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## From Spain to the United States: Joaquín Rodrigo's Transatlantic Legacy

Marta Mateo, Cristina Lacomba and Natalie Ramírez (eds.)



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## PREFACE

# Joaquín Rodrigo: Over Sixty Years of Historical Ties across the United States

**Cecilia Rodrigo Kamhi**

Victoria and Joaquín Rodrigo Foundation

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Before embarking on this journey, let me introduce a few very significant details of my father's personality. I don't intend to analyze his music because I am not a musician myself. However, from my point of view as daughter, and after many years as manager and witness to Rodrigo's success throughout the world, I hope these few lines may add supplementary light to the study of the composer.

The Maestro's personality can only be truly understood if we know what his process of composition was as a blind composer in the twentieth century. Rodrigo was blind from the age of three, and although he was an accomplished pianist, he never played the guitar. He wrote his music in Braille, which he adapted to his own needs, and once the manuscript of the work was complete, he dictated it note by note to a copyist, a task which always took him much longer than composing the work itself.

This long and very time-consuming process for Rodrigo to put his compositions on paper (in his own words, it was a labor fit for Benedictines) is a fact that I am afraid is often unknown, and gives a totally different dimension to his work. Afterwards, together with his wife Victoria at the piano, they would go through the score to correct any faults or errors that they detected.

Rodrigo and his music have aroused interest in the United States for many years and the country played a vital role in the composer's career. The fact that four of the five guitar concertos he composed were premiered in the United States is by itself very eloquent.

So let's start travelling!

In 1957, Joaquín Rodrigo and his wife Victoria made their first trip to the US and visited Puerto Rico to attend the Pablo Casals Festival. He gave concerts and lectures at the University. From there they went to New York for an extended stay with Andrés Segovia and fellow composer Carlos Surinach. They made significant visits to the Julliard School, where they met all the professors, and to the Foundation for the Blind.

One year later, in 1958, one of the greatest events in Rodrigo's career took place. His work for guitar and orchestra, *Fantasia para un gentilhombre*, dedicated to Andrés Segovia who was, of course, the soloist, was premiered on March 5th by the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra under the Spanish conductor, Enrique Jordá.

As to the whereabouts of *Concierto de Aranjuez* at this point, it had not been premiered yet. The first US performance of the work took place in 1959, with the Cuban guitarist Rey de la Torre and the Cleveland Orchestra. This was 19 years after its premiere in Barcelona. *Concierto de Aranjuez* immediately achieved enormous success in America, as this letter from conductor Leopold Stokowski testifies:

“27 November 1968

Dear Maestro,

We all wish to thank you for the very great pleasure we had in performing recently your concerto de Aranjuez. Mr. Díaz played the solo guitar part and every player in the orchestra and all the public cheered after we had finished your great and delightful music.

Do you have any compositions for symphonic orchestra?

Hoping we may hear from you.

Leopold Stokowski”

But there was someone else, an unexpected artist, who was very impressed by the work. In 1960 Columbia Records released the jazz version by Miles Davis, a recording that was an enormous hit throughout the world and remains today one of the classic achievements in jazz. The Maestro recognized that a masterpiece has to pay the price of inspiring others to express their feelings through their own transcriptions. The final result was that the original work became even better known around the world. That was probably the first arrangement of *Concierto de Aranjuez*. Since that time, there have been hundreds of versions circulating and others are constantly appearing. This is a true phenomenon.

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To continue with world premieres that took place in the US, there was another important one in 1960: *Cuatro madrigales amatorios*, in its version for soprano and orchestra, was premiered by the Louisville Orchestra with the great Spanish soprano Marimí del Pozo.

In 1963, Joaquín Rodrigo was appointed Visiting Professor of music at the University of Rio Piedras in Puerto Rico where, together with his wife, he spent a few months. Around 1966, the American Wind Symphony Orchestra in Pittsburg, commissioned a work for the orchestra. The *Adagio for wind instruments* was premiered in Pittsburg that same year. In 1967, *Concierto Andaluz* for four guitars and

orchestra, commissioned by Celedonio Romero, written and dedicated to the Royal Family of the Guitar, Los Romeros, was premiered by the San Antonio orchestra and Los Romeros.

In 1970, the Maestro returned with his wife to Los Angeles, to attend the world premiere of *Concierto Madrigal* for two guitars and orchestra at the Hollywood Bowl, which was crowded to capacity with 20,000 people. Pepe and Angel Romero were the soloists with the Los Angeles Symphony, under the Spanish conductor, Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos. From Los Angeles, Joaquín Rodrigo and Victoria went to Houston, where they paid a visit to NASA, as guests of honor. The astronauts accorded them a very cordial welcome and invited the composer to touch all the objects on exhibit there: the space modules, various instruments, and moon rocks. In March 1978, the Houston Symphony premiered Rodrigo's symphonic poem *In search of the beyond*, written to commemorate the bi-centennial of the United States and dedicated to NASA.

My father would never have imagined that in the year 2002, following my visit to Houston to attend a Rodrigo Centennial homage concert, another NASA astronaut from Spain, Michael López-Alegría, would take the CD with the recording of *In search of the beyond* with him on the Endeavor shuttle flight which flew 216 times around the earth. Captain Lopez-Alegría sent me the certificate signed by his crew.

In 1982, on his last visit to the United States, Rodrigo was awarded the honorary degree "Doctor Honoris Causa" from the University of Southern California. And in 1983, *Concierto para una fiesta* for guitar and orchestra, commissioned by the Mc Kay family from Texas in honor of their daughters' debut in society, was premiered in Fort Worth, by the Texas Little Symphony, with conductor John Giordano, and soloist Pepe Romero.

It is true that Joaquín Rodrigo first became known in the United States through his *Concierto de Aranjuez* and progressively his entire repertoire for guitar. However,



since the death of my parents –Victoria on July 21, 1997, and Joaquín on July 6, 1999– interest in Rodrigo's music has not ceased to grow in this country. I have been witness to the increasing number of US musicians of all disciplines who study and perform his works, according special interest to the incredible range and diversity of his output. There has been a notable rise in programming Rodrigo's works among orchestras as well. Over the years many American artists have made significant comments on Joaquín Rodrigo which have deeply moved me. I would like to quote guitarist David Starobin: “I have never met Rodrigo, but have spent a lifetime in his arms”.

My travels have taken me many times to the United States for all kinds of occasions, to name a few: the Bloomington (Indiana) International Harp Competition which featured Rodrigo's harp concerto *Concierto Serenata*, a US tour to celebrate his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, and of course the celebration of his Centennial year, 2001, attending concerts in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston and other cities. In 2000 the Ballet Hispánico of New York staged a choreography based on the life of Victoria and Joaquín Rodrigo, called “The eyes of the soul”, in New York, with outstanding success.

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Rodrigo's music is featured not only in concert halls but in many other fields, such as Hollywood films, TV series, sports competitions, as background for exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, fashion shows, CD recordings, and radio programs such as the recent one called “The other Joaquín Rodrigo” (on Radio station in Chicago), which underlined the distinction of his total output, not only his guitar repertoire.

Special mention should be made of the growing presence of Rodrigo's music in all sorts of educational institutions and universities, stimulating students' interest to focus on his works, and providing incentives for doctoral theses. I especially remember being pleasantly surprised in 2014 when a music professor, Kevin Shealy, from the Lexington High School in South Carolina contacted me about the school band's desire to incorporate the composer's life and music along with the study of his wind band

works. The result was an amazing performance of music and dance featuring the “Adagio for wind instruments” in their Fall production in schools and in local competitions with other schools.

Joaquín Rodrigo, besides being a composer, historian, philosopher, writer and musicologist, was a scholar, although he never formally attended a university as a student. He was himself a university professor at the University Complutense of Madrid for over 25 years. He also gave classes in Music History to students from US universities. In this context, two US Universities dedicated a festival to the composer:

- 2001 International Festival at Winona State University in Minnesota, dedicated to Joaquín Rodrigo’s Centennial Year, on the initiative of Music Professor Suzanne Draayer, author of *A Singer’s Guide to the Songs of Joaquín Rodrigo*, written after extensive interviews with the Rodrigo family. The book is a reference for English-speaking singers to obtain better knowledge of pronunciation of the Spanish text and how it is incorporated to the music.
- 2009 International Festival at University of Texas, El Paso (UTEP), promoted by Dena Jones, pianist and member of the Faculty.

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In both university events, concerts, lectures, recitals, video-viewings and lively round-table discussions took place with enthusiastic student and faculty participation.

This outline of Rodrigo's journey throughout the US comes to an end this year, 2019, in which the 20th anniversary of Joaquín Rodrigo's death has been commemorated in outstanding events, such as *An Anniversary Celebration: The Guitar and Beyond*, featuring performances at the Hispanic Society, each preceded by lectures devoted to compositions by Joaquín Rodrigo, organized and performed by renowned musicians such as Douglas Riva, Anna Tonna, Eva León, and many others. The celebrations, spearheaded by the Foundation for Iberian Music at the City

University of New York, also included an international symposium at the King Juan Carlos I of Spain Center at New York University, and a round table with a concert at Harvard University, within the framework of the Instituto Cervantes Observatorio at Harvard University. Participating in this event were the eminent scholars Walter A. Clark, Antoni Piza, Javier Suárez-Pajares and Douglas Riva, moderated by Isabel Pérez Dobarro.

This ongoing program of events for our journey will close with a finishing touch: the biography of Joaquín Rodrigo written by Walter A. Clark and Javier Suárez Pajares, to be published in 2020, and the creation of the Joaquín and Victoria Rodrigo Endowed Chair in Spanish Music and Culture, at the Center for Iberian and Latin American Music, at the University of California, Riverside, at the request of its Founder and Director, the Distinguished Professor of Music Walter A. Clark.

To conclude, after reading and listening to so many different definitions of Joaquín Rodrigo, this is the way I see my father: 'Spanish nobility' best defines Rodrigo – both as a musician and as a human being.

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# INTRODUCTION

## Joaquín Rodrigo in the United States<sup>1</sup>

Isabel Pérez Dobarro  
Concert Pianist

The legendary violinist Yehudi Menuhin once remarked: “It is wonderful to think that the Spanish will long be reminded of their character, their qualities of thought, of feelings and being, through the music of Joaquín Rodrigo.”<sup>2</sup> No doubt, these words reflect Rodrigo’s international transcendence and his renown as one of the greatest exponents of the Hispanic musical repertoire. Over the years, some of the world’s most accomplished musicians have performed his work in the most prestigious venues. There are thousands of versions of his immortal *Concierto de Aranjuez* in both the classical genre and others, and today, the piece is a symbol not just of the composer’s music, but of Spain and Spanish culture.

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Although Rodrigo’s work spans the globe, it has had an especially notable impact in the United States, to such an extent that, upon his death, the *New York Times*’ obituary called him the “Master of Spanish Classical Music” and described the

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[<sup>1</sup> Editors’ note: English translation, offered by the Observatorio, of the original Spanish submitted by the author. See study 055-11/2019SP.]

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.joaquin-rodrigo.com/index.php/es/palabras>

*Concierto de Aranjuez* as a “haunting masterpiece.”<sup>3</sup> In 2019 alone, over 60 U.S. orchestras programmed performances of Rodrigo’s works, including the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and the Cleveland Orchestra, and in 2020, his pieces will be performed by the San Antonio and San Diego Symphonies.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, on the twentieth anniversary of his death, numerous festivals, chamber concerts, and recitals have been held across the country, in addition to panels on his life and work at a number of illustrious institutions, including Harvard University, the City University of New York, New York University, and the Hispanic Society.

With this publication from the Observatory of the Instituto Cervantes at Harvard University, our goal is to join in these commemorations by analyzing the continued presence of Joaquín Rodrigo and his music in the United States, framing our work within the study of Spanish culture’s impact in the U.S. in general and on American classical music in particular. This collection begins with a contribution from the composer’s own daughter, Cecilia Rodrigo Kahmi, who, in “Joaquín Rodrigo: Over Sixty Years of Historical Ties Across the United States,” offers her own unique and privileged perspective on her father’s travels and achievements in the U.S. Besides describing the genesis and development of each event, her article offers exceptional insight into her father’s personality and reveals his original method of composing (as he was blind from the age of three). As the President of the Victoria and Joaquín Rodrigo Foundation, she also reflects on her own experiences with the dissemination and reception of Rodrigo’s work.

This volume also includes essays by eminent musicologists, performers, and specialists on the life and work of the composer: Dr. Walter Aaron Clark, Distinguished Professor at the University of California, Riverside; Dr. Antoni Pizà, Director of the Foundation for Iberian Music and Professor at the City University of New York; Dr. Javier Suárez-Pajares, Professor at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid; and Dr. Douglas

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/07/08/arts/joaquin-rodrigo-97-master-of-spanish-classical-music.html>

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.joaquin-rodrigo.com/index.php/es/eventos-clon>

Riva, internationally acclaimed concert pianist. I also humbly include myself among these contributors. Each piece in this volume considers Joaquín Rodrigo's reception in the U.S. from three perspectives: the performance and programming of his pieces, the influence of his music on other musical genres (particularly jazz), and his critical reception.

Rodrigo's presence and extraordinary success in the U.S. have always been closely linked to the linked to efforts of the performers who played his work: these musicians actively collaborated with Rodrigo during his life and have deliberately programmed his works and sought to disseminate them throughout the country. Thus, the story of *Concierto andaluz* is also the story of Los Romeros and their legendary recording for the Mercury label; we cannot talk about the inception and U.S. debut of *Fantasia para un gentleman* without acknowledging the determination of the brilliant Andrés Segovia and of conductor Enrique Jordá, who at that time led the San Francisco Symphony. And needless to say, Miles Davis's recording of *Sketches of Spain* transformed the already celebrated *Concierto de Aranjuez* into an essential piece in the international canon that audiences of every sort across the globe know and revere.

Of Rodrigo's numerous performers, Clark chooses to focus his study on Los Romeros, the most important guitar quartet of our time. He emphasizes that the relationship between Los Romeros and Rodrigo, besides embodying their personal friendship, also entailed a kind of high-level artistic symbiosis: the group, or some members therefore, commissioned works from the composer, who, in turn, contributed to the development of the repertoire for guitar ensemble, which had been scarce until that point. Through their performances and recordings of Rodrigo's work, Los Romeros played an essential role in the dissemination of his pieces, creating a legacy that still lives on in the U.S.

In his essay “The Reception of Joaquín Rodrigo’s Works in the U.S.,” Suárez-Pajares highlights that such illustrious performers as pianists José Iturbi, Joaquín Nin-Culmell, and Alicia de Larrocha; guitarists Andrés Segovia and Rey de la Torre; and conductors Enrique Jordá and Leopold Stokowski were essential in introducing U.S. audiences to Rodrigo’s work. Much of this essay focuses on three events that were extraordinarily pertinent to this process: the composition and debut of *Fantasía de un gentilhombre* thanks to a commission from Andrés Segovia and Enrique Jordá’s insistence on using his position as principal conductor at the San Francisco Symphony to promote Spanish music; José Iturbi’s fruitless efforts to program the symphonic poem *Por la flor del Iliri blau*; and a debut of Rodrigo’s work by the Louisville Orchestra as part of its program for the promotion of contemporary music.

