

Peoria Symphony Orchestra Program Notes
March 11, 2017
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The works heard here on this program were written with 15 years of one another during the First World War and the years following, and the three works by de Falla and Turina are closely linked by the Spanish songs and rhythms that permeate the music. Our soloist, Mexican pianist Jorge Federico Osorio, opens with de Falla's exotic *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*. He then turns to a more modernist French work that calls for tremendous virtuosity, Ravel's *Concerto for the Left Hand Alone*. The two closing works feature the orchestra itself: Turina's *Fantastic Dances*, and the suites from Falla's ballet *The Three-Cornered Hat*.

Manuel de Falla (1876-1946)
Noches en los jardines de España (Nights in the Gardens of Spain)

Falla worked on his Noches en los jardines de España between 1909 and 1915. Its premiere was in Madrid, on April 9, 1916, with piano soloist José Cubiles.

Born in the southern port city of Cádiz, in the heart of Andalusia, Manuel de Falla never forgot his musical roots. By 1900, he had moved to Madrid, and took part in the vigorous musical life of the capital, taking lessons at the conservatory, and forming close bonds with like-minded young composers like Isaac Albeníz, Enrique Granados, and Joaquin Turina. In 1907, he moved to Paris - then the artistic capital of Europe and a magnet for ambitious young musicians. While he eagerly absorbed the newest French styles, his music remained firmly grounded in Spain. His first great successes, the opera *La vida breve* (1913) and the drama (later a ballet) *El amor brujo* (1915) are both set in Andalusia, and both are filled with references to Andalusian and Gypsy music. When war broke out in 1914, he returned to Madrid, beginning what would be the most successful period in his career, producing, among many other works, the intoxicating *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*.

This work was initially sketched out while was in Paris. In January 1909, Falla wrote home asking his family to send a copy of *Jardins d'Espagne* - a deluxe set of reproductions of landscape paintings of Spain's most famous formal gardens, by the Catalan artist Santiago Rusiñol. With Rusiñol's paintings as an initial inspiration, he set to work on a set of piano pieces that would become *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*. What began as a set of four nocturnes went through many revisions until he settled on three-movement set of "symphonic impressions" for solo piano and orchestra - completed in 1915, after he had returned to Madrid. When the work was premiered at Madrid's Royal Theatre in 1916 Falla wrote that:

"The author of these symphonic impressions for piano and orchestra considers that, if his aims have been successful, the simple listing of their titles should be guidance enough for their listeners." He also notes: "Bear in mind that the music of these nocturnes does not try to be descriptive, but rather simply expressive,

and that something more than the echoes of fiestas and dances has inspired these musical evocations, in which pain and mystery also play a part.”

Despite Falla’s note, a little bit of explanation just *might* be needed for those of us not intimately familiar with Spanish dances and famous Spanish gardens! The first movement, *En el Generalife (At the Generalife)* refers to the astonishing 14th-century Moorish palace and gardens that are a part of the Alhambra in Granada. The music is based upon the Andalusian *jaleo*, a highly expressive song accompanied by clapping. The opening is hushed and atmospheric, and when the piano enters, it weaves a sinuous counterpoint around the main idea. According to Falla, a second idea heard in the piano near the middle of the movement was borrowed from a blind fiddler who played it on the streets of Madrid. There are occasional bursts of stronger rhythm in this movement, but the music always returns to the quiet moody character of the opening. The second movement, *Danza lejana (Distant Dance)*, is filled with whirling fragments of the *malagueña*, an emotional *flamenco* song form. Throughout the movement the piano imitates the strumming sound of the Spanish guitar. A sudden upward sweep at the end of the movement leads directly in the third moment, *En los jardines de la Sierra de Córdoba (In the Gardens of the Sierra de Córdoba)*. Here, Falla paints a picture of a *zambra gitana*, a party where Gypsy musicians provide the entertainment. The movement is set as a *copla*, an Andalusian form where a refrain alternates with improvised verses. The forceful main idea alternates here with impressionistic contrasting material provided mostly by the piano. The ending, dominated by the piano, is reflective and quiet.

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Concerto in D Major for Piano, Left Hand Alone, and Orchestra

Ravel composed this work in 1929-30 for pianist Paul Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein played its premiere in Vienna on January 5, 1932.

In 1929, Ravel was working on two piano concertos more or less simultaneously. But though they share a common affinity for jazz, it is otherwise hard to conceive of two works that are more different. The G Major concerto is a fairly light, somewhat “neoclassical” work, very much in the mold of Mozart, and filled with good humor. The D Major concerto heard here is much more serious, densely-textured, and sometimes aggressively modernist work. The more sober nature of the concerto in D Major was intentional - as Ravel later noted in comparing the two: “The *Concerto for the Left Hand Alone* is very different [from the G Major]. It contains many jazz effects, and the writing is not so light. In a work of this kind, it is essential to give the impression of a texture that is no thinner than on a part written for both hands. For the same reason I resorted to a style that is nearer to that of the more solemn kind of traditional concerto.”

