

MANUEL DE FALLA

Manuel de Falla was born into the home of a wealthy Cadiz family on November 23, 1876. His earliest memories were the songs and stories told to him by his Moorish nanny, la Morilla and his mother playing the works of Chopin and Beethoven on the piano. It was she who taught Falla his first musical notes.¹

Redeemed from the frivolous life of most young Andalusian gentlemen because he wanted to do something grand in the realm of art, he was allowed to pursue music.² Because of his place of birth, he already carried the songs of Andalusia in his blood.³ He had had a Moorish nanny to sing him to sleep with sweet sounding Arabian melodies and to tell him old Andalusian tales. His imagination took root in fertile Andalusian, Moorish ground. It would later become the inspiration for his music.

At the age of nine, Falla visited Sevilla which completely captivated him. Returning to Cadiz, he recreated the charming lost city of Sevilla and called it Colon. It was in the secret atmosphere of his secluded chamber that he governed his metropolis with his imagination for six years unbeknownst to his parents and professors and also wrote his first opera seria, *El Conde de Villamediana*.⁴ In his thoughtful child's mind not even Cadiz had a theatre repertoire as grand as that of his Colon.

As a child, Falla was deeply interested in prose, Spanish history and the old legends that had thrilled him from the first time his nanny had told them to him.⁵ These three things and his city of Colon were his greatest joy in life.⁶

Falla's initiation into classical music began at age ten with his attendance and that of his parents at musical evenings held in the home of Salvador Viniegra. While these soirees did not impress him immediately, his musical path in life was awakened during the symphonic concerts at the museum of Cadiz. It was, however, in Sr. Viniegra's musical salon where Falla performed for the first time on the grand piano in front of a select audience. He never forgot the experience.

From age seventeen a conviction both frightening and profound, to study composition, took hold of him.⁷ He was afraid of the calling because he did not think he could achieve it, especially in terms of inspiration.⁸ Without inspiration it would not be possible to fulfill the calling. He found the courage to follow his path through his religious beliefs.

During the last years of the 19th century, Falla spent short periods of time in Madrid where he studied the piano with a fellow pupil of Albeniz, Jose Trago. He also changed his name from Manuel Falla to Manuel de Falla. The critics praised his many talents. Very difficult pieces were “played effortlessly and with great delicacy.” He was equally praised for his accompanying which was “always discreet.”⁹

MADRID 1900 – 1907

In 1900 Falla moved to Madrid where he worked on some zarzuela with Amadeo Vives and Joachin Turina. He also wrote several short works for chamber ensemble, continued his piano studies with Trago and gave private piano lessons in order to support himself and the family business which was on the verge of bankruptcy. He did not enjoy writing zarzuela because, for Falla, it was a mere copy of Italian opera which so in vogue at the time.¹⁰ To Falla, zarzuela had no national character. He wrote it only for the money.

In 1902, he began his studies with Felipe Pedrell, one of Spain’s great musicologists. Pedrell was a great inspiration and taught Falla about instrumentation. Falla respected the Maestro for the love and passion he had for his art and the new horizons he saw for Spain’s music in the old manuscripts he had discovered.

In 1903, Falla composed the *Allegro de Concierto*. He entered it in the Piano Competition for Composition which was held at the Madrid Conservatory. Enrique Granados won the competition. In 1904, Falla finished *La vida breve* and entered it in a competition.

In 1905, Falla was awarded the prestigious Ortiz y Cusso Prize for a public competition between Spanish pianists which was also held at the Madrid Conservatory. There were more than thirty participants and they included the Catalan virtuoso, Frank Marshall (he later became the teacher of Alicia de Laroccha), who seemed a sure winner.¹¹ The program was very

demanding. Candidates were expected to perform works by Bach, Scarlatti, Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann, Saint Saens, Paganini and Liszt. Falla's austere and poetic interpretation of the selected works won him the prize of a grand piano. He did not see himself as a virtuosic pianist but rather as a musician who applied himself assiduously and patiently to the purely musical studies set down by the jury.¹² At this period in Falla's life he lived in abject poverty, taken to sporting a bushy moustache and wearing a bowler hat. He had also fallen in love. ?

