

**SPANISH MUSIC FOR GUITAR FROM THE TIME OF GARCÍA LORCA:
THE GENERATION OF 1927**
*By Rodolfo Betancourt **

*En la redonda
encrucijada,
seis doncellas
bailan.
Tres de carne
y tres de plata.
Los sueños de ayer las buscan
pero las tiene abrazadas,
un Polifemo de Oro.
¡La Guitarra!*
Federico García Lorca

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In a brilliant recording released in 1997 (IGW 22876), the Cuban American guitarist Ricardo Iznaola pays homage to the spirit of the guitar music composed by the creators of the Generation of 1927. It includes works by his mentor, Regino Sainz de la Maza, as well as music by Adolfo Salazar, Rodolfo Halffter, Gustavo Pittaluga, Rosa García Ascot, Julián Bautista and Eduardo Sainz de la Maza.

Perhaps the most outstanding feature of this production, which was made in only a weekend, is the intimate relationship of Ricardo Iznaola with this repertoire: being Regino Sainz de la Maza's *protégé*, he could meet and talk about these pieces with the composers themselves. With a very high technical quality and a sophisticated and honest

* Translated from Spanish by Rodolfo Betancourt, revised by Robert F. Cohen, PhD. Denver, New York - January 2001

approach, Ricardo Iznaola invites us to let ourselves be lead by this admirable music, music that in another reality might have been forever lost in oblivion.

I] HISTORY REMEMBERED

For the last hundred odd years, there have been very important literary movements in Spain that have left profound marks in history. The generation of Azorín, Unamuno, Pío Baroja and Valle-Inclán, known as “La Generación de los Maestros” or the Generation of 1898, with its iconoclastic attitude toward the Spanish society and the radical negation of 19th century aesthetic and moral values, built a solid platform for a fruitful intellectual environment, an environment that for the first time became aware of history and was able to put its place in the cultural world in perspective.

This poetic movement had its parallels in other arts, especially in visual arts: Darío de Regoyos and Ignacio Zuloaga, among others, who incorporated into Spanish art the technical and stylistic elements of European schools, mainly those of the French Impressionists. At the same time there was a new musical renaissance, relatively unassociated with the poetic movement: Felipe Pedrell (1841-1922), Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909) and Manuel de Falla (1876-1946). The works of Manuel de Falla, Ortega de Gasset, and Pablo Ruiz Picasso were an important inspiration to the next wave of poets, musicians and visual artists.

The Poets

In December of 1927, on the 300th anniversary of his death, a group of young Spanish intellectuals met in Seville to remember and pay homage to the greatest poet of the Golden Age, Luis de Góngora. This was the public introduction of the group lead by Federico García Lorca, Dámaso Alonso, Vicente Aleixandre, Geraro Diego and Rafael Alberti.

One of the factors that gave its special character to this generation was its direct association with music. Unlike previous Spanish literary movements, in which the poets did not mingle with musicians, many poets of the Generation of 1927 were themselves musicians. García Lorca and Alberti made projects with composers like Espla. This kind

of interdisciplinary collaboration was an uncommon event in the Spanish cultural environment of those years. In fact, García Lorca had had extensive musical training since childhood. It was in 1920, with the arrival of Manuel de Falla in Granada, that ideas for the aesthetic recovery of the old “cancioneros” and folkloric traditions took a tighter grip in García Lorca’s mind. The neoclassical and nationalistic musical movement initiated by Manuel de Falla coincides with the neoclassical and nationalistic movement of García Lorca and the Generation of 1927.

II] MUSIC BY THE GENERATION OF 1927

At the beginning of the 20th century, there were three currents that set the pace of music: Neoclassicism, Serialism and Nationalism. Within the neoclassicists we can differentiate between two different trends: The first one, which was led by Stravinsky, had a cosmopolitan character and the second one, which took hold in Spain, became a nationalist movement. What started as impressionism with Turina and the early Manuel de Falla, later evolved into nationalism. The inspiring works were composed during the 1920’s: *El Retablo de Maese Pedro* and the *Concierto para Clavecín*. These works influenced a group of composers living in Madrid who became the musical branch of the Generation of 1927.

El Grupo de Madrid, 1930

These composers, known as “El Grupo de los Ocho” or “El Grupo de Madrid,” became associated with the literary movement through the figure of the great critic Adolfo Salazar (1890-1958). These eight composers —Rodolfo and Ernesto Halffter, Rosa García Ascot, Juan José Mantecón, Salvador Bacarisse, Julián Bautista, Gustavo Pittaluga and Fernando Remacha— began to meet with one another in 1930.