The idea of a piano work for the left hand alone was certainly not original to Ravel - there are a sizeable number of left-handed pieces written either as technical etudes or independent pieces, some as early as J.S. and C.P.E. Bach. In Ravel’s case, the inspiration was one of the 20th-century’s great virtuosos, Paul Wittgenstein (1887-

1961). Wittgenstein was already a budding star when he was drafted into the Austrian army during World War I, and sent to the Eastern Front. He was shot in the right elbow, captured by the Russians, and sent to a prisoner-of-war camp in Siberia. His right arm had to be amputated, and rather than despair, Wittgenstein resolved to make a career as a left-handed pianist - going so far as to write from Siberia to Josef Labor, his former piano teacher in Vienna, asking him to compose a concerto for the left hand alone. Wittgenstein was repatriated in 1916, and returned to touring after the war. Labor's concerto was only the first of many works the pianist commissioned - Strauss, Britten, Korngold, Hindemith, Prokofiev, and many others wrote works for him. But it is Ravel's *Concerto for the Left Hand Alone* that has remained a standard part of the piano repertory.

Ravel seemed to relish the technical challenge of writing for one hand, but the collaboration with Wittgenstein was not particularly happy - Wittgenstein did not particularly like the piece at first, and eventually cancelled the planned Paris premiere, which Ravel was to have conducted. However, he later wrote "It always takes me a while to grow into a difficult piece... Only much later, after I'd studied the concerto for months, did I become fascinated by it and realize what a great work it was."

Rather than the conventional three movements, the *Concerto for the Left Hand Alone* is in several interconnected sections, beginning with a somber passage for the low strings and woodwinds that eventually swells into the full orchestra, and ushers in an extended solo cadenza. The piano's part, alternating between a simple quasi-oriental melody and deep accompaniment was designed to showcase Wittgenstein's phenomenal technique. The secondary theme is no less virtuosic for being lyrical. The tempo gradually increases into the second large section, which is a scherzo-style march, eventually incorporating a bluesy countermelody. The section ends with acceleration into a grand passage for full orchestra and a long piano cadenza that develops many of the main ideas. The orchestra reenters at the very end for a brief flourish of a coda.

Joaquin Turina (1882-1949) **Danzas fantásticas (Fantastic Dances)**

Turina composed a piano version of this work in August 1919, and completed the orchestral version heard here by December of that year. This version premiered in Madrid on February 13, 1920. Duration 17:00.

Turina was born in the Andalusian city of Seville, and his initial studies in piano and composition were in his hometown. While he was still in his teens he moved on to Madrid, where he hoped to have his first opera performed at the Royal Theater. Though he did not succeed in staging the opera, he did continue his studies at the Royal Conservatory, and struck up a lifelong friendship with Manuel de Falla. He and Falla moved to Paris, and Turina spent the years before the first world war there, working with Vincent D'Indy, and becoming thoroughly absorbed by the music of Debussy. Falla and other Spanish émigrés later convinced Turina to return to his Spanish roots, and most of his subsequent music had ties to Spanish folklore and music - particularly of his native

Andalusia. When war broke out in 1914, Turina returned to Madrid, working for several years at the Royal Theatre as its choirmaster, and eventually joining the faculty of the Conservatory. Turina's music - nearly always rooted in Spanish style but maintaining the compositional forms and harmonies he soaked up in Paris - is among the finest from 20th-century Spain.

Danzas fantásticas, Turina's most frequently-performed work, was inspired by the 1919 novella *La orgía* (*The Orgy*), by another Seville native, José Mas. Though he notes in a memoir that he did not try to directly tell the story, Turina did include quotes from the novella at the beginning of each movement to indicate the atmosphere portrayed. Each of the movements is further based upon a Spanish dance. In the opening movement, *Exaltación* (*Exaltation*) the score is headed by the following: "It seemed as though the figures in that incomparable picture were moving inside the calyx of a flower." After a dark introduction, the music moves into a lively Aragonese *jota* - a sexy couples' dance that combines duple and triple meter. The movement includes several dramatic stops and starts, and a rather mysterious closing passage. In *Ensueño* (*Dream*) Turina begins with: "The guitar's strings sounded the lament of a soul helpless under the weight of bitterness." In this case the dance is a Basque *zortzico*, a folk dance with a distinctive 5/8 rhythm that lends this lyrical and languid music an underlying uneasiness. In the final movement, *Orgía*, "The perfume of the flowers merged with the odor of *manzanilla*, and from the bottom of raised glasses, full of the incomparable wine, like an incense, rose joy." In this case, the dance is a *farruca* - a bold, *macho* men's dance in Andalusian *flamenco* style. There is a brash and brassy introduction before the dance begins in a lighter style. The more strident music of the opening keeps interrupting the dance until the very end: a wistful cello solo and a final shout from the brass.

