

# *Musica!*

An Exploration of Latin & Spanish Themes

October 24, 2017



## Program

*Toreador Song - from Carmen Suite #1* by Georges Bizet

*El Salon Mexico* by Aaron Copland

*Macarena* by Rafael Mendez

*Granada* by Agustín Lara

*Suite Española – Casilla* by Isaac Albeniz

*Nights in the Garden of Spain* by Manuel de Falla

*Danse Boheme – from Carmen Suite #2* by Georges Bizet

*Danzón No. 2* by Arturo Márquez

## *Carmen* by Georges Bizet

*Carmen*, Bizet's last work, was premiered in Paris in 1875 to a hostile and uncomprehending audience. The opera's failure, followed three months later by Bizet's death at the age of 36, is legendary for being one of the cruelest misjudgments of history. Bizet was used to failure, since none of his previous theatrical ventures were successful. Yet none of them displayed the genius that lifts every page of *Carmen* to great heights. Had he lived, Bizet would surely have extended his list of masterpieces. Verdi, after all, found his true voice at the same age as Bizet and lived into his eighties. Wagner, at 36, still had his seven greatest operas to write.

It was Bizet's own idea to use Prosper Mérimée's novel, *Carmen*, as the story. In 1872 he was commissioned to write a three-act opera for the Opéra-Comique. He was assigned the libretto team of Meilhac and Halévy, who divided up their duties according to French custom with Meilhac in charge of the plot and the dialogue, Halévy writing verses for music.

The Opéra-Comique preferred that its dramas intersperse music with spoken dialogue rather than recitative. It also preferred its operas to end happily with villainy and sin put firmly in their place. It was a family theatre where audiences were amused and entertained, but never shocked.

--Eric Kujawsky

## *El Salon Mexico* by Aaron Copland

The music of Aaron Copland is so entrenched in American consciousness. Listeners familiar with his best-known works such as *Rodeo* or *Fanfare for the Common Man* may not realize, however, that Copland's long career took him through several distinct periods: a first jazzy phase, from 1925 to 1929; an avant-garde period from 1930 to 1936; a populist phase from 1936 to 1949; and a final return to modern, serial territory. Through all these phases his personal hallmarks are evident: transparent orchestrations (he described it as "keeping instruments out of each other's way"), a supreme mastery of rhythm, and the ability to assign thematic or emotional expressiveness to particular parts of the orchestra, letting each carry an individual idea to build the larger whole.

*El Salón México* marks Copland's entrance into his populist phase, when he wanted to find a broader audience for contemporary music by using simpler harmonic melodies, often based on folk tunes, in a more accessible but still sophisticated manner. The work's genesis was a visit to Mexico in 1932, when composer Carlos Chávez brought Copland to a popular dance club called *El Salón México*.

Copland determined he would write a "musical potpourri" that would convey his impression of the Mexican people. He realized that as an outsider he might miss the mark: "I felt nervous about what the Mexicans might think of me meddling with their native melodies." But he discovered he needn't worry when, "at the first of the final rehearsals that I attended ... as I entered the hall the orchestral players, who were in the thick of a Beethoven symphony, suddenly stopped what they were doing and began to applaud vigorously." The work was premiered by Chávez conducting the Mexico Symphony Orchestra on August 27, 1937, and was a critical and popular success.

In creating his potpourri, Copland borrowed at least nine Mexican folk tunes from two collections he received during his trip, *El Folklore y la Musica Mexicana* edited by Ruben Campos and *Cancionero Mexicano* by Frances Toor. Most of the tunes use meters of 6/8 or 3/4 time, sometimes in alternation. Copland applied standard folk music practices throughout the work, such as harmonizations in parallel thirds and sixths, slides in pitch, clarinet cadenzas, string glissandos, and some call-and-response constructions.

The work consists of an introduction and four major segments, alternating slow-fast-slow-fast. A trumpet solo following the introduction is the longest quoted melody from Compos' collection, a tune called *El Mosco*. A slow "Mexican hat dance" segues into a lyrical, broad melody that ends with a repeated trumpet call, announcing the second, faster segment. This builds to a crashing close, followed by the so-called "siesta" section, introduced by a solo clarinet and violin. Lyrical, "sleepy" melodies alternate, followed by an insistent, rocking melody that gradually increases in tempo. The finale builds in rhythmic intensity and melodic complexity, when, as Copland writes, "I present the folk tunes simultaneously in their original keys and rhythms. The result is a kind of polytonality that achieves the frenetic whirl I had in mind before the end, when all is resolved with a plain unadorned triad."

--*Barbara Heninger*

## *Macarena* by Rafael Méndez

Rafael Méndez was born on March 26, 1906 in Jiquilpan, Mexico. His musical training began when he was five, when his father needed a trumpet player for the orchestra comprised of family members. The Méndez orchestra was a popular performing group and appeared regularly at festivals and community gatherings. Rafael loved the trumpet and actually practiced more than his father allowed.

