

***España* (1883)**

Emmanuel Chabrier (1841-1894)

Chabrier began his career working in the Ministry of Interior for 18 years before becoming a full-time composer when he was almost 40.

As a composer, Emmanuel Chabrier was a late-bloomer. His father wanted him to be a lawyer, like him. So Chabrier, a native of the Auvergne region in central France, studied law in Paris and went to work in the Ministry of the Interior for 18 long years. Yet all the while, music pecked at his heart. As a child he had studied piano, then composition, and as an adult, he composed as a hobby, publishing a number of minor works and two operettas before quitting his Civil Service job in 1880 to compose full time. By then, he was almost 40.

A lighthearted sort, Chabrier went on to write many comic operas, which suited his personality and were popular at the time. With a gusto for experiencing life, in 1882 Chabrier headed off to Spain, where he became enthralled with Iberian music. As he travelled along the Iberian Peninsula, Chabrier noted his impressions of the Spanish sights and sounds: the cafés, plazas and other local color, and especially the diversity of folk music, exotic dances, and dancers. The end result was the work, *España*, a bubbling fusion of upbeat rhythms and orchestral color, which unlocked Chabrier's true talent for composing.

At first imagined as a work for piano, *España* grew into what Chabrier called a "rhapsody for orchestra." During the opening, imagining a giant guitar, Chabrier created a simple harmonic palette that places the focus on rhythmic and instrumental patterns. Written in a traditional sonata form, the two main themes contrast the tempestuous Spanish *jota* (a dance by a couple in triple meter with complex rhythms accented with heels and castanets) with the slower, lyrical *malagueña* (a Spanish dance similar to the fandango). The kinetic first theme, with repeated *hemíolas* (two groups of three beats replaced by three groups of two beats), is similar to "America" in *West Side Story*. The trombones introduce a new theme, punctuated by references to the opening theme. This is followed by a vivacious coda that brings back the trombone for an exciting conclusion.

Chock full of instrumental patterns and infused with an organic energy that builds from beginning to end, *España* drew an encore at its premiere in 1883. It remains among the best-loved scores offering French musical impressions of Spain (others include Debussy's *Iberia* and Ravel's *Rapsodie Espagnole*). Chabrier's work came to an end in 1888, when he grew ill and died at just 53—making his late start to composing more unfortunate. His talent would eventually cause Ravel to write that "all of contemporary French music stems from [Chabrier's] work."

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***Ritmo Jondo* (1952)**

Carlos Surinach (1915-1997)

Like Chabrier's *Espana*, Carlos Surinach's music exploits the brilliant, fiery imagery of Spain. Unlike the Frenchman, the Barcelona-born composer didn't need to travel to find inspiration. During his career, Surinach wrote chamber, choral, orchestral, guitar and piano music; but what ruled his career was music for dance. In fact, he became one of the premier dance composers of his time. According to Surinach, it was not entirely intentional. His compositions were simply magnets for choreographers. A move to the United States in 1951 further widened his world of composing and allowed him to create the work, *Ritmo Jondo*.

The son of a Spanish stockbroker and an Austrian-Polish pianist, Surinach's first piano teacher was his mother. At 14, he began studying piano and music theory at Caminals Academy of Music. From 1936–39, he studied composition with the director of the Barcelona Municipal Conservatory, Enrique Morera, who suggested that Surinach might improve his technique by studying in Germany. He visited Düsseldorf, Cologne, and Berlin. The influence of his German training mixed with his Spanish passion provided a perfect mix. "Technique without inspiration," he learned, "you become a very, very cold thing."

Returning to Spain in 1942, Surinach was appointed conductor of the Barcelona Philharmonic Orchestra and Teatro de Liceo. But he never fully embraced his conducting career and his focus returned to composing. His first major compositions reflected his German influence, and in 1945, he composed his first ballet.

Quoting the Spanish writer, Cervantes, Surinach said: "If you are born Italian, you sing; if German, you play; if Spanish, from the moment you are out of the womb, you want to dance. It turns out that my music, even the most serious pieces, all suggest in some way, dance. Most of my works have not been written for ballet, but they nevertheless were taken by choreographers, and they made a ballet out of them."

After a few years in France, Surinach moved to the United States, where his work was embraced by choreographers and dance companies, including the Joffrey Ballet and Martha Graham. Often based on the eight-tone flamenco scale and characterized by rhythm and melody, his compositions were in high demand.

Ritmo Jondo was Surinach's first ballet piece written in the U.S. Taking inspiration from Spanish gypsies, it features three flamenco rhythms in three distinct instrumental pieces. First performed as a six-minute suite for chamber ensemble, the second version became a 20-minute orchestral score for choreography that premiered in 1953. The third version, scored for symphonic band, did not surface until 1967. It resembles the first version and remains the one most often performed.

The movements include: "Bulerias," a quick, joyful, improvisational flamenco dance with shifting rhythms. The clarinet and trumpet enter in fanfare fashion, and the rhythm is picked up by percussionists and clappers trading back and forth in "Seata," a mournful ritual song of Seville sung in the streets during Good Friday, distant drums in an ominous pattern are heard as the clarinet and trumpet blend for

a slow, fluid theme. The third movement, “Garrotin,” features a temperamental dance of flamenco origins. Less melodic, the music accelerates into ever wilder displays of passion. Clappers and xylophone join the fray and alternate with long, intricate phrases from wind instruments, until all merge for a short coda.

Surinach became an American citizen and remained in the U.S. until his death in 1997, but his compositional style never lost the sound of his homeland.

***Concierto de Málaga* (1981) Celedonio Romero (1913-1996)**

Concierto de Málaga
was composed by
Pepe Romero’s father,
Celedonio Romero
who dedicated the
concerto to Pepe.

Before world-class classical guitarist Pepe Romero, there was Celedonio, his father, who was a true star in his own right. Spain’s great composer Joaquín Rodrigo said of Celedonio: “He has contributed immensely through his artistic interpretations for classical guitar music. More importantly, he has enlarged and enriched the repertoire of 20th-century music with his own compositions.” During his lifetime, Celedonio formed a guitar dynasty with his sons Celin, Pepe, and Angel, causing *The New York Times* to write: “Collectively, they are the only classical guitar quartet of real stature in the world today; in fact, they virtually invented the format.”

Celedonio was born in Cuba in 1913, where his architect father was working, but the family soon returned to their native country of Spain. A musical wonder, the boy began to study the guitar on his own at 5, gave his first recital at 10, and then studied composition at the conservatory in Málaga on the southern Mediterranean coast. Pepe says: “He was completely self-taught, to the point that when he went to the conservatory, the guitar teacher did not want to accept him because he already could play much better than he could.”

Celedonio fell in love with Angelita, a singer and stage actress, and had three sons, whom he taught guitar as toddlers. But civil war came to Spain in 1936, with the leftist-backed government pitted against the former prime minister, Francisco Franco’s fascists. Málaga fell to Franco, and all over Spain, artists and intellectuals were imprisoned, including Celedonio. His jail term was brief, but he was prevented from leaving Spain, hindering his career. In 1957, the family received permission to visit an aunt in Portugal; from there, they fled to California.

“My father had such an influence on me that I cannot tell where he ends and I begin,” says Pepe. “He was such an inspiring man . . . to be around him, you saw the world through a poetic mind and soul.” On stage, Celedonio appeared aristocratic. Personally, he was quite charming, possessing an impish, youthful quality. His talent, technique, and musicianship were extraordinary. A prolific composer, he wrote hundreds of compositions, including 10 concertos for guitar and orchestra.

Among these is *Concierto de Málaga*, dedicated to Pepe. Celedonio was known to play this piece with both hands as though at the piano, producing secondary sounds with his left hand by pulling on strings and prancing on frets. With torrents of strumming this breathtaking piece requires strength, dexterity, and speed to play. In fact, it sometimes requires the soloist to contort the angles of their wrists while

playing. Occasional percussive drumming on the body of the guitar adds to the drama. The guitarist's right-hand strums, picks, and rolls in one fluid motion—a technique that only the most brilliant guitarist can produce.

Celedonio died at age 83 in 1996. His sons, as well as his grandsons, continue his legacy, their concerts in homage to him. When his father passed away, Pepe was at his bedside playing the guitar, just as Celedonio had played for Angelita at the moment Pepe was born.

***Capriccio espagnol*, op. 34 (1887) Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)**

This audience favorite is arguably one of Rimsky-Korsakov's three greatest orchestral works.

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's *Capriccio espagnol* is a robust, intoxicating orchestral panorama of Spain, full of passionate tunes and brilliant colors. Like the Spanish melodies and scenes that inspired it, the suite is bursting with beauty and inventiveness. Despite being relatively short (approximately 15 minutes), it is an audience favorite and among the more popular works performed today.

The piece was written in 1887 during a period when Rimsky-Korsakov was feeling proud of his musical accomplishments. He thought it was time to compose a showpiece for orchestra with a Spanish theme. He sketched out his idea, then unhappily crumpled it up. He reimagined the work, keeping the Spanish theme, but making the orchestral music so big and razzle-dazzle that each and every musician needed to be a true virtuoso in order to play it.

The five brief movements include: *Alborada*, an old Spanish morning song, is marked as “lively and noisy,” opening with a shimmering “morning dance” exploding in a blaze of color. With lively solos for violin and clarinet, it conjures a festival celebrating sunrise in northern Spain. *Variazioni* is a slow movement, initially a regal then warm melody, which is passed around different groups of instruments, each more soaring than the last. *Alborada* returns for an interlude similar to the first movement, except in a different key and the instruments have changed around. *Scena e canto gitano*, a gypsy song, begins with dazzling passages for five different groups of instruments, offering solo passages to a variety of instruments. The music proceeds with fiery violins racing to the concluding movement. *Fandango asturiano* dances first with dignity and then with wild abandonment, bringing the listener back to *Alborada* before reaching an exciting conclusion.

During the first rehearsals of *Capriccio espagnol*, the orchestra musicians who were playing kept applauding Rimsky-Korsakov's extraordinary talent. But genius is often accompanied by ego and the composer was known to have such an ego. The premiere took place in St. Petersburg in 1887, with Rimsky-Korsakov conducting. It was a huge success—the audience embraced the flashy work, erupting with applause and crying out to hear it again. Unfortunately, this annoyed the composer, who thought that people were not seeing beyond the shimmering façade to its true merits.

He said: “The opinion formed by both critics and the public, that the *Capriccio* is a magnificently orchestrated piece, is wrong. The *Capriccio* is a brilliant composition for

the orchestra. The change of timbres, the felicitous choice of melodic designs and figuration patterns, exactly suiting each kind of instrument, brief virtuoso cadenzas for instruments solo, the rhythm of the percussion instruments, etc., constitute here the very *essence* of the composition and not its garb or orchestration.”

Nonetheless, the piece was a success and still is today, regardless of what constitutes its greatness. Tchaikovsky called it “a colossal masterpiece of instrumentation” and Rimsky-Korsakov “the greatest master of the present day.”

***Carmen* Suites No. 1 & 2 (1875)**

George Bizet (1838-1875)

Carmen is an opera in four acts by French composer Georges Bizet. The opera was first performed in 1875 where it failed to win over the audience.

Seductive and irresistible Spanish rhythms bring a riveting tale of love and lust to life in George Bizet's Suites 1 and 2, from his famous opera, *Carmen*. The Parisian composer and piano virtuoso set the opera in Seville, Spain, it has everything an opera could want—drama, color, and instantly recognizable tunes. Yet, Bizet's fiery tale of passion, jealousy, and murder was shockingly a failure after its premiere in Paris in 1875. It's difficult to fathom, as it is surely regarded among the greatest operas ever written. Perhaps most unfortunate of all, Bizet died months later, knowing only that it was a flop.

One explanation for the response is that *Carmen* arrived during a prudish era and it shook the audiences' sensibilities. The opera told the story of a love affair between a provocative factory-girl, Carmen, and the toreador Escamillo, her flirtation with Don José, a corporal of the guard, and her murder by the jealous soldier, whose life she has ruined and corrupted. The audiences couldn't seem to get past the sordid tale to appreciate the brilliance of the opera and its music.

After Bizet's death, the French composer Ernest Guiraud arranged excerpts from the score in his own order, into two orchestral suites of six movements, each including arias, choruses, and dances from the opera. The result is enthralling melodies as the sultry sounds of Spain are highlighted from some of the opera's finest moments. It is flamboyant, fun, and an enduringly popular piece, filled with Spanish dance rhythms.

Suite No. 1 offers a feast of hypnotic, graceful, and clever melodies. A short *Prélude* introduces the ominous theme for both Carmen and her impending fate. This leads to cheerful yet delicate music, the *Aragonaise*, which opens the final act as crowds gather for a bullfight. Next, the lyrical *Intermezzo* (Prelude to Act III) features stunning woodwind melodies. The *Seguedille* (a type of Castilian folksong) comes next and is an orchestral arrangement of Carmen's Act I aria, in which she seduces Don José. *Les dragons d'Alcala* (*The Dragons of Alcala*) is an upbeat march that forms the opera's Prelude to Act II. The suite's exciting finale, *Les Toréadors*, which opens and closes the opera, precedes the fateful Carmen theme. Toreador Escamillo's song is heard briefly