Within the sphere of piano performance, Riva highlights the importance of Gregory Allen and Anton Nell’s recording “Joaquín Rodrigo: The Complete Music for Piano” for Bridge Records, the composer’s first U.S. piano anthology. Riva also offers a detailed exploration of Rodrigo’s compositional language, using *A l’ombre de Torre Bermeja* as an example. In that piece, Rodrigo pays homage to both Isaac Albéniz and pianist Ricardo Viñes. In his meticulous analysis, Riva points out Rodrigo’s technical and compositional originality in this “paraphrase” of Albéniz’s *Torre Bermeja*.

The second segment of our collective project addresses the cultural mobility of Rodrigo’s work and particularly of his *Concierto de Aranjuez* through an analysis of Miles Davis’s *Sketches of Spain*. Pizà argues that the album does not fit within the aesthetics of jazz nor within the domain of classical music but, rather, belongs in another space beyond categorization, defined by its “formal instability” and “in-betweenness.” Pizà argues that this lack of definition goes beyond the merely aesthetic to defy the traditional conception of authorship and raise questions of cultural appropriation and convergence. The confusion between the American and the Spanish, the traditional and the modern, evinces a remarkable example of the possibilities of intercultural dialogue between the two countries.



Finally, my essay “Reflection of Joaquín Rodrigo and his Music in the U.S. Media” explores U.S. music critics’ acceptance his music. By analyzing the content of the most important North American publications, I have found recurring themes associated with Rodrigo’s music and contextualized it within the cultural reception of Spanish art in the U.S.

Rodrigo’s music is already part of North American cultural heritage. Regardless of whether you hear it at Carnegie Hall, in a jazz club hosting Bobby McFerrin and Chick Corea, in a Sephardic synagogue during the Kaddish, or in the 1996 film *Brassed Off*, the genius of his music continues to excite generation after generation with Spanish music at its most sublime. As soprano Montserrat Caballé once said, Rodrigo’s work is an extraordinary and “eternal legacy.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.joaquin-rodrigo.com/index.php/es/palabras>



# Rodrigo and Los Romeros in the Land of Rock 'n' Roll: A Brief History of a Historic Relationship

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## Abstract

Joaquín Rodrigo (1901-99) was a prolific composer of works for various media in a wide assortment of genres, but audiences are most familiar with his large output for the guitar, especially the *Concierto de Aranjuez* for guitar and orchestra. Among the principal champions of his guitar music have been the Romeros—the father, Celedonio, his three sons, Celín, Ángel, and Pepe, and two grandchildren, Lito and Celino. This essay explores Rodrigo's personal and professional relationship with the Romeros over four decades, from the 1960s to the 1990s. The deep friendship and mutual respect that bound them together also resulted in a sort of symbiosis, whereby Rodrigo provided the Romeros with new repertoire, while they enlarged and enhanced his reputation, especially in their adoptive country of the United States, where the guitar was associated more with rock 'n' roll than with the classical and traditional musics of Spain.

## Keywords

Rodrigo, Romeros, Aranjuez, Andaluz, Madrigal, Para una fiesta

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In the year 2019 we commemorate two important events in the history of Spanish music: the twentieth anniversary of the death of Joaquín Rodrigo (1901-99), and the eightieth anniversary of his completion of the *Concierto de Aranjuez* for guitar and orchestra. We can look forward to further commemorations in 2020: the eightieth anniversary of the premiere of the *Aranjuez*, in Barcelona with Regino Sáinz de la Maza as soloist, and the sixtieth anniversary of the formation of the Romero Guitar Quartet, the first such ensemble of any eminence in the history of classical music. This article provides an overview of the several and significant ways the careers of Rodrigo and the Romeros intersected, and how their collaboration bore first fruits not in Spain but rather in the United States, a country in which rock 'n' roll was then the dominant form of musical entertainment.<sup>1</sup> In the process of working together, Rodrigo and the Romeros forged a deep bond, one that was mutually beneficial: Rodrigo supplied the Romeros with new repertoire to perform, and their innumerable performances of his music greatly enhanced his reputation here.

The Romero family left Spain in 1957 to resettle in Southern California at the invitation of an American man and his wife, Farrington and Evelyn Stoddard, who had first met them a few years earlier while on vacation in the Romeros' home town of Málaga. At that time, the father, Celedonio, was the only Romero with an active performing career, though his first son, Celín (b. 1936), was a rising star, giving lessons and appearing on local radio. Pepe (b. 1944) was a child prodigy, and his brother Ángel (b. 1946) would soon blossom into a virtuoso as well. But there was as yet no Romero quartet. A radical change of locale would prove necessary for that to happen. Celedonio's professional ascent had hit a sort of glass ceiling in Spain, and he and his wife, Angelita, concluded that the only remedy for this situation was to move abroad. The United States beckoned as a land of limitless opportunity for the Romero family.

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<sup>1</sup> For an in-depth history of the Romero family, consult this author's *Los Romeros: Royal Family of the Spanish Guitar* (Urbana, Chicago, Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2018).

Thus, with the financial and logistical support of the Stoddards, the Romeros moved to Santa Barbara in the summer of 1957. Their plan was to relaunch Celedonio's concert career in these more lucrative surroundings and to use teaching as a reliable source of income. On June 13, 1958, Celedonio gave his debut performance in the U.S., at Santa Barbara's Lobero Theatre.<sup>2</sup> It was a huge success, but Santa Barbara itself was too small a stage for his talents. So, the family decamped for Hollywood shortly thereafter. (In 1969 they moved farther south, to Del Mar, a coastal suburb of San Diego that reminded them very much of Málaga).

However, there was still no guitar quartet, just a family of talented guitarists giving lessons to Hollywood studio musicians like Tony Mottola and aspiring classical guitarists like Christopher Parkening. The impetus to form a quartet came in 1960, after Celin had been drafted into the U.S. Army Reserve and was completing basic training at Fort Ord in Monterey, California. The base held an open house for families of the soldiers, and the Romero clan descended on Monterey with their guitars. Celedonio and his sons entertained the soldiers and their families with lively renditions of malagueñas and fandangos. A fellow soldier, Jim Lucas, planned to become a talent agent when he got out of the army, and he suggested to Celin that he could manage the four of them. The Romero Quartet was born. Already in 1961 they were giving concerts in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Chicago, and, Boston. They were soon appearing on television as well, including spots on the Tonight Show, Jack Paar, and later Ed Sullivan. This was the same television program on which millions of Americans got their first glimpse of another famous quartet of musicians, not from Spain but rather from England—the Beatles.

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During these early years, however, the Romeros had to confront one serious obstacle: a near-total lack of repertoire for a quartet of classical/flamenco guitarists.

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<sup>2</sup> By an interesting coincidence, it was in that same year that Andrés Segovia premiered the *Fantasia para un gentilhomme*, a guitar concerto Rodrigo wrote especially for him. The premiere took place in San Francisco, a little over 300 miles north of Santa Barbara.

Their concert programs consisted mostly of a potpourri of solos and duets from the standard guitar repertoire, concluding with crowd-pleasing flamenco numbers played by all four guitarists. Celedonio also made arrangements of concertos by Bach and Telemann, but he wanted new music by living composers written specifically for the quartet. He soon turned to Joaquín Rodrigo for assistance.

The Romeros were no strangers to the great maestro's music. In July 1964, at the tender age of 18, Ángel gave the West Coast premiere of the *Concierto de Aranjuez* at the Hollywood Bowl, with Eleazar de Carvalho conducting a Spanish-themed program of Albéniz, Falla, Ravel, and Rodrigo. Celedonio was actually to have played this premiere, but Angelita did not want him to appear as a concerto soloist because she feared that he might succumb to the temptation of an encore with one of the attractive young female musicians. Ángel stepped forward to take his place, instantly becoming another luminary in the City of Stars. Writing for the *Los Angeles Times*, Albert Goldberg noted that Angel excited “unreserved admiration for his disciplined, incisive rhythm, his authority, surety and taste, and the manner in which he projected the tinkling, fragile tones of one of the most delicate of instruments in one of the world's largest amphitheatres” (Goldberg, 1964).

Two years later, on June 30, 1966, Celedonio wrote to Rodrigo asking him to compose music for the quartet, an invitation Rodrigo readily accepted.<sup>3</sup> Celedonio introduced himself by reminding the composer that they had met many years earlier, at an event sponsored by the Ateneo de Sevilla in which Rodrigo spoke and Celedonio played. Rodrigo immediately saw the potential of a collaboration with the Romeros and set about to craft some music for them. He wrote the following to the Romeros' Columbia Artists manager, Herb Fox, on October 29, 1966: “As I said in my former letters, I have decided to start immediately with the composition of the four guitar

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<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Cecilia Rodrigo for the precise date of this letter, which she provides in her eloquent foreword to *Los Romeros*, p. xiii.

Concerto for the Romeros, postponing the composition of all the other works I was commissioned with.”<sup>4</sup>

This work was the *Concierto andaluz*, for four guitars and orchestra, which they premiered on November 18, 1967, with the San Antonio Symphony, under the baton of family friend Victor Alessandro (Ángel played the *Aranjuez* on this same program). This was the same year in which the Romeros were granted U.S. citizenship, but they retained a deep cultural connection with their Spanish homeland. Hence, the title of this major work was actually Celedonio’s idea, as he wanted a musical homage to his native Andalusia that would include characteristic songs and dances, as a sort of musical portrait of the region. The Romeros then recorded the *Andaluz* and *Aranjuez* on the Mercury label, and this remains one of their best and most iconic recordings.<sup>5</sup>

The concerto sounds very Spanish from the first note to the last, but it is not based on preexisting melodies; rather, Rodrigo freely composed themes that nonetheless evoke the bolero, *sevillanas*, *zapateado*, and fandango. As was the case with the *Aranjuez*, Rodrigo adhered to the traditional concerto structure of three movements, fast, slow, fast. Those familiar with the *Aranjuez* immediately note, however, that this middle movement is not nearly as dramatic, as it does not climax in a sort of *cri-de-coeur* laden with tragic desperation followed by muted resignation. Nonetheless, it produces a lyrically tranquil mood that contrasts effectively with the very dancelike outer movements, brimming as they are with the sort of flamenco effects one anticipates in an “Andalusian Concerto.”

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<sup>4</sup> The Romero family’s extensive archive of manuscripts, programs, diaries, and correspondence is now located in Special Collections of the University Libraries at the University of California, Riverside. It can be accessed at <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8057mh2/>.

<sup>5</sup> Mercury LP SR-90488/1968. See Clark, *Los Romeros*, 285-96, for a complete list of the Romeros’ albums. The family subsequently recorded all of the guitar concertos on a Philips three-CD set (432 581-2), with Neville Marriner conducting the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields. One of my favorite guitar recordings is Pepe’s album of the solo works, again on the Philips label (LP 9500915/198; Cassette 7300915/1981). In an interview by Laurel Ornish, “Guitar’s First Family Visits: Romeros, Symphony Made History Together,” *San Antonio Express-News*, May 9, 1995, 12B, Celedonio stated that they had already played the *Concierto andaluz* hundreds of times around the world, in every city with a major symphony orchestra.

The work was well received in Spain, by both the public and officialdom. The Spanish government bore no ill will towards the Romeros for having left Spain, though the family had fought on the Republican side during the Civil War. They were splendid cultural ambassadors at a time when the Franco regime was seeking to rehabilitate its international reputation, in order to secure economic assistance from Western European countries and the United States, which in turn viewed Spain as a valuable ally in the Cold War. Thus, it is not all that surprising that a fan of the new *Andaluz* concerto was none other than Generalísimo Francisco Franco. Rodrigo's wife, Victoria, wrote to the Romeros on August 4, 1972, concerning a ballet choreography of the *Andaluz* performed at the Palacio de La Granja during a reception held there by Franco. This was an annual event for members of the government and diplomatic corps. The production, using recorded music, proved to be a hit, which was really saying something in the case of Franco, who took little interest in music. Victoria noted that the dictator, who almost never attended concerts, actually congratulated Antonio and his dancers and said he would like to see it again sometime.

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Although we know of no further performances of the *Concierto andaluz* for Franco, the Romeros used the work in other political and diplomatic contexts.<sup>6</sup> For instance, they later appeared in a program honoring His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales on February 20, 1986, in Austin, Texas, performing the *Andaluz* with the Austin Symphony. At all events, Rodrigo was very pleased with the results of their collaboration, and Victoria reported on his plans to write another concerto for the Romeros, whom he “loves and admires so much.” As we shall see, he would compose a solo concerto for Pepe and then provide thematic raw material for another, composed and premiered by Ángel.

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<sup>6</sup> This was not the first time that Franco heard a Romero play the guitar. An untitled clipping in the Romero family archive, dated January 26, 1944, states that Celedonio performed at the request of and before Franco himself in the Palacio de la Capitanía General in Barcelona. See Clark, *Los Romeros*, 51-52.



Pepe developed an especially close relationship with the composer. He once remarked to an interviewer with the Madrid newspaper *El Mundo* that, though he had performed the *Concierto de Aranjuez* thousands of times, every time he was completely captivated by it (Dávila, 1995). In fact, Pepe was eight or nine years old when he first played through the *Aranjuez's* guitar part, and he listened to the earliest recording of the piece, by Sáinz de la Maza. He also paid close attention when Celedonio played it. Pepe once reported to me that during one concert season, he performed the work no fewer than forty times! Yet, he never tires of it:

Every time I play it, or I think of it, it's new, it's different. It brings new feelings, new ideas. It does exactly what music should do: make people feel good. Music has a purpose in Creation. Sound is a very important part, and music plays a very important role, far more important than most people realize. For that reason, it's very important to use it always with respect, with compassion, and—above all—with love. The *Concierto de Aranjuez* is actually a key to a door that opens up into a different state of being, a beautiful state. It's the kind of music that is like a key to a state of grace.<sup>7</sup>

Part of his enduring attraction to the music of Rodrigo has to do with his personal relationship with the composer himself. Pepe was chosen by Rodrigo and the government of Spain to be one of the major participants in the worldwide celebration of that composer's ninetieth-birthday year, in 1991. Among other appearances in connection with this, he performed tributes with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, at the Berlin Philharmonie, in the Musikverein in Vienna, and at Moscow's Great Hall of the Pillars. Perhaps Pepe's mostly enduring tribute to the composer and his most famous concerto is the documentary in which he played a central role: *Rodrigo: Concierto de Aranjuez & Shadows and Light*; a film tribute to Rodrigo by Larry Weinstein and Rhombus Media (1992/94). Pepe not only gives a stirring rendition of the work but also provides insightful commentary about the composer and his music.

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<sup>7</sup> Excerpted from publicity materials in the Romero archive, pertaining to an upcoming concert with the Dallas Symphony.

Given the close nature of their personal and professional relationship, it is not at all surprising that Rodrigo wrote his final guitar concerto for Pepe. The *Concierto para una fiesta* was actually commissioned by William and Carol McKay of Fort Worth on the occasion of their two daughters' debutante ball, in 1983 (the *fiesta* to which the title refers). The McKays were a prosperous ranching family who clearly thought this would be a very distinctive and classy way to introduce their daughters to polite society. Pepe gave the premiere on March 5, 1983, with the Fort Worth Chamber Orchestra at the McKays' debut party in the ballroom of Redglea County Club.

