

## THE TECHNIQUE OF NATURAL RESONANCE

To understand Manuel de Falla fully and his method of composing, it is necessary to understand his spiritual essence that was rooted in the great tradition of Spanish mysticism in the sixteenth century and even earlier. The profound melancholy that permeates his work is one of religious mysticism not emotional romanticism. In all of his writings the music reflects powerful images of ecstatic aspiration and profound spiritual suffering. Even in those works that do not appear to have any deep or tragic implications, beneath the surface, there lurks the Spanish sense of tragic destiny and death.

Through his unique sound Falla did not express the individual in the typical style of romanticism but rather evoked the stirring emotions that came from a center of passion that extended outward to an eternal consummation. He was also not interested in Nature. Nature does not speak through his music. Falla's music was of the earth and reflected the human spirit and collective consciousness. Suffering and seeking were the dominant motifs.

For Falla there was no difference between secular and sacred, because on the innermost spiritual plane, this division did not exist. The art of creating was a celebration of faith. Because of his mystical beliefs, he himself, was incapable of profanity either artistically or creatively.

While Spanish music especially that of Andalusia is associated with vivid colour and exoticism, in truth its two main characteristics are aesthetic

mysticism and passionate lyricism. Lyrical elements are often outlined or emphasized by powerful images of drama and strong emotions as seen in the music of Victoria and compared to the serenity of Palestrina.

In the music of Falla the soul of Spain found its authentic expression through two principles that are continually reflected – Gothic intellectual idealism and the charm of Arabian sensuality. Falla's ideal was to discover firstly the national idioms of Spain and secondly to immerse himself in Spain's musical history and bring the two together in an authentic musical style that would be universal.

The results of his efforts in this direction proved to be exceptional and began to be realized through his application of the technique of natural resonance. His first significant work using this particular technique was the *Seven Popular Spanish Songs*. The songs became a cornerstone of his later, mature works and from his personal, systematic development of the technique of natural resonance that he applied to his harmonizations, he began to derive his unique sound.

Modern scholarship writers of theory have hardly paid scant attention to Manuel de Falla and in all their analyses, there is barely a mention of natural resonance. It should be noted that although Falla learned something of resonance from Debussy, he did not choose to follow and imitate the great French composer. Rather Falla sought to enlarge and enrich harmonic resources by means of a very simple and fundamental expedient he had read about in a book he had accidentally found while wandering through the Botanical Gardens of Madrid. The name of the book was called

*L'Acoustique Nouvelle* written by Louis Lucas in the early part of the eighteenth century. Within its pages lay the fruits of study that were to be the basis of his composition. Because modern scholarship has not understood Falla's methods and intentions and has often labeled his music as impressionistic, when in fact it is not, it is important to note that Falla did not copy or imitate Debussy with respect to resonance or any other theoretical aspect.

The technique of natural resonance is based on the recognition of the harmonics of the fundamental note, as essential notes in the harmony. The recognized harmonic then becomes the new fundamental note.

According to Jaime Pahissa, Falla's close friend of many years, the premise of natural resonance was to recognize real notes of the harmony and notes that were produced by natural resonance always in their corresponding position that is to say the harmonics of a fundamental note and the harmonics of a harmonic considered in its turn as fundamental. The technique gave a personal style and character to Falla's works, especially his later ones. (Pahissa, page 77).

The process of this technique immediately expands harmonic resources and brings changes to the harmonic status of individual notes yet they remain within a strictly controlled situation.

Using natural resonance technique allowed Falla to present his cadence harmonies in embryonic form and then simply shift their emphasis

and function from harmonic to fundamental within the series of natural resonance.

Falla was not entirely original in the technique of natural resonance. The old Spanish church composers knew about it because brass instruments did not have valves. Natural resonance therefore had to play a vital part in the overall construction of a musical composition.

While tonality enriched Western music, it also overlooked the relevance of natural harmonics. It was Louis Lucas who rediscovered and formulated its basic principles and precise musical significance. Falla used natural resonance to evoke the stark sense of tragedy and doom that lies deep in the Andalucian soul as well as to express the intellectual idealism of harsh, relentless, hostile Castile. It was to become a vital, integral part of the expression through music of the total soul of Spain.

Falla's best example of modality may be found in his *El amor brujo*. His modality was derived from melody. It was archaic, primitive, mysterious, mystical, exotic and earthy. His modality did not imply chromaticism. The basic harmony and harmonic clashes arise out of the contours of the melody. His harmony is the vertical reunion of melodic notes such as may be found in the *Juego*.

One of the finest examples of his unique sound as a result of natural resonance may be heard in *El retablo de Pedro*. The work reflects Falla's further extension of the theory of natural resonance.

The *Harpsichord Concerto* is built of the full fruits of Falla's natural resonance. The work is not tonal. It is a series of natural harmonics and brings together old Spanish music and the expected sonorities. It represents his final achievement in his search for a universal style based on Spanish resources. It evokes the intense Spanish spirit and the universal historic spirit of Spain. Most importantly, this grand work breaks through the narrow exclusive nationalism and gives Spain a universal voice that she has not had since the Golden Century (sixteenth century).