Manuel de Falla

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The Musical Times

AND SINGING-CLASS CIRCULAR.

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— MAY 1 —

MANUEL DE FALLA.

BY G. JEAN-AUBRY.

There is no greater satisfaction for an art-critic than that of seeing the future justify his predictions and realise all the hopes he entertained concerning an artist, long before the public had even a glimpse of his work.

When, at my request, Manuel de Falla came to London on May 24, 1911, to play in a concert of Spanish works, both old and modern, given by our excellent artist and friend Franz Liebich, I was certain that some day England would hold it an honour to have been the first after France to welcome one of the greatest composers of modern Spain.

At that time Albeniz's death had already deprived us of the inexhaustible magic of an essentially musical soul. To those of us who knew all that Albeniz was still capable of contributing to universal music, to those who had been acquainted with him and loved him fondly, Albeniz's death had been a severe blow our hearts could not recover from, and we contemplated the musical future of Spain with anxiety.

I met Manuel de Falla a short time before Albeniz's death, one evening after a concert-lecture devoted to the glory of the French harpsichordists, given by that great Spanish pianist Joachim Nin, and myself. He appeared to me then as a nervous little man, with a keen look, a high forehead, and the Andalusian type which unfailingly betrays the proximity of African and Arabian influences; in fact, as one at once resolute and thoughtful, eager and uncommunicative. Then some years went by. Later on, on October 30, 1910, the desire to pay pious homage to Albeniz having induced me to promote the first concert of modern Spanish music ever given in France, de Falla came to accompany some of his own songs and play his '*Pièces Espagnoles*'; and it was in the course of the following spring that I succeeded in bringing him to London.

At that time we became fast friends; and the friendship brought me true relief from the loss of Albeniz and great expectations for the modern Spanish School.

Since then, how many evenings we spent together, attending concerts or discoursing about works and their composers! His talk would always breathe the same spirit, the same impassioned conviction, the same thirst for truth and the same sensibility, all of which are reflected in his works and make me love the man as much as the artist.

At that time de Falla lived simply, unobtrusively, working unheeded, faithful to a few friends—for whom he was ever ready to cross the whole of Paris to meet them at a station, or to see them off, if they merely went through.

How often we met (and these remembrances are among the best of my life), until that August afternoon in 1914 when he entered my room, and in a voice quivering with emotion announced to me '*We have taken Mulhouse.*' Shortly after this meeting, my military duties separated us, and he had on his own side to return to Spain.

De Falla, then, was no longer the young Spanish composer who had come to Paris to work and learn; already the Opéra-Comique had in January, 1914, performed his '*Vida Breve*' with a success which would have been greater still if one of those accidents that sometimes occur in the theatrical world had not put a temporary end to the career of this interesting work.

Since his return to Spain, Manuel de Falla has begun to understand truly his mission; to-day he is the most striking figure of the Spanish School, to-morrow he will be a composer of European fame, just as is Ravel or Stravinsky. Therefore my friendship has no need to help my pen to praise as he deserves. His artistic life is an example of exclusive scruple and firm will, of self-caution and eager resolution, and when I consider its curve, I can still remember the impression his face made upon me when I looked upon it for the first time and knew nothing of him yet.

Manuel de Falla was born at Cadiz on November 23, 1877. There he began learning music very early under the direction of Mlle. Elois Galluzo. He studied harmony with Alejandro Otero and Enrique Broca; later on he went to Madrid, where he pursued his studies first with Jose Trigo (pianoforte), then with Felipe Pedrell, the great Catalonian composer (composition). He was still under fourteen when the first-prize for pianoforte playing was unanimously awarded to him by the Madrid Academy of Music, but a virtuoso's career was not enough to feed either his ambition or the wealth of expression he could already feel confusedly in him.

From 1890 to 1904 he divided his time between playing as a pianist in solo music or concerted chamber music, and composing many operatic, chamber, or pianoforte works; but none of these compositions was published, and their composer even now cannot be brought to give any information whatever concerning them.

Following the example of his elders, Albeniz and Granados, de Falla had already looked towards France. He was one of the first to spread in Spain a curiosity and taste for modern French music, including in his concerts the latest French musical productions. In 1905 he won as a pianist the Ortis y Cusso prize, and in the same year he sent to the Madrid Academy of Fine Arts, who had put up the composition of a Spanish Opera for competition, '*La Vida Breve*,' a lyrical drama in two Acts and four scenes. To the credit of the Academy he carried off the prize,—for official bodies are not always rightly inspired, whether in France or elsewhere.