During this period, there was a very popular television soap opera called *Dallas*, starring Larry Hagman. It presented viewers with a weekly glimpse into the supposedly sordid and selfish world of well-to-do Texans. The genesis of this concerto provides a refreshing rebuttal to that tawdry narrative. In fact, one journalistic commentator at the time remarked that “[t]he composition already is going a long way toward changing the image of Texas.”<sup>8</sup> The *Dallas* TV series was a huge hit in Germany, so an article in *Stern* magazine commented that:

*Dallas* fans have to change their views. Those who were pretty sure all the time that Texas' high society is satisfying its cultural needs only with cocktails, intrigues, and country music are set right by a colleague from the same branch as J.R. The reason is: oil millionaire William McKay has two charming daughters, Alden Elizabeth and Lauri Ann, who were allowed a small wish from Papá on the occasion of their debutante ball. They had no Porsche, no diamonds from Tiffany on their wish list, but a guitar concerto for them by Joaquín Rodrigo.<sup>9</sup>

To be sure, Rodrigo received \$20,000 for his composition, and the entire event cost the McKays upwards of five times that much—more than either a Porsche or Tiffany jewelry would have cost at that time. Concerning the music itself, Pepe declared that the Rodrigo *Fiesta* is “by far the most difficult piece ever written for the guitar” (Anon., 1983-4, pp. 1-2). John Duarte recalls how Pepe once confided something of the work's genesis to him:

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<sup>8</sup> Lloyd Stewart, “A Magical Evening Planned for Jewel Charity Ball,” from a Texas newspaper at the time of the premiere (name and date of the paper not available), translated by the reviewer from the original German.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in *ibid*.

[Rodrigo and I] always had a ritual of smoking cigars together. [The composer said,] ‘You know I am going to die soon, but, you will die soon too because everyone dies. And then think how much fun we are going to have smoking our cigars and saying—Look at those poor bastards down there trying to play our piece.’” . . . Though standards rise from year to year, it may be near the truth for some time. After some 35 years of reviewing I am left without an adequate superlative to describe Pepe Romero’s performance. (Duarte, 1984)

The first movement features themes from Valencia, which is logical insofar as Rodrigo himself was also Valencian. The restlessly introspective second movement provides more rhythmic than lyric interest and is animated by the alternation of 6/8 and 5/8 and complex groupings of beats within each measure. The final movement bursts forth with *sevillanas*-inspired rhythms and tunes, which provide the musical “fiesta” we have awaited.<sup>10</sup>

One might well wonder how Rodrigo was able to compose so effectively for the guitar, being a blind non-guitarist. Having worked closely with him, Pepe states that Rodrigo had a special Braille machine for sketching out his ideas. As the guitarist explained to the Ambassador Auditorium’s Newsletter:

[t]hen he dictates the whole thing, without the Braille reminders, to a copyist. He dictates the piccolo, first flute, second flute, etc., right down the score. Everything is in his mind. I take the music he sends me and I play it for him. In some places, I come up with alternate ways to play certain passages, closer to what I think he wants to say—maybe some re-voicing of chords or perhaps a little different technique to use on the guitar. (Anon., 1997, p. 7)

Another Rodrigo concerto merits our brief attention here, and that is the *Concierto madrigal* for two guitars and orchestra. This was originally composed for the duo of Ida Presti and Alexandre Lagoya, but it was the duo of Pepe and Ángel that finally premiered and recorded it.<sup>11</sup> This celebrates the Spanish and Italian musical heritage by using traditional rhythms and historical melodies in the context of a

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<sup>10</sup> Pepe subsequently recorded this work in 1984 on the Philips label (LP 4111331/1984; CD 4111332/1984; Cassette 4111334/1984), with Neville Marriner conducting the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields.

<sup>11</sup> On the Philips label (LP 6500.918/1975; re-release CD 400 024-2/1983), with Neville Marriner conducting the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields.

neoclassical language that is distinctively Rodrigo's. It also features some of the most breathtakingly difficult guitar music written to that time. John Duarte was moved to say of this recording that "as a display of guitar playing it is staggering."<sup>12</sup>

Ángel also developed a warm personal relationship with Rodrigo. He has performed the *Aranjuez* on innumerable occasions, in addition to making several recordings of it. He also published an edition of the concerto, with his own fingerings.<sup>13</sup> He loves to tell the story of his first recording of the *Aranjuez*, in 1967 with the San Antonio Symphony:

Even today, the guitar world still considers it to be a very explosive interpretation, which is totally uninhibited, both emotionally and technically, by a very young man. . . It was recorded in one take. I did a second recording in 1976 with the London [Symphony Orchestra] and Previn. The *Aranjuez* is one piece that I never forget; I never have to practise it. (Wassily Saba, 2010, p. 15)

Ángel is, besides, a talented artist, and in his home he prominently displays a large abstract oil painting that he calls the *Concierto de Aranjuez*. The vibrant colors and dynamic brushstrokes coalesce into abstract patterns and suggest nothing of the actual palace and gardens there, though there is a guitar in the middle of the composition. This expressionistic work conveys his own inner response to Rodrigo's music. He painted it around the time that he was first performing and recording this piece in the U.S., during the late 1960s, and his "brushes" included the feet of his baby boy, Lito (b. 1967), who is a fine guitarist in his own right and has been a member of the quartet since the death of Celedonio in 1996.

However, Ángel is creative not only as an artist but also as an arranger and composer. About five years before Rodrigo died, Ángel requested a concerto from him, but the venerable composer demurred, citing his advanced age. However, not wanting his beloved guitarist to go away empty-handed, Rodrigo sent him some harmonized

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<sup>12</sup> Duarte, John. (1975). In a review from *Records and Recording* (December), 48-49.

<sup>13</sup> Piano reduction published Mainz: Schott, 1984.

themes, including a *jota* and other Spanish-style melodies. Ángel used these as the basis for his own guitar concerto, *Rincones de España* (Corners of Spain), which he premiered in 1991.

During the 1983-84 season, the Ambassador Foundation in Pasadena presented a program of works in honor of “the two great romantic Spanish composers of our time, Rodrigo and Moreno Torroba.” Though Rodrigo was still alive and composing, Torroba had passed away in November 1982. The program featured the *Concierto andaluz* and Torroba’s *Tonada concertante*, with Ángel as soloist. Pepe also invited soprano Elli Ameling to sing songs by Rodrigo; in addition, Pepe and that composer’s son-in-law, violinist Agustín León Ara, gave the world premiere of Rodrigo’s *Serenata al alba del día*.

In the Ambassador publicity materials cited earlier, Pepe observed that “Torroba was a little more placid, with a somewhat nostalgic quality to his music, while Rodrigo has a certain feeling of unrest. I believe Torroba composed thinking of the past, and Rodrigo was always searching for the future” (Anon., 1983-4, p. 2). On another occasion, Pepe remarked that “if we think of the guitar as a temple, I would say two of the strongest pillars are Rodrigo and Torroba” (Anon., 1992, p. 7).

There is no doubting that Rodrigo is a mighty pillar in the guitar temple. But even pillars need support, and without great performers to present their masterpieces to the world, they would remain obscure. The Romeros have done more than their fair share to make certain that Rodrigo will never be obscure. And their promotion of this repertoire extends now to a third generation. Celín’s son, Celino, who was born in the U.S. in 1969, regularly performs the *Aranjuez*, and he and Pepe have performed the *Concierto madrigal* several times. Celino replaced Ángel after the latter departed from the quartet in 1990, but Pepe, Celín, Celino, and Lito still proudly play the *Andaluz*, the first concerto ever written for guitar quartet.

The culmination of the relationship between Rodrigo and the Romeros might well have been the conferring of an honorary doctorate on the composer by the University of Southern California, on May 13, 1982.<sup>14</sup> Pepe was (and still is) on the guitar faculty there and was the driving force behind this award, which recognized not just his achievements writing for the guitar but also for a wide assortment of media and in all genres, including works for film and the stage, orchestra, piano, voice, chorus, chamber ensemble, as well as concertos for cello, violin, piano, and harp. Despite the crippling disability of blindness that might have discouraged many another creative artist, Rodrigo brought forth a legacy of music that will endure as long as there are human beings to appreciate its craftsmanship, originality, and sincere emotion. Such an achievement was certainly worthy of a doctorate from any American university—and of our grateful admiration.

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<sup>14</sup> In conjunction with the awarding of this honorary doctorate, Pepe's USC students gave a recital of Rodrigo's music for the composer himself. I was privileged to meet him at that memorable event, for the first (and last) time. The performers included members of the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet, which plays the *Concierto andaluz*, and especially Scott Tennant, who later recorded a two-CD set of the solo guitar works of Rodrigo for the GHA label.

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# The Reception of Joaquín Rodrigo's Works in the United States<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This article explores the milestones of the performance of Joaquín Rodrigo's music in the U.S. from José Iturbi's attempt to program *Per la flor del Illiri blau* in the course of his 1935 summer concerts through the U.S. premiere of *Concierto de Aranjuez* in Cleveland during the 1959-60 season. It will consider the historic commission of *Cuatro madrigales amatorios* by 1948 by the Louisville Orchestra, but the main focus will be on the period between the composition of *Fantasia para un gentilhombre* in 1954 and its world premiere in 1958, which featured guitarist Andrés Segovia and the San Francisco Symphony with its conductor Enrique Jordá.

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## Keywords

Joaquín Rodrigo, *Fantasia para un gentilhombre*, Andrés Segovia, Enrique Jordá, José Iturbi, *Concierto de Aranjuez*, Louisville Orchestra's commissions

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[<sup>1</sup> Editors' note: English translation, offered by the Observatorio, of the original Spanish submitted by the author. See study 055-11/2019SP.]

## 1. Introduction

In January 1950, the journal *Arbor* asked José María Pemán, Melchor Fernández Almagro, and Pedro Laín Entralgo what they considered the most important artistic or cultural occurrence for Spain in 1949. Pemán responded that it had been the centenary celebration of Jaime Balmes and its repercussions abroad. Fernández Almagro was as clear as he was precise: “Ortega y Gasset’s presence at the commemorative events held in the United States and Germany on the second centenary of Goethe’s birth.” Laín responded: “based on my own strictly personal impressions, I can cite one: the tribute to Joaquín Rodrigo at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires.”<sup>2</sup>

Beyond highlighting Rodrigo’s relevance in the 1940s, these responses demonstrate the obsession of Spain’s foremost intellectuals with exporting their culture out of a nation that was fully alienated from the international political context. Excluded since 1946 from international institutions by Resolution 39 of the U.N. General Assembly, and also excluded from the Marshall Plan, Spain was dependent on economic support from Argentina under the leadership of Juan Domingo Perón—a world leader fiercely opposed by Harry Truman—to maintain its critical sociopolitical situation. The Spanish government had assigned a rising star of its diplomatic corps, José María de Areilza, as its ambassador in Buenos Aires, and Joaquín Rodrigo’s trip to Argentina was practically an official state visit. Upon his return, he had to submit a report on his activities to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

By the close of the 1940s, a change seemed near, and in November 1950, U.N. General Assembly Resolution 386 lifted sanctions on Spain. Diplomatic relations with the Western Bloc were beginning to normalize, but cultural relationships had already paved the way for political solutions. In this sense, it is interesting to examine the story

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<sup>2</sup> “Encuesta sobre el Año Viejo.” *Arbor*, Madrid, vol. 15, no. 49 (January 1950), p. 146.

of Joaquín Rodrigo's emblematic work *Concierto de Aranjuez*, which premiered in 1940, as a piece whose international dissemination was conditioned upon the evolution of Spain's political situation: during World War II, it was performed in both Portugal and in Germany (Suárez-Pajares, 2013, p. 35), and after the war, it had been performed outside of Spain only in Buenos Aires, on July 26, 1947, at a concert sponsored by the Spanish government (Neri de Caso, 2013, pp. 530-535). Nevertheless, on May 7, 1950, shortly before the abovementioned U.N. resolution 386, it was performed in Paris with the Orquesta Nacional de España, under conductor Ataúlfo Argenta, and featuring a young guitarist: Narciso Yepes.<sup>3</sup>

The U.S. had been the primary objective of Spanish diplomatic activity in the 1950s, and, indeed, it was the U.S. that catalyzed this change in Spain's status on the international stage, culminating with the country's entry into the U.N. in 1955. In fact, *Coros y Danzas de España*—part of the women's branch of the Falange political movement and, in those years, Spain's flagship musical propaganda initiative—performed at the Hollywood Bowl in August 1950; at the end of that year, the Instituto de Cultura Hispánica in Spain hosted Karl Wecker, general manager of the Hollywood Bowl (Cavia, 2008, pp. 56-58; Ferrer Cayón, 2015, pp. 97-98). Interviewed by the editors of *La Vanguardia*, Wecker stated: "I would like to bring over the National Orchestra and Spain's most celebrated artists. The United States has more interest in Spanish culture with every passing day" (Anon., 1950, p. 3). Back in the U.S., *Los Angeles Times* reported that Wecker was "considering the possibility of commissioning Rodrigo to write a ballet on the subject of Don Juan for Hollywood Bowl presentation" (Goldberg, 1950, p. 61). In winter 1950, Rodrigo attempted to travel to the U.S., but he was unable to do so.<sup>4</sup> It was still early, but from 1954-60, when the political situation was nearly normalized, Spain placed José María de Areilza at the head of its embassy in Washington, D.C., and the process accelerated. *Concierto de Aranjuez* had not had its U.S. debut, but something of even greater cultural import was afoot.

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<sup>3</sup> <[joaquin-rodrigo.com/index.php/en/concierto-de-aranjuez-2/estrenos](http://joaquin-rodrigo.com/index.php/en/concierto-de-aranjuez-2/estrenos)>.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Rodrigo to Andrés Segovia, Madrid, 17 Feb 1950. Linares, Fundación Andrés Segovia.

## 2. Three Aces for a Fantasia

Since composing *Concierto de Aranjuez*, Rodrigo had been reluctant to write another guitar concerto. It was only Andrés Segovia's insistence, prominence, and obstinate unwillingness to play *Concierto de Aranjuez* that convinced him to write another concert piece featuring guitar. Previously, Rodrigo had considered the possibility of Segovia playing *Concierto de Aranjuez* at the concerts that accompanied his stay in Buenos Aires in 1949;<sup>5</sup> later, he tried to save the piece's U.S. premiere for Segovia.<sup>6</sup> Eventually, however, he agreed to write something new. First, this was *Tres piezas españolas* for guitar, which Segovia commissioned in 1952 and Rodrigo finished in September 1954. In the same letter in which Segovia acknowledged receipt of the "Fandango" and "Zapateado" from *Tres piezas para guitarra*, he wrote to Rodrigo: "Start working on the fantasia for guitar and orchestra...".<sup>7</sup> Rodrigo replied: "When I received your letter, I locked myself up in Torreldones; I told everyone that I was traveling, and in two weeks I composed the fantasia for you, under the title: *Fantasia para un gentleman*."<sup>8</sup>

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With the news that Rodrigo had completed this new piece, Segovia returned to the U.S., where he had completed a successful concert tour from January to June of 1954, at the end of which, in New York, he made the first phonographic recording of Rodrigo's *Zarabanda lejana* (DECCA DL 9751).<sup>9</sup> Thus, after a few months in Europe, Segovia was back in New York in late October, and he remained in the U.S. to give concerts until March of 1955.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Letter from Enrique Iniesta to Rodrigo, Buenos Aires, 7 Mar 1949. Madrid, Victoria and Joaquín Rodrigo Foundation; letter from Rodrigo to Andrés Segovia, 22 Jan 1949. Linares, Fundación Andrés Segovia.

