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THE NEW MUSIC OF SPAIN

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FOR many years we were accustomed to count Spain as decadent, —a country of obsolete customs and stereotyped conventions, impoverished and debilitated, its intellectual and spiritual sterility symbolized in its arid sierras. The artistic genius of Spain, signally manifest in the past, came to be accepted as a thing of that past, without share in the life of the present beyond the interest attached to historic relics in the libraries and museums of its own and other countries.

Least of all has been rated Spanish music. For decades it has been dismissed as trivial, something “only regarded as *salon* music, consisting almost exclusively as it does of songs and dances” (Naumann). Such features as have attracted notice have become familiar in a guise which renders it impossible for foreigners to realize the development of feeling and thought, the racial tradition, which they characterize. Spanish themes and dance-figures have been utilized by composers all over Europe and America; but the music so produced bears no intrinsic relationship to the tonal idiom produced by the psychology of the people of Spain. Treated as exotic curiosities, Spanish melody and rhythm have been mixed with foreign clichés of harmony and tonality as indiscriminately as oriental bric-a-brac mingles with English Victorian furniture in suburban villa drawing-rooms, the resultant confusion being as vulgar as it is ridiculous. Apart from such

debased imports we have known nothing of Spanish music until comparatively recently.

Much of this is the result of our own complacency. The sonorities of Spanish music have not accorded with the aesthetic theories which we accepted from our Teutonic teachers as absolute; so we dismissed them as crudities unworthy of further investigation. But Spanish musicians have not been blameless. Neglecting or repudiating the rich natural home product, their own folk-lore, they have followed foreign fashions; but since these neither admit of real assimilation by the Spanish temperament, nor yet of the convincing expression of Spanish impulses, the result has been an uninteresting hybrid, in which the two strains stultify the powers of each other.

Meanwhile, the folk-music, forbidden the higher circles, has perforce remained a feature of the life of the common populace, eventually being driven for shelter into the public fairs, the theaters and the cafés of the towns. Here it has gradually degenerated, being modified in the larger towns to gratify the taste of foreigners seeking "local color" of a previsioned kind. Thus all its finer qualities have been adulterated by weak sentiment, and the result, further weakened by foreign mutations, provides the sickly effusions which constitute our "Spanish" dance-hall vogues. But in the rural districts and the more isolated towns of the provinces the traditional art has maintained its vigor and developed local forms redolent of the races and physical atmospheres of the varied divisions of Spain.

Thus the national music of Spain is not to be summed up in a few general types of song or dance. Its varieties are many and as strongly contrasted as the unrelated races,—Iberian, Catalonian and Andalusian,—from which they emanate. Above all, it is utterly false to label Spanish music as consistently sentimental, languorous or even voluptuous. It has a wide range of feeling, even as the literature, architecture and painting of the country, comprising fiery passion, broad merriment, harsh vigor and cool intellectual grace: it is a true expression of the mingled elements which go to make up the nation. And its aesthetics, albeit radically different from that of European convention, have as sound a basis and as continuous a traditional evolution.

Much of the lassitude attributed to Spain was the result of the drain of blood and money caused by disastrous wars. With peace came rejuvenescence. Alien influences exercised less effect. Partly through the self-centeredness necessitated by recuperation, partly through the interest commencing to be manifest in certain Spanish characteristics abroad, the old pride which once made Spain mistress of Christendom began to revive. Invasion, followed by the competition resulting from attempts at rehabilitation, re-awakened the characteristic independence and patriotic enthusiasm of the Spanish mind. This at first took a romantic trend, as in the verse of Espronceda, Zorrilla, Nuñez d'Arce and Campoamor: the history of Spain was idealized as a retrospective theme for the inspiration of modern thought.

