: “English.”

In the mid-70s, there was a failed attempt to launch Paco internationally, starting with the Island label, which had catapulted Bob Marley to fame. And in 1977, there was going to be a historic meeting with one of the great saints of Latin music, Carlos Santana, who had been surprised by the interventions of the Algeciras guitarist on Al Dimeola's album.

“It was the active promoter Gay & Company who was in charge of organizing the monster poster, ‘In concert Santana and Paco de Lucía’. It must be said that in the same Paco appeared in smaller letters than the Chicano. What was heard later denied calibers,” write Gamboa and Núñez (Gamboa 2003).

There were two concerts. On August 19, in Barcelona and on the 21st, in San Sebastián, in 1977: “Now I am going to play with my brother Paco de Lucía who is not only a giant with his instrument, but also as a person, in his heart and in his soul,” announced Santana, who was escorted by percussionists Pete Escovedo and Raul Recov, while Ramón de Algeciras and Carlos Rebato accompanied Paco. ‘It was the first time they played together - Pedro Calvo recalled -. They understood each other that way. Paco played his thing, flamenco. The concert ended with Paco being three lengths ahead of Santana, when they crossed their guitars (Téllez 2015).

Both would play together again in London, before 20,000 people, several years later and without it serving as a precedent again.

“The music he plays, the notes he releases, are free of clocks, they are outside of time,” said Carlos Santana when Curro Sánchez interviewed him for the documentary “The Search.” (Sánchez 2014).

A few days after Paco’s death, Carlos Santana was asked about that old friend and, in a way, rival: “He was an extraordinary and immortal person,” he said. He is at the level of Stephen Hawkins, Albert Einstein, John Coltrane, Bob Marley or Michael Jackson... all of them are immortal geniuses. I saw him last year, when he came to play in Las Vegas, and it was incredible. Whenever he played it was like that, a huge flash, a force of nature. At first it was sad to learn of his death, but then I accepted that he is now with God, that he is scratching waves of light in the sky, driving the angels crazy.”

“He was made of another wood, rosewood,” he concluded.

The shadow of Paco de Lucía was seen in young guitarists such as the American of European origin, Ottmar Liebert, who achieved considerable success with his “Solo por ti”, in which he covered Santana.

“That’s not flamenco,” Paco de Lucía was always clear, “that’s one of those elevator guitarists. I’ve always spoken very badly of him, and I don’t like to speak badly of anyone, but he’s selling the name of flamenco out there.” I have always called him like the rags. Once I was sitting at the airport in a city in Arizona, in the sunshine. I saw him arrive and at first, I didn’t recognize him, but as he got closer, I thought he was him and I said to myself: this one is coming to hit me. And I got up running and he came very nervous, justifying that he was not flamenco, that he did not try to impose his music as flamenco music, that he did what he could, that he had a lot respect for flamenco. And I told him, well, I have nothing against you, I am defending the culture of my land, the music that I and many people have been showing around the world for many years. And “You are confusing a lot of people. He said yes, he became very humble and we each went our own way” (Téllez 1994).

Liebert’s proposals had their consequences, starting with “Nouveau Flamenco”, which reached, with different luck, Jesse Cook or Miguel de la Bastide, in Canada, and Eric Tingstad, in the United States.

In the musical-sentimental map of the Algeciras native, Chick Corea was a teacher, John McLaughlin is the firm friend with whom he has shared many things and in his contacts with Coryell

and Al Dimeola, he always felt attracted by their technical expertise: “Al Dimeola He has a very beautiful guitar sound, a technique, a rhythm. He is a great guitarist. McLaughlin is a great musician. I maintain a very close relationship with him. With Chick Corea, too. When we see each other, we spend hours talking. I have dedicated two songs, and he has dedicated things to me,” he summed me up on one occasion (Téllez 2015).

It was also his British manager Barry Marsahll who brought together John McLaughlin and Paco de Lucía. Before they both ended up linked, much later, to Michael Stein. Shortly before he died, the flamenco artist planned to record again with his compadre Juan, which was what he called him and with whom he toured, first with Larry Coryell and then with Al Dimeola. It was much more than a commercial operation.

Jazz improvisation is very important for the knowledge of harmony. You have to improvise on harmonies and in a very sophisticated way. I went there to learn, and I had a very bad time. Very bad, to the point that at the beginning, in every concert, I arrived at the hotel with back pain and headaches that killed me. I arrived at the hotel and asked myself what I was doing there, if I am, I told myself, a flamenco guitarist who has my name and my prestige, who does not I don't need this for anything. But there was something that told me that I could get something from there, that it was all a matter of trying hard until one day you see the light. I asked them what that was like, how you had to play, and they laughed. This “You work on modesty, they thought. But I didn't understand anything, nothing. Until the light suddenly turns on” (Téllez 2015).