PARIS 1907 – 1914

Falla arrived in Paris in the summer of 1907 with no work prospects.¹³ Yet, without Paris, Falla felt he would have been "buried in Madrid, interred and forgotten, leading a gloomy life, living miserably off his few lessons and keeping his prize like his opera, hidden in a drawer."¹⁴ He was unable to give concerts because the pianos were so terrible but he did have great success playing the overture for his work, *L'Enfant Prodigue*, without an orchestra. He went on a successful tour and a second tour which was somewhat more artistic as well as profitable, was planned for the fall. In Geneva he was able to play on a Pleyel piano at the Pleyel Concert Hall and he adored the climate. He began to acquire a few students and was invited to make his debut as a conductor in Luxembourg. He was more than pleased to have made the decision to leave Madrid. ? Debussey

In Paris, his first big thrill was to meet Paul Dukas. Upon explanation of his reasons for coming to Paris, Dukas offered to listen to his *La vida breve*. Dukas greatly encouraged Falla. He advised the composer not to change his personal style and to work alone. Dukas then introduced Falla to Albeniz who greeted him in his own truly, magnificent fashion.¹⁵

Artistic protection was also offered by Debussy whom Falla finally met. He too, helped Falla with direction and publishing of his works. Falla loved Debussy's music not so much for the novelty of the style – impressionism – as for the purely musical ideas.¹⁶ ?

One evening Falla attended a concert at the Aeolian Hall. The featured work was a new quartet so full of dissonance that the gentleman next to Falla commented on its awfulness. The other gentleman said "well, what do you expect. These things are now fashionable and I myself am writing a series of pieces for which I use the same method."¹⁷ The

gentleman was Isaac Albeniz and the series of pieces to which he referred was his *Iberia*.

On another occasion Falla went to the Albeniz home and was surprised to find Dukas, a permanent guest due to a family misfortune. Albeniz, hardly able to play anymore, sat down at his piano and while his charming daughters served drinks, performed a strange version of *Iberia* which involved his hands, voice and his Cuban cigar, the complicated spirals of smoke matching the beautiful melodies of *Triana*.¹⁸

In 1908, Falla took part in a concert tour that took him to the north of Spain. He soon returned to Paris after visiting his family in Madrid. In 1909 Albeniz secured some financial aid for Falla so that the composer could work on his *Cuatro piezas espanola*. They were published at the publishers' request and performed by Ricardo Vines. On the 18th of May, of that same year, Isaac Albeniz died. ?

In 1910 Falla began work on *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*. One day during his rambles, trying to temper his inner troubles through a jaunt, he stopped in front of a Spanish bookshop and his eye fell upon a book called *Granada*. He bought the book with his last few francs and spent the night reading it. Next morning he and his inspiration were ready to write. His Muse was once again in her place. The power of creation began to flow and beautiful, beguiling melodies of the new work began to bewitch his mind. Even though Falla had never been to Granada, he expressed in the work, the Alhambra, the Generalife, its gardens and murmuring fountains filled with the pungent, sensual fragrance of myrtles.¹⁹

The instrumentation not only marked the characteristics of original Andalusian folk songs but as well, it marked certain effects unique to Primitive Hispanic Arabian instruments. The highly descriptive music expressed more than the echoes of fiestas and dances, it also evoked the mystery and pain of life.

MADRID 1914 – 1920

In 1914, Falla left Paris for Spain at the outbreak of WWI. A weak figure with two broken front teeth and sans his toupee, Falla arrived back in Madrid. He hardly resembled a man “inside of which a great soul burned.”

He settled into a flat on the Calle Ponzano and attempted to find work again. *La vida breve* was to debut at Madrid's Zarzuela Theatre. However, there were prejudices to overcome concerning the work. It was Andalusian, its themes were based on Andalusian music. This kind of folk music was considered "vulgar, fit only for drunken revels and tourists looking for the picturesque."²¹ A special article was written the day before the premiere to advise the audience that Falla had only done what Beethoven had done in his *Pastoral Symphony*. He had extolled and sublimated popular and vulgar subjects. The respectable audience adored the work and Falla's name was on everyone's lips.

