

„EL Espiritu Santos” - Santos Hernandez Rodriguez

Prólogo

Many myths and tales are ranking around this Madrilenian guitar maker. Some called him a silent, secrets conserving personality, who did not want to give insights into to his work – opposite to the family and many close friends, that described him as a friendly, open – minded man. Right or wrong – today this must remind up to anyone´s personal opinion.

What, however, can be said?! It is fact, today, that this “guitarrero” has placed the deepest and widespread footsteps in the history of the “Spanish guitar” in the first half of the 20th century. And, more and more, facts come to light, that Santos Hernandez was the most important guide into the modern world for “Spanish Guitarmakers of all categories”. For me reasons enough to “cast an eye” on this personality!

Biographical Dates

Born in Madrid in 1873

He started to work in the “guitarrería” of Valentin Viudes at the age of 10. During this period, he met for the first time Antonio Emilio Pascual Viudes y Aznar, with whom he should work together in a future period of his life. The years with Valentin Viudes brought him a lot of experience. It is said that later on he also formed part of the workshops of Rafael Ortega, Saturnino Rojas, and Hijos de Gonzalez. So, he for himself could collect a great deal of impressions from some of the most important Madrilenian guitar-makers.

From 1893 to 1898 he was doing his military service.

Some time after he began working in the “taller” of Manuel Ramirez de Galarreta Planells (1864-1916), and around 1905 became the leading craftsman there. His colleagues were Domingo Estesó, Modesto Borreguero, and A. E. Pascual Viudes. He worked for MR until the latter´s death in 1916, and afterwards for the widow up to around 1919. Then he started to establish himself.

The earliest “Santos” guitar (as he is called worldwide in nowadays guitar world), constructed for himself, was “El Bombón” from 1903, probably made in his home at c/Humilladero 10. A guitar he created in the Ramirez workshop in 1912 (originally built as an 11- string instrument, then converted to a 6- string guitar) should become the world’s most famous guitar for the next 25 years. With the “Manuel Ramirez 1912” Andrés Segovia started his worldwide career.

After 1916 the “guitarreria” continued as “Viuda de Manuel Ramirez” with the builders Santos, Domingo Estesó, and Modesto Borreguero, who were allowed to stamp their initials (SH, DE, or MB) onto the label. Santos stopped working for the widow around 1919 – and from on that time he worked on his own. The earliest guitars from the self-established period date from 1918, already with the address “Aduana 27”. It is fact, however, that Santos had asked permission to establish a guitar shop in 1921- and this was given to him the same year. But, according to the family, “Aduana 27” already belonged to him since 1917. So, although living in c/ Nicolas Salmeron, he already must have worked there before establishing his “taller de guitarras”. In 1932 the street number had been changed to “Aduana 23”. Santos Hernandez stayed there until to his death on March, 18th,1943. But, as it was with Manuel Ramirez, Matilde Ruiz Lopez (1874-1960), the widow of Santos, continued. In 1945 an exhibition of many important Santos guitars took place in a bookshop in Madrid’s c/Arenal, and several well-known players (Regino Sainz de la Maza, the sisters Espana and America Martinez, Quintin Esquemre, etc.) performed on these instruments and gave lectures.

In 1946 Matilde Ruiz got permission to change the workshop’s name into “Viuda de Santos Hernandez“ and employed Marcelo Barbero as a guitarmaker and Fernando Solar for repairing violins, because – as Manuel Ramirez – Santos had constructed violins from time to time. The guitarrero Manuel Rodriguez mentions, that his father, who had a close contact to Santos and his wife, sometimes helped to varnish the instruments. According to Santos Bayón Ruiz (the last owner of the guitarreria) Fernando Solar worked there until 1948. Barbero stayed a little longer, but already worked under his own label in Madrid’s c/ Ministreles.

After the death of Matilde Ruiz in 1960, the guitars were constructed by Francisco Fernandez, and later by Vicente Checa. Felicano Bayón de la Morena, who had married Esperanza Ruiz, the niece of Matilde, at first made repair works and then started making guitars of his own in 1963/64. They are named “Sobrinos de Santos”.

His son, Santos Bayón Ruiz, started as a guitarmaker in 1970 and continued until 2007. Then “Aduana 23” was opened from time to time – and the final close happened in 2009.