He soon learned that jazz improvisation was different from flamenco, which almost does not exist. In the case of jazz, it is based on standards known to everyone to which musicians came and went as a common homeland to return to. And his head stopped hurting, his back ached, and he stopped wanting to get out of the way. Many jazz musicians passed through his life, including Wynton Marsalis or Chick Corea, whom he would call “Chiquito”, who was also always clear that “Paco cannot be put into the container of flamenco, just like that. Paco is much more than that.”

Paco, however, never became completely comfortable in that environment. In fact, although he admired him, he also said no to Eric Clapton himself when he proposed recording with him. Paco de Lucía believed that Eric Clapton is “a musician with a lot of emotion” and remembers Jimi Hendrix “as the crazy man that we would all like to be.” He also admired Pat Metheny and John Scofield, but “as a musician, my favorite is Chick Corea” (Téllez 2015).

De Lucía identified jazz with pure music, which maintains “the same mold that identifies them, jazz, soul, blues, flamenco... - he told me in 1982 - I call this culture, but I don't think it's the same inspiration, but the connection of taste, the same harmony”. His traveling companion Camarón de la Isla would also agree with this same assessment, who in December of that same year, told me that “jazz is very similar to flamenco, because it is music of the people, because it is roots, the roots are good here.” and they are good there, but when I sing I remember the gypsy, the flamenco, my own music” (Téllez 1982).

Jazz had flirted with flamenco since ancient times, from the “Spanish tingle”, which emerged from that surprising piano solo that Jelly Roll Morton titled “Tía Juana” in 1924, to its echoes in Charlie

Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, John Coltrane, Jim Hall, Noah Howard, Gil Evans or, of course, Miles Davis, with his “Sketches of Spain.”

“Fusion? - Paco de Lucía still asked in 1989 - I don’t believe in it. It may work, but with these people with whom I played, the music was neither flamenco nor jazz, it was a fusion of musicians, rather than of music,” he commented to Paco Espínola, referring to Larry Coryell, John McLaughlin and Al Dimeola (Espínola 1989).

Another essential reference in Paco’s jazz learning is precisely the texan Larry Coryell, whom someone defined as “the other mythical and imitated progenitor of the super-fast guitarists who come from every corner today.” From Coryell, Paco learned his sensitivity with acoustics.

Ángel Casas, when commenting on the trio’s first concerts, attributed its ideological conception and leadership to John McLaughlin, who opened the show, although the biggest applause went to Paco and Coryell closed: “Larry Coryell is given the role. of a hot musician who often rocks into the vibe with force. Coryell goes in an overflowing style and reaches unleashed climaxes without losing composure or precision. Coryell plays his contrast role with McLaughlin in the differentiated casting that is proposed. I imagine Paco de Lucía plays the exotic side of the matter, outside of here. Spiritual food for McLaughlin at this stage, it advances the trio in its roots atmosphere” (Téllez 2015). Pohren, reluctant to such mestizo adventures, cites that according to journalistic reviews and broadcasts of the time, “Paco’s tour with McLaughlin and Larry Coryell in 1979 also had the objective of driving the fifteen-year-old public and other types susceptible to mass hysteria crazy.”

“Basically,” the Algeciras guitarist declared to José Luis Bueno, “I have never changed my style, what’s more, I don’t know how to change my style, nor do I want to move away from what is my root, my identity, what I do is try to find out how other people play. I get into a lot of places, but it’s only out of the desire to learn something new for me, and then bring it back to my music” (Pohren 1992).

Paco placed, therefore, “one hand in tradition and another, searching.” As he always did. And he exported what he learned in jazz to his own performance: “Now within flamenco music, I think I was the first who began to organize improvisation, so that the entire group could play... I leave open some areas in which I resort to types of chords where they can feel free and express themselves, not like the majority of music stars in Spain, who force musicians to play note by note what you tell them to play. That, for me, is very boring, because it is detrimental to the music, to the final result” (Téllez 2015).

For this reason, he undertook a pioneering search that was not always understood. Respect for his roots was always full. And when accusatory voices were raised after his forays into jazz or classical music, he always gave a forceful reply: “I never intended, as was said, to abandon flamenco. I wanted to expand my knowledge and then return to my music and fight with new ones.” ideas. I will never betray my culture.” “If you lose your identity you are left with your ass in the air,” he stressed for the umpteenth time. “The strength of a musician is precisely in his identity. It would be ridiculous for me to pretend to be Beethoven. Or Chick Corea. Because I don’t have any capacity to be one of these, I have the capacity to be a flamenco guitarist...” (Téllez 2015).