In 1916, the Méndez orchestra performed for guerrilla leader Pancho Villa. He was so taken with the family orchestra, that he “drafted” the family into his army. Rafael quickly became Villa’s favorite player, and after several months demanded that Méndez stay with the rebels, even after the rest of his family were allowed to return home. Months later, Méndez was released from the rebel army, and he began to perform in several travelling circus bands, in addition to the family orchestra. He joined the Mexican army in 1921, where he played in the army orchestra.

At age twenty, Méndez moved to the United States, working in steel mills in Gary, Indiana. Unhappy that he could not play his trumpet as much as he desired, Méndez moved to Flint, Michigan, where he began working at the Buick Company plant and playing in the company band. After winning a last minute audition for the Capitol Theatre orchestra, Méndez moved to Detroit. He began working with other orchestras in the area, including the Ford orchestra and the Fox Theatre orchestra. It was also in Detroit that Méndez met and married his wife, Amor Rodriguez.

In 1939, Méndez joined the MGM orchestra, where he played on several movie soundtracks and performed regular live concerts. After hearing an MGM concert featuring Méndez, a Decca records representative offered him a twelve record contract. He was also contracted to arrange, compose, and author trumpet method books by the Carl Fischer company. Méndez began to appear more frequently as a soloist with orchestras away from the movie studio. He appeared on such well-known shows as *The Bing Crosby Show*, *The Red Skelton Show*, *The Art Linkletter Show*, and Milton Berle’s *The Texaco Star Theater*, and Xavier Cugat and his orchestra featured Méndez as a regular soloist at the Hollywood Bowl. Méndez’s popularity as a trumpet soloist led to conflicts with his MGM schedule, and in 1949, he left the orchestra.

It was at this time that Méndez began his full-time career as a trumpet soloist. He appeared with symphony orchestras, college ensembles, concert bands and big bands across the United States and Europe. Soon he was performing more than one hundred concerts per year. Méndez had a strong sense of duty toward education and began to work with public school bands as a soloist and clinician more frequently as his career progressed.

*Granada* by Agustín Lara

Composed in 1932 by Mexican composer Agustín Lara, the song is about the Spanish city of Granada and has become a standard in music repertoire.

Agustín Lara's career spanned nearly 70 years. In that time, he penned over 600 compositions and gained himself an international reputation as one of Mexico's most prolific and dearly loved musicians. Lara was born in Mexico City on October 30, 1897 though he claimed Veracruz as his birthplace. His father, a doctor, was a capable piano player who introduced his son to the instrument at an early age.

--Rita Pomade

## *Suite Española* by Isaac Albeniz

Spanish composer-pianist Isaac Albéniz traveled the world as an ambassador of Hispanic culture in the late-19th and early-20th centuries, evoking the sounds and landscapes of his homeland in vividly colored tonal sketches redolent of Debussy's impressionistic idiom. Born in Catalonia in 1860, Albéniz studied at conservatories in Madrid, Leipzig, and Brussels before settling first in England and then in France, where he died of Bright's disease in 1909. Although he is best known for his lyrically evocative piano pieces, he also left a substantial body of songs, operas, and other dramatic works.

Albéniz's colorful *Suite Española* (Spanish Suite) for piano-which included Granada, Cádiz, Asturias, and five other pieces tied to specific locales-helped establish the 26-year-old composer as a foremost exponent of Spanish musical nationalism. Written in 1886, the suite opened the gates to a flood of Spanish-flavored pieces that would culminate in his atmospheric masterpiece *Iberia* of 1905-1908. Córdoba was published in 1898 in a collection titled *Chants d'Espagne* (Songs of Spain). Much of Albéniz's piano music was inspired by the folk traditions of the southern region of Andalusia, the birthplace of the flamenco guitar.

*Suite Española* contains contrasting movements that are inspired by different locations. Castilla is cast as a seguidilla, a triple-meter dance style from the south of Spain.

--Harry Haskell

## *Nights in the Garden of Spain* by Manuel de Falla

Manuel de Falla completed his most famous orchestral work, *Noches en los Jardines de España* (“Nights in the Gardens of Spain”) in 1916. He attached no specific program, but the title of the three movements suggest the Spanish pictures that he sought to evoke. The first movement is called “In the Gardens of the Generalife”; the second, “A Dance Is Heard in the Distance;” the third, “In the Gardens of the Sierra de Cordoba.” “If these ‘symphonic impressions’ have achieved their object,” Falla has written, “the mere enumeration of their titles should be a sufficient guide to the hearer. Although the composer has followed a definite design, regarding tonal, rhythmical, and thematic material, the end for which it was written is no other than to evoke [images of] places, sensations, and sentiments. The themes employed are based upon the rhythms, modes, cadences, and ornamental figures which distinguish the popular music of Andalusia, though they are rarely used in their original forms; and the orchestration frequently employs certain effects peculiar to the popular instruments used in those parts of Spain. The music has no pretensions to being descriptive; it is merely expressive. But something more than the sounds of festivals and dances have inspired these ‘evocations in sound,’ for melancholy and mystery have their part also.”