While this one work was a great success, it did not solve Falla's financial worries. Between his own problems and those of his family, who were now submerged in ruin, he was prevented day after day from finishing the instrumentation for *Noches*.²²

The day Falla visited Granada was one of great rapture for him and compensated somewhat for the torments of his existence which at times surrounded him with so much meanness and dullness.²³ What he saw through the window of the Comares Hall in the Alhambra was a hill with prickly pear trees protecting gypsy caves. Their burnished trunks reflected the noonday sun like mirrors.²⁴ He saw the Generalife with its beautiful fountains, tree upon tree, flowers and shrubs.

For a time Falla lived with good friends in Barcelona and worked on his orchestration. But there was so much noise at the guesthouse where he stayed that he finally told his friend he could not write. He needed a quiet place. His friends offered him their villa in Sitges and assured Falla that the only sound he would hear was the sound of the sea at the foot of the old iron gate.²⁵ Falla was at the time working on a new piece called *El amor brujo*.

Not long after his return to Madrid, Falla received a request from one of Andalusia's best dancers, Pastora Imperio, to write a song and a dance. She was the most outstanding dancer of authentic, typical, serious Andalusian dance. Her mother particularly interested Falla as she knew the soleares, the siguriya, the polo and the martinete from which he captured the essence of the music for the song and dance that grew into *El amor brujo*.

The final touches to the orchestration of *El amor brujo* were the excuse for another visit to Granada. Falla was an unmatched master of instrumentation. The question was how to communicate the magic and bewitchment of his melodies to the audience via aural sensation.²⁶ Ultimately, it was not accomplished through the requirement of impossible virtuosity of an instrument but rather through the complete mastery of the means of how to express what he wanted to communicate...."a faint tremor of anguished hope, a rending cry, within the shout, the tears this woman swallows...."²⁷

Falla was so highly accomplished in his art of instrumentation that any sound could be reproduced on the piano. The orchestra was his greatest achievement. It was the living embodiment of his ideas and concepts expressed in his compositions.

GRANADA 1920 – 1929

In 1920, Falla went again to Granada to find a cheap house to rent as he needed a peaceful retreat. He had to recover from severe financial losses as a result of his publisher's bankruptcy. He ended up in a tavern called Polinario's, famous for its wine, not watered down, paintings and flamenco cante. When his new friends recognized ~~he~~ ^{him} and his sister, a house was found.

It was in Granada where Falla's quest for the archaic, genuine songs of Andalusia began. While he was in Sevilla during Easter weekend, he searched for a *saeta*. Just beside the Triana Bridge he heard one. A venerable old gypsy woman was on her knees, arms wide open like a cross, singing it. A deaf creature who had come from the alley where she lived, she had pushed her way through the crowd. Her hair was short and stood on end because she had just donated her plaits to the Virgen of Hope. Tattered,

destitute, she was suddenly transfigured into an angel of song, forgetting everything around her except her adoration of Christ and the Virgin as the Cachorro passed by.²⁸

In June of 1922, Falla organized the first competition of cante jondo in Granada. Falla was assisted by Zuloaga the painter, Lorca the poet and other good friends.²⁹

Falla organized the competition because he wanted to stop the decadence of cante that had fallen into an abysmal state. The truly great singers had been forgotten and all that prevailed were a lot of ridiculous warblings that passed for *fandangos* and *columbianas*.³⁰ Falla was very severe. He eliminated all the present day folksingers who knew only the rowdy songs of the Sacromonte Caves or neighbourhood taverns. At the festival, there was a seventy-two year old man named Tenazas who had walked all the way from Puente Genil to Granada, smoking his pipe and holding his pipe cleaner. He brought tears to the eyes of all those who heard him sing. Lorca had found an old woman begging in the Albaicin and she knew only that the singing of the *serranas* had to begin with the *liviana* which was thought to have been lost.

The cante jondo festival was a great success even though the competition itself did not achieve much.³¹ Jealous competitors made one old pure cantaor drunk before his performance. He was still riotously applauded simply because the renowned critics, artists and writers who had come to the festival, attracted by Falla's prestige, did not know anything about cante jondo.