Adolfo Salazar was the musical soul of what was known as the *Residencia de Estudiantes*. This “student residency,” born from the *Institución de Libre Enseñanza*, was founded in 1876 and inspired by the ideas of German pedagogues Krause and Frobel. It offered an alternative to the old education controlled by the state and was a decisive factor in the evolution and interaction of poets, visual artists and musicians. Lorca,

Alberti, Buñuel and Dalí had a very close contact with other artists, intellectuals and with eminent international figures that were frequently invited: Einstein, Bergson, Freud, Paul Valéry, and so forth.

Adolfo Salazar's influence on "El Grupo de los Ocho" was really great. Defending his musical and aesthetic values in his position as critic for the Madrid newspaper, "El Sol" ("The Sun"), he stimulated in these young composers the desire for the renovation of Spanish music. Salazar advocated for an evolution beyond Manuel de Falla, seeking aesthetic support in the new European *avant-garde*: Debussy, Stravinsky, Ravel, Bartók and even Schoenberg. These creators from "El Grupo de los Ocho" contributed with different alternatives to those proposed by Salazar, among them that of a stylized regionalism.

There was another group that originated in Barcelona, whose philosophy also differed from Salazar's: The C.I.C. (Catalonian Independent Composers)—Manuel Blancafort, Joan Gilbert Camins, Roberto Gerhard, Agusti Grau, Ricardo Lamote de Grignon, Federico Mompou, Baltasar Samper and Eduardo Toldra—. Although some of its members, like Mompou and Gerhard, achieved international recognition, this group had a very short life.

Among many other composers who lived during these times and who were isolated from the rest was Antonio José Martínez Palacios, perhaps the most talented of all.

Fates

It is not easy to evaluate whether "El Grupo de Madrid" reached its goals. The Spanish Civil War disbanded this and other intellectual groups after 1936. Besides Ernesto Halffter, who lived in Lisbon during the war and later returned to Spain, all of them, except Remacha, left the country. For some others there was no way out: on October 11, 1936, Antonio José Martínez Palacios was executed at Monte Estepar, near Burgos, his city of birth. His death, a close resemblance to the death of García Lorca, symbolizes the loss of this generation of creative geniuses, whose innovations never did make a full impact.

However, it was because of exile that these composers influenced beyond the Spanish frontiers, mainly in South America: Rodolfo Halffter in Mexico, Ernesto Halffter in Portugal and Julián Bautista in Argentina, to mention only a few. In Spain, under Franco, the names of these artists almost disappeared and the influence was very small.

It was towards the end of this dark age when some historians like Antón García Abril, Cristóbal Halffter, Ramón Barce and Tomás Marco began to investigate, uncovering real treasures. Even Ernesto Halffter had certain influence during the last years of Franco's régime: In 1960, he finished the last opera of Manuel de Falla, *La Atlántida*. a work that otherwise would have become unpublished.

III] RICARDO IZNAOLA AND THE MUSIC FOR GUITAR BY THE GENERATION OF 1927

Ricardo Iznaola became interested in this repertoire in 1978, when he received from Regino Sainz de la Maza a copy of Antonio José's *Sonata*. In 1981, after an invitation from the National Spanish Radio to offer a recital within a series of monographic programs, Ricardo Iznaola paid his first homage to the Generation of 1927. This was the first time, in more than 45 years, in which works like the aforementioned *Sonata* by Antonio José, *Giga* by Rodolfo Halffter, *Preludio y Danza* by Julián Bautista, two *Homenajes* by Pittaluga and *Española* by Rosa García Ascot were listened to in public.

An outcome of Iznaola's 1981 performance was his recording, which is formally evocative of a recital from the time of García Lorca, featuring three big moments¹: The first belongs to pieces by Regino Sainz de la Maza, the second has compositions for guitar by El Grupo de los Ocho, and the third works by Eduardo Sainz de la Maza. The styles are very different from each other, although there is a unifying element that is in harmony with the aesthetic goals of the Generation of 1927: The awakening of imagination and metaphor as the supreme poetic value.

¹ Recitals in the 1930's used to have three sections with two intermissions.

Regino Sainz de la Maza

Regino Sainz de la Maza was the guitarist most identified with García Lorca's generation. He met Lorca in 1920, after the poet wrote a critique about Sainz de la Maza (Regino for his contemporaries): "*Es, como Llobet y Segovia, un caballero andante que con la guitarra a cuestras recorre tierras bebiéndose los paisajes y dejando los sitios por donde pasa llenos de melancólicas músicas antiguas. (El mástil de la guitarra sirve muy bien de lanza.)*"² Years later García Lorca dedicates to Regino his *Seis Caprichos*, which is included in *El Poema del Cante Jondo*.