In the live album that results from the European tour with his sextet, “Live one summer night” (1984), he will pay tribute to Chick Corea, with the title “Chiquito.”

“We can find the origin of Paco de Lucía’s Sextet with its configuration, in what critics have described as the best group that Chick Corea led, one of the happiest productions of contemporary jazz, the group ‘Return to Forever’, Chick Corea, who was on tour in Spain in the 1970s, was an admirer of flamenco and the restless guitar of Paco de Lucía with whom he would record and perform in the 1980s – observes musicologist Norberto Torres-. Look at their formation in 1972: Chick Corea, keyboards, Flora Purim, vocals, Aitor Moreira, percussions, Joe Farrell, flute and sax, Stanley Clarke, bass - says Torres, who cites ‘Le grand livre du jazz (From New Orleans) as a source jusqu’au jazz-rock’, signed by E. Berendt and published in Paris in 1986-. If we look closely at both groups, we can observe some discrepancies that indicate the desire on the part of Paco de Lucía to develop a clearly flamenco formation” (Torres 1992).

It is also significant that, upon Paco’s death, Chick Corea embarked on a tour with the musicians of the first sextet. Throughout his shared history with the sextet, Paco will incorporate other important musical news. For example, the clicking of heels that occasionally accompanies the playing or the prominent role of the rhythm guitar. Paco abandons the traditional rasgueados, increases the modulating bases, and approaches, according to Claude Worms, the way of playing of some of his jazz colleagues such as Joe Pass or Wes Montgomery.

“Flamenco – Paco explained – has always been very attractive for jazz musicians because jazz began like flamenco, in the roots of the people, but it developed in a young country like the United States, a country that is constantly evolving, , and jazz is at levels of intellectuality in which the roots are missed, the virgin thing that our music can have, that is why jazz musicians look for people who are rooted in customs and in stronger folklore bases than where they are” (Téllez 2015).

In 1982, the tour finally took place with the pianist Chick Corea, who had been introduced to him, it is said, by Pedro Ruy-Blas: “For me – he confessed –, Chick Corea is one of my musicians. One of my Musicians, with capital letters. He is one of those musicians that mark you. He is a jazz geek, and I felt comfortable playing with him” (Téllez 2015).

The one from Chelsea, Massachusetts, and the one from Algeciras, Cádiz, appeared together, on stage, on October 9 of that year, but in a place as exotic as the Altos de Chavón amphitheater, in the Dominican Republic, but they led to carried out a long tour of the United States or Japan. They shared the stage again, on the occasion of the XXV Victoria Gasteiz Jazz Festival, on July 21, 2001.

Together with Jorge Pardo, the jazz pianist Chano Domínguez, who lived in Seattle for a time, translated the music of the author of “Entre dos aguas” into jazz, in a legendary album titled “Diez de Paco”. Chano Domínguez maintains that Paco was more than just a self-taught flamenco artist: “He has drank a lot from classical music, which were the first flamenco pianists for me, but he also drank from popular music, from songs, look at the latest album that he gave us. left, based on the couplet. He never forgot what was around him. He knew how to pick it up and put it at the top of the music, with bigger words. We will never finish delving into Paco’s musical legacy. If today musicians like me are playing all over the world, much of the blame for that lay with Paco, because he was the first musician who made flamenco understandable worldwide. Paco filled the theaters because people understood what he was doing” (Téllez 2015).

Chano would participate alongside Paco de Lucía in his historic meeting with Wynton Marsalis, the trumpeter from New Orleans, at the Vitoria festival: “I didn’t know him when he came to see me once at the Central, in Madrid,” says Domínguez. “He told me he wanted to play with me, he went to the hotel and came back with his trumpet.”

During the Vitoria Jazz Festival, Marsalis and Paco de Lucía met in person in 2006: “I would love to play guitar with a brass orchestra,” Paco blurted out. “I’ll lend you mine,” Marsalis responded. “I was pleasantly surprised that he started making flamenco rhythm with his personality. For me, as a flamenco player, it opens doors to see how a musician from another style, from another world different from our music, can reinterpret it,” said Paco.

And Marsalis proclaimed: “I had the opportunity to be with one of the great musicians in the world. “If I had had the opportunity to record with someone like Louis Armstrong, I would have felt the same as recording with Paco de Lucía” (Téllez 2015).

A different issue, for Paco de Lucía, was that of rock and roll. He was less attracted to it than the bolero: when Rubén Blades proposed to record a bolero album, Paco put him off because what he really wanted was to record salsa, or a version of Pedro Navaja.

Around the rock and roll, the same thing happened to him, that it did not attract him. Despite this, he has been lucky enough to co-star in curious experiences such as that joint performance in Seville, back in 1991, when he performed on the same program as Bob Dylan or Keith Richards, although not in the same session: “Interesting, he said some time later. when they asked him about that quote - but I think there should have been more flamenco guitarists, more Spanish guitarists, even classical guitarists. And at that festival, it was just me and Vicente Amigo” (Téllez 2015).