In music, though with a more concrete reversion to the folk-idiom, work such as Pedrell's operatic trilogy *Patria, Amor, Fideo*, represents this rather mystical tendency. To folk-lore Fernan Caballero turned definitely in his verses, and Frederico Olmeda in his music; but both sought to use it purely thematically; neither realized that Spanish folk-lore demanded an aesthetic derived directly from its substance. Izaac Albeniz, gaining perspective from abroad and Claude Debussy, bringing the foreigner's un-habituated vision, made musicians realize the picturesque qualities, the novel capacities for color inherent in the rhythmic and modal peculiarities of the Spanish folk-idiom. With both, however, this remained mainly pictorial or at least atmospheric in effect. Albeniz's music is ultimately a collection of *genre* studies, colored and stylized by the hues and delineative features of Spanish folk-mode and rhythm. Into a similar application Granados endeavored to infuse racial typification, as in the *Goyescas*; but his work still lacked the unifying factors of an aesthetic and architectonic system directly derived from the sonorities of Spanish folk-music.



It remained for Manuel de Falla to coordinate the physical and spiritual elements of Spanish folk-music into a basic aesthetic for

the modern development of a representatively Spanish musical style. From his earliest published compositions his dual pre-occupation has been apparent. The *Piezas Españolas*, thematically localized as they are by characteristic modes and rhythms, are equally expressive of definite phases of Spanish psychology in their harmonic treatment, in the penetrating inflections which create their moods and atmosphere. Andalusia, permeated with the poetry of Moorish thought, and full of the sense of drama which still clings to the battle-ground of two ideals of civilization, is inherent in the score of his opera, *La Vida Breve*. It is characteristic of the new insight and analysis inaugurated by his work in Spanish music that de Falla here explores and epitomizes as an aesthetic style the Moor-derived chant which furnishes the basis of the most distinctive type of Spanish popular drama,—the emotional songs sung by the folk in popular gatherings and places of entertainment,—the vivid and graphic *Malaguenas*. In a way this work may be said to be the synthesis of Spanish folk-song in art-form, as *El Sombrero de Tres Picos* epitomizes the more formal types of Spanish dance. Again, two dominant characteristics of the Spanish temperament,—passion and humor, tragedy and comedy,—are concentrated in each respectively. The latter elements represent at once a too little exploited aspect of the Spanish mind, so far as music is concerned,—the aspect exemplified in Cervantes and Goya, for instance,—and at the same time do valuable work in dissipating the sentiment which has fastened upon foreign minds regarding Spanish musical thought.

In the *Noces en los Jardines de España*, in *El Amor Brujo*, and the six *Canciones Populares*, de Falla goes deeper into the psychological significances of racial music. The first is less an application of folk-types than an expansion of the racial idiom to embrace purely subjective and personal states. It is less a reversion to a racial style than a propulsion of all the accumulated romance, poetry, passion and remote beauty of ages of Spanish night into an acutely sensitive modern experience. It is an expression of the "genius of place," born of innumerable inherited and experienced associations made conscious through the complex sensibility of modern psychology. In a similar way, *El Amor Brujo* penetrates to the abstract essentials of Spanish sonorities and rhythms,

an affinity to the impulses governing Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps* being evident, though matter and personal method naturally differ in the two works. Here it is less the expressed, externally recognizable elements of the Spanish temperament, with its consequent folk-modal and rhythmic peculiarities, which absorb de Falla's attention, than the elemental sources of the racial consciousness. Its matter is a sublimate of the aural elements underlying the racial characteristics of Spanish music. With *El Amor Brujo*, de Falla propounds a new directness and objectivity of method in the music of his race, a fresh primitivism of presentation which pays less attention to grace of contour and external form than to the stark delineation of the dynamic essentials concentrated in the emotional impulses reaching back to the fundamental being of his race. Some of the dances might be extracts from a tonal Book of Genesis of the Spanish temperament; their "modernity" is that of the crude, downright simplicity, the elemental grandeur of vision apparent in primitive cave-paintings recently discovered in Spain, which seem destined to re-infuse Spanish painting with primary impulse.

By such projection of his personal sensibility into the general consciousness of his race, de Falla has created a music endowed with more than personal significance, despite its individuality. Its "modernity" expresses a contemporary consciousness of elements farther back than the records even of tradition itself. Unpretentious, he does not essay the grandiose; but his music has a certain nobility given by a consciousness large enough to realize fundamental sources; and, since these extend backwards through all human experience in differing varieties, it has a corresponding humanity.