Manuel de Falla

Suites No.1 and No.2 from *El sombrero de tres picos* (*The Three-Cornered Hat*)

The first full-scale performance of this ballet took place at London's Alhambra Theatre on July 22, 1919. The orchestral suites heard here were published in 1921. Duration 22:00.

Manuel de Falla's ballet *El sombrero de tres picos*, like many of the great ballet scores of Stravinsky, Ravel, and Prokofiev, was the result of a commission by impresario Serge Diaghilev for his famous Ballets Russe. Diaghilev originally approached Falla in 1915 with a plan for turning the composer's *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* into a ballet. Falla refused to allow this - one of the few times Diaghilev was turned down in any way! - but he did promise a ballet score based upon Pedro de Alarcón's novel *El corregidor y la molinera* (*The Corregidor and the Miller's Wife*). Falla was at first thwarted by a troublesome clause in Alarcón's will, but he was eventually granted permission to use the story, and set to work on the score. With the limitations imposed by the first world war, it was impossible for Diaghilev to mount a full-scale ballet production, but he did produce a preliminary version - as a mime set to music - in Madrid in 1917. This early version had been scored for a chamber orchestra, but with the end of the war in sight, Diaghilev insisted upon a full orchestral score. The premiere of the full ballet featured

choreography by Diaghilev's protégé Léonide Massine and sets and costumes by Picasso. The immediate success of this performance led Falla to extract two orchestral suites from the ballet score.

The ballet is in two scenes, with Alarcón's farcical story set as a series of traditional Spanish dances. The two suites draw on the main musical episodes of these two scenes, and are presented in the order of the original ballet score. The ballet opens with music titled *Afternoon* - a bold trumpet fanfare, and then more languid music with flashes of humor that sets the scene. In the first scene, the Miller's wife eludes his embraces and flirts with the old Corregidor, a local magistrate who wears a three-cornered hat as his badge of office. The Corregidor sneaks back later and hides, watching the Miller's wife dance a *fandango* (*The Dance of the Miller's Wife*). This is sensuous, dramatic music based upon the *flamenco* dance - you can imagine the stomping feet, and flirtatiously whirling skirts. In the next sequence (*The Corregidor – The Miller's Wife*) the Corregidor reveals himself, and in the guise of comical solo bassoon, he attempts to dance a *minuet* with her - she pretends to be flattered, dancing a more graceful version of the same music. She flirts even more outrageously in the final sequence (*The Grapes*) offering him grapes and then flitting away, until the clumsy Corregidor finally trips and falls on his face. He stomps off furiously, and the Miller, who has seen the whole thing, emerges from hiding and completes the *fandango* with his wife.

The second scene begins at a feast given by the Miller and his wife. *The Neighbors' Dance* is a languorous *seguidilla*, a couples' contra dance that includes some of the sexier moves from the *fandango*. (The *seguidilla* was one of the dances condemned by the Church in Spain as too lascivious for proper young women!) *The Miller's Dance* is a *farruca*, a form that was typically danced by a solo man as a display of virility and physical prowess. (Falla added this dance to the original ballet at the last minute, at Diaghilev's insistence - as a showpiece for Massine.) It begins with a pair of thoroughly macho flourishes from the horn and English horn and continues in a series of dramatically rhythmic phrases, leading to furious ending. The Corregidor's bodyguard bursts in and arrests the Miller on a trumped-up charge. The Corregidor returns in the middle of the night to chase the Miller's wife, but, while in hot pursuit, he falls into the millpond. He hangs his wet clothes on a chair and falls asleep. The Miller, who has escaped, returns, and seeing the clothes, he believes his wife has been unfaithful. He steals the Corregidor's clothes, and goes off to seduce the Corregidor's wife. The Corregidor awakes, and is forced to put on the Miller's clothes - just in time to be arrested by his own men, who are looking for the escaped Miller. A crowd gathers, and the Miller returns to dance a mocking *chufleta* around the Corregidor, just before the old man is dragged away. The ballet closes with the entire ensemble in the *Final Dance*, a *jota* with a lively cross-rhythm throughout. The music is alternately light-hearted and dramatic, but in the end brings this set to a joyful conclusion.