France allured de Falla irresistibly, and in 1907, as the composers Albeniz and Granados, the pianists Ricardo Vines and Joachim Nin, and Miguel Llobet, that admirable guitarist, had done, and as Joaquin Turina and Civil y Castelví were just doing, he came to settle in Paris. From the very first he received a warm welcome from Paul Dukas, the already glorious composer of '*L'Apprenti sorcier*,' the powerful '*Sonata*,' and the

'Variations sur un thème de Rameau.' Claude Debussy was not less friendly to him, and soon all the most original and interesting among the Parisian musical personalities granted him their sympathy. All regarded him as one of themselves, as they did Maurice Ravel, Albert Roussel, or Florent Schmitt. His only published works were 'Quatre Pièces Espagnoles' and 'Trois Mélodies,' but these were enough to prove that he possessed a superior musical organization, and was gifted with a melodic sense at once thoroughly Spanish and distinctly personal.

His 'Quatre Pièces Espagnoles,' entitled 'Aragonesa,' 'Cubana,' 'Montanesa,' 'Andaluza,' show clearly that they are picturesque pieces in the plain sense of the word, and therefore we may infer that they merely follow the traces of the twelve pieces collected by Albeniz under the general title of 'Iberia.' There are evident affinities of race and character between de Falla's pieces and those of Albeniz. But the process of composition is widely different; the former are at once more fluid and more penetrating, and their sensibility more restrained and less expansive. In them we can already feel de Falla's intention not to say too much. This is rather new in Spanish music. The French influence—more particularly that of Debussy—had a good deal to do with this departure.

When in the course of a period of time sufficient to allow of a comprehensive view of the French pianoforte music of the last twenty-five years, we shall realise better that the supreme quality of the works of Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel, for instance, is a perfect sense of proportion and the absence of useless phrases; whereas in Granados and Albeniz, as in Dédot de Sévérac among the French (and these are three examples of the best and among those which I love the most), there are sometimes pages somewhat lacking in interest where the purely pianistic development checks the truly emotional and picturesque curve of the subject. But in this respect de Falla's 'Quatre Pièces Espagnoles,' like some of Turina's, afford perfect proportion. As he published his 'Quatre Pièces,' de Falla also gave 'Trois Mélodies' ('Les Colombes,' 'Chinoiserie,' 'Seguidille') composed on poems by Théophile Gautier.

It is not a rare thing to find foreign musicians composing songs to French words. Lately this difficulty has been triumphed over by the Russian, Stravinsky, on Verlaine's poems; by an Italian, Alfred Casella; by the young English composer, Eugène Goossens, in his 'Proses Lyriques' from the excellent French poems of Edwin Evans,—and this notwithstanding the fact that the French language not being strongly accented is no doubt the hardest language for a foreigner to set to music. And yet I think no French composer has given better evidence of unflinching prosodic sureness than Manuel de Falla.

In that respect 'Les Colombes' is a perfect realisation, and the melody is an example of the repressed, delicate sensibility of its author. De Falla's melodic phrase, such as it is found in his songs, in his pianoforte pieces, and in the themes of 'La Vida Breve,' unfolds with a languid ardour which restrains itself precisely as it is about to become sentimental, in the bad sense of the word, and it melts away discretely and unobtrusively. The Finales of 'Les Colombes' and 'Chinoiserie' are characteristic examples of this trait. Yet neither the 'Pièces Espagnoles' nor the 'Trois Mélodies,' however excellent they may be, could afford de Falla frames wide enough for his inspiration, for though he is a skilful melodist and an expert in pianistic expression, he is above all a symphonist, and it is in his orchestral music we must look for his true personality.

If the study of the latest French symphonists—Debussy, Paul Dukas, or Maurice Ravel—has been fruitful to him, and if their intimacy has renewed the suggestions he had acquired in the course of his early studies in Spain, we must not forget that 'La Vida Breve,' a lyrical drama in two Acts, had been entirely composed by de Falla before he came to France, at a time when he still had but faint echoes of the Debussy and post-Debussy orchestration. Nevertheless, it is for its orchestral qualities that 'La Vida Breve' deserves to stand as one of the best among modern Spanish operas.