Tenazas who had won the ^{suddenly} competition was negotiating with a record company with Falla's help when he was nowhere to be found. One day he decided to leave the expensive lodgings Falla had located for him. When Falla did find him, Tenazas told him that he'd "got himself a woman." Falla laughed when he learned what had happened to his recording star.³²

Falla had gone to Granada in search of silence and time. He found inner harmony and eternity. During the day he embraced the luxurious growth on his walks deep into the Alhambra Hills and the harsh and delicate colours of amethyst, opal and Sierra Nevada pink. At night he listened to the echoes of Granada, half sung coplas and undulating laments.³³

Pure essence became the heart of his work. Everything became important with the knowledge that came from a new awareness. Writing a letter, ordering a book, sending a bill – all were consciously lived moments for him, moments in which he served God. His sonorous echo reached from the poor areas of the Albaicin to the distant sufferings of far off China. His art began to immolate his love for all creatures. A soul of high ideals, his conscience gave priority to humankind before all other interests, even artistic.³⁴ Falla felt that the day his music would be understood, humankind would have heard the call of God. Neither the music nor its message would ever be compromised as can be seen in a letter he wrote to Lorca dated February 9, 1929.

“I do not need to tell you, who knows so well, the differences that separate us regards the theme of your *Oda*. If I were to work on it I would go about the task in a humble attitude, hoping that all humanity could be deified by virtue of the Sacrament.....”³⁵

GRANADA 1930 – 1939

Falla’s life remained in the “unpresent” for the next several years.³⁶ That is to say that in his solitude, he created the illusion that what had existed inside of him during the 12th century was the same in the 20th century. The laurels, roses and cypresses that grew outside his house were there in the 12th century as were the whitened walls. He did not subject himself to the world’s vain worries and his music, so full of spirituality, reflected this.

Falla experienced several mystical events. He found himself sitting on the banks of a wide and gentle river in one such event. It turned out to be the Danube. He did not know how long he had been there, only that he had sat on the shores of many rivers but never before on one where the “current of time”³⁷ carried things away.

Another time he found himself on a mountain peak watching the sun rise. Watching the dawn break, he again, experienced the loss of time.

A third event occurred one night when he was unable to sleep. He got up and looked out the window and saw a star that he had not seen before. It glowed very brightly. In the silence of the night a dog began to bark. The bark was so sad and plaintive, as if the animal were weeping. For Falla, it seemed as if the star shining so mysteriously and with such splendour, could no longer light up the Universe because it no longer existed. Its heavenly

light had been extinguished and it had ceased to shine centuries ago even though it was reaching our Universe in that moment. He sat down and composed one of his most beautiful pieces as a result of that spiritual experience.

The arrest and murder of his dear friend Federico Garcia Lorca filled Falla with bitterness and deeply shook him.³⁸ He found it difficult to understand the unpunished violence that was taking place in Granada. The San Nicholas Church had been burned to the ground and someone, without any shame, rang the bells. The senselessness of what had happened in Granada was even more tragic since Granada had not supported the political military movement.

On September 28th, 1939, Falla left his little house in Granada for Buenos Aires. Very pale, he took leave of his good friends and his cat, Confucious, never to meet again. His last words to his friends were "Until the valley of Josaphat."³⁹

Arriving in Buenos Aires he settled in a villa in the country with his sister, living in extreme financial hardship. Since there was a war in Europe going on, he could not receive author's ~~writer's~~ monies for his concerts. He particularly loved the beds of carnations that grew in Buenos Aires and reminded him of his Granada.

In 1941, he fell ill with a fever and stopped work on *Atlantida* that he had begun in 1927. In 1943, he began again to work on *Atlantida*. The work brought him great peace.

Atlantida lay between mythology and archaic times of primitive Iberia, between the legendary land of the Gadex of the Romans (Cadiz) and before that of the Iberians and before that of the lost continent of Atlantis. The coat of arms of Cadiz bears the figure of Hercules and the two pillars. The poem stirred his imagination with dark, ancestral dreams and brought his unfaded childhood images to life.⁴⁰ The work was finished by his student Ernesto Halffter after Falla's death.

