

Notes on the Spanish Composer Joaquín Turina by Laura French

Seville

Joaquín Turina was born in Seville on 9 December 1882 to a middle class family. His father was a painter. He was a child prodigy, named so because of his improvisations when he was four, on an accordion given to him by one of the maids. He started his piano lessons with Enrique Rodríguez. He studied harmony and counterpoint with Evarista García Torres when he was twelve; he remembered him fondly always.

When he was fifteen, Turina first presented himself in a recital organized by the Society of Quartets, in which he played the *Fantasy About Moses*; the critics noted that it was a very difficult piece. Ten months later, he played in the same place, and he began to explore piano pieces and pieces for chamber music.

At fifteen, he wrote an opera, *La Sulamita*, and he thought the debut of this opera would be easy at the Royal Theatre in Madrid. He later blessed the fact that it wasn't.

He initiated his studies in medicine, but gave them up for a career in music. García Torres told him that he needed to move to Madrid, for which his father gave him moral support and money.

Madrid

In March of 1902, barely three days after arriving in Madrid, Turina went to the Royal Theatre to attend a performance of the Fifth Symphony of Tchaikovsky. Of the musical life in Madrid, he was most taken with the orchestral concerts, more than the operas, chamber music, etc.

On this first trip to Madrid, his father got his friends to try to have *La Sulamita* played at the Royal Theatre, particularly his good friend and fellow painter José Villegas. Turina returned to Seville without having accomplished his goal. But in October, he returned to Madrid, and renewed his acquaintance with the painter, who was Director of the Prado Museum at this time. He also met Miguel de Falla, and they became life-long friends.

On the fourteenth of March of 1903, Turina held a concert at the Atheneum, his first in Madrid, during which he played Scarlatti, Beethoven, Schumann, and Wagner, and three pieces of his own that have since disappeared.

His personal life changed radically with the death of his father and mother in 1903 and 1904.

He followed the advice of José Villegas to move to Paris.

Paris

In 1905, Turina began to give piano lessons and classes in composition under Moritz Moszkowski. In January of 1906 he started taking classes with Vincent d'Indy at the Schola Cantorum, although he continued piano lessons with Moszkowski. The Schola Cantorum was to be a big influence in his life.

In April of 1907 he played before the public in the Aeolian Chamber. He was such a success that eight days later he appeared in the same venue to play his Quintet in Sol Minor (with the Parent

Quartet). Turina himself considered this his first piece, ignoring everything before it. But the best prize was that de Falla, was there, and Isaac Albeniz, who changed his esthetic ideas about what he should compose. He got Turina to promise that he would from then on compose music that was based on Spanish songs (better yet Andalusian songs), rather than basing them on French music.

In 1908, he married Obdulia Garzon, by whom he was to have five children.

At 31, he finished his training at the Schola Cantorum.

In 1914 he had to leave Paris because of the start of World War I.

Madrid

In October, Turina debuted the comedy *Margot*, op. 11, with the librettists Gregorio Martinez Sierra and Maria Lejarraga, his mainstays whenever he composed something for the theater.

In January 1915, a concert is held that honors Falla and Turina, who both studied in Paris. Turina's output was symphonic music, chamber music, songs, and most of all piano pieces, which number more than seventy of the total output of a more that a hundred pieces.

Turina wrote a number of compositions, and in 1918 he contracted with Diaghilev to direct the tour of the Ballets Russes in Spain.

He was contracted as a master composer by the Royal Theatre while he composed *Danzas Fantasticas* (1919), *Sevillan Symphony*, (1920) , *Jardin de Oriente* (1923) and the *Oracion del Torero* (1925), among others.

He devoted himself to teaching composition, at first in his house, and later at the Conservatory of Madrid.

He became a music critic for various publications in succession, when they would go under.

While the Spanish Civil War was on, he carried a document that identified him as an employee of the British Consulate, and eventually he was named General Commisar of Music in Spain, a position from which he formed the National Orchestra of Spain.

Turina died in Madrid on the 14th of January of 1949.

His hobbies were reading and photography. He attended assiduously whatever processions were going, even going to Seville for Holy Week. He loved Parades, and attended them with passion.

He loved bullfights, but didn't attend every one. He also loved movies.