<sup>6</sup> Letter from José Rey de la Torre to Rodrigo, Colorado, 26 Jul 1 949. Madrid, Victoria and Joaquín Rodrigo Foundation.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Andrés Segovia to Rodrigo, Geneva, 24 Sep 1954. Madrid, Victoria and Joaquín Rodrigo Foundation.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Rodrigo to Andrés Segovia, Madrid, 14 Oct 1954. Linares, Fundación Andrés Segovia.

<sup>9</sup> Recording made in June. Letter from Andrés Segovia to Rodrigo, New York, 4 June 1954. Madrid, Victoria and Joaquín Rodrigo Foundation.

<sup>10</sup> The essential resource for information on Andrés Segovia's travels and concerts is the work by Gimeno, Julio. "Andrés Segovia en la prensa" <[guitarra.artepulsado.com](http://guitarra.artepulsado.com)>.

Shortly after hearing of its completion, Segovia received the music for *Fantasía para un gentilhombre* in San Francisco. He wrote to Rodrigo:

I gave the score to Jordá, who wanted to look at it, and the result is that we have decided to include it in next season's symphony concert, and to both make an LP with it, either for DECCA or for RCA Victor. Everything is on track. Jordá is a magnificent conductor and he's very beloved in San Francisco, despite the short amount of time he's been here.<sup>11</sup>

In November 1954, Spanish conductor Enrique Jordá, who had known Rodrigo since the 1930s, had been chosen by the public and the board of the San Francisco Symphony to succeed its long-serving music director, Pierre Monteux. During his first season, he presented pianists Gonzalo Soriano and Alicia de Larrocha, as well as Segovia. Thanks to Jordá's efforts to support Spanish music and performers, the government of Spain awarded him the Grand Cross of Alfonso X the Wise in 1956, in recognition of his "contributions to music and for serving as a 'musical conquistador' in the New World" (Anon., 1956a, p. 6; Anon., 1956b, p. 17). Rodrigo and Segovia had also received this decoration in 1953, meaning that the three Spanish musicians involved in the debut of *Fantasía para un gentilhombre* had all earned the highest distinction the Spanish state awards to intellectuals and artists. Getting three such decorated personages to agree was no easy task, and the debut was delayed, much to Rodrigo's chagrin.

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Finally, Jordá told Rodrigo that the board of the San Francisco Symphony had approved hiring Segovia for the 1957-58 season, and that their intention was to host the world premiere of *Fantasía para un gentilhombre*.<sup>12</sup> At this point, Segovia appeared more interested in debuting the piece in London, under John Barbirolli and with the BBC Symphony Orchestra; the San Francisco Symphony and Jordá prevailed, however, and they teased the premiere in a press release announcing their season (Gessler, 1957, p. 73). Or rather, what prevailed, more than the conductor or the orchestra, was

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<sup>11</sup> Letter from Andrés Segovia to Rodrigo, San Francisco, 24-11-1954. Madrid, Victoria and Joaquín Rodrigo Foundation.

<sup>12</sup> Letter from Enrique Jordá to Rodrigo, Sydney, 14 Jun 1957. Madrid, Victoria and Joaquín Rodrigo Foundation.

Segovia's cachet, which he was going to share with Rodrigo so that the latter could attend the premiere. It is true that Segovia was not as eager to perform Rodrigo's works as the composer would have liked, but his generosity was unquestionable: "...it's not worth sacrificing the cachet of San Francisco for what you could get anywhere in Europe and, since I plan to share with you, there's more in it for both of us."<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, Segovia premiered the "Fandango" from *Tres piezas españolas* at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires in July 1957,<sup>14</sup> then proceeded to perform it at Festival Hall in London, which was completely full, with about 4,000 attendees; the work was "one of the most applauded pieces on a night of standing ovation" (Miquelarena, 1957, p. 35). On February 27, 1957, Jordá presented Rodrigo's *Zarabanda lejana y villancico* for string orchestra to the San Francisco audience, though the arrangement for chamber orchestra was by a Catalan composer based in New York, Carlos Suriñach.<sup>15</sup> Leopold Stokowski had already conducted Rodrigo's original version at the Pacific Coast Music Festival in Santa Barbara (Houk, 1955, p. 79) on September 17, 1955, though that was not the U.S. debut, as we will see later on.

Finally, on February 27, 1958, Rodrigo left for San Francisco to attend the debut of his *Fantasia para un gentilhomme* at the War Memorial Opera House with the San Francisco Symphony, led by Jordá and featuring Segovia as soloist. Rodrigo's second trip to the U.S. would extend until late April. From San Francisco he went to Los Angeles, then to New York, and, finally, to Washington, D.C., where the Spanish Embassy held a reception in his honor (Anon., 1958, p. 13). Segovia was with him for all of these stops, though the composer could not attend Segovia and Jordá's recording of *Fantasia para un gentilhomme* with Symphony of the Air, one of the most famous

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<sup>13</sup> Letter from Andrés Segovia to Rodrigo, Stockholm, 11 Oct 1957. Madrid, Victoria and Joaquín Rodrigo Foundation.

<sup>14</sup> Letter from Andrés Segovia to Rodrigo, Buenos Aires, 10 Jul 1957. Madrid, Victoria and Joaquín Rodrigo Foundation.

<sup>15</sup> Information provided by the archives office of the San Francisco Symphony.

orchestras of all time. This recording (DECCA DL 10027) was included, along with the “Fandango” from *Tres piezas españolas* in the triple album *Segovia Golden Jubilee* (DECCA DXJ-148), an era-defining album in the history of recorded guitar music.

### 3. Iturbi: Ambassador of Spanish Music in the U.S.

José Iturbi, who also had the Grand Cross of Alfonso X the Wise –which he had received in 1948– was part of the same circle of Valencian musicians to which Rodrigo had belonged until his dazzling success led him to the U.S. (where he became a mass-market musician even before his involvement with Hollywood films in the 1940s elevated him to the highest levels of fame). In 1931, Rodrigo dedicated a piano serenata to Iturbi, though we do not know if Iturbi premiered it. Four years later, the two met in Paris, where they must have discussed a work that was more in line with the pianist’s tastes: the symphonic poem *Per la flor del Iliri blau*. While vacationing in Valencia in 1935, Iturbi was able to examine the score, gather first-hand opinions, and learn about the piece’s renewed success following its Madrid debut by the Orquesta Filarmónica in November of 1934. A few delayed echoes of the Madrid debut reached New York thanks to a notable review published in the *New York Times* (Anon., 1935a, p. X6).

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Iturbi then decided to program the U.S. premiere of *Per la flor del Iliri blau* for a July 1935 concert series he was going to conduct at the Lewisohn Stadium. These plans were stymied, however, when the orchestral materials did not arrive in time. Iturbi had programmed the same piece a few days earlier at the Robin Hood Dell in Philadelphia and, a few days thereafter, at the Woodland Theatre in Hillsborough, California, with the same outcome: last-minute cancellation after the press had already publicized the debut (Anon., 1935b, p. 52; Anon., 1935c, p. X5; Anon., 1935d, p. 5; Anon., 1935e, p. 14; Anon., 1935f, p. 41).



Although he was unable to conduct *Per la flor del Illiri blau*, Iturbi did lead the Philadelphia Orchestra on August the 13<sup>th</sup> 1937, before an audience of 3,500 at the Robin Hood Dell in another Rodrigo piece: the *Zarabanda lejana y villancico* (S.I.S., 1937, p. 3). This piece would be performed many more times in the U.S., to the great joy of North American audiences, which never tired of the unexpected and fortuitous similarity between the *villancico* and “Pop Goes the Weasel.”

Prior to Iturbi, there is only one documented instance of a Rodrigo piece being performed in the U.S.: a piano version of *Zarabanda lejana*, which was originally composed for guitar and later for orchestra. Composer and pianist Joaquín Nin-Culmell first played this piece on January 24, 1936 at the Town Hall in New York, and many times thereafter (Anon., 1936, p. 18). During the Iturbi years, we have a record of one other Rodrigo piece being performed in the U.S.: *Serranilla*, a song with piano accompaniment, which Sarita Fajardo sang at a vespers service at the Whatchung Avenue Congregational Church in New Jersey on May 28, 1939 (Anon., 1939, p. 12).

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#### 4. Rodrigo and the Louisville Philharmonic Society

In 1948, in an interview with a Tennessee newspaper, Rodrigo said “government aid and encouragement to orchestras never has been so great as at present. However, [...] composers do not have sufficient help to carry on their artistic tasks,” a statement that would be reprinted countless times in the North American press (Anon., 1948a, p. 12).<sup>16</sup> Rodrigo’s belligerence when it came to asserting the figure of the composer over the performer was part of a renewed movement to shift importance away from the tyranny of soloists and toward a neoclassical (or platonic) advocacy for the primacy of composers and their ideas. At exactly that same time, the Louisville Philharmonic Society (known previously and later as the Louisville Orchestra) announced its own initiative within that same line of thought:

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<sup>16</sup> The first time that we see this news item, which will be repeated countless times during the final quarter of 1948.



The Louisville Philharmonic Society, which will present six pairs of subscription concerts this season under the direction of Robert Whitney, has announced a departure from the accepted 'star-soloist' system of programming. The orchestra now intends to build its season around the composer (Anon., 1948c, p. 120).

Rather than six acclaimed soloists, the stars of the season would be six composers, each of whom would receive five hundred dollars for a ten-minute piece (Anon., 1949, p. 9). The composers that the Society chose were: Virgil Thomson, Roy Harris, and Claude Almand from the United States; Darius Milhaud from France; Gian Francesco Malipiero from Italy; and Joaquín Rodrigo from Spain. The Society went so far as to boast that it would hire only three soloists, including the Spanish coloratura soprano Marimí del Pozo, who would make her U.S. debut with the world premiere of *Cuatro madrigals amatorios* for orchestra. This was a historic moment in the world of modern symphony orchestras: the Louisville Society would continue to utilize this novel commission scheme in coming seasons, as it was widely praised and served as a model for other ensembles.

Marimí del Pozo again sang the *Cuatro madrigales amatorios* on December 29<sup>th</sup> of that year at a pops concert for the El Paso Symphony Orchestra, led by Hine Arthur Brown (Anon., 1948b, p. 1). In the early 1950s, the groundbreaking African-American coloratura soprano Mattiwilda Dobbs included the original piano version of *Cuatro madrigales amatorios* in her repertoire.

In the late 1950s, the Louisville Society expanded its ambitious program by recording the pieces it had commissioned for its own label. The record of the Society performing *Cuatro madrigales amatorios* was released in 1960, with Robert Whitney as conductor and featuring the North American soprano Audrey Nossaman (LOU 606). In February 1961, Robert Whitney collaborated with another soloist, his sister Grace Whitney, to make the first commercial recording of Rodrigo's *Concerto in modo galante* for cello and orchestra (LOU 613).

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## 5. And, finally, *Concierto de Aranjuez*

In her memoirs, Victoria Kahmi recalls that in Spring 1956, the conductor Robert Shaw—who was on tour in Europe with his acclaimed choir—visited her home in late April to see Rodrigo’s work:

He was enthusiastic about the *Concierto de Aranjuez*, and thought it ridiculous that it had never been played in the United States. Coincidentally, at that time, the guitarist Rey de la Torre, who lived in New York, was in Madrid. He was able to speak with Shaw that same night, and between them they set a date for the première in New York. (Kamhi 1992, 164)

In 1949, Cuban guitarist José Rey de la Torre wrote a letter to Rodrigo that offers valuable insight into the situation surrounding the U.S. debut of *Concierto de Aranjuez*: “Antonio Iglesias informed me of your commitment to Andrés Segovia with regard to the *Concierto*, as well as your decision to authorize me to perform it in this country if, for any reason, Segovia does not do so in the coming season.”<sup>17</sup>

This matter coordinated by Iglesias proved to be a dead end, even though Segovia did not, in fact, play *Concierto de Aranjuez* in the U.S. or anywhere else. Rey de la Torre resigned himself to playing *Zarabanda lejana* far and wide and recorded it on his album *The Romantic Guitar* in 1959 (CBS-Epic Gold Label Records, LC 3564). His first documented performance of *Zarabanda* was at Carnegie Hall on June 29, 1951 (H.C.S., 1951, p. 9), but he began to include it more regularly in his recitals in 1955. In 1956, after a European tour, Rey de la Torre experienced some physical setbacks that significantly hindered his performance career. Consequently, the U.S. debut of *Concierto de Aranjuez* was so delayed that it did not take place until November 19, 1959, in Cleveland, under the baton of Robert Shaw. This probably contributed to its failure to make a particularly large impression.

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<sup>17</sup> Letter from José Rey de la Torre to Rodrigo, Aspen (Colorado), 26 Jul 1949. Madrid, Victoria and Joaquín Rodrigo Foundation.

Nevertheless, the North American public was about to feel the real—and unexpected—impact of *Concierto de Aranjuez*: Miles Davis and Gil Evans recorded a jazz version of the piece for the album *Sketches of Spain* (CBS 320230) between November 1959 and March 1960. Despite the timing, it was not Rey de la Torre’s debut of the piece that brought the work to Davis’s attention, but the 1957 recording that Narciso Yepes made with the Orquesta Nacional de España under Ataúlfo Argenta (Alhambra MCC 30054), which Davis probably encountered through London Records’ inclusion of that recording in their series “España” (LL 1738).<sup>18</sup>

## 6. Conclusions and Postlude

One sort of subtext throughout this essay has been the importance of recordings in the dissemination of Rodrigo’s work in the U.S. An album piqued Miles Davis’s interest in *Concierto de Aranjuez*, and an album was also the final service that Iturbi paid to Rodrigo’s music when he recorded the *Homenaje a la Tempranica* for RCA Victor in 1951 (3L1672). That same year, violinist Christian Ferras, performing with the Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire de Paris under George Enescu, recorded *Concierto de estío* for DECCA (LXT 2678), a fact that must be considered in relation to the first U.S. performance of that work in Carnegie Hall on October 3, 1952, featuring Ruggiero Ricci as soloist with the New York Philharmonic under Charles Paul (H.C.S., 1952, p. 15). Symphony of the Air’s recording of *Fantasia para un gentilhomme*, made shortly after its late premiere in San Francisco, was just as important as the debut itself, and, as this paper has shown, it was the Louisville Philharmonic Society that made the first recordings of *Concerto in modo galante* and of *Cuatro madrigales amatorios* in its orchestral arrangement.

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<sup>18</sup> A review of this edition in the U.S. media can be found in Hood (1958).