If we wished to give a rapid and somewhat arbitrary definition of 'La Vida Breve' we might say that it is a Spanish 'Cavalleria Rusticana,' but with this essential difference: that it is 'Cavalleria Rusticana' composed by a consummate musician, penetrated with a keen desire to express his thoughts without making easy concessions to the mob. Several critics have been struck by the likeness of 'La Vida Breve' to 'Cavalleria Rusticana'; but it should be noted that this is due to the libretto, and to the fact that the former is cut into two Acts, almost like Verga's libretto to Mascagni's opera. Fernandez Shaw's drama, upon which de Falla bases his opera, is a very simple fable, extremely well suited to music, in so far as it allowed of a compressed action without any complexities, and it afforded the composer musical scope.

The action turns upon the love of a poor Andalusian girl for a young man above her in station, who in spite of the girl's despair, marries in her presence a young heiress. The unfortunate girl dies heart-broken. At first the theme is not particularly original, and the action thus summarised looks like a mere newspaper paragraph; but the plot, though condensed, is very cleverly and, above all, very simply constructed by Fernandez Shaw, a writer who, unfortunately for Spanish letters, died prematurely. Destitute of idle flourishes and silly sentimentality, Fernandez Shaw's poem from beginning to end breathes true dignity and emotion, which have been well responded to by the noble music of the composer.

De Falla has considerably expanded the theme proposed to him. He has not been content to follow its simple outline, but has surrounded it with all the colour and glory of a full, copious, symphonical art, entirely free from grandiloquence and far-fetched affectation. However refined, however well-informed as to the latest orchestral resources he may be, he does not think it necessary to make use of the whole-tone scale, &c., at every turn, or to lavish harp-glissandos at random, to show that he is up to it. Musical snobbism of that kind has nothing to do with this honest, learned composer, who places sensibility and emotion much above theories and dogmas. The fulness and copiousness of his art are the striking qualities of his orchestration, and they reveal themselves not in power or sonorous quality, but, on the contrary, in a maximum of effect produced with a minimum of means. We never feel confronted with mere padding, and have nowhere the impression of a sonorous nothing. All the musical drama unfolds, expands, and ends tragically without any useless thunder.

In fact de Falla has enriched each Act of the drama with a purely symphonical part. In the first Act he has linked the two scenes with an admirable evocation of Granada at dusk faint sounds of voices rise from the distant town, and all the atmosphere is laden with nonchalance, fragrance, and love, artfully suggested. Here the composer begins to betray his gift for emotional picturesqueness, tokens of which he was to give later on, and which proceeds from his thoroughly Andalusian nature, whose

proverbial musical ease is, in his case, happily restrained by a deeply artistic sense.

In the second Act we see the wedding enlivened by the 'singer's' voice and coloured by dances executed to the cheers of the lookers-on, and here de Falla gives free utterance to the rhythmical gifts of his race; the Spanish dances and melodic themes mingle and stand out of the symphony or creep into it with irresistible charm.

But the rarest and most wonderful thing in all this is the taste with which he has everywhere expressed the feelings of his personages, the framing scenery, and all the modulations of the action. Scattered all over with exquisite melodies, this score does not contain a single page composed for the sake of effect.

Felipe Pedrell's 'Celestina,' Albeniz's 'Pepita Jimenez,' and de Falla's 'Vida Breve,' are just now the three characteristic works of the modern Spanish lyrical stage: three widely-different works which show the many ways and ample resources of Spanish music since it re-assumed a national existence and began to be concerned with harmonic science—its necessary support. After winning the approbation of all the most exacting musicians at the Paris Opéra-Comique, 'La Vida Breve' has since the war met with tremendous successes on various Spanish stages. It is perhaps the first time that a Spanish musical work of a lofty kind has attracted in Spain a large enthusiastic public; it is also a sure sign that something is changed for the best in that musical realm so long asleep, and whose awakening is glorious.

On de Falla's return to Spain in the winter of 1914-15, the success of 'La Vida Breve' spurred him to further achievement. We knew that he had for some time been working passionately at three 'Nocturnes' for pianoforte and orchestra, the publication of which we were longing for; but something else was in store for us before these appeared: de Falla had composed 'El Amor Brujo,' a Gitaneria in one Act and two scenes, on a libretto by Gregorio Martinez Sierra, which were performed at the Lara Theatre in Madrid on April 15, 1915.

The work met with a doubtful success, a fact which, properly understood, is to the praise of the composer, for he had endeavoured to apply to a national popular scenic form his artistic endowments, the like of which had not been witnessed until then.

