

Carlos Núñez - www.carlos-nunez.com

If you think Spain is just flamenco, you are about to make a most amazing discovery. From Galicia in the northwest corner of Spain comes a surprising music with ancient Celtic roots and modern Spanish energy, a tradition repressed during the Franco dictatorship that is now enjoying a joyous renaissance. All this and more is embodied in the music and career of Galicia's most successful musical export: Carlos Núñez.

Núñez is one of Galicia's most revered artists, undisputed as the tradition's greatest piper. He is also enormously popular across the rest of Spain and throughout Europe and Latin America. He had a Number One hit and his records regularly attain gold and platinum status in Spain, while worldwide he has sold over a million albums. He is already known in Irish music thanks to his early "adoption" by The Chieftains (so close was his musical and personal connection he was dubbed "The Seventh Chieftain"). He played on many of the acclaimed Irish group's CDs including *Treasure Island*, *The Long Black Veil*, the Grammy-winning *Santiago* (inspired by Galician music), Mexican project *San Patricio*, and their latest release, *Voice of Ages*.

Núñez then launched his own solo career and built on his long list of collaborations. His own releases featured a who's who of international performers, starting with his 1996 debut, the aptly titled *Brotherhood of Stars*, which had over 50 guests (80 performers appeared on his 1999 release, *Os Amores Libres*). With platinum sales in Spain, *Brotherhood* was a remarkable breakthrough for both Núñez and Galician music. Núñez followed with *Mayo Longo* (2000), *Todos Os Mundos* (2002), *Finisterre: The End of the Earth* (2003), *Carlos Núñez in Concert* (2004), *Cinema Do Mar* (2006) and *Alborada Do Brasil* (2009).

His first performance in the U.S. was with The Chieftains in the record-breaking 1994 Carnegie Hall "Daltrey Sings Townshend" concert. ("Quite an introduction," he laughs.) He also toured the U.S. with The Chieftains and did a few solo dates in 2005; then his career took off in Europe and Latin America.

Núñez could not have picked a better time to launch his new voyage to America. Following a decade in which Spain has focused its resources on promoting flamenco around the world, it's now time to look beyond this narrow definition of Spanish culture and explore the fascinating Celtic traditions of Galicia.

"Galicia," Núñez explains, "is the magical part of Spain." A region both beautiful and mystical, it has a culture and music all its own. Galicia was shaped by an ancient history (tied to the Celts who inhabited that corner of the country over 2500 years ago). At the western-most part of Spain, perched on the Atlantic coast, Galicia is a land connected to cultures from across the globe, not only from their own seafaring history but from a constant influx of Christian pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela. Then, during the dictatorial Franco regime, flamenco was promoted as the "national music," while other regional arts, languages and cultures faced severe repression. Now, Galicia is undergoing a modern day renaissance, as its music and culture blossoms and spreads beyond its borders to growing acclaim.

Carlos Núñez was born in 1971 in Vigo, the port that connects Galicia to the world -- Vigo is where Hemingway first set foot in Spain; it remains today much as found it. Núñez started playing the gaita at the age of eight. He studied recorder and Baroque music at Madrid's Royal Conservatory. At the age of 12, he performed at Brittany's Festival InterCeltique (it was there he first heard The Chieftains).

Núñez's music draws on influences that range from ancient and contemporary Celtic (with a unique Spanish swing) to Medieval and Baroque, and also borrows from the sounds and styles of the places where Galicians have settled, including Cuba, Brazil, Argentina, even the United States.

He's the undisputed master of Galicia's signature musical instrument, the gaita, or Galician bagpipes. "What the flamenco guitar is to the south, the gaita is to the north," he explains. "The pipes have been here for over a thousand years. They are the oldest in the world. Everyone knows Scottish bagpipes and Irish uilleann pipes, but they are the descendants of the Galician pipes." The gaita is musically more flexible than its Irish and Scottish relations, and in the hands of Núñez -- who also plays pennywhistle, ocarina, Jew's harp, tin whistle and flute -- an exciting and funky 21st century instrument. "People say I play the pipes like the electric guitar!" he says.

Another Núñez trademark is his unique ability to work so effortlessly with so many different artists and traditions, something he also attributes to Galician culture. "We are like chameleons. We always mix with the cultures of the places where we go and then we make a new melting pot, a new mix."

Last year, he made his first major US tour and presented his Sony Masterworks debut, *Discover*, that showcases the range and depth of this groundbreaking instrumentalist, who has taken Galician music to all corners of the world. Proof is in the stunning list of guests that appear on *Discover*, including Linda Ronstadt, Los Lobos, Jackson Browne, Ry Cooder, Waterboys frontman Mike Scott, Sinéad O'Connor, Laurie Anderson, The Chieftains (who launched Núñez's career), flamenco singer Carmen Linares, Irish accordionist Sharon Shannon, Scottish accordionist Phil Cunningham, flamenco guitarist Vicente Amigo, Brazilian star Carlinhos Brown, Early Music master Jordi Savall, Spanish soprano Montserrat Caballé, and Buena Vista Social Club members Omara Portuondo, Compay Segundo and Cachaito.

He toured again North America again last summer taking by storm such festivals as Milwaukee Irish, Dublin OH, or Edmonton in Canada. He is coming back to 30 North American cities in February and March and releasing a new album, "Inter-Celtic", that features music and artists from the different Celtic countries, such as The Chieftains or Altan from Ireland, Alan Stivell from Brittany, or Scottish pipers, but also Ry Cooder.

With the new album and tour, Carlos Núñez is bringing Galicia's Atlantic coast traditions to our own shores. Says Núñez: "America changed my way of seeing music. I met so many amazing musicians, people like Alison Krauss, Ry Cooder, Jackson Browne, Ricky Skaggs and Emmylou Harris. They were so open, so generous. I know American audiences will hear their influence on my music."