Significant details on the guitars of Santos Hernandez

The silhouette of the head

1903 “El Bombón”. For this instrument, made for himself and probably constructed at home, SH used a head design that could normally be found on smaller, intensively decorated (mother of pearl) guitars from Manuel Ramirez’s workshop. This kind of head Domingo Esteso had given to most of his Flamenco guitars all over his career.

Photo courtesy of Beverly Maher

1918. The rosewood guitar, already showing the Aduana label, was made whilst SH still worked for MR’s widow. This would explain the use of the classical MR head design.

Photo courtesy of Leonardo Plattner

1922. During the years 1921/22 SH constructed several smaller guitars with a 640 mm scale and mother of pearl decoration in the rosette. The head now is without the little tip in the middle

Photo courtesy of S. H. Hogenmüller and E. P. Hofmann

1923. The luxuriously decorated instrument shows a small notch on each side of the head.

Photo courtesy of E. P. Hofmann

1925 (around). The classical SH head appears for the first time, although, from time to time, there are also guitars with the 1921/22 variation.

The classical form will remain SH’s brand for the rest of his life.

Conclusion:

The development of the head design could be seen as a process of abstraction, from the carved linings to the straight two blocks – like a plant growing out of the soil and unfolding itself.

By the way...

At least two SH instruments (“La Rubia”, and a 1940 guitar) show an unusual detail. SH had cut the “windows” for the machine heads in their lower part in the style of Antonio de Torres. Normally these parts had been “rounded” on SH guitars.

Both instruments belonged to Regino Sainz de la Maza, and, according to the Santos family, the player had forced the guitarrero to do so. Maybe the idea was to give the strings more freedom on their way from machine head to saddle.

Photo courtesy of S.H. Hogenmüller (1940 guitar) and (“La Rubia”)

The decoration of the soundhole

In his book “Manuel Rodriguez Sr. – Leben und Erfahrungen im Gitarrenbau” (Bochinsky, Frankfurt/ Main, 1999) the author, whose family always had a close, friendly contact to Santos and his wife, states that Santos gave each guitar a special rosette (p.31). And, in fact, when looking at the different decorations over the years, one gets the impression, that the “constructor” tried to inherit each instrument a characteristic of its own. This could have been with simple, coloured wooden rings, surrounding a small mosaic, or with rich, filigree inlays, sometimes also in mother of pearl. All these decorations are never “overloaded”, always reflected, in order to complete an all including harmony on the whole guitar. This borderless variety is unique, up to now, in the history of Spanish guitar making.

Photo section of selected Santos’ rosettes.

The bridges of Santos guitars

The majority of SH guitars show a decoration of two small pieces of bone on the upper and lower part of the bridge, where the strings are fastened. Also, a small,

rectangular rim of bone appears from time to time. In some guitars of the 1921/22 period (these instruments will be discussed later on) a rectangular piece of bone covers the whole knotting block and sometimes show inlays of the same material, or mother of pearl, in the wings of the bridge

In his “masterpieces”, however, made of best Brazilian rosewood or highly figured maple, SH paid a special attention to the decoration of the bridge. Here we often find a small rectangular rim of ivory, surrounding a sheet of mother of pearl. Sometimes there are also two small rims (ivory and mother of pearl), while the precious wood in the centre remains visible. According to the Santos family, this expensive decoration explains, that Santos had made the guitar for an important and well – respected client – or for his own pleasure.

Some extraordinary guitars around 1921 to 1923

From these years some extensively decorated, slightly smaller instruments are still existing. Their scale length differs between 64 and 62 cm, and soundhole, as well as the wings of the bridge, show mother- of-pearl and ivory inlays. The label, also, is a special one. The explanation could be, that SH, when opening his shop in 1921, wanted to show his possibilities in guitar-making to the future clients by demonstrating the different models he could be able to build. Here he followed the models of Manuel Ramirez, who, in his smaller, highly decorated guitars also used another label than in his standard instruments.

This leads to the system of “etiquetas” in the SH guitars

SH 1903, “El Bombón”, only shows name, town, and year. Up to now it’s unique.

From 1916 to around 1919 there was the “Viuda de Manuel Ramirez” Label with the SH stamp on it.

During his self- employed period, from 1918 until to his death in 1943, Santos always used two different labels for his classical and flamenco instruments, the “theatre stage”, and the “cross”. Whilst the first type was mostly used on the cypress, mahogany, and Indian rosewood guitars, the “cross” appeared in luxury Brazilian

rosewood or maple instruments (also an expensive import-material) in companion with complicated rosettes, rim inlays, and exclusive bridge decoration. These guitars represented the highest standard of the art of Santos.

In a rosewood guitar from 1918, to be seen in Grondona/Waldner: *La chitarra di Liuteria*, 2001, we already find the “theatre stage” label with Aduana 27 and the MR head design. A 1919 flamenco guitar, however, shows a special etiqueta “Plaza de Nicolás Salmerón 8”, the location where he lived with his family in these days.

The smaller, luxuriously decorated instruments of the 1921/22 period have a label very similar to that of the “1919 flamenca”, but here the direction “Aduana 27” is printed.

Santos’ guitars do not carry a numbering, and, except the year of construction, nothing hand-written could be found on his early labels. Around 1931 he started to place his signature there from time to time. And in about 1935 until to the end of his life this appeared regularly.

The Santos Bracing

In his early guitars, strongly influenced from the style of AdT and then MR, Santos more and more started onto a path of experimentation. And, really, all kinds of bracing possibilities can be found: Different numbers of fan struts, sometimes even in parallel position, slanted bars, etc. A luxury rosewood guitar with ivory/ mother-of-pearl bridge and exquisitely elaborated rosette from 1921 is fitted with a curved back. And sometimes SH did not finish the work on the body with gluing the “fondo” but working the other way round – fastening the top as the final process! Manuel Rodriguez reports, that Santos also carefully observed the drying process of his woods and their structure. Finally, an interesting explanation for his many different systems came from the family. Santos Bayon states, that, for example, the thorough examination of a top, or a back (knocking, studying the annual rings, etc.) led the guitarrero to the question: “What does the wood tell me – and how can I transfer its

secrets into sound? “And it is reported that Santos had worked in that way. The wood itself determined the bracing and strutting - nothing else!

All this would explain, that on all his guitars the master showed a total concentration on the construction of the instrument. As already mentioned before, while talking about the rosettes, Santos created each guitar as a personality of its own, a unique masterpiece.

The Santos Sound

There are different starting points when talking about the Santos sound. One is the way “from traditional to modern”. Another would be “from heat to splendour”. And “from living room to concert hall” could also make sense. Looking at the circumstances at the beginning of the 20th century might be helpful here. In these days the new type of guitars created by Antonio de Torres began to influence Madrid’s guitar making scene. And also, there was the arrival of the modern guitar’s second icon, Vicente Árias, who, in 1900, opened his first “taller” (Calle de las Huertas 29) in the neighbourhood of Manuel Ramirez. And in the same year he constructed two revolutionary instruments, shaped similar to Torres, with double backs and stunning inlay work. Of course, this must have been noticed in his surroundings. A new type of guitar had arrived alongside the big-bodied instruments of the Francisco Gonzalez line!

The earliest known Santos guitar, “el Bombon” from 1903, shows a lot of relationship to the work of the two southern masters. The interest in progress was a continuous companion of Santos’ work, all over his life.

During the years SH worked for MR’s widow (1916 – 1919) he followed more or less the line of Torres, which had become a basic factor of MR’s guitarrería (A 1904 MR guitar with satinwood sides and a veneered back of spruce and satinwood has a tornavoz!). And over the years of his independence, he more and more tried to find new possibilities to develop the qualities of the instrument.

There was also a movement in the scene of the guitarists. In Grandmaster Francisco Tárrega’s footsteps several extraordinary players/ musicians appeared on the stage: Miguel Llobet, Emilio Pujol, Domingo Prat, just to mention a few. They helped to spread the beauty of the classical guitar all over the world. The most famous of them

all, a self-taught Andalusian named Andrés Segovia, became the epitome of the concert guitar in the 20th century. And in Madrid, the town of Santos, Regino Sainz de la Maza was in the leading role. To sum up: There was a growing interest, there were a lot of fantastic players, and there was a strong demand for high quality guitars!

The Torres and Árias are famous for their colourful, warm, and intensive sound, based on their similar constructing details in the strutting system. Santos, however, with his continuous efforts to improve the instrument, managed to bring in a new aspect – a splendid brilliance in combination with a carrying voice, ideal for larger concert halls – and exactly these properties were important for the travelling virtuosos, who no longer performed in small circles, but filled large concert halls.

Also, in the world of Flamenco times had been a changing. “Toque”, more and more, had equal rights in comparison to “Cante” and “Baile”. There was no longer a reduction in thumb technique and “rasgueado”. Players like Paco Lucena, Javier Molina, and Ramon Montoya – all admirers of the classical guitar – used a lot of its possibilities (picado, tremolo, etc.) for their personal style. And Estebán de Sanlúcar, a well- respected flamenco player and accomplished classical guitarist, who in his early years moved to Argentina and established an important guitar – circle in Buenos Aires, had brought flamenco to South America.

All these “modern” flamenco players needed a “modern” instrument for demonstrating their virtuosity.

And here the “guitarristas” found in Santos Hernandez the ideal “guitarrero”. In his flamenco guitars, mostly made of cypress, he managed to create a symbiosis between the crisp, sharp flamenco voice and the lyrical qualities of a classical instrument. So the guitarists were able to present their complicated “falsetas” with a lot of modulation and tonal colour. Santos’ “flamencas” produced the purest flamenco sound possible as well as charming and singing trebles and basses. Numbers of still existing guitars proof this until nowadays. Even rather damaged ones – flamencos mostly did not take care of their instruments - still have these two, almost magic, qualities!

Famous guitars by Santos Hernandez

The perhaps most famous one was the instrument Andrés Segovia played for about 25 years. It is labelled “Manuel Ramirez 1912”, but constructed by SH, first as an 11-string guitar (for Antonio Jimenez Manjón) and then converted into a normal, 6-string one. It was a present to Segovia by Manuel Ramirez, and the player’s favourite until the Hermann Hauser 1937 appeared. Santos had done several repairs on the 1912 instrument, and on one of these occasions asked permission to glue his label inside – as the guitar was made by himself. Segovia refused and only allowed the SH “etiqueta” with a hand-written repair mark.

Segovia had received some Santos instruments from on the 1920es, but didn’t exchange for his 1912. One of these, a perfectly preserved 1924 guitar, the maestro donated to the “Victor Espinós Music Library” in Madrid. Another, later instrument, was the reason for the break between AS and SH. Santos expected Segovia’s visit, but the latter didn’t show real interest in the guitar but praised the work of a maker in Geneva (Alfred Vidoudez). This reaction hurt Santos’ feelings so much, that he never allowed Segovia to try this masterpiece. He baptized it “La Inedita” and kept it for himself all his life. All prominent players visiting the guitarrería tried and praised the guitar’s extraordinary beauty and qualities. Only Segovia never again got permission! In 1970 the family sold the instrument with the help of Juan Antonio Agüera, the widower of the famous flamenco dancer Carmen Amaya.

Regino Sainz de la Maza, the head of the Madrid guitar scene, was a great admirer of SH guitars. In 1979 he owned 4 Santos instruments, 3 made of rosewood, and one maple guitar. With this masterpiece from 1934, named “La Rubia”, Don Regino gave the first performance of Joaquín Rodrigo’s famous “Concierto de Aranjuez”, which took place in Barcelona, November 1940. Some years ago, this guitar came via Sainz de la Maza’s daughter Carmen into the hands of the guitarist María Ester Guzmán. And there she is!

Some of SH’s masterpieces had been kept by the family like a precious heritage, such as “La Clavelitos”. The name had its origin from the decoration of the soundhole looking like carnations.

With the help of Regino Sainz de la Maza the widow sold the instrument to

Dr. Andrés Hernandez, who brought it to Venezuela. This happened in 1956. Later it was purchased by the guitarist Bartolomeo Dias and went with him to the United States.

Finally, in 1993, it became part of an important Japanese collection.

Another famous instrument, called “Pepita Jimenez”, came into the hands of Mariano Cubas Martín, who in the 1950es possessed an important guitar collection in Madrid. After his death the instruments were bought from the famous Granada player Manuel Cano Tamayo (1925 – 1990). It is said that this SH guitar had belonged to Ramon Montoya.

And Ramon Montoya (1880 – 1949) in the world of Flamenco played a similar part as Andrés Segovia did in the classical guitar world. It is curious, that both virtuosos had been accompanied for decades by SH guitars made in the MR guitarrería - Segovia’s 1912 and Montoya’s 1916, made under the widow’s label, with the SH stamp. This instrument, named “La Leona”, as the legendary Torres 1856, accompanied Montoya until 1946, when he gave it as a present to his friend, the painter Marius de Zayas. The latter helped Montoya to escape from the civil war-Spain and later made possible to produce his Paris recordings. “La Leona”, among other SH guitars, is still in the de Zayas family’s possession.

Santos also built a “negra flamenca” for Montoya. This happened in 1922 and is one of the first rosewood flamenca – maybe because RM used classical techniques in his performing. Now the guitar resides in an Italian collection.

We don’t know how many SH instruments Ramon Montoya possessed during his life. At any rate there will be no doubt that Santos was his preferred guitarrero.

In the de Zayas collection another famous guitar could be found. It belonged to Manolo de Huelva (1892 – 1976), the perhaps most mysterious flamenco player. Those who had the good luck to see and hear him performing praised his “toque” as incomparable and absolutely unique. He himself didn’t like to play in public and show his incredible technique. When accompanying singers in “juergas” he sometimes played behind the stage, invisible for the audience. The famous guitarrero Arcangel Fernandez recalls, that Huelva asked him to make a copy of his Santos. This happened around 1962.

When he had finished the instrument the guitarist came, looked at the guitar and kept it, without playing any note! Nobody should see him performing!

During the first half of the 20th century also a number of performers could be found, which excelled in both, classical and flamenco, and started international careers.

A young Andalusian, Esteban de Sanlúcar, was one of them. Already in his early years he moved to Argentina and established an important guitar circle in Buenos Aires. He was a friend of Andrés Segovia, who once signed the label of Esteban's 1929 Santos guitar.

Two other examples of this species were Vicente Gomez (1911 – 2001) and Angel Iglesias (1916 – 1977). Both pupils of Quintín Esquembre, the two players formed a duo and soon became famous all over Europe. In the 1940s they started their solo performances in two different parts of the world. Gomez moved to the United States, released several successful recordings and made a Hollywood career as guitarist and film music composer. Iglesias, however, mainly gave concerts in the northern and eastern parts of Europe, as a classical guitarist as well as part of a flamenco ensemble. And the favourite instruments of both were Santos Hernandez guitars!

Two famous performers, one classical and one flamenco, who have always played and still play their Santos guitars, must be mentioned absolutely. Their names are Luise Walker (1910 – 1998) and Pedro Soler (1938 -).

Luise Walker was one of the most important female guitarists of the 20th century.

An Austrian child prodigy, she received her SH 1924 via Miguel Llobet, and performed with her all over Europe, in the United States, and the Far East. From on 1940 she was "Professor" at the Viennese "Hochschule für Musik", and there she had taught a lot of nowadays renowned guitarists. After her death the guitar was given to one of her favourite pupils, Leo Witoszynskyj, who in 1999 engraved an impressive CD with the title "A guitar narrates".

And Pedro Soler, still one of the rare performers of pure, but virtuous flamenco, plays a Santos "blanca" from 1929 – and his two CDs, "Sombras" and "Luna Negra", present the Santos sound as it was and is – incredible!

Classical players, flamencos; virtuosos in both arts – SH was able to fulfil the desires of all these personalities, but not only theirs. One of Spain's leading folk musicians, the Castilian Agarpito Marazuela (1891 – 1983), was famous for his studies, researches, and compositions to the “folklore musical castellano”. He played the guitar and the “Dulcaina”, an antique folk instrument, similar in sound to an oboe. Legendary was his fighting against the Franco regime, for what he had been imprisoned after the 1936 Civil War. In his late years he received many honours, and today his importance in Spanish folk music is similar to the role of Woody Guthrie or Pete Seeger in the United States. His beloved classical guitar was a Santos!

This short excursion should demonstrate the importance of SH instruments in different guitar worlds. And in 2005 the famous virtuoso Carles Trepát (owner of an 1892 Antonio de Torres guitar) used a 1920 SH flamenco guitar for his second recording of popular songs by the composer Manuel Lopez-Quiroga!

Epílogo

Basta! Everything, as usual, should come to an end – and so it is with this text. At the beginning, there has been the headline “El Espiritu Santos” – never, never in a blasphemous sense. And now, at the end, I would allow me some personal statements. What is that for me – El Espiritu Santos? What makes this guitarrero so magic?

These are my personal opinions:

- The widespread number of teachers in his early years (before 1900)
- The work in a guitarrería that had very soon followed the paths of the Torres /Arias principles
- The natural talent for woodwork
- The innate feeling for aesthetics in decoration
- The instinct for discovering the possibilities of sounds “sleeping” in the woods
- The early contact with great players (classical – flamenco – traditional)

- The lifelong desire to progress in his profession
- The intensive dedication and concentration on each guitar he has constructed!

Santos Hernandez, a guitar maker and his instruments – El Espiritu Santos!

This man has demonstrated, that a progressive search for improvement, for new directions, for unusual ideas, is absolutely necessary – but one aspect will always remain the dominating and most important one: The sound of music!

Santos Hernandez, “guitarrero” - for me a miracle!

Karlstein, 28 / 2 / 2022

Siegfried “Hogi” Hogenmüller

----- Enclosed are a few interesting Santos guitars -----

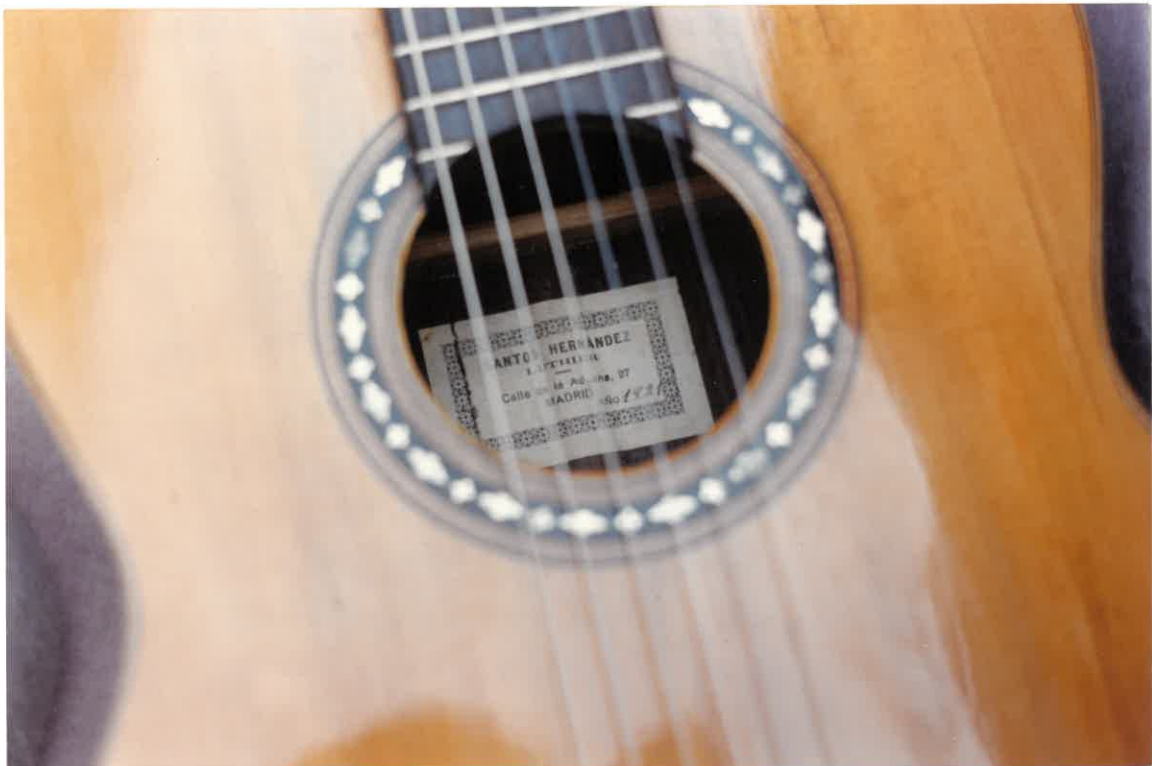


Santos Hernandez (ca. 1917)
Label: Viuda de Manuel Ramirez
stamped S. H.





Santos Hernandez 1921





Santos Hernandez 1921

- arched back -



Santos Hernandez 1922
"negra flamenca" for Ramón Montoya

Photo coll. J. Acornera -4-





Santos Hernandez 1923
(Scale 63 cm)





Santos Hernandez 1929

Esteban de Sanlúcar's guitar,
the label signed by
Andrés Segovia

S/H



Santos Hernandez 1937

- maple -

5/3
H



Santos Hernandez 1940
- the last guitar made for
Regino Sainz de la Maza -
- rectangular machine slots -





Santos Hernandez 1941
(rosewood)

Santos Hernandez 1942
(cypress - scale 64cm)

- two examples of
the late epoch -

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