THE MYSTICISM OF MANUEL DE FALLA

Falla was, according to Francis Poulenc, a great mystic. He lived his faith in secret and intensely. His character was that of a dignified and reserved man. He either approved or disapproved of a work. Rarely did he

pay attention to technical details yet he was a master of them. Falla was a mystic in a pure, clear state.⁴¹

In rehearsals he did not get angry, he just got nervous. On the spiritual side he was deeply calm. One day Falla and Poulenc went to a small Venetian church. It was beautifully decorated for some religious holiday. As soon as they entered the church Falla began to pray and Poulenc had the sensing that he no longer existed for Falla. Falla did not even take note of Poulenc leaving such was the “state of his Assumption.”⁴²

He lived his days in Granada and Buenos Aires in solitude, and in meditation. His spirituality deepened in Buenos Aires. His intense religious feelings verged on mysticism. Sometimes at night he could be heard singing his prayers and orations.⁴³

In Granada, Falla lived humbly in his carmen. The word “carmen” comes from the Arabic and means “enclosed garden.”⁴⁴ In Granada, carmenes are hanging gardens on stepped terraces. Within each garden there is a house. While they can be very humble and simple, within them, one finds peace, love and beauty.

It was in such a carmen that Falla’s fertile and chaste inspiration was nourished. The seclusion led him to become monk-like. His gaze became clear, limpid, delighted with ecstasy at the works of God. In many ways he can be compared to another Carmelite, St. John of the Cross.

In his music the narcissistic soul and voluptuous body aspired to disembodiment and the incorporeal, without losing any of its humanity – line, rhythm, colour, smell.⁴⁵ To define a narcissistic soul, observe the Andalucian man or woman especially when they are out walking. He/she will always move to the reflection of the inner mirror of each one’s aesthetic imagination. Falla saw, through his music, the outside world as a great and marvellous book with all the creatures of the world, beautiful and complete.⁴⁶

On the morning of November 14, 1946, Falla’s sister found him dead and at peace. The congratulations for his upcoming seventieth birthday had to be quickly changed to obituaries. Concerts in his honour became memorial recitals. Falla’s body and fragments of his *Atlantida* were sealed up and returned to Cadiz. He was laid to rest in the crypt of the Granada Cathedral where he found his eternal peace.

¹ Ministerio de la Cultura, Manuel de Falla: His Life and Works
(Ediciones Opnonax, Madrid), 1996, p. 19

² Ibid, p. 20

³ Ibid, p. 20

⁴ Ibid, p. 22

⁵ Ibid, p. 23

⁶ Ibid, p. 23

⁷ Ibid, p. 27

⁸ Ibid, p. 27

⁹ Ibid, p. 30

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 39

¹¹ Ibid, p. 43

¹² Ibid, p. 43

¹³ Ibid, p. 51

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 51

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 52

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 53

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 54

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 54

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 71

²⁰ Ibid, p. 95

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- ²¹ Ibid, p. 83
²² Ibid, p. 83
²³ Ibid, p. 85
²⁴ Ibid, p. 85
²⁵ Ibid, p. 86
²⁶ Ibid, p. 109
²⁷ Ibid, p. 109
²⁸ Ibid, p. 156
²⁹ Ibid, p. 159
³⁰ Ibid, p. 159
³¹ Ibid, p. 159
³² Ibid, p. 164
³³ Ibid, p. 197
³⁴ Ibid, p. 211
³⁵ Ibid, p. 212
³⁶ Ibid, p. 217
³⁷ Ibid, p. 217
³⁸ Ibid, p. 220
³⁹ Ibid, p. 235
⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 245
⁴¹ Ibid, p. 264
⁴² Ibid, p. 264
⁴³ Ibid, p. 274
⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 277
⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 277
⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 277

MANUEL de FALLA
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THE ANCIENT MUSIC OF ANDALUCIA

Falla's interest in the Ancient Music of Andalucia began with the folk music of the Andalucian pueblos. For the great Andalucian composer, authenticity and the spirit of the work were of prime importance. To be designated as authentic and categorized as having elements of Ancient Andalucian music, a work had to contain the following:

1. the situation or story had to be represented through the dance.
2. the text had to be alluded to, through the music.
3. some historical fact of Andalucia had to be represented in the work.
4. the moment in history or time as to when the work was sung or danced had to be authenticated.

Realism and tradition were also important to Falla in his search for the authentic music of Andalucia. He did not want mere impressionism. For him, this repudiated realism. Falla was able to bring all four of the above-mentioned elements of Ancient Andalucian music as well as realism and tradition together in his ballet suite *El amor brujo* composed in 1915.

The concept of the representation of a situation or story through the dance was very important to Falla. Not only was the intimate link to dance one of the distinguishing features of Ancient Andalucian music, it became a particular condition for Falla in his *El amor brujo* where the story unfolded through both the dance and the composer's harmonic progressions. This imbued the work with stability and a "seeming coherence."

The words "seeming coherence" have given rise to the question of whether or not the use of dance merely created an illusion and ruptured rather than unified the work with respect to its particular style. Upon closer observation it has been seen that Falla's use of dance in *El amor brujo* did not cause a rupture but rather, it permitted the co-existence of two distinct musical styles, the specific elements of Ancient Andalucian Music and the music of the Gypsies.¹

Allusion to the text through music was also another distinguishing feature of Ancient Andalusian Music. Like the dance, poetry was intimately linked to the ancient music.

Ancient Andalusian poetry was based on spontaneity. It depicted ordinary events in an extraordinary way. Full of violent lyricism, its words held a magical power over its listeners and evoked an imagery that went beyond the sense of the word itself.²

In Falla's *El amor brujo* for example, we are informed by the text that the gypsy lover of Candelas is dead. The circumstances of his death are not known. It is known, however, that quarrels between rival gypsy families were most always settled by the knife. For the gypsies, the knife had a death association.

The imagery that surrounds the death of the gypsy lover evokes the idea that there has been a terrible fight with knives and that the lover has been mortally wounded and left to die which was the custom. In this particular kind of imagery, no words are alluded to in the text, yet the whole world of the gypsy is reflected – a world of sophisticated primitivism and elemental in all its concerns.

Falla brings authenticity and realism to his work by alluding to the unspoken imagery of the text through certain passages of music which express the tragic events that have taken place and which have ultimately led to the bloodshed and death of the gypsy lover.³

In order to impart even more realism to his gypsy ballet, Falla has represented an important historical fact – the coming of the Gypsies to Granada. In the 15th century about four hundred gypsies arrived in beautiful Granada, which was at the time, the last remaining Arabic stronghold.⁴ To the gypsies, Granada was an ideal city. It had an air of mysticism. Its philosophical fatalism was most compatible with their own traditions.⁵ Proud, arrogant and aloof, they chose to live on the outskirts of Granada in caves. Among other things, they were highly skilled in the occult arts and divination.⁶

Falla set *El amor brujo* in Granada. The gypsies were his key characters. The action for the ballet was to take place in a cave. During the

Ritual Fire Dance there is a strong reference to the occult when a spell is cast by the Gypsy woman against the Spectre.

Lastly, the work is authenticated by Falla's use of three very old Andalusian melodies. In his use of these melodies, he has considered the elements of rhythm, modality and certain melodic intervals that have determined the undulating line and the cadences of Ancient Andalusian Music. His tempos have influenced the precise placement of the accent which is extremely important to give the music authenticity. He has chosen modality over tonality because for Falla, tonality was far too decisive. The composer has also given careful consideration to the use of dynamics and the voices of the singers. ?

Confirmation of the presence of other elements with respect to Ancient Andalusian Music which further attested to the authenticity, realism and tradition of Falla's ballet include:

- (a) the harmonization of essential notes of the mode, particularly, I, IV and V
- (b) static harmony
- (c) allusion to oriental modes
- (d) guitar effects in the harmony and accompaniment
- (e) rasgado effects pertaining to the guitar
- (f) the natural resonances that are joined to the principal notes of the chord.

Like so many of the European composers, Falla did not permit his own ideas to dominate his technical language. He depended on his inspiration, the "duende". In allowing his creative inspiration to guide him, Falla was able to compose a work that was so very Spanish yet at the same time it was universal. *El amor brujo* speaks to the soul of everyone.⁷

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- ¹ Luis Campodónico, Falla.
Traducción de Frances, Avila
(Avila, España), 1959
- ² Federico Sopena, Manuel de Falla y Su Música Andaluza.
(Ediciones Rialp, S.A., Madrid, España), 1976, p. 8
- Federico Garcia Lorca, Romancero gitano.
(Manchester University Press, New York), 1988, p. 17
- ³ Federico Garcia Lorca, Romancero gitano.
(Manchester University Press, New York), 1988, p. 17
- ⁴ Ibid, p. 17
- ⁵ Ibid, p. 17
- ⁶ Ibid, p. 14
- ⁷ Federico Sopena, Manuel de Falla y Su Música Andaluza.
(Ediciones Rialp, S.A., Madrid, España), 1976, p. 106

THE MOTIFS OF MANUEL DE FALLA

Many of the elements of ancient cante andaluz were to serve as motifs in the works of maestro Manuel de Falla. These motifs, although difficult to prove by European standards have clearly defined the differences between the Ancient Music of Andalucia and impure, modern flamenco.¹

DUENDE

One of the elements of ancient cante andaluz which became a motif in Falla's works was the duende. Duende was one of the most important concepts of the Ancient Andalucian belief system. A mysterious power that could be felt but never seen, it existed in everything and was everywhere according to the ancient peoples of Andalucia.² Nothing in life took place or happened without the duende. It fully possessed the Soul and drew from the Soul that most profound expression of suffering and death known throughout Andalucia as "*The Tragic Myth.*"³

The outstanding characteristics of the duende were darkness and negativity. Associated with death and the unconscious mind, it sprang from the depths of the earth. The duende could never be summoned at will but when it was present, its force was fearful and compelling.⁴ It was then the people of Andalucian would say "*Viva Dios!*" Dark and shuddering it demanded that each person climb the Tower of Perfection but only if he or she struggled with the duende.

In painting, the duende was represented through dark colours. In poetry, it was perceived as tragedy or death. In music it was expressed through the element of dissonance and black sounds. A clue to its presence, especially in Falla's music was that a particular passage was only written once. The passage itself was, in turn, totally dependent on how it was interpreted at a precise moment. The interpretation was not possible to repeat since it was in that "precise moment" that the interpreter had found something new or unprecedented because of the presence of the duende. Like a miracle, the duende brought freshness to the old and familiar and made it seem as if the old and mundane had suddenly been newly created.⁵

PENA NEGRA

Andalucian pena negra was the expression of the dramatic struggle that took place over a period of centuries between the Andalucian Soul and the two civilizations, the Roman and the Phoenician, that had imposed themselves on Andalucia. It did not refer to melancholy or nostalgia.⁶

Pena negra was deeply rooted in the duende and expressed the Andalucian sense of suffering. It evoked the anguish of the heart and a deep sadness.⁷ It was the terrible scream of the Soul as it remembered “dead generations.”⁸ A poignant elegy for lost centuries, it was the Soul’s pathetic evocation to other moons and other winds. It was the precious stone of the sob, pried open and revealed. The voice became the river, upon which the tears of the Soul fell.⁹

Through all the anguish, one could still smile. Pena negra did not blind, it did not weep out of self-pity. One knew the longing and deep love of pena negra even though Death was just behind the door.¹⁰

Romance de la Pena Negra

*Cordoba.
Lejana y sola.*

*Jaca negra, luna grande
Y aceitunas en mi alforja.
Aunque sepa los caminos
Yo nunca llegare a Cordoba.*

*Por el llano, por el viento
Jaca negra, luna roja.
La muerte me esta mirando
Desde los torres de Cordoba.*

*Ay! Que camino tan largo!
Ay! Mi jaca valerosa!
Ay! Que la muerte me espera,
Antes de llegar a Cordoba!*

*Cordoba
Lejana y sola.¹¹*

Cordoba.
Far off and lonely.

Black horse, big moon
And olives in my saddle bag.
Even though I know the road
I'll never get to Cordoba.

Across the plain and through the wind,
Black horse, red moon.
Death is watching me
From the towers of Cordoba.

Ay! How long the road!
Ay! My valiant horse!
Ay! Death awaits me
Before I get to Cordoba!

Cordoba.
Far off and lonely.¹²
Federico Garcia Lorca

Pena negra, rooted in duende, strongly reflected the element of fatalism found in ancient cante andaluz.¹³ It became an important motif for Falla because of its integrity. He expressed it through very sharp dissonance that was intended to interpret pain, anguish and frustration. The threnodic melody, like a lament for the dead evoked the deep sadness and hopeless despair that the Ancient Andalucians believed was their unalterable Destiny.

