**Falla (y Matheu), Manuel de** (b Cádiz, 23 Nov. 1876; d Alta Gracia, Argentina, 14 Nov. 1946)

Alyson Payne

Spanish composer. Falla was the central figure of his generation, eclipsing composers such as Joaquín Turina and Joaquín Rodrigo. He blended Spanish musical nationalism, cultivated by Felipe Pedrell, Isaac Albéniz, and Enrique Granados, with modernist techniques to create a style heralded as both universal and Spanish. After his death, he became a figure of legend. Later Spanish composers, such as Cristóbal Halffter and Luis de Pablo, cite Falla as having the most profound effect on their aesthetics.

Falla received his early musical training from his mother, who taught him piano as well as other basics of music. As a boy, Falla had literary aspirations, creating several short-lived magazines with friends, such as *El Burlón* (1889) and *El Cascabel* (1890). His talent for writing would serve him well as he later authored articles on music, and also fashioned his own libretti. Yet, he eventually turned his creative energies toward music. In 1896, Falla began taking trips to Madrid to study piano with José Tragó, who also was teaching the young composer, Joaquín Turina. The two composers would eventually meet and form a mutually beneficial friendship. Taking up residence in Madrid, Falla enrolled in the Madrid Conservatory and graduated in 1899. He also began premiering some piano compositions as well as works for small chamber groups.

Even in Madrid, earning a living by composing proved difficult. The zarzuela, a type of Spanish light opera, offered the most promising financial rewards. During his early Madrid years, Falla composed six zarzuela, for which received neither fame nor fortune. It was also during these years that he met composer Felipe Pedrell, and began to study with him. His new teacher encouraged him to explore the riches of Spanish folklore. In 1905, the Academia de Bellas Artes sponsored a contest for a new Spanish opera. Falla worked with a burst of intense energy, composing *La vida breve*, based on a poem by Carlos Fernández Shaw. The opera won the top prize, yet the opera was not staged as promised. Disillusioned by the Spanish musical establishment, Falla left for Paris in 1907, where he would remain for the next seven years.

In Paris, Falla socialized with the best musicians of the day, including Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, and Paul Dukas as well as Albéniz and noted Spanish pianist Ricardo Viñes. In France, he finally achieved his long-sought success. *La vida breve* was staged in Paris in 1914 to glowing reviews. Falla also took several trips to London to introduce his works to English audiences. While abroad, Falla worked on two of his more well-known pieces, *Siete canciones populares españolas* and *Noches en los jardines de España*. Unfortunately, the First World War sent Falla back to Madrid in 1914.

Falla, buoyed by his Parisian successes, received a warm welcome in Madrid. He soon began collaborating with impresario Gregorio Martínez Sierra and his wife María Lejárraga. He also met Spanish poet, Federico García Lorca, with whom he had a lasting and fruitful friendship. Falla had become known for his modernist, Andalusian style, and his next work, *El amor brujo*, delved deeper into gypsy-inspired music. The work, classified as a *gitanería* (gypsy revel), used gypsy performer Pastora Imperio. The premiere provoked a variety of reactions from admiration to scorn. Yet, Madrid had become more cosmopolitan, thanks in part to the visits from foreign musicians seeking respite from war-torn Europe. In 1916, for example, Igor Stravinsky toured Spain along with the famous Ballet Ruses, run by Sergei Diaghilev. Diaghilev was much taken with Falla’s music, especially his pantomime, *El corregidor y la molinera*. Diaghilev thought the work perfect for a ballet adaptation. Falla subsequently revised the work, now entitled *El sombrero de tres picos*, which also featured sets and costumes by Spanish artist Pablo Picasso. He wrote his last Madrid work, *Fantasía Baetica*, on commission from pianist Artur Rubinstein. By 1919, Falla found life in Madrid too hectic. His father and mother both died that year, and Falla himself found his health failing. He moved south to Granada, where he composed some of his best-known pieces.

In Granada, Falla amused himself by writing music to accompany Lorca’s dramatic works for puppet theater. The Princess de Polignac had requested from Falla a work for her private theatre in Paris, preferably a chamber opera. Falla, turning away from the Andalusian inspired-style, instead sought inspiration in Spain’s Golden Age. He thus created *El retablo de Maese Pedro*, a neo-classical chamber opera that drew upon a scene from Miguel de Cervantes’ immortal novel, *Don Quixote*. Falla opera, featuring marionettes, became quite successful as it was later staged in New York City (1925) by the Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra as well as Amsterdam (1926) and Zürich (1926). Harpsichord virtuoso Wanda Landowska, who had met Falla in Granada, urged him to compose a piece for harpsichord. The result was the Harpsichord Concerto. This work, along with El retablo de Maese Pedro, mark the high point of his neo-classical style.

When the Second Spanish Republic was declared in 1931, Falla and many other intellectuals found the new government refreshing. As the Republic took a decidedly anti-Catholic turn, Falla—himself a devout Catholic—could no longer support such a cause. With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, followed by the assassination of his friend Lorca and the arrest of other friends, Falla became deeply depressed. He set sail for Argentina on 2 October 1939.

In Argentina, his fragile health improved for a while. He continued to work on his epic cantata *Atlántida*, ultimately leaving over six hundred pages of sketches, notes, and score fragments. His only student, Ernesto Halffter would complete *Atlántida* in 1961. Falla died in 1946 and his remains were transported back to Cádiz for burial.

**References and Further Reading:**

Budwig, Andrew and Gilbert Chase. *Manuel de Falla: a Bibliography and Research Guide*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1986.

Collins, Chris. “Falla in Britain.” *The Musical Times* 144/1883 (2003): 33-48.

Christoforidis, Michael. “Folksong Models and their Sources in Manuel de Falla’s *Siete canciones populares españolas*.” *Context* ix (1995): 12–21.

Hess, Carol A. *Manuel de Falla and Modernism in Spain, 1898-1936*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

———. *Sacred Passions: the Life and Music of Manuel de Falla*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

**Web Resources:**

<http://www.manueldefalla.com/>