It was through this friendship that Regino Sainz de la Maza met the other artists and intellectuals. Many composers dedicated their pieces to him because he was the editor of a collection of guitar music for the Spanish Musical Union. This is how they became known through the editor and the performer. These works were catalogued but not all of them were published. Many of them were in the process of preparation when the Civil War came. In fact, many compositions were lost and have not been discovered yet: *Aria* by Hallfiter, *Pavana* by Bacarise or *Toccata* by Rodrigo. The *Sonata* by Antonio José, perhaps the most ambitious piece for guitar composed in Spain until 1933, was also catalogued, but it was not printed until very recently by another editorial house. Ricardo Iznaola made the first recording of this monumental work in 1990 (IGW- 22874-5).

Regino Sainz de la Maza's style has its roots in popular music from the Spanish South and in his native Castilla. Iznaola chose *Zapateado*, *El Vito*, *Rondeña*, and *Canciones Castellanas*. *Zapateado* is the most famous piece and it is the one most frequently performed: virtuosic in character, it is, like the other pieces, very idiomatic for the guitar. The arrangements of *El Vito* and *Rondeña* show a stylized treatment of flamenco techniques and character. For the six *Canciones Castellanas* Sainz de la Maza shifts his attention toward his homeland, Burgos. These beautiful albeit difficult arrangements of popular dances are the first climactic moment in the recording by Ricardo Iznaola.

² "He is, like Llobet and Segovia, a mounted knight who, with the guitar on his back sweeps the country drinking the landscapes and leaving the places he passes through filled with melancholic old music (the neck of the guitar might very well be a spear)." (Trans. R.B.)

El Grupo de Madrid, many years later

Neoclassicism and stylization of traditional musical forms are the primordial characteristics of “El Grupo de Madrid.” *Romancillo* and *Los Cuatro Muleros* by Adolfo Salazar, the critic and composer who inspired this movement, use popular melodies collected by García Lorca himself. Adolfo Salazar makes these melodies his own melodies and surrounds them by a very special harmonic treatment. *Romancillo* was composed in 1927 and was dedicated to Isabelita, García Lorca’s sister.

We can feel the spirits of past composers like Scarlatti or Padre Soler in *Giga* by Rodolfo Halffter (1900-1987) and in *Española* by Rosa García Ascot (b. 1906), a student of Manuel de Falla and the only woman among these composers. These two pieces form a framework for two works by Gustavo Pittaluga (1906-1975), perhaps the most iconoclastic composer of this generation. *Elegía: Homenaje para la Tumba de Mornau* and *Homenaje a Mateo Albéniz* are among the pieces with the most progressive harmonic language and rhythmic treatment.

Using musical elements that were developed thirty years later by composers like Benjamin Britten, Pittaluga was a composer ahead of his time. *Elegía* is dedicated to the German expressionist movie director Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, who had a career in Hollywood – he filmed the first vampire movie, *Nosferatu*. There is in this piece a shadow of American blues, exposed subtly in the harmony. This duality between expressionist art and the Americanization of Hollywood, which makes it one of the most original contributions to the guitar repertoire in the 20th century, is fascinating, indeed. *Preludio y Danza* by Julián Bautista (1901-1961) adapts with ingenuity to the guitar idiom of Manuel de Falla’s musical inheritance.

Eduardo Sainz de la Maza, the circle is closed

Six compositions by Eduardo Sainz de la Maza (1903-1982), Regino’s brother, complete this journey through music by the generation of García Lorca. Having devoted himself to composing and teaching, Eduardo Sainz de la Maza is perhaps the least related to the Generation of 1927. However, he shares with García Lorca a fascination with Latin

America. Eduardo lived this fascination directly while traveling back and forth from Cuba to New Orleans, playing in jazz clubs.

Habanera is a symbol of this bridge between Latin America and Spain. Another piece in habanera rhythm is Eduardo's arrangement of *La Paloma*, by Sebastián Iradier. The brilliant *Bolero* is based in the popular 18th century Spanish dance. The following pieces show a very deep impressionistic influence: *Homage a Toulouse-Lautrec* and the very poignant *Campanas del Alba*, a "trémolo" surpassed only in popularity by Francisco Tarrega's *Recuerdos de la Alhambra*.

The arrangement of the cowboy song *Colorado Trail* has its story: Months before Eduardo's death, Ricardo Iznaola visited him to enquire about some of his compositions, most of them named in old programs of Regino's concerts, although Ricardo had never seen or listened to them. One of them was *Colorado Trail*, composed during the 1940's for a competition sponsored by Guitar Review in New York. After sight-reading the piece in Eduardo's presence, the composer dedicated it to Ricardo, thirty years after being composed. A year after Eduardo Sainz de la Maza's death, Ricardo Iznaola and his family moved to Colorado.

Denver, October 1998
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