THE GUITAR

An essential element of ancient cante andaluz, as has been mentioned earlier, was the guitar. A timeless essence of Andalucia, the guitar became a recurring motif in Falla's music.¹⁴ It symbolized Fate and was associated with both love and death. It stood for the "untruthful side of love" which has been compared to the bitterness of the wine of Malaga.¹⁵

The guitar motif was primarily employed by Falla to create atmosphere. For example, a characteristic technique of guitar playing is known as *rasgado*. In this situation, the five fingers symbolize five swords.

The guitar represents the heart. *Rasguedo* symbolized the heart or guitar being wounded by the fingers or five swords as they tore over its strings.

The melancholic beauty of the sound of the guitar was used by Falla to awaken intimate memories that slept in the unconscious mind.¹⁶ A sobbing sound evoked human sorrow and lost souls. A pervasive, subtle sound heard in both dynamics and rhythms represented Death.

Falla was most particular with respect to guitar dynamics. Sudden piano going to forte and the delicate shadings within these two main dynamics gave richness to the rhythms he chose.¹⁷ Pauses and placement of accents were equally important. Very often the latter occurred at different points within the bar and between the clefs especially for the piano.

Specific dynamics were used to produce lyrical tension, trembling, wavering, undulation and imagery.¹⁸ Falla's guitar motifs were imitative of the instrument in most of his works. Their role was to provide a plaintive, melancholic background that could evoke the violence, forces of darkness, destiny and duende that were all such a part of ancient *cante andaluz*. To Falla, the sounds of a guitar were extremely important. Creating these sounds as part of his motifs became in itself, another aspect of his artistry.

MYSTICISM

Another element of ancient *cante andaluz* that became an essential motif in Falla's music was mysticism. Mysticism embodied fear, violent actions and tragedy. It set up conflict and struggle not only between positive and negative forces but also between the Past and the Present, Man and the Cosmos, Heaven and Earth.¹⁹

The Ancient Andalucians believed that it was only through conflict and struggle that reality could be achieved as well as the understanding that one must participate in all aspects of life because that was the Fate of human destiny to do so. Destiny inevitably ended in Death and could not be altered.²⁰

The mythical land of Andalusia provided Falla with the perfect city in which to set his great work, *El amor brujo* – Granada. Once verdant and fertile, the plains became dry and parched. The winds that blew across those plains now herald tragedy. The streets of the city utter the tragic cries and

pena negra of past centuries. The clear pools of water now stagnant attest to the might of the great Arabian palace, the Alhambra and the once beautiful gardens, the Generalife. All that began in love has now ended in sorrow.

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- ¹ Edward F. Stanton, The Tragic Myth: Lorca and cante jondo, (University Press of Kentucky, Kentucky), 1978, p. 15
- ² Ibid, p. 10
- ³ Ibid, p. 10
- ⁴ Ibid, p. 11
- ⁵ Federico Garcia Lorca, Deep Song and Other Prose, Translated and Edited by: Christopher Mauer (New Directions Publishing Corporation, New York), 1980, p. 46
- ⁶ Ibid, p. 105
- ⁷ Edward F. Stanton, The Tragic Myth: Lorca and cante jondo, (University Press of Kentucky, Kentucky), 1978, p. 33
- ⁸ Federica Garcia Lorca, Deep Song and Other Prose, Translated and Edited by: Christopher Mauer (New Directions Publishing Corporation, New York), 1980, p. 25
- ⁹ Ibid, p. 26
- ¹⁰ Ibid, p. 112
- ¹¹ Ibid, p. 112
- ¹² Ibid, p. 113
- ¹³ Edward F. Stanton, The Tragic Myth: Lorca and cante jondo, (University of Kentucky, Kentucky), 1978, p.33
- ¹⁴ D.E. Pohren, The Art of Flamenco. (Musical New Sources Limited, England), 1984, p. 31
- ¹⁵ Edward F. Stanton, The Tragic Myth: Lorca and cante jondo. (University Press of Kentucky, Kentucky), 1978, p. 37
- ¹⁶ Ibid, p. 39
- ¹⁷ Ibid, p. 43
- ¹⁸ Ibid, p. 43
- ¹⁹ Ibid, p. 82
- ²⁰ Ibid, p. 82

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April, 2001