This is one of the most deeply poetic of Falla’s works, tone-painting in the most delicate colors. It is, as Joaquin Turina remarks, “really wonderful evocation, although in a sense the most tragic and sorrowful of his works. In the peculiar flavor of the orchestral sonority, one can discern a feeling of bitterness, as if the composer strived to express an intimate and passionate drama.” Jean-Aubry finds that here “Falla is much more than a painter of Spain; he is an invoker of Spanish emotion, often the most hidden, the most reserved. Nothing is less brilliant than these nocturnes; but nothing is more strongly colored by the play of lights and shadows skillfully contrived. The force and the simplicity of the effects are remarkable.”

The first performance of *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* was given in Madrid where Enrique Fernandez Arbos, who had commissioned the work, conducted the Orquesta Sinfonica at the Teatro Real, on April 9, 1916.

Unlike many of his works, *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* has no definite program. Although the movements have definite titles, the course of the music proceeds on a free plan and has no connection with definite pictorial images. *En el Generalife* (In the Generalife) refers to the *jannat al-’arif*, “the garden of the architect” (or the musician) — on a hillside overlooking the Alhambra, the most beautiful place in the whole of Granada. Suzanne Demarquez asks: “In what garden is the *Danza lejana* (A distant dance) performed? It consists of fragments of dances, shreds of melodies, harmonies, punctuated by guitars and tambourines that suddenly burst forth and then are gone almost as quickly. It is music carried on the breeze of a balmy night.” Manuel de Falla writes: “The second and third nocturnes are joined without interruption by means of a bridge in which, beneath a tremolo on the violins in the highest register, are sprinkled, like distant echoes, the notes which begin the fundamental theme of the ‘Distant

Dance.' The bridge ends with an ascending passage for the piano, in octaves, which is resolved in a tutti with which the third and last nocturne begins." The last nocturne is called Manuel de Falla En los jardines de la Sierra de Cordoba (In the gardens of the Sierra de Cordoba). We have suddenly been transported to one of those large villas on the hill-side above Cordoba. It is evening when a party is in progress, with a zambra of gypsy musicians: players, singers and dancers, while somewhere under the trees is a long trestle table with a row of dama-juanas (demi-johns) holding two or three firkins of manzanilla apiece. The music and dancing continues till morning, until the feet and limbs of the dancers begin to tire and the fingers and wrists of the guitar players lose their rhythm. It has been a wild night, orgiastic, un-European; and yet the composer has so arranged things that we have it all clearly before us, and our dreams do not outstay their vividness.

--*Marina and Victor Ledin*

## *Danzon No. 2* by Arturo Márquez

Arturo Márquez was born in Álamos, Sonora, in 1950. Márquez's father was a mariachi musician in Mexico and later in Los Angeles and his paternal grandfather was a Mexican folk musician in the northern states of Sonora and Chihuahua. Because of Márquez's father and grandfather, he was exposed to several musical styles in his childhood, particularly Mexican "salon music" which would be the impetus for his later musical repertoire.

He started composing at the age of 16 and then attended the Mexican Music Conservatory where he studied piano and music theory from 1970 to 1975. Subsequently, he studied composition from 1976 to 1979 with Federico Ibarra, Joaquín Gutiérrez Heras and Héctor Quintanar. The *Danzones* are based on the music of the Veracruz region of Mexico. *Danzón no. 2* was included on the program of the Simon Bolívar Youth Orchestra conducted by Gustavo Dudamel on their 2007 tour of Europe and the United States. It has also opened the door for the discovery of other pieces by the composer that are increasingly being performed throughout the world and extensively in Latin America. He currently lives with his family in Mexico City.

Márquez has been the recipient of several prestigious awards and honors. Márquez was awarded the National Arts and Sciences (Premio Nacional de Artes y Ciencias) award of Mexico by President Felipe Calderón on December 14, 2009. In February 2006, he made history when he became the first musician to receive "La Medalla De Oro De Bellas Artes de Mexico" (Gold Medal of Fine Arts of Mexico), one of Mexico's most coveted award for career accomplishments in the fine arts.

Márquez has also been honored at several musical festivals throughout Latin America where his music has been performed extensively and has obtained a large following. His *Danzones* are increasingly being used for ballet productions throughout the world.

Written for full orchestra, the piece features solos for clarinet, oboe, piano, violin, trumpet, and piccolo. *Danzón No. 2* was commissioned by the National Autonomous University of Mexico and was premiered in 1994 in Mexico City by the Orchestra Filarmonica de la UNAM under the direction of Francisco Savin. The rhythmic interest in the piece is maintained through the use of varying accents and tempi. This staple of the contemporary Mexican music literature expresses and reflects on the dance style named *danzón*, which has its origins in Cuba but is a very important part of the folklore of the Mexican state of Veracruz. The music was inspired by a visit to a ballroom in Veracruz.