Given the breadth and dispersion of North American audiences, Rodrigo's work was more accessible through the record industry and the tremendous market that industry had created. The U.S. debut of Rodrigo's *Concierto serenata* for harp on March 17, 1957 in Hawaii, which featured renowned harpist Nicanor Zabaleta with the Honolulu Symphony under George Barati, ought to be worth highlighting (Davenport, 1957, p. 6), but there is no doubt that this performance had a far lesser impact on the general U.S. public than the recording Zabaleta made in 1960 for Deutsche Grammophon (SLPM 138,118), with Ernst Märzendorfer and the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester, which The *San Francisco Examiner* publicized, even including a photo of the composer (A.L.B., 1961, p. 187).

And in reality, no matter how much Rodrigo wished to elevate the figure of the composer, great performers would always be essential to the dissemination of his music. The fact that young performers as superb as Victoria de los Ángeles and Alicia de Larrocha recorded Rodrigo's music and included it in their repertoire was an important avenue by which he gained recognition in the U.S. in the 1950s and thereafter.

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President Eisenhower's visit to Spain on December 21, 1959—while Miles Davis and Gil Evans were recording their version of *Concierto de Aranjuez*—marked the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries. After settling matters on the American front, Spanish foreign policy turned its eye toward Europe, which was reluctant to accept the singularity of the Franco Regime. In 1960, Areilza concluded his term as ambassador to Washington, D.C., and was transferred to Paris from 1960-64. In 1960, the French government welcomed Rodrigo into the *Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* and, in 1963, named him a *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur*. However, it is important to be cautious when drawing conclusions from this essay's "circumstantial evidence." Rodrigo was an instrument of propaganda for Spanish culture and civilization in certain (often hostile) contexts where that culture and civilization were

questioned, but it was exceedingly rare that he acted in any official representational capacity. In the 1940s and 50s, the composer generally represented himself and himself alone, using the few resources he could access, with the essential aim of promoting his music. From that position of independence, perhaps the efficacy of his message was, in political terms, all the greater.

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# The Piano Works of Joaquin Rodrigo

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**Summary:** This study provides a general discussion about the piano works of Joaquín Rodrigo, the relationship of his piano works to those of earlier Spanish composers, his distinctive 20<sup>th</sup>-century pianistic style, his sources of inspiration, the relationship of his *A l'ombre de Torre Bermeja* with *Torre Bermeja* by Isaac Albéniz including musical examples, and his pedagogical works for piano.

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**Keywords:** Spanish piano music, 19<sup>th</sup>-century piano style, 20<sup>th</sup>-century piano style, sources of inspiration, pianistic techniques, pedagogical works

Joaquín Rodrigo composed an extensive and highly varied catalogue of works for piano, including some 50 solo piano compositions, two concertos for solo piano and orchestra, four works for piano duet and one for two pianos. His important contribution to Spanish piano repertoire is uniquely his own.

Rodrigo was a “born” pianist with a remarkable and natural technical ease at the keyboard. Although he did not pursue a career as a soloist, his pianistic technique allowed him complete freedom to compose for the piano. More importantly, his thorough knowledge of previous Spanish keyboard music gave him a unique perspective which led him to create his own highly personal piano works. Rodrigo commented that the piano was very,

. . . important in expressing the emotional needs of musicians in the nineteenth century, when they find in the piano the ideal instrument, the ideal vehicle, for [expressing] those emotions. But, Spain, for various reasons, had no connections with the instrument during this century, and one can hardly find any music which is worth preserving written for the piano in the first eighty years of the nineteenth century [in Spain].<sup>1</sup>

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Rodrigo rather harshly dismissed almost all Spanish piano music composed during the first 80 years of the nineteenth century as not having real value, while he considered that only after 1880 were Spanish piano works of true importance being composed. Rodrigo was referring principally to works by Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909) and Enrique Granados (1867-1916).

Naturally, he was acutely aware that during the final decade of the nineteenth century, Granados was the composer who gave Spain a glorious period of late-Romantic piano masterpieces. Granados’s keyboard writing, while distinctive and firmly rooted in the pianistic style developed during the last half of the nineteenth

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Calcraft and Matthews (2016), p. 220.

century, did not define a new type of piano technique, as do the piano works of Franz Liszt (1811-1886), Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909) or Claude Debussy (1862-1918).

Rodrigo was not by nature a Romantic composer; he was modern and forward looking. Consequently, he was deeply impressed with a work which at the time of its composition was tremendously modern: Albéniz's monumental suite *Iberia*. Rodrigo described this masterpiece as being "of supreme importance internationally for the piano"<sup>2</sup> and as the "richest music written for the Spanish piano."<sup>3</sup> For Rodrigo the music of Albéniz "represented the incorporation of Spain into Europe, or more correctly, the reincorporation of Spain into the European musical world."<sup>4</sup>

In *Iberia* Albéniz created an entirely new and modern concept of piano music, with dense and extremely complex pianistic textures and modern harmonies; these demanded new and highly developed techniques from pianists wanting to play the twelve glorious and extremely difficult works which make up the suite *Iberia*.

As Rodrigo wanted to follow neither the footsteps of the Romantic period nor those of Albéniz, he found that he faced a difficult problem in writing for the piano, saying: "On one side there was this tremendous suite *Iberia*, and on the other the great French Impressionist piano of [Claude] Debussy and [Maurice] Ravel (1875-1937) making it very difficult [for all composers] to create for [the piano] in a way which would be personal."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 221.

<sup>4</sup> ". . .lo que Albéniz representa para Europa es la incorporación de España o, mejor dicho, la reincorporación de España al mundo musical europeo." Translation by Douglas Riva. Quoted in Rodrigo and León Ara (2019), p. 208. (Texts revised and prepared by Carlos Laredo Verdejo).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 221.

Thus, Rodrigo was inspired to form his own distinct twentieth century piano style, based on what he described as ‘elimination,’<sup>6</sup> which led to, in his words, “much smaller [and] much clearer”<sup>7</sup> textures. To use a word popular today, some might say he “deconstructed” the music that preceded him. In order to avoid what he described as the “magnificent Albéniz piano”, he sought inspiration in the *Sonatas* composed by Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757) during the many years the Italian composer had lived in Spain. The clear textures, keyboard antics and virtuosity of Scarlatti’s *Sonatas* had a profound influence on Rodrigo’s music, as did the vast expressive and technical potential of the pianos manufactured in the twentieth century. Rodrigo’s highly distinctive piano works require a flexible, refined and virtuoso pianistic technique. Often, the textures are two-voiced, and just as in Scarlatti, there may not be a profusion of notes but every note is important.

The demands Rodrigo places on pianists are guided by his almost limitless imagination which created a musical world where anything was possible. His music is completely different from virtuoso works such as the *Etudes* by Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849) and Franz Liszt, which tend to concentrate on one particular technical difficulty throughout the work, requiring stamina for effective performance. In Rodrigo’s piano works the pianist always needs to be prepared for sometimes numerous, and often frequently changing, technical challenges in order to follow the musical path along which his unlimited imagination leads us.

Cecilia Rodrigo, the composer’s daughter, has frequently observed that almost all her father’s compositions were created with either a specific performer or a certain concert or other event in mind. An example of this personal connection—and in addition, an ideal example of Rodrigo’s often unusual methods of finding his inspirations—is *A l’ombre de Torre Bermeja* (In the Shadow of *Torre Bermeja*). It is an emblematic work by Rodrigo for several highly interesting and unusual reasons. The

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Calcraft and Matthews (2016), p. 221.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Torre Bermeja referred to in the title is a fortification near the Alhambra in Granada, Spain. However, Rodrigo's title does not refer to the Torre Bermeja itself but rather to a piano work by Isaac Albéniz titled *Torre Bermeja*. Thus, the title of Rodrigo's work wants to convey that he was composing "in the shadow" of Albéniz. Rodrigo claimed that his somewhat curious title, partly in French, partly in Spanish, recalls that Albéniz had used similar titles on occasion. Although I have not personally verified that claim, it certainly is intriguing.

As a child, Rodrigo had heard the great Spanish pianist Ricardo Viñes (1875-1943) in concert in Valencia, during which he experienced "my earliest emotions of the great piano [works] of Albéniz and the subtleties of Debussy and Ravel."<sup>8</sup> Later in 1927, while Rodrigo was studying in Paris, he met Viñes and they became friends. Rodrigo dedicated what he considered to be his most important piano work, *Preludio al gallo mañanero*, to Viñes.<sup>9</sup> After Viñes died, a group of composers wanted to create an homage to him by composing a collection of works in his memory. Rodrigo was inspired to base his contribution to the Viñes homage on a work that the latter had recorded, and according to Rodrigo, had especially enjoyed performing: *Torre Bermeja* by Isaac Albéniz. Today, *Torre Bermeja* is rather infrequently performed by pianists and the work is most often heard in transcription for the guitar. Modern pianists tend to favor other Albéniz works which Viñes also recorded, such as *Granada*, *Seguidillas* and *Serenata española*.

Rodrigo decided to make his homage to Viñes into something of an intellectual exercise, by composing a kind of commentary or paraphrase of Albéniz's *Torre Bermeja*. He was inspired by the atmosphere of the Albéniz piece; however, he did not directly quote any portion of the Albéniz original but wrote his own distinctive version,

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Rodrigo and León Ara (2019), p. 231. Translation by Douglas Riva. "Escuché de niño, en Valencia, a Ricardo Viñes y a él debo mis primeras emociones ante el gran piano de Albéniz, el sùtil de Debussy y de Ravel."

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. ". . . fue para mí un honor poderle dedicar la que considero mi más importante obras para piano *Preludio al gallo mañanero*...". Translation by Douglas Riva.

which is essentially an homage to both Albéniz and Ricardo Viñes. It is fascinating to compare Viñes's interpretation of *Torre Bermeja* with Rodrigo's performances of his *A l'ombre de Torre Bermeja*.<sup>10</sup>

A comparison of three brief excerpts from Albéniz's *Torre Bermeja* and Rodrigo's *A l'ombre de Torre Bermeja* reveals both the similarities and differences between the two works. In *Torre Bermeja* Albéniz included three principal melodies in the tonality of E in both major and minor modes. Rodrigo used the same tonality of E but alternated the major and minor modes from the order used by Albéniz. Both composers use the same meter in their works. Although the time signature differs in the two pieces (Albéniz 3/8, Rodrigo 3/4), the difference is simply a matter of notation since the two time signatures produce an identical effect. When comparing the opening of the two pieces (Examples 1 and 2), we see that Rodrigo placed this section in E minor rather than E major, as used by Albéniz. However, in measure 1 Rodrigo changed the first note of the Albéniz melody from the original G# to E, and in measure 3 he changed the first note from E to B. In later measures he adds new melodic material.

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<sup>10</sup> Both may be heard at the following: Albéniz, *Torre Bermeja*, performed by Ricardo Viñes, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MxTj6epPcoE>. Rodrigo, *A l'ombre de Torre Bermeja*, performed by the composer, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1aPcLGn\\_qH8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1aPcLGn_qH8).

Example 1

Albéniz, *Torre Bermeja*, measures 1-13

PIANO.

*mf*

*rapido.*

*pp una corda semp*

## Example 2

Rodrigo, *A l'ombre de Torre Bermeja*, measures 1-11

**Allegro ma non troppo**

Piano

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Following the opening section, Albéniz composed a haunting melody evoking the Arabic past of the fortification Torre Bermeja which gave the piece its title. Rodrigo's second theme is an interpretation or paraphrase of the Albéniz melody which captures the latter's evocative mood without copying it. Rodrigo transforms the Albéniz theme in his own distinctive style, as Examples 3 and 4 illustrate:



### Example 3

Albéniz, *Torre Bermeja*, measures 22-32

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## Example 4

Rodrigo, *A l'ombre de Torre Bermeja*, measures 37-46

The image displays three systems of musical notation for Example 4, measures 37-46 of Rodrigo's *A l'ombre de Torre Bermeja*. The first system (measures 37-39) features a treble clef with a melodic line marked *mf espressivo* and a bass clef with triplet accompaniment. The second system (measures 40-44) continues the melodic and accompanimental lines. The third system (measures 45-46) shows the final measures, with a *pp* dynamic marking and a fermata over the final note. A red asterisk is placed below the bass clef staff in the second measure of this system.

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Albéniz's third melody of *Torre Bermeja*, in E major (Example 5), is used by Rodrigo as a point of departure, creating an exquisite melodic fragment which he develops into the climax of his homage to Albéniz and Viñes (Example 6):

## Example 5

Albéniz, *Torre Bermeja*, measures 85-99

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system features a vocal line in the upper staff with the instruction *cantando.* and a piano accompaniment in the lower staff. The second system shows a piano accompaniment with the instruction *grazioso e dolce.* The third system shows a piano accompaniment with the instructions *cresc.* and *dim.*

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## Example 6

Rodrigo, *A l'ombre de Torre Bermeja*, measures 84-94

The musical score for Example 6, measures 84-94 of *A l'ombre de Torre Bermeja* by Joaquín Rodrigo, is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 84-85) shows a piano accompaniment with a treble line featuring chords and a bass line with triplets. The second system (measures 86-92) includes a *poco rit.* marking and features a prominent bass line with triplets and a treble line with chords. The third system (measures 93-94) is marked *a tempo* and features a treble line with chords and a bass line with triplets. Dynamics include *pp*, *p*, and *a tempo*.

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*A l'ombre de Torre Bermeja* is but one example from Rodrigo's catalogue of piano works. It is notable that the first recording of his complete piano works was recorded in the United States by pianists Gregory Allen and Anton Nell: *Joaquín Rodrigo: The Complete Music for Piano* (1991), Bridge Records, 9027 A/B. Rodrigo commented: "Gregory Allen's recording of my works for piano is excellent. His magnificent technique and his authentically fine interpretations satisfy me completely."

In closing, it is important to note a particularly unusual aspect of Rodrigo's piano works: his music for children, something quite rare for a composer of his genius. Rodrigo composed works which express childhood emotions, and which were specifically conceived for children to perform. Although a number of great composers have written music recalling their childhood—such as Enrique Granados's *Cuentos de la juventud*, DLR IV:2, and Robert Schuman's *Kinderszenen*, Op. 15—these works were not intended for children to perform. Moreover, the adult emotions expressed in these works are primarily nostalgic recollections of youth. Rodrigo's works for children, on the other hand, while not technically simple, are appropriate for children both technically and emotionally.

For older and serious piano students, Rodrigo's works have a distinctive quality that is important for musical development in the modern world. It is to be hoped that this publication and the worldwide events during the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rodrigo's passing will encourage both professional and amateur pianists as well as educators and students to explore and widely perform this rich catalogue of important music.

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# The fusions and confusions of the *Concierto de Aranjuez* in jazz: A listener's musings

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**Abstract:** Reflections on *Sketches of Spain* (1960) by Miles Davis and Gil Evans, focusing on their jazz version of Joaquín Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* (1940). Motivated by Edward Said's and Homi K. Bhabha's writings, the recording is analyzed as a cultural artifact characterized by its "formal instability" and its typological "in-betweenness," rendering it neither classical nor jazz; neither Spanish nor non-Spanish; and neither traditional nor modern, among other dualities. *Sketches* is an artwork that defies categories and inhabits the interstices of cultural expectations.

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**Keywords:** Joaquín Rodrigo; *Concierto de Aranjuez*; Miles Davis; Gil Evans; *Sketches of Spain*

## 1. Introduction

Some time ago, while listening to *Sketches of Spain* (1960) and specifically to its first, longest, and possibly most influential track, “Concierto de Aranjuez (Adagio),” I was reminded of the late Edward Said and his famous pronouncement regarding Palestinian writing. “The striking thing about Palestinian prose and prose fiction,” he writes, “is its formal instability” (1986, p. 38). The trope of “formal instability”—understood here, as a certain reluctance to settle in clear-cut frameworks and categorizations—is what defines Miles Davis’s and Gil Evans’s famous collaboration. No doubt, *Sketches* is a polished work, where all musical principles, including form, are cared for in fastidious detail—from the overall structure to the voicings of the harmony, the highly controlled dynamics, the sophisticated and at the same time innovative recording techniques, and so forth. Its success and longevity, however, is not dependent on these quantifiable achievements, but rather on its inconclusive categorization, its hybridity at many different levels. *Sketches* thrives in its “in-betweenness,” its ontological “interstices”, to use Homi K. Bhabha’s terms (1994, p. 1; 1996, pp. 53-60). Its hybridity is not an anomaly, but rather its *raison d’être*.

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## 2. Neither jazz nor classical. What, then?

*Sketches of Spain* is sometimes ascribed to *third stream* aesthetics, in other words, a “genre of music located about halfway between jazz and classical music,” as Gunther Schuller, its major proponent, defined it (Schuller, 1986, p. 114). This is especially relevant in the case of “Concierto de Aranjuez (Adagio)”, a track, as is well known, based on the main theme of the Adagio of the famous guitar concerto by Joaquín Rodrigo, *Concierto de Aranjuez* (1940).

Neither jazz nor classical, Evans’s arrangement inhabits a no-man’s land, an unknown crevice in the mesh of cultural expectations. “Like all the Gil Evans collaborations [with Miles Davis],” writes Jeremy Yudkin, *Sketches* “is only partly



successful, for the band plays neither with the precision of a classical orchestra nor with the loose freedom of a jazz band” (Yudkin, 2008, p. 54). Another renowned critic, Martin Williams, although pleased with Davis’s playing, also voices serious doubts about the arrangement, which in his view is “something of a curiosity and a failure, as I think a comparison with any good performance of the movement by a classical guitarist would confirm” (Williams, 1993, p. 204).

This leaves *Sketches* in general and “Concierto” in particular with a genre question mark: is it jazz, classical music, Muzak, “world music” (Harrison, 1997, p. 81) or maybe even flamenco? “In recent years,” writes John Szwed, a Davis biographer, “some have criticized the Davis-Evans collaborations as mood music, easy listening, elevator music, as mid-cult schlock better suited to TV commercials” (Szwed, 2002, p. 213). Confounded about its hybrid status, a British reporter once asked Miles Davis if *Sketches* was “really jazz”, to which he retorted, “I think it is” (Chambers, 1998, p. 25). In reality, however, *Sketches* could not claim to be at home in any musical genre, as even some of the other tracks on the record were dismissed as “bogus flamenco” (Chambers, 1998, p. 12).

*Sketches* might be part of a new musical genre or a genre in-between—a genre without a monolithic, individual author, among other things, which is a staple of most classical music. In 1961, *Sketches* was awarded a Grammy for a category called “Jazz Composition of More Than Five Minutes Duration.” Is *Sketches* really a “composition” and, if so, who is the composer? “Concierto,” for instance, could be attributed to Rodrigo, Evans or Davis. And the same multi-author responsibility applies to the other tracks. The Grammy in 1961 rewarded mostly longish musical works with complex orchestrations such as the ones by Duke Ellington and Lalo Schiffrin, creations that would fall in the category of *third stream* jazz. Needless to say, “composing” in jazz is a fluid category that often overlaps with improvising and arranging. The fact, though, is that in essence *Sketches* has no compositions, if by composing we mean creating new, absolutely original music. Some sources for *Sketches* are classical, including

Rodrigo's Adagio. The rest are elaborations of folk materials. Neither/nor, we could say. *Sketches* is beyond the traditional Western concept of authorship. In *Sketches* authorship falls in-between and, in the process, creates a contour of formal instability.

### 3. A guitar concerto without guitars

The instrumental choices of Evans's arrangement of the original *Concierto* also expose some of its taxonomical in-betweenness. Whereas classical compositions, generally speaking, are attached to a very specific sound, many non-classical works are not particular about their timbre and an arranger has an ample margin of freedom. As a "classical" piece, *Concierto de Aranjuez* was orchestrated with skill, its timbre being an essential component of its entity. Oblivious to this fact, in his score, Gil Evans subverts the *Concierto*'s original instrumentation. It includes castanets, a too-obvious cultural signifier of Spain that Rodrigo eluded, using indeed no percussion at all. The castanets at the beginning of the track, most likely overdubbed, almost forcefully pasted on the other tracks, one could say, are not metrical; there are no perceptible downbeats or accents as in most Spanish music using them. They are not even meant to sound like castanets. They create, rather, a background, an ambience, a soundtrack, if you will, like raindrops or wind through rustling leaves.

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Miles Davis's memorable solo (on a flugelhorn first and muted trumpet later on), on the other hand, soars to supplant the elaborate guitar solo at the beginning of the movement. A harp aims at imitating the strumming of the guitar. Listeners may wonder, why not use an actual guitar then? It takes a few seconds to realize that the guitar is totally absent in this recording. That Evans had the audacity of eluding the guitar in what would become the most beloved composition of the guitar repertoire is indeed notable. It works, no doubt, because the flugelhorn and trumpet evoke not the guitar of the original *Concierto*, but what seems to have inspired it, the singing, in a very abstract way, of a sort of a neobaroque aria, perhaps a far-flung, unconscious reference to the *sarabande*, an idealized baroque dance-movement evocative of the

ancient Spanish *zarabanda*. According to Javier Suárez-Pajares, Rodrigo was at the time fascinated with Stravinsky's innovative ways of incorporating baroque and neobaroque music in his compositions, and the Adagio is Rodrigo's reading of this trend (personal communication September 12, 2019).

#### 4. National fusions and geographical confusions

The miracle of Evans and Davis's "Concierto de Aranjuez (Adagio)"—its paradoxical success—is the jumbling of diverse cultural and geographical national misattributions. For listeners it is a blessing in disguise. The album's title, its jacket, the musical sources, and the arrangement (including the aforementioned castanets, among many other instruments not present in the original) are all "Spanish." Gil Evans, moreover, often thought of and referred to it as a "Spanish album" (Stein Crease, 2001, p. 206). Davis also believed (mistakenly, as it turned out) that the recording included music from Peru. "We got a folklore record of Peruvian Indian music..." Miles Davis stated in his autobiography (Davis, 1989, p. 241); and later he mentioned that during the recording sessions of *Sketches* a trumpet player was "trying to play this Mexican melody" (Davis, 1989, p. 242). A Brazilian track was also to be included, but eventually was left out of the final record.

A clarification of those statements seems necessary. The "Brazilian" track was "Song of our Country" and was based on *Bachianas Brasileiras, No. 2* ("Aria: Canto da Nossa Terra") by Heitor Villa-Lobos. The tune, though, was not included in the original 1960 album. It would actually be incorporated in later re-issues of the recording starting with *Directions* (1981), Miles Davis's double compilation album. It was reissued subsequently many more times. What Davis calls "Peruvian Indian music," on the other hand, was the track titled "The Pan Piper" (side 2 – track 1). Some scholars and writers, including two Gil Evans biographers (Hicock, 2002, p. 108; Stein Crease, 2001, p. 209), have mistakenly attributed its source, perhaps following Davis's autobiography, to a Peruvian melody sung by street vendors in the Andes. Nat Hentoff,

more perceptive and better informed—he was present during some of the recording sessions—had already observed in the original liner notes that the track uses “a folk melody [that] Gil heard on an ethnic recording.” The source, identified and analyzed in detail by Iván Iglesias (Iglesias, 2010, pp. 312-333), is “Alborada de Vigo,” a folk tune included in Alan Lomax’s field recordings of Galicia (Spain) issued in 1956 as part of *The Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music*.

Nor is there any “Mexican melody” in *Sketches*. Davis might be confusing it with a folk melody allegedly compiled by Carlos Chávez and used in Davis’s and Evans’s “Blues for Pablo” from the album *Miles Ahead* (1957). In the autobiography’s discussion of the recording sessions of *Sketches*, Davis’s allusion to a “Mexican melody” can only be described as a cultural and geographical Freudian slip, muddling the categories of “Spanish” and “Mexican.” In any case, the main source for “Blues for Pablo,” named after a fallen hero of the Spanish war of 1936-39, is “Por la noche canta el cuco” (Iglesias, 2010, p. 306) from *The Three-Cornered Hat* (*El sombrero de tres picos*, 1919) by Manuel de Falla. “Blues for Pablo” is sometimes also misattributed (Hicock, 2002, p. 110) to the score *Love, the Magician* (*El amor brujo*, 1915) by the same composer. Meanwhile, confusing as it is, the source for “Will o’ the Wisp” (*Sketches*, side 1 – track 2), a track that immediately follows “Concierto,” is indeed based on *Love, the Magician*.

There is more to this confusing musical world tour. Miles Davis felt a connection with the “blackness” of Spain as conveyed, he thought, by the sources of the music for *Sketches*. He regarded the “Saeta” (*Sketches*, side 2 – track 2) as a difficult piece to perform because of “all those Arabic musical scales up in there [the *saeta*], black African scales that you can hear. And they modulate and bend and twist and snake and move around. It is like being in Morocco” (Davis, 1989, p. 242). Regarding “Solea” (*Sketches*, side 2 – track 3), he considered it “close to the American black feeling in the blues. It comes from Andalusia, so it’s African-based” (*ibid.*). Needless

to say, Arabian origins are not in Africa but in Asia, which is almost the only world region that Davis does not mention.

## 5. From Festive Spain to Mystical Spain: Being “drained of all emotion”

Rodrigo’s Adagio, although an original composition, has been linked to the *saeta* (Wade, 2006, p. 273), the mournful unaccompanied song performed often from a balcony during the Holy Week processions in Andalusia. This is not the case since, as mentioned earlier, the movement seems to hark back to the baroque period via Stravinsky. Either way, whether its source is the *saeta* or baroque music, interestingly enough, here, to the cliché of festive Spain, another trope is added: that of mystical Spain.

Mysticism, thus, is what in the end connects “Concierto” and *Concierto* at a deeper level. Rodrigo owed some of his thinking about what is a valid representation of Spanish music to the French Hispanist Henri Collet. The author of several studies about Spanish polyphony, Collet had been Rodrigo’s friend and protector in Paris, where he introduced him to Paul Dukas, Rodrigo’s main teacher in France. Collet was also one of the main promoters of the idea of a “mystical” Spain, a country which in his view was better represented by the spirit of Castile than that of Andalusia (Llano, 2012, pp. 65-77). Rodrigo himself expressed his preference for Manuel de Falla’s “Castilian” works, such as *Master Peter’s Puppet Show (El retablo de Maese Pedro)*, 1923) to those articulating *andalucismo*, such as *The Three-Cornered Hat* (Moreda Rodríguez, 2017, p. 52).

One can easily imagine a 1960s fan, grabbing a *Sketches* LP at a record store and reading Nat Hentoff’s earnest liner notes: “A brooding, dramatic Spanish sound and feeling pervades all the works on this record.” It does, actually. Miles Davis, to be sure, also felt it: “After we finished working on *Sketches of Spain*, I didn’t have *nothing* inside me. I was drained of all emotion...” (Hentoff, 1960, p. 244). According to

Hentoff's liner notes, again, after concluding the recording sessions for *Sketches*, Davis said to Evans: "Our next record date will be silence" (Hentoff, 1960, n. p.).

## 6. The Way to Reach the Moderns

"The way to reach the moderns," a 1920s pamphlet inserted in the daily *New York American*, assured its readers that by advertising in its publication they would reach a hip set of jazz-age customers. From James P. Johnson's 1923 stride tune "You Got to Be Modernistic" onwards, jazz had promoted itself explicitly as a beacon of modernity and urban stylishness. Rodrigo's *Concierto*, on the other hand, seems to espouse traditional, earthy, rural values. *Sketches* needed to negotiate both sets of values. Some of this was to be accomplished through the album's jacket art.

Enter Mark Rothko and abstract expressionism. The album's jacket, the first physical element a potential buyer would encounter in the sixties and a crucial element for its promotion, includes a matador-like Miles Davis with a trumpet (as a sword's avatar) over a background of three stripes. This iconography brings to mind the Spanish flag but executed in the abstract expressionist style of Mark Rothko's signature "multiforms" or stripe paintings, still trendy in the 1960s. The art, in any case, seems to represent two different, apparently opposed, cultural spaces: on the one hand, national identity and tradition (matador, the flag, etc.), on the other, modernity (abstract expressionism). Film director Pedro Almodóvar in the soundtracks of *High Heels* (*Tacones lejanos*, 1991) and *The Flower of My Secret* (*La flor de mi secreto*, 1995), by the way, also plays on this duality by using music from *Sketches* ("Saeta" and "Solea"), signaling at national roots, but with a powerful modern twist. Spanish, yes; but also current and hip—a way to reach the moderns. The brilliance of *Sketches* relies on this swinging duality, thus, the fluidity between roots and modern hipness, and the formal instability it generates.

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## 7. A Catalan Detour

The story of how *Sketches* came to be has been told numerous times. In essence, Davis had developed a love for Spanish music thanks to actress Beverly Bentley, with whom he had a relationship. She had spent time in Spain shooting a film and she even attended a birthday party there for Hemingway, an unabated fan of the country. In 1958, she brought back to the US a recorded anthology of flamenco guitar as a gift for Davis (Szwed, 2002, p. 207). In 1959, Davis also attended a show in New York of the *Ballet español* directed by the Mexican dancer Roberto Iglesias. On his way home, he stopped at a store and bought “every flamenco record in the place” (Szwed, 2002, p. 207).

A few months after, in 1959, while visiting Los Angeles, and with an already whetted appetite for all things Spanish, Davis heard Rodrigo’s *Concierto* for the first time. His friend and fellow musician Joe Mondragon played a record of the *Concierto* for him, probably in a version by guitar virtuoso Narciso Yepes (Iglesias, 2010, p. 309), and Davis was immediately sold on it. “Goddamm, these melody lines are strong. I knew right there that I had to record it, because they just stayed in my head” (Davis, 1989, p. 241). And record it they did, except that Columbia Records, being Columbia, failed to ask for Rodrigo’s authorization.

The composer learned about *Sketches* through Tete Montoliu, the eminent blind Catalan jazz pianist. In 1960 Rodrigo, his daughter Cecilia, and her future husband, Agustín León Ara, went to hear Montoliu at a jazz club in Madrid. The jazzman, who claimed to have been the first in Spain to own a copy of *Sketches* (Jurado, 1992, p. 18), gave the Rodrigo family an enthusiastic report of the album. Rodrigo, though, became understandably irate with the American label for having used his music without permission (Moyano Zamora, 1999, p. 123). Rodrigo next asked Montoliu to come to his house to play the album for him. He did, and in addition to feeling bothered by the illegal use of his music, in Montoliu’s telling, Rodrigo did not



like the jazz arrangement he heard (Jurado, 1998, p. 18). Eventually Rodrigo changed his mind and came to accept the subsequent jazz recordings of his music in part because the legal terms of use were resolved (Ediciones Joaquín Rodrigo now owns the Gil Evans arrangement), but also in part because these versions, far from obliterating the original guitar concerto, have helped disseminate it.

Montoliu remembers that his acquaintance with Rodrigo dated back to his first piano lessons with Petri Palou. The latter was a close friend of composer Frederic Mompou, Rodrigo's old acquaintance. According to Montoliu's reminiscences in his autobiography, Mompou asked Rodrigo's advice regarding whether Palou should take this young gifted blind student (Montoliu). Rodrigo responded that blindness should make no difference; only the student's talent and potential. "Teaching a blind student", Montoliu remembers Rodrigo reportedly saying to Mompou, "is neither more nor less difficult [than sighted students], it only requires the will to do it" (Jurado, 1998, p. 50).<sup>1</sup>

Despite Montoliu's acknowledged debt to Rodrigo for having indirectly recommended him to Petri Palou, thus jumpstarting his musical education and helping him overcome some of the hurdles of his disability, he always felt ambivalent towards the *Concierto* in particular and to Rodrigo's music in general. He nevertheless recorded the Adagio's tune for a Japanese album, but only reluctantly. "My *Aranjuez...* in the Japanese recording", states Montoliu, "has nothing to do with the original, it is a bit of melody and after I improvise a blues. They imposed it on me and I didn't know what to do with this" (Jurado, 1992, p. 18).<sup>2</sup>

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## 8. Appropriating the appropriation

Montoliu's lack of enthusiasm for Rodrigo's Adagio and its jazz sequels was an exception to how most Spanish jazz musicians and audiences felt. Briefly, from the

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<sup>1</sup> Author's translation.

<sup>2</sup> Author's translation.



very beginning, they embraced “Concierto” as a genuine musical expression of “Spanish jazz.” It would appear that *Sketches*, given its cultural fusions and confusions, gave an Orientalist and foreign view of Spain. Maybe it did, but even since the issuing of the album, Spanish audiences and musicians have appropriated it as their own, no matter how foreign and exotic its tropes were. In short, they appropriated the appropriation.

Following the enormous triumph of *Sketches*, and especially of “Concierto,” the Adagio’s main theme has been performed and recorded with great success by dozens of jazz musicians including Don Hill, Chet Baker, Al Jarreau, Bobby McFerrin, and Chick Corea. Corea’s tune “Spain,” inspired by the Davis and Evans collaboration, has in fact become a cultural identifier of “Spanish jazz.” Musicians, scholars, and audiences even consider it one of the foundational stones of “flamenco jazz,” one of Spain’s own brands of jazz (Manuel, 2016, p. 33; Zagalaz, 2012, pp. 33-54).

“Authentic” Spanish jazz, thus, is, in the end, the USA rendering of “Spanishness” through the work of Davis, Evans, and Corea. Needless to say, authenticity is a myth (Llano, 2010, pp. 1-15). To a certain extent, Spanish jazz musicians and audiences now see themselves through the work of foreign artists, like early-twentieth century Spanish composers adopted French models of Spanishness (Llano, 2010, pp. 1-15). To go back to Almodóvar for a second, the fact that he uses tracks from *Sketches* also implies that he, a Spaniard, feels comfortable with foreign tropes about Spain (Iglesias, 2010, p. 332).

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## 9. A Coda: Incommensurability

As the cliché goes about all great art, *Sketches* in the end defies all categories. The album is successful not despite its resistance to definition, but because of its taxonomical fluidity, its formal instability, its in-betweenness. Hybridity, of course, is the essence of all creativity in the end and *Sketches* displays this idea fully.

Creolization is always the source of creative work, the location of culture and art. Terms such as “mongrelization, bastardization, corruption” and many other “terms of incommensurability,” in John Szwed’s words, need to be seen in a positive light as much as those of “borrowing, influence [...], montage, fusion, and collage” (Szwed, 2011: 20). *Sketches* falls in between all categories: what is its genre? What is its national identity for a “Spanish album”? Why is the guitar avoided in a guitar composition? And then, Peruvian, Mexican, Brazilian, Arab, Moroccan, African, and black identities are collapsed, fused and confused for artistic purpose—or even for promotional ends. A matador presented as a Rothko image; abstract expressionism used to evoke bullfights. It is in part improvised, but at the same time carefully scored and recorded with, at the time, innovative techniques such as overdubbing. Who is the author of “Concierto”? Rodrigo? Miles Davis? Gil Evans? Mongrelized, bastardized, *Sketches* is not pure or authentic; but no one can say it is inauthentic. It is based on cultural and musical appropriations, but Spaniards themselves have adopted it as a model to be followed. In the end, *Sketches* is incommensurable art.

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# Reflection of Joaquín Rodrigo and his Music in the U.S. Media<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Joaquín Rodrigo's music has been very successful in the United States. His most famous work, *Concierto de Aranjuez*, has been transcribed for a variety of arrangements and styles, and the leading U.S. orchestras program his works frequently (in 2019 alone, more than 60 symphonic ensembles included a work by Rodrigo in their concerts). For this reason, the media has shown great interest in Rodrigo in the form of reviews, articles, and interviews with the composer. My aim is to provide an initial overview of the evolution of Rodrigo's critical reception in the U.S., up to the year of his death (1999). Thus, I have surveyed a selection of articles from the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Chicago Tribune*, among other publications. After my research, I have concluded that Rodrigo's critical reception focuses on his guitar music (especially his *Concierto de Aranjuez*), his blindness, and the Spanish character in his works. The newspapers also praise his mastery in composition, although, in many cases, they critique his conservatism. Additionally, I have found several clichés about Spain in critics' descriptions of his work.

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## Keywords

Joaquín Rodrigo, reception, critics, United States.

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[<sup>1</sup> Editors' note: English translation, offered by the Observatorio, of the original Spanish submitted by the author. See study 055-11/2019SP.]

## 1. Notes on Joaquín Rodrigo's Critical Reception in the United States

When describing the reception of Messiaen's music, Dingle and Fallon state that "a composer's reception consists in whatever posterity attends to it and thus ultimately influences his music more than anything he himself can control" (Dingle & Fallon, 2013, p. 277). In this analysis of what lives on and, conversely, what the collective memory forgets, the press plays an essential role in both forming and preserving opinion. Thus, in those circumstances in which members of the public do not have prior knowledge or detailed information about a particular topic, the media is one of their main resources; it outlines the context and perspective within which they learn about a specific fact, focusing their attention on certain aspects of the same (Happer & Philo, 2013). Furthermore, newspaper libraries make it possible to revisit events, gather opinions from the past, and track the evolution of those opinions over time. It seems appropriate, then, to conduct an initial analysis of the critical reception to Rodrigo's life and oeuvre within this collective work on his presence in the U.S.

This analysis focuses on U.S. print publications written during the composer's life, leaving a study of his contemporary reception for future researchers. Additionally, this research is limited to a selection of media outlets, namely: *The American Hebrew & Jewish Messenger*, the *American Israelite*, the *Atlanta Constitution*, the *Atlanta Daily World*, the *Baltimore Afro-American*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Chicago Defender*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Hartford Courant*, the *Jewish Advocate*, the *Jewish Exponent*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Newsday*, the *New York Amsterdam News*, the *New York Times*, the *New York Tribune*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Philadelphia Tribune*, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Washington Post* between January 1, 1910 and January 1, 2000.<sup>2</sup> To find and compile these sources, I consulted the ProQuest Historical Newspapers database, using the keywords "Joaquín

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<sup>2</sup> Although Rodrigo died on July 6, 1999, this study includes articles published through the end of that year, given the presence of obituaries and more widely circulated articles printed upon his death.

Rodrigo” and “J. Rodrigo.” The search returned the 486 results that formed the basis for this analysis.

This study is divided into three sections: 1) the earliest mentions of Rodrigo’s music before the release of Miles Davis’s *Sketches of Spain*, which was essential in the dissemination of the composer’s work in the U.S. 2) the composer’s leap to fame in the U.S., and 3) the consolidation of his reputation in the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## 2. Rodrigo in the U.S. before *Concierto de Aranjuez*

The U.S. media’s earliest mentions of Rodrigo already situated him among Spain’s foremost composers. On December 2, 1928, the *New York Times*’ Raymond Hall named him one of the most promising young composers from *Catalonia* (Hall, 1928, p. 146). In addition to correcting this geographical error (Rodrigo was Valencian), later texts emphasized Rodrigo’s use of Levantine folklore:

The first Spanish novelty presented this season by Bartolomé Pérez Casas and his Orquesta Filarmónica was a symphonio poem, “Por la Flor del Lirio Azul,” (For the Blue Fleur-de-Lis), by the young Valencian, Joaquín Rodrigo. The mood ranges from colorful brio to nostalgic lyricism. It is a delicate piece, of marked Levantine folk character, and at the same time personal, some modern French influence excepted. Good materials, taste and workmanship throughout. It is the best thing from Rodrigo’s pen and confirms him in the front rank of “Young Spain.” The blind composer, present, was warmly acclaimed. (Hall, 1935b, p. X6).

Thus, the first fact noted is Rodrigo’s place of origin, followed by his work’s evocative color and lyricism, characteristics that many later critics will also discuss. Next comes the fusion of Spanish folklore and French modernism combined with sound technical composition, and a mention of Rodrigo’s blindness, a distinguishing and remarkable characteristic. All of these elements reappear a few months later in Hall’s review of the performance of *Zarabanda lejana y villancico* by the Orquesta Sinfónica de Madrid under the baton of Enrique García Arbós:

The orchestration shows the harmonic refinement and elegance of facture typical of Dukas's pupil; none of the subtly evocative archaic perfume of the original is lost. Particularly, the saraband confirms the delicate poetic sensibility of the blind young composer from Valencia; the treatment shows many analogies to that of Ravel in the "Pavane." (Hall, 1935a, p. X4)

Beginning in that same year, 1935, reviews of U.S. concerts featuring Rodrigo's work begin to appear. The earliest examples we can find include ads for the canceled debut of *Per la flor del lliri blau* (1935), the successful U.S. premieres of *Preludio al gallo mañanero* (1931) and *Zarabanda lejana y villancico* (1937) by celebrated pianist and conductor José Iturbi (Anon., 1935a, p. 11; Anon., 1935b, p. 52; Anon., 1935c, p. X5; Anon., 1937, p. 3; Many Recitalists, 1931, p. 138), and recitals by pianist Joaquín Nin-Culmell at Town Hall in New York (1936 and 1938) and at Paine Hall at Harvard University (which included a piano transcription of the abovementioned *Zarabanda* and *Siciliana*) (I.S., 1936, p. 18; Downes, 1938, p. 8; Anon., 1940, p. 5). In their reviews, U.S. journalists still view Rodrigo as a figure that is unknown to the American public, indiscriminately grouping him with other composers from the Second Republic (Brown, 1941, p. L6).

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In the late 1940s, however, a commission from the Louisville Orchestra, which had decided to shift its programming focus for the 1948-49 season from soloists to composers, included Rodrigo among some of the most acclaimed composers of his time, including Virgil Thomson and Darius Milhaud (Anon., 1948, p. f22). That commission yielded the piece *Cuatro madrigales amatorios*, which immediately achieved notable popularity within the U.S. for both its orchestral and chamber versions.

Curiously, despite Rodrigo's extraordinary fame following the *Concierto de Aranjuez*, it was the 1952 *Concierto de estío* for violin and orchestra that captured the attention of famed *New York Times* critic Harold Schonberg, who heard a recording of the piece by Christian Ferras and the Conservatoire Orchestra under the direction of George Enesco and, later, a recording by violinist Ruggiero Ricci with the New York



Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall. Schonberg notes the “fervent lyricism, colorful Spanish rhythms and conservative harmonic texture” (Schonberg, 1952, p. X6) in his first review of Rodrigo, adding that it is a “very effective showpiece” that avoids “the obvious derivations and the nightclub tango-castanet style; and while it is predominantly conservative in idiom, it is a sincere, musical work” (Schonberg, 1952, p. 15). Here, we again see the notions of lyricism and color already suggested back in the 1930s. Schonberg adds the conservatism of Rodrigo’s language to these characteristics, making him the first to describe that aspect of his work. It is essential to understand that during this era, the Darmstadt School—the antithesis of Rodrigo’s style—was experiencing its most popular moment.<sup>3</sup> Finally, we see the notion of derivativeness (a ubiquitous cliché in criticism of Spanish music) from which Rodrigo’s work manages to exempt itself.

*Concierto de Aranjuez* was first reviewed by one of the news sources analyzed here in 1955, thanks to a recording from London featuring Narciso Yepes, which also included Manuel de Falla’s *Noches en los jardines de España*. The work is described as a piece that “has its own pride, a kind of Spanish dignity with the Moorish tinge” (Cassidy, 1955, p. h4). This clearly raises a number of stereotypes associated with Spanish exoticism and Muslim influence, which arise repeatedly in U.S. criticism.

In April and May of 1957, Rodrigo makes his first trip to the U.S. with his wife, pianist Victoria Kahmi. After giving a few lectures in Puerto Rico, they travel to New York, where, in addition to sorting out some editorial matters, they make their foray into New York social life in the company of Carlos Suriñach and Andrés Segovia (Laredo Verdejo, 2011, pp. 337-338). We can find evidence of their second trip the following year in print media, where it is recorded that the composer gave a lecture-concert entitled “The Contemporary Music of Spain” in several cities and attended the premiere

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<sup>3</sup> “Darmstadt School” refers to the serial music written in the 1950s by such composers as Nono, Boulez, Maderna, and Stockhausen and promoted by the same in the German city of Darmstadt during those years. The term comes from a lecture by Luigi Nono entitled “Die Entwicklung der Reihentechnik” (The Development of Serial Technique).

of *Fantasía para un gentleman*, featuring Andrés Segovia with the San Francisco Orchestra (Anon., 1958a, p. 30). The *Washington Post* interviewed Rodrigo in connection with these events, making particular note of his blindness and musical style; Rodrigo described the latter as an attempt “to capture the spirit of 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in Spain and put it to music—not traditional Spanish music, but I modernize and intellectualize it” (Salem, 1958, p. 1). In the context of Rodrigo’s tour, the *Boston Globe* dedicated a brief article to the “totally blind” Spanish composer (as he starts to be known) in its column *Odd Items From Everywhere* (Anon., 1958b, p. 12).

Despite the apparently successful debut of *Fantasía para un gentleman*, the news sources analyzed for this study barely mention the piece, which appears only in a description of Segovia’s recording on his 1959 album *Golden Jubilee* (Salzman, 1959, p. 1). After this moment, however, the *Fantasía* and *Concierto de Aranjuez* were regularly programmed at U.S. venues, definitively linking Rodrigo’s name with guitar music.