Announced that night were Stanley Clarke, Larry Coryell, Paco de Lucía, John McLaughlin, Rickie Lee Jones, who was Tom Waits’ muse, and George Benson. Presented by George Duke as a tribute to a recently deceased Miles Davis, Paco de Lucía protested; “Not only did they ignore very good classical and flamenco guitar players, because Manolo Sanlúcar and others should have been there, but they also forgot about guitarists of the stature of John Scottfield or Pat Metheny and went overboard with the ‘rockers’. “There should have been guitarists of true musical avant-garde, not those considered avant-garde because they wear more torn pants or longer hair than the others” (Téllez 2015).

It attributes to Keith Richards, his opinion about Paco de Lucía: “If they think I play the guitar well, it is because they have not listened to him,” he stated then, in Seville. But it’s not accredited that. Diego A. Manrique thinks something similar, about their relationship:

“According to Javier Limón, “Keith told me: ‘What I would really like is to do a duet with Paco de Lucía on two guitars.’ When I proposed it to him, Paco told me: ‘Well, it doesn’t work, right?’ I thought it was amazing, how great Paco was, man.”

Magnificent? No: sensible. What common territory could they share? Malagueña, which was the first piece Keith learned? How many guitar duets has the rolling stone recorded? Limón,

remember, was Paco's producer. It was enough mischief to distinguish between a genuine feeling and something told to the gallery ("the Spanish public is the hottest in the world").

I assume that Richards, like any well-traveled guitarist with half a century of experience, knew about Paco. However, it is not mentioned in his book *Life*. Furthermore, during his numerous visits to Spain, he never expressed any flamenco passion. The only time Keith worked in a Spanish studio was for *Weird Nightmare* (1992), a project dedicated to the music of... Charles Mingus" (Manrique 2014).

Also, the word "fusion" was used since the 60s in the rock scene and Sabicas and Joe Beck got together on a "Rock encounter" in 1966, an album to which "The soul of flamenco and the essence of rock" would be added.

In 1995, the Canadian singer Bryan Adams convinces Paco de Lucía to accompany him on the star song of the original soundtrack of "Don Juan de Marco", the controversial film by Michael Kamen: "I think Bryan Adams is a good singer and a good singer. person, I had a good time with him, we recorded the song in Jamaica in an old colonial house, we had a good time, it was successful and it reached a type of audience that it would not have reached by playing bulerías, it seemed positive to me, something anecdotal," he said (Téllez 2015).

"I listen to musicians, not a specific music, and there is so much chaos within rock that to find what is good, you have to listen to a lot of people," Paco assured. However, he also maintained that flamenco was in a special moment, so "it needs contributions from all sides so that we also learn from what is not usual in our music. These unions have served me well. The guitar is changing and I have an obligation to the people who follow me, to open new fields. Mike Oldfield is a great musician who is not in our vein and from whom we have a lot to learn, that is why I have gone looking for his music" (Téllez 2015).

Now, I hear Paco de Lucía's guitar in the awful movie "Vicky, Cristina, Barcelona", which Woody Allen released in 2008. "Entre dos aguas" travels there, but I can't stop thinking, while I listen to it in New York, under the sound of the Manhattan director's clarinet. And in a couple of children lost in the Big Apple where, one night, Sabicas—who was more afraid of airplanes than Franco and who still lived in the Village—went to listen to a teenage guitarist, to, in a way, it changes life and changes history, among skyscrapers.

Images from Paco de Lucía's Life

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SEÑAS PERSONALES (SIGNALEMENT)

Profesión (Profession) *guitarrista*  
Estado civil (Etat civil) *soltero*  
Lugar y fecha de nacimiento (Lieu et date de naissance) *Algeciras (Cadiz) 21-12-94*  
Domicilio (Domicile) *Ilustración, 17*

ESPOSA (EPOUSE)  
Profesión (Profession) \_\_\_\_\_  
Lugar y fecha de nacimiento (Lieu et date de naissance) \_\_\_\_\_

HIJOS MENORES DE 15 AÑOS (Enfants de moins de 15 ans)  
NOMBRE (prénoms) EDAD (âge) SEXO (sexe)

Firma del titular (Signature du titulaire) *Paco de Lucía*

Y de su esposa (Et de son épouse) \_\_\_\_\_

24 OCT 1966  
DIRECCION GENERAL PASAPORTES  
El Director General (Le Directeur Général)  
P. D.  
RAFAEL FERNANDEZ LANGA  
COMISARIO GENERAL









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