Tarantas versus Tarantos

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It is well known that the difference between *taranta**s*** and *tarant**os***, is that the former is *libre* while the latter has a slow 4/4 *compás* (Pohren characterizes it as '*zambra*-like').

For this reason the danced version is called *tarant**o*** - it usually a slow 4/4 dance, speeding up at the end into either tango or rumba.

One thing that has puzzled me, however, is that when *taranto* is sung without dance, it is often *libre*. At first I thought this was just mis-labeling, but I am not so sure anymore.

I listened to all the things labeled '*taranto*' that I could find, and while 14 cuts were recorded with a 4/4 *compás*, 14 cuts were libre - 50% out of a sample of 28 recordings.

Of those labeled '*tarantas*', all 38 recordings that I listened to were libre.

In fact, Hispovox has an anthology record called *Tarantas y Tarantos*; one side is devoted to each. On the side devoted to *tarantos*, two are libre (Mairena and Chocolate), two are in *compás* (Curro de Utrera and Los Chiquillos de Algeciras[1]), and one is La Bernanda's *tarantos por bulerías* (doesn't really count) - hence, *por tarantos* we have two *libre* and two *a compás* (excluding La Bernanada's *bulerías*). Both Mairena and Chocolate sing one verse *libre*, and then sing some funny hybrid thing - Mairena ends *por tangos*, and Chocolate ends with *por bulerías* - neither of these can be considered *tarantos* in the '*zambra*-like' sense.

As mentioned above, Paco de Lucía accompanies his brother with *compás*. He also plays *a compás* for Fosforito, and for Camarón on their first *colaboración especial* record. However, after that, Camarón records seven more things labeled '*taranto*', and Paco play for all of them; and they are all *libre*.

Aside from Mairena, Chocolate, and Camarón, *libre tarantos* are recorded by Jose Sorroche, Caracol, Chaquetón, Menese and Sordera (he actually has two recordings - one with and one without *compás*).

So what is going on? Clearly *tarantas* is libre, but what about *tarantos*? The following three explanations come to mind:

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[1] *Los Chiquillos de Algeciras* were Paco de Lucía and his singer brother Pepe, when in their teens. On some versions of the *Tarantas y Tarantos* record there is an error, where instead of including their *taranto*, they include a *siguiyiras*.

A. The singers in question don't know what they're doing.

- unlikely - we're talking about Mairena, Chocolate, Camarón, Menese, ... These are pretty heavy hitters, and in particular, include singers who make a point of knowing what they are doing.

B. The records are mis-labeled.

- It is common folklore that flamenco records are often mis-labeled. I'm not sure how wide-spread this really is. Anyway, if this is the explanation, it would suggest that record companies perform at about chance with respect to the distinction between *tarantas* and *tarantos*. However, this mis-labeling hypothesis would predict that things labeled '*tarantas*' should also be wrong - clearly this is not the case, as evidenced by the 38 *libre cantes* labeled '*tarantas*'.

C. *Tarantos*, as a *cante* with *compás*, is a rather artificial *cante*, created mainly to make it danceable.

- This is what I think may be going on. I suspect that the terms '*tarantas*' and '*tarantos*' are used more or less interchangably, *except* that there is some awareness that when it is in *compás* it must be *tarantos*. Some singers seem to feel the need to sing *tarantos* in *compás*, others don't (and others, like Camarón and Sordera, sing them both ways).

Further evidence that *tarantos* is not created as a *cante a compás* comes from its rather awkward fit into the *baile*. My wife, who has danced it on a number of occasions describes the *cante* as 'round peg in a square hole'. The basically *libre* nature of the *cante* is kept in *compás* only through the guitarist's *compas*. This, in fact causes problems with the *baile*:

Usually, the dancer does a *remate* between *tercios* of the *cante* - there is a traditional riff the guitarist does for this:

"da-da-da-dum-dum-dum-dum-dum-da-dumpy-dumpy-dum" (ending on D)

The problem is where does this riff come in. If the guitarist stays in *compás*, then it has to come in on the tail of the *tercio* - however, it is somewhat tricky for all parties involved to anticipate when this will be, due to the prolongation of the *tercio* by the singer. To get around this problem, some guitarists *remata* the end of the *tercio* with a *rasgueado*, and then do the run. This helps signal to the dancer when to do his or her *remate*. However, the *rasgueado* also breaks the 4/4 *compás*, and technically, causes everyone to go out of *compás*.

I once played for a dance class where Manolete was mounting a *taranto*. Towards the end of the classes, he brought in a singer and also the guitarist Felipe Maya.. Soon the issue of whether to *rematar* the *tercio* with the *rasgueado* or not came up, and Manolete, the singer, and Felipe started arguing about it. After the class was over, the argument continued in the *Moka* bar (the bar where everyone went from *Amor de Dios*). Each person would sing

‘*Ay mi muchacho - brump - da-da ..*’

- ‘*¡Que no! - ay mi muchacho - da-da ...*’

- ‘*¡Que no! - ....*’

This went on, so I left, had lunch, took a nap, and came back - they were still at it, and David Serva had joined the argument:

‘*Ay mi muchacho - brump - da-da ..*’

- ‘*¡Que no! - ay mi muchacho - da-da ...*’

- ‘*¡Que no! - ....*’

Years later, I was back in Madrid watching a video of a rehearsal where a *taranto* was being put together for a concert. Exactly the same argument started, and the dancer stormed out of the room in frustration.

A round peg in a square hole ...