

Program Notes by Todd Wetherwax

Nationalism in Music or Why Music Sounds Spanish (Italian, German, French, etc.)

One of the most important musical developments in the 19th century was the idea that music became part of the culture of a nation. Composers began being influenced by folk music of their country or region, rather than concentrating on traditional musical forms such as the symphony, concerto, and sonata. Instead they became focused on the texture, special sounds, or effects made by groups of instruments. By the turn of the 20th century, composers were viewed as either conservative traditionalists or avant-garde.

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937), who began his career as a radical Impressionist composer espousing the ideals of Satie and Debussy (more attention to musical effects and textures and less importance on form), became one of the leading composers of his generation. He ended his career as a traditional composer whose use of orchestral effects influenced the next generation of musicians working in Paris (Stravinsky, Gershwin, Poulenc). Ravel often composed new works first for the piano and then later reworked them for full orchestra. His best known works are *Bolero* (1928) and his orchestration of Moussorsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1922). The work presented today, *Pavane pour une infante défunte* (Pavane for a Dead Princess), was composed in 1899 and published the following year for piano. The version for full orchestra was not presented until 1910 and was a popular success. Ravel once said that it is "an evocation of a pavane that a little princess might, in former, times, have danced at the Spanish court". The dance 'pavane' was a French court dance from the early 16th century.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) was born into a musical Viennese family and began basic piano lessons at age five. Like Mozart, Schubert lived a very short time and produced an astonishing amount of high quality music. His output includes over 600 songs (Lieder), chamber music, opera and symphonies. Schubert's music brims with singable melodies, while still remaining true to traditional forms. The Symphony No. 3 dates from 1815 – a very productive year in which Schubert composed over 20,000 measures of music. The Symphony No. 3 is in the traditional four movements, but the third (Minuet) is more of a Scherzo with an emphasis of one beat to the measure. The Trio section uses the traditional Austrian *ländler* (folk dance) much in the style of Haydn. The slow second movement is very song-like and is reminds one of the ballet music to *Rosamunde*. What is hard to imagine is that at age 18, Schubert was able to produce such an 'easy listening' piece while holding down a full time school teaching job, and yet still find time to write over 140 songs that year! It is no wonder that the Viennese have a special place in their hearts for Schubert. Of all the famous musicians who lived and worked in Vienna (Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Strauss, Mahler etc.), Schubert was the only one who was a native of Vienna.

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) achieved fame in his lifetime as a virtuoso violinist and composer. His most famous compositions are the violin concertos known as "The Four Seasons" (1723). He wrote over 500 concerti, 50 operas, and numerous cantatas, sonatas, and church music. He was one of the first composers to write for the public rather than for the nobility and his works were known and admired throughout Europe. J.S. Bach, for example, arranged several concertos from Vivaldi's op. 3 for keyboard. *The Concerto con 2 Violini Leuto, e Basso* (Concerto for 2 Violins, Lute, and Bass) RV 93 dates from the 1730's when Vivaldi was living in Prague and is

dedicated to the Bohemian Count, Johann Joseph von Wrtby. By this time the lute was considered an archaic instrument by most musicians, although there were still some devotees who were able to find new music by good composers. J.S. Bach, for example, composed four suites for the lute during this same period. There are several reasons why the lute declined in popularity. The rise of the orchestra, opera and the commercial concert hall put a quiet and delicate instrument like the lute at a huge disadvantage; it simply couldn't be heard in a big noisy room. As the growing middle class became more affluent, keyboard instruments (harpsichord and piano) were cheaper to purchase and easier to play. In 1727 the French author Titon du Tillet wrote that 'the difficulty of playing it [the lute] well, as well as its little use in concerts, have almost made it disappear. I do not think one could find in Paris more than three or four venerable old gentlemen who are still playing the lute'. Fortunately, the Baroque lute repertory is still performed often using a guitar.

The Spanish musician Joaquín Rodrigo (1901-1999) achieved great success as both a pianist and composer. Blind from youth, Rodrigo did not let his impediment interfere with his work. Like his contemporary Ravel, Rodrigo chose not to abandon tonal harmony or classic forms, but rather use them in a personal (Spanish) way to convey his musical ideas. After studying at the conservatory in Valencia, Rodrigo moved to Paris and studied composition with Paul Dukas (composer of *The Sorcerers Apprentice* which was featured in the Disney film *Fantasia*). In 1939 Rodrigo completed the *Concierto de Aranjuez*. The work was an instant success and established Rodrigo as one of the most important Spanish composers of the 20th century.

According to the composer, the first movement is "animated by a rhythmic spirit and vigour without either of the two themes... interrupting its relentless pace"; the second movement "represents a dialogue between guitar and solo instruments (oboe, english horn, [bassoon](#), french [horn](#) etc.)"; and the last movement "recalls a courtly dance in which the combination of double and triple time maintains a taut tempo right to the closing bar." He described the concerto itself as capturing "the fragrance of magnolias, the singing of birds, and the gushing of fountains" in the gardens of Aranjuez. The haunting second movement has been arranged in many ways, including a version by Miles Davis for his *Sketches of Spain* album.

The concerto balances the guitar against a full orchestra without overpowering the delicate sound of the guitar. The guitar enters with a strummed passage, joined by agile counterpoint from the woodwinds, then the strings enter with quickly bowed chords sounding like a giant guitar. Guitar techniques include *flamenco*, *punteado* (picked ornamentation in flying scale passages), and *rasgueados* (strumming). The second movement adagio is the most famous movement of the concerto. The guitar strums quietly while the English horn plays a melancholy melody inspired by the *saeta*, an Andalusian lament sung during Holy Week. The theme is considered to be a lament on the death of the composer's infant son. The final movement, Allegro gentile, is a clever combination of Baroque-sounding counterpoint and folk-like melodies. Various solo instruments and groups pass the final theme back and forth, and after a final cadenza, the movement ends quietly and without fanfare.