

Manuel de Falla, *Three-Cornered Hat: Suite No.1*
“Ritual Fire Dance” from *El Amor Brujo*
Joaquín Rodrigo, *Concerto de Aranjuez*
Arturo Márquez, *Danzón No.3*

Spanish composer Manuel de Falla (1876-1946) had a slow start to his musical career. For one, he lacked the sensational performing skills of other Spanish virtuoso pianists of his time such as Albéniz and Granados. For another, Spain—unlike its European neighbors to the east—did not possess the orchestral and operatic institutions to buoy the burgeoning efforts of new composers. When he was finally offered an opportunity to tour France as a piano accompanist, the 31-year-old de Falla promptly packed his bags. This French tour eventually led him to settle down in Paris for the next seven years, where he began to network with the likes of Stravinsky, Ravel, and Debussy.

De Falla was obligated to move back to Madrid when World War I broke out, but he did so now as an established composer: by this time, European audiences had come to recognize his creative skills, and he carried a signed contract with a leading French music publisher. The war encouraged other European artists to retreat to neutral Spain, and it was on a 1917 trip that ballet impresario Sergei Diaghilev encountered de Falla, a connection that facilitated the commission for a new ballet score. In collaboration with artist Pablo Picasso (who designed sets and costumes) and Russian choreographer Léonide Massine, *The Three-Cornered Hat* was premiered in London in 1919 to enthusiastic audiences.

The Three-Cornered Hat tells the story of three townspeople in a rustic Spanish village: the miller, the miller’s ravishing and vivacious wife, and the pompous and lecherous local magistrate (who wears the distinctive three-cornered hat). Suite No. 1 portrays four scenes from this story. The first scene is an introduction to the characters and the village on a warm afternoon. The second scene is a lively fandango (by the miller’s wife), with orchestral forces evoking the vibrant strumming of guitars and dancer’s castanets. The third movement portrays the stuffy magistrate through solo bassoon and the miller’s wife’s tenderness with lyrical strings. The fourth and final movement is yet another set of spirited and festive dances depicting the wife’s antics of fleeing from the magistrate while concurrently baiting him with delicious grapes.

The music for “Ritual Fire Dance” comes from de Falla’s 1915 ballet *El Amor Brujo*, which tells the story of a Romani woman who is haunted by the jealous ghost of her former lover. Despite falling in love with someone new, the ghost’s constant presence prevents her from moving on. She eventually attempts to exorcise the ghost through a set of rituals, one of which is the “Ritual Fire Dance.” This iconic music has trills and swells that mimic licking flames, with pulsating rhythms that continually build the intensity of this supernatural struggle.

With the success of his ballets and other works, de Falla emerged as a leader in the Spanish classical music scene from the 1920s to the 1940s. This torch was then passed on to Joaquín Rodrigo (1901-1999) for the second half of the 20th century. Rodrigo, also an accomplished pianist, composed around 170 works, including concertos, works for orchestra and choir, 60 art

songs, dozens of pieces for solo piano and guitar, as well as music for ballet, theater, and film. Blinded at the age of three from diphtheria, he did all his composing in Braille that was then transcribed for publication.

As a boy, Rodrigo received a solid musical grounding, and at age 25, he moved to Paris to further his musical education and begin his career. He would continue to live and work in France and Germany throughout the Spanish Civil War, eventually returning to Madrid after the brutal fighting had ended. Rodrigo's response to his country's devastation was his *Concerto de Aranjuez*, a nostalgic look back to an earlier time in Spain's history. Aranjuez is a picturesque city that sits in the southern exurbs of Madrid, boasting a resplendent palace and gardens built by King Phillip II in the late 1500s.

Concerto de Aranjuez is Rodrigo's most famous piece, taking audiences on a musical journey to this beautiful city and its gardens through its interplay of Classical orchestral color and flamenco-style guitar. The first movement, *Allegro con spirito*, is joyful and buoyant, evoking the warmth and vitality of Spanish life. The second movement, *Adagio*, is the emotional heart of the concerto, full of longing, and suggesting a personal grief for something lost. The third and final movement, *Allegro gentile*, returns to a graceful character with musical phrases and gestures meant to recall a courtly dance.

Arturo Márquez was born in 1950 in the town of Álamos, deep in the heart of Mexico's Sonora desert. His father, a mariachi performer, moved the family to Los Angeles in 1962, where Márquez began violin lessons in junior high school. He also tried his hand at composing, with a range of musical influences that included the traditional music of Mexico, the Beatles, Doors, Carlos Santana, and Chopin. Upon graduating high school, he continued his musical training at Mexico's National Conservatory of Music, and subsequently completed a master's degree at the California Institute of the Arts.

Márquez's *Danzón No. 3* is based on a Cuban ballroom dance of the same name. Evolving from the European contredanse in the late 1800s, the Cuban danzón is a slow, suave, hip-swiveling dance that eventually migrated to neighboring Veracruz, Mexico. Marquez's *Danzón No. 3* begins with a refined and intimate character as melodies sensuously unfold from the solo violin and flute. From there the tempo and dynamics pick up steam, capturing the spontaneity of dancers breaking from their formal steps to embrace the passion of the moment. Throughout the music, infectious rhythmic syncopations punctuate an overall elegance capturing an older style of Latin American dance.

--David H. Johnson

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