I do not think he was wrong in this, and if his work was not as heartily welcomed as it should have been, it was because the composer had to ignore deeply-rooted habits, to overcome a long-indulged carelessness, and at first his effort could not but rouse amazement, and run counter to the comprehension of a public little prepared for such sumptuousness. Not only was the attempt interesting, but it was of a nature to show a way to other composers.

The prejudice of hierarchy in styles is one of those we must fight against most vigorously; through it true art and the popular taste are left wide apart, and this we have no right whatever to overlook. It is not for a skilful composer to humble himself to take up a lower style, but on the contrary to raise to the dignity of true music a style too long abandoned to vulgar ease.

It is notable that after the performance of 'El Amor Brujo,' de Falla could with few modifications draw from the opera a symphonical series; he merely suppressed the spoken or sung parts and enlarged the instrumentation. The former setting was scored for pianoforte, flute, piccolo, oboe, French horn, two violins, 'cello and double-bass, which formed a somewhat peculiar combination owing to the

considerable predominance of wind instruments over strings. The re-orchestration was for the usual symphonic orchestra. It introduced clarinets, a bassoon, trumpets, and increased the effective force of the strings. But this modification has not altered the essential character of the work, which is to be found in its particular colour, or the semi-Arabian style of its idioms.

At the same time de Falla was completing the symphonic work called 'Nocturnes,' in which the pianoforte was to play an important part. This work was brought out at the beginning of 1916, in Madrid; later on it was performed at Cadiz, Grenada, San Sebastian, and (outside Spain) in Geneva towards the end of last October. It is a symphonic Suite in three parts, the exact title of which is 'Noches en los jardines de Espana' ('Nights in the Gardens of Spain'), and the several parts are described respectively: (1) 'En el Generalife'; (2) 'Danza lejana' ('Dance in the distance'); (3) 'En los jardines de la sierra de Cordoba'; and the indication given by the author as an under-title is 'Symphonical Impressions, for pianoforte and orchestra.'

In this work the pianoforte part is actually an orchestral one, and has nowhere a tendency to remind one of an ordinary concerto. Therefore we cannot consider it in de Falla's work in the same light as we would in a classical concerto, or even in works such as Rimsky-Korsakov's Concerto, Liapounov's Phantasy, or César Franck's Variations. It is rather with the use of the pianoforte made by Vincent d'Indy in his 'Symphonie sur un Thème Montagnard' that we might compare that made by de Falla, were not the symphonical atmosphere absolutely different. Nowhere is the pianoforte heard alone, but always as a part of the general orchestration or by way of adornment or sonorous embroidery of the orchestral ground. The thematic material is built, as in 'La Vida Breve,' or in 'El Amor Brujo,' on rhythms, modes, cadences, or forms inspired by but never directly borrowed from the Andalusian folksong. It is an actual re-creation of the popular soul. In fact de Falla's intentions (which are wonderfully realised) are more expressive than picturesque or descriptive.

We should be wrong to see in de Falla nothing but an 'evoker' of picturesque Spain. He is rather a poet of Spanish emotion; and indeed, however allured we maybe by the original instrumentation and technical sureness of these three 'Nocturnes,' we cannot but acknowledge while listening to them that we are chiefly penetrated with the emotion they breathe. In them the composer has given an unprecedented example of true greatness derived from an element apparently destitute of distinction. The last two parts are linked with each other; 'Danza lejana' is based on a mere tango-rhythm, but it is worked up in such a masterly fashion that it becomes equal in greatness to the most powerful parts of any symphony ever composed, and brings the work to a close in a most glorious climax.

Here de Falla's love for the popular music of his race has met with its first reward. Besides he has endowed Spanish music with its first great symphonic work, at once new and national. And in saying this I forget neither Albeniz's admirable 'Catalonia,' nor Turina's 'Procession del Rocio,' nor Conrado del Campo's 'Divina Comedia,' nor Perez Casa's 'Suite Murcienne'; but none of these has plunged so deeply as the 'Noches en los jardines de Espana' into the inmost recesses of Spanish sensibility. In these symphonic impressions the power of emotion is equal to the power of evocation; it is the very charm of Andalusia, with its languor, its

passion, its splendour, its high spirits, its secret melancholy, which sings here with all the resources of modern musical technique.