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### 3. *Sketches of Spain* and *Concierto de Aranjuez*

In 1960, the album *Sketches of Spain* by Miles Davis and Gil Evans, which included an arrangement of *Concierto de Aranjuez*’s second movement, launched Rodrigo to a far higher stratum of fame than that of classical music. The high-quality re-orchestration prompted renowned jazz critic Tony Gieske to call the arrangement “unique” and state that Gil Evans “is right inside Rodrigo’s head,” in a symbiosis strengthened by a shared admiration for “Debussy, Ravel and the early Stravinsky” (Gieske, 1960, p. 1). Following the album’s success, the adagio was included in media of all kinds, including TV ads and film. Thus, thanks to this peculiar fame, Rodrigo’s works became a key component in the repertoire of guitarists across the country: Victor Messer included *Aranjuez* in his Carnegie Hall recital in October 1960 (Anon., 1960, p. 36), the guitar duo Ida Presti and Alexandre Lagoya programmed *Minuetto pomposo* for their Town Hall performance (Ericson, 1961, p. 43), Renata Tarrago debuted *Aranjuez* in

Philadelphia in 1962 (Singer, 1962, p. 67), and Alirio Días performed it with the New York Philharmonic in 1970 (Ericson, 1970, p. 33), to name just a few examples from the period.

Nevertheless, two soloists stood out above the rest: Andrés Segovia and Narciso Yepes. Rodrigo had dedicated *Fantasía para un gentilhombre* to Segovia, and the guitarist was famed for his performance of the piece; Yepes received acclaim for his renditions of both *Fantasía para un gentilhombre* and *Concierto de Aranjuez*. The press described the *Fantasía* as “a delightful work, a piquantly spiced development of tunes by the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Gaspar Sanz” (Ericson, 1963, p. 127), though some critics attacked it as “overblown” (Salzman, 1959, p. 1).

The critical reception to *Concierto de Aranjuez* was overwhelmingly positive, with critics suggesting that “classical guitarists seeking orchestral arrangements will be forever indebted to Joaquín Rodrigo for providing them with the gorgeous *Aranjuez Concerto*” (Pleibel, 1969, p. t30). Along with Segovia and Yepes, young guitarists such as John Williams, Julian Bream, Ángel Romero, and Christopher Parkening began to perform Rodrigo’s works, of which they would become extraordinary exponents in the following decades (Henahan, 1968, p. D26).

There is no doubt, however, that one of the most significant events of the decade was the commission Rodrigo received from Los Romeros to compose a concerto for four guitars and orchestra in 1967. The *Chicago Tribune* and *New York Times* reported on the San Antonio Symphony’s debut of *Concierto andaluz* under the baton of Victor Alessandro (Anon., 1967, p. f12; Ericson, 1967, p. 59). Still, the subsequent LP, which included both *Concierto andaluz* and *Aranjuez*, received mixed reviews: the *Los Angeles Times* described the concert as “an attempt by Rodrigo to recapture some of the distinctive guitar-orchestra ambiance of the earlier piece, and he does not quite succeed. The melodies are pleasant enough, but undistinguished. Still, there can be no disputing the craftsmanship involved” (Pleibel, 1969, p. t30).

In the 1960s, Rodrigo's vocal works (particularly *Cuatro madrigales amatorios*) became a mainstay of Spanish repertoire in the U.S. Two vocalists spearheaded interest in programming his pieces: Victoria de los Ángeles and Montserrat Caballé. The former already had an established career in the U.S., while the latter had caused a stir with her debut at the Metropolitan Opera in the role of Lucrezie Borgia (Sullivan, 1965, p. 525). Victoria de los Ángeles performed Rodrigo's works at Harvard Square Theatre (for which the *Boston Globe* praised her performance of *De los álamos vengo, madre* [Miller, 1963, p. 17]), at the Philadelphia All Star Concert, at the National Academy of the Arts in 1963 (Schloss, 1963, p. 11), and at Orchestra Hall in Chicago. The *Chicago Tribune* gave her a glowing write-up for this last performance, though the review is rife with Spanish stereotypes and clichés (featuring everything from the “Madonna of the Macarena soon to be carried thru the streets of Seville” to bullfighting) (Cassidy, 1964, pp. 1-b1). The print media also reported on the inclusion of Rodrigo's work in his famed recording *Cantos de España* with the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra under por Frühbeck de Burgos (Anon., 1963, p. 143). Montserrat Caballé received positive reviews for her recording of works by Montsalvatge and Rodrigo (ODEON ASDL 833). American critics praised her recording of Rodrigo, of which they said “any one by itself is delightful” (Ericson, 1965, p. X21), and which they described as “difficult, dramatic, and not as musically derivative as historians have you expecting from these composers” (Willis, 1966, p. g12). Other pioneers in the programming of Rodrigo's music in the U.S. included Audrey Nossaman, Martina Arroyo, Phyllis Curtin, Mattiwilda Dobbs, Carolyn Smith-Meyer, Susan Larson, Roberta Peters, Lewis Segal, Ok-Ja Lim, and Veronica Tyler.

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Works for the piano and harp also drew attention from U.S. critics, though to a lesser degree. Of note was Gonzalo Soriano's recital of Spanish music at Town Hall, including the debut of *Tres sonatas de Castilla*, which the *New York Times* described as “show-pieces, well written for the instrument, strongly flavored with the musical idiom” (B.J., 1955, p. 21). Later, Mavina Leshock performed Rodrigo's *Estampas andaluzas* at the Philadelphia Art Alliance (“atmospheric” is the adjective applied to

*Barquillos de Cádiz* (Singer, 1965, p. 25). Additionally, in a profile of Alicia Larrocha for the *New York Times*, Raymond Hall highlights her commitment to contemporary Spanish composers, including Rodrigo (Ericson, 1966, p. 87).

As for Rodrigo's harp pieces, in 1964, the Philadelphia Orchestra debuted *Concierto serenata* under the direction of Ormandy, with Marilyn Costello, a member of the orchestra, as a soloist, though it was not until renowned harpist Nicanor Zabaleta performed the piece years later that it became a major success. In the *Washington Post*, Paul Hume described the latter performance as "pleasant, amiable at times, spiced with unusual rhythms and pungent harmonic moments. While it is expertly written for both soloist and many solo voices in the orchestra, it is of the thinnest musical material. Only playing as patrician in style as Zabaleta's makes it palatable" (Hume, 1972, p. B11).

Finally, it is important to note that in the 1960s, the path blazed by Miles Davis forged ahead in the jazz world, particularly in form of the Modern Jazz Quartet, which transformed Davis's arrangement of the adagio in *Concierto de Aranjuez* into a staple of their repertoire, which they performed at President Nixon's reception for the Shah of Iran in 1969. The *Washington Post*, *Times Herald* wrote that "the musical high point of the evening came during the performance of the adagio movement of the 'Concierto de Aranjuez [sic],' a three-part work by Joaquín Rodrigo, the blind Spanish contemporary composer. The movement is one of stately beauty, perhaps reminiscent of a Spanish lament or hymn... The performance brought the biggest applause of the concert and the President burst into a broad smile at the end of the piece" (Hollie, 1969, p. 1). The beauty of the concerto and the artist's blindness are codes that continue to be associated with the figure of the composer time and time again.

Thanks to his extensive presence in the U.S. through guitar, voice, piano, and harp compositions, and to the frequent jazz arrangements of *Concierto de Aranjuez*, Rodrigo had become "[one of the] masters and the creator of a new Spanish music"

(Darrah, 1962, pp. 1-c9), a music that “has never failed to charm” (Ericson, 1963, p. 127).

In the 1970s, dance companies in the U.S. began to routinely program Rodrigo’s music. Of particular importance were the José Greco Dance Company and Nana Lorca’s Flamenco Dance Theater (Steinfirst, 1970, p. 13). This practice was later adopted by local companies, including the Boston Ballet, which included *Concierto de Aranjuez* in its show from February 12-14, 1975 (Anon., 1975, p. 1).

The *Concierto madrigal* for two guitars and orchestra also premiered in the 1970s, at the Hollywood Bowl, in July. The final product of that performance was less than desirable due to technical problems with the amplification system, but that did not prevent a positive critical reception, which defined the work as “charming, old-fashioned (in a legitimately retrospective manner), repetitive, dreary” (Bernheimer, 1970, p. a8). The decade also saw another, more modest debut of *Tres viejos aires de danza* at West Side Orchestral Concerts in July 1973 (Shepard, 1973, p. 43).

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Following the lead of Miles Davis and the Modern Jazz Quartet, Jim Hall also made an arrangement of *Concierto de Aranjuez* that aimed “to free the work from its more classical associations” (Davis, 1976, p. 62). Other musicians who adapted Rodrigo’s work in this period included the guitarist Laurindo Almeida (whose arrangement has its roots in frequent collaborations with the Modern Jazz Quartet) and singer and trumpet player Herb Alpert. In his review of the latter’s arrangement in the *Chicago Tribune*, Larry Kart described the piece as “Americanized” through its multiple layers of adaptation in the U.S. (Kart, 1979, pp. 1-d3).

#### 4. Composer of the *Concierto de Aranjuez*

The international acclaim for *Concierto de Aranjuez* distinguished Rodrigo and eclipsed his other works and activities in the final decades of his life. In fact, most critics refer

to him as “the composer of *Concierto de Aranjuez*.” On the topic of its renown, Robert Sherman wrote that “the slow movement has almost taken on the status of a pop tune” (Sherman, 1980, p. CN15), and others, such as Alan Kozinn, assert that the piece “is not only the most frequently performed and most recorded work in the guitar’s small concerto repertory, but one of the few guitar compositions to have... entered the standard orchestral literature” (Kozinn, 1981, p. GU27).

Although Rodrigo’s second best-known work, *Fantasia para un gentleman*, did not achieve that same level of recognition, it nevertheless had a major impact in the U.S. during the third stage of his career. The other guitar and orchestral works (*Concierto andaluz* for four guitars and orchestra and *Concierto madrigal*) were programmed with some frequency, largely driven by the momentum they received from Los Romeros. New singers such as Anne Turner, Judith Caldwell, Linda Schurman, and Marni Nixon also added Rodrigo’s pieces for voice to their repertoires, and virtually every singer who performed Rodrigo’s work chose *Madrigales amatorios*. Despite trends in earlier periods that framed Rodrigo within strictly Spanish repertoires, or as part of a special subset in a recital, mostly in these last decades, Rodrigo’s music was individualized and performed alongside work by composers as varied as Schubert, Stravinsky, and Walton (Horowitz, 1980, p. 45).

Musical highlights in the U.S. during the last decades of Rodrigo’s life included the debut of *Concierto pastoral* for flute and orchestra, commissioned by James Galway, and *Concierto como un divertimento* for cello and orchestra, dedicated to and composed for Julian Lloyd Webber.

In his *Washington Post* review of *Concierto pastoral*’s debut, Paul Hume highlighted the “echoes of Falla’s ‘Puppet Show,’ both in the delicate scoring of solo winds and the spiky turns of melodic and harmonic thought. Here, too, was some fast, intricate, spectacular writing for solo flute and orchestra” (Hume, 1980, p. F9). Note the reappearance of one of the codes that continually reappear in any discussion of



Rodrigo's music: his roots in the music of Falla, in an attempt to establish a line of continuity. The very same critic once wrote that "The spirit of Spain at its most fragrant is bound up in the two works: the 'Concierto de Aranjuez' for guitar and orchestra by Joaquín Rodrigo and music from Manuel de Falla's glorious ballet 'The Three-Cornered Hat'" (Hume, 1981, p. B11).

Critics described *Concierto como un divertimento*, a commission by Julian Lloyd Webber, as "a romantic, melodious, and lyrical Spanish concert; a very enjoyable piece that ought to be included in the cello repertoire" (Robins, 1984, p. C39). The piece's composition process also received notable attention. In an interview with Lloyd Webber, the cellist described his collaboration with Rodrigo and how, despite the language barrier, both were able to create a wonderful piece of which the cellist felt quite proud (Reich, 1987, p. K8).

Finally, Gregory Allen's recording of Rodrigo's complete works for piano (with Anton Nel when four hands are required), which until this period was fairly obscure relative to the composer's works for guitar and voice, played a key role in their dissemination. Joseph McLellan praised the project, saying it "enhances Rodrigo's stature" (McLellan, 1992, p. G4) while Lesley Valdés described it as "delightful" (Valdés, 1992, p. 40).

When Rodrigo died on July 6, 1999, every major U.S. newspaper included an obituary. The following day, the *Washington Post* wrote.

Joaquín Rodrigo, 97, the composer whose "Concierto de Aranjuez" for guitar and orchestra became one of the 20th century's best-known pieces of classical music, died July 6 at his home in Madrid. The composer, who had been blind since childhood, wrote the concerto in 1939. Its romantic tunes reminiscent of Spain's Arabic past have made it a favorite among concert-goers ever since... He was hailed as the country's leading composer of the time, thanks to the success of the concerto. Other well-known works by Mr. Rodrigo include "Fantasía para un gentilhombre," also for guitar and orchestra. (Anon., 1999, p. B6)



In this brief tribute, we can see some of the ideas that recur in the analysis of Rodrigo's reception in the U.S.: composer of *Concierto de Aranjuez* and *Fantasia para un gentilhombre*, blind, and one of Spain's most important artists.

The *New York Times* obituary, entitled "Joaquín Rodrigo, 97, Master of Spanish Classical Music," reported the composer's death in similar language:

Joaquín Rodrigo, a major figure in Spanish classical music whose haunting masterpiece, "Concierto de Aranjuez," inspired dozens of interpretations worldwide, including a jazz version by Miles Davis, died on Tuesday at his home in Madrid. He was 97. Maestro Rodrigo, as the blind composer was frequently called, wrote 26 works for the guitar and helped to move that instrument to center stage in concert halls. The three-movement "Concierto de Aranjuez" is his most widely performed guitar piece, and there are some 50 recordings of it currently on the market. (Goodman, 1999, p. B9)

Notice similar codes to those in the article in the *Post*. However, a month later, the *New York Times* published a far longer article by composer Pablo Zinger that includes a detailed review of Rodrigo's work, and ultimately concluding that the composer deserves to be remembered as one of the great Spanish composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Zinger, 1999, p. 2).

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## 5. Conclusions

Rodrigo has been a continuous topic in U.S. media. Although there was only the occasional mention of foreign concerts and recordings from the 1930s until the 1960s (with a few exceptions), thanks to Miles Davis's *Sketches of Spain* and the dedication of other jazz musicians, as well as guitarists such as Los Romeros, Segovia, Yepes, Williams, and Parkening; singers such as Montserrat Caballé and Victoria de los Ángeles; and cellist Julian Lloyd Webber, Joaquín Rodrigo achieved widespread recognition in the U.S., and his works were widely circulated there.

Descriptions of the composer and his work tend to revolve around a few common topics that have remained steady over time: blindness, Spain, mastery, and

the guitar, with emphasis on each topic expanding or contracting according to the era (early writing on Rodrigo focused on his blindness, while later reviews turned toward his craftsmanship, orchestration, coloring, etc.). Although his reception in the U.S. was largely favorable, critics were at times reproachful of his conservatism and the simplicity of his material. Even so, in all of the reviews analyzed here, there is an underlying admiration for his compositional technique and his stature as the greatest Spanish composer since Manuel de Falla.

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