



Flamenco guitar player

Ramtin Montazemy is a Flamenco guitar player. He is 32 and he lives in Leeds.

How did you start playing Flamenco?

17 years ago, someone in Iran gave me a video of Paco de Lucia, the greatest guitarist ever. And I watched it and fell in love with Flamenco

I hadn't imagined Flamenco as being big in Iran?

It's quite popular in Iran. The Flamenco style actually started in Spain with gypsies, who were originally from India. They got kicked out of India and tried to find somewhere safe to live. After going to many places the King of Spain let some of them settle in Andalucia, in the south of Spain and that's how Flamenco came to be there. At first it was just played with singing, dancing and playing with basic instruments like spoons, pots, boxes, and pots for making butter (I don't know what you call them).

The guitar was brought to Andalucia by Ziryab, a man from Baghdad. Some people say he was Persian, some say he was Kurdish. He invented the guitar and the guitar became the main instrument of Flamenco.

What Flamenco artists do you like?

My favourite is Sabicas. The music he plays sounds like magic to me. A lot of music now is to show off how quickly people can move their fingers on the guitar and you can forget about feeling and art. People say Sabicas music is quite simple but it's my favourite. I have a nice piece from Sabicas I like to play called "Arabian Fantasy" which shows the influence of the east on Flamenco. [You can hear it here](#) (it's the second piece)

Have you played much Flamenco in the UK?

I don't have permission to work in the UK, because I haven't been granted refugee status yet, so I can't play professionally. I have done quite a lot of gigs though, some for charities (for Oxfam, for Yorkshire CND and for a breast cancer charity called "Just Because").

In Iran you have to get permission for anything. The thing I love about Britain is that if you want to play in a venue, no one comes to check the type of music you play, if it fits with the rules of your country. People really appreciate my music and it helps me develop. I am really grateful that people like my music and that I have the freedom to do it.

My favourite gig was at Wakefield cathedral, it was well advertised and people came especially to hear me. I performed at Planet Leeds and was on BBC Radio Leeds in September 2007.

Do you play with anyone else?

Last year I met a Flamenco dancer, Adriana. She is from Mexico. What I like about this country is it's so multicultural. I couldn't imagine that I would meet a Mexican Flamenco dancer in the UK. I am learning a lot from working with a dancer. In Flamenco you have to learn three kinds of playing- playing solo, playing with a dancer and playing with a singer. Unfortunately I haven't met a singer yet!

When you play with a dancer you have to communicate and understand each other a lot with your eyes, and sometimes with telepathy. Before Adriana met me she used to dance to music from tapes, so I think she was pleased to meet me!

I really like working with Adriana because she has the same experience about music as me, she likes to be creative when she performs. People say with Sabicas that you never heard him play a piece the same way twice- that's what I try to do.

What are your hopes?

Hopefully I can get the chance to get a proper job doing my music professionally - teaching, learning, performing. My big ambition is to travel the world, learning about different kinds of music.

Why?

I believe that there is something more than music when people play. Music is also an instrument, carrying your feeling to other people. I feel that in some traditional music there is some spirituality which is being lost with our civilised, modern lifestyles. The basic music, from villages in Africa and from Aborigines in Australia- the didgeridoo is a powerful meditation

Have you tried the didgeridoo?

I did but I couldn't make any noise! I have a friend in Iran who plays it, that's where I first met the didgeridoo.

Will you be playing Flamenco in Refugee Week?

Yes, definitely. I'm open to any offers!

[Listen to Ramtin playing here](#)