Besides the difficulties inherent to the war, the absence of a printed score makes the performance of de Falla's 'Nocturnes' somewhat difficult. In England the war has roused a praiseworthy interest in other musical efforts than the German ones; the English public has realised that France on one side, and Russia on the other, own considerable riches in chamber-music works as well as in orchestral works. If Spain cannot yet afford so many productions for our curiosity, at least she already reckons some whose qualities can vie with those of other musical nations.

To-day de Falla is indisputably the most characteristic musician of the new Spanish generation; he has reached the age of mastership, and in Spain the young musicians already consider him as a leader. He has inherited the ruling power one moment assumed by Albeniz but checked by his death; he continues the same tradition, though with a different nature;

in short, he incarnates the greatest musical hopes of Spain. Thanks to him we shall soon see Spain share the prestige of the Russian Ballets. Serge de Diaghilew, after enriching his Russian stock with admirable French works such as Maurice Ravel's 'Daphnis et Chloe,' could not but appreciate the rhythmical interest, at once picturesque and musical, of modern Spain. He has asked de Falla to compose a ballet, and de Falla is now working at it, after a subject borrowed from Alarcon's 'El sombrero de tres picos' ('The three-cornered hat').

But even now 'La Vida Breve' and the 'Noches' can give the British public sufficient evidence of Manuel de Falla's art. I look forward to the day on which the 'Nocturnes' will be performed in London, the pianoforte part played by the composer as it has been in Grenada and Cadiz, and on that day I hope to be one of the audience, and then I shall remember that fine evening in May, 1911, when de Falla already dreamt of his 'Noches en los jardines de Espana' during our slow walk amidst the vernal grace of Kensington Gardens.

MODERN FRENCH ORGAN MUSIC.

BY HARVEY GRACE.

(Continued from March number, page 114.)

We have seen that the modern French composer has struck out a line of his own in the matter of fugue and toccata. He has also done what is perhaps an even more difficult thing,—written some really original marches. (By-the-by, is it not remarkable that so few Germans wrote marches for the organ?)

Guilmant, Salomé, Claussman, Tombelle, &c., gave us admirable examples, but were content to be more or less conventional (the best of the few exceptions is Guilmant's 'March on a theme of Handel,' with its capital fugal section in place of Trio). But the best of their work in this way is not on a level with the 'Pontifical' and F sharp Marches of Widor. There is surely no finer organ march than the former, with its sustained pomp and its weight without heaviness. In it, as in its fellow*, we find something more than an effective rhythmic movement,—there are breadth and development, and the absence of a set Trio is a gain. Both works, especially the first, are really symphonic. Saint-Saëns also broke new ground with his 'Marche Religieuse,' which is not so well-known in England as it deserves to be. He begins with a page and a-half of syncopated bass,—a very un-marchlike procedure which, with the swaying chords above, suggests bells.

* Especially in the 1900-01 version.

Ex. 1. *Allegro maestoso*. ♩ = 66.

The musical score for Ex. 1, 'Allegro maestoso', is presented in two systems. The first system begins with a treble staff containing a series of sustained chords and a bass staff with a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The second system continues the chordal texture in the treble while the bass staff has more movement. The third system shows a more complex texture with moving lines in both staves. The piece concludes with a final chord and a 'Ped.' (pedal) marking. The tempo is marked 'Allegro maestoso' and the time signature is 2/4. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

The more 'tuney' middle section might easily have been commonplace, given less skilful treatment. A fine effect is produced by the gradual resurrection of the opening theme: it begins on page 5 to assert itself in the bass, and on the following page appears brilliantly on the manuals hidden in widespread arpeggios. This march is particularly well adapted for the showing-off of good diapasons. The harmony is mostly simple, but is set out in such a striking way that it is often more interesting than merely 'spicy' passages.

Boëllmann's second Suite is rapidly finding the favour that was somewhat overdue, so I need only draw attention to the March with which it concludes,—a most telling example, with a hint of bells in its chief theme, and some very glowing harmony. A highly original March by Hillemacher is perhaps rather too strong meat for most, but will be enjoyed by all with a palate for the daring and unexpected. It is one of a very original and charming set of pieces published in 1905. Other Marches well worth attention are by Augustin Barié (No. 3 of Three Pieces), a 'Marche de Fête' of Henry Busser (a sonorous affair suitable for use in a big building), and last, but very far from least, the 'Cortège' and 'Marche Funèbre' of Louis Vierne, in the Twenty-four Pieces. These two last-named are calculated to make the most obtuse man in the pew sit up and take notice. He has not been accustomed to composers of organ marches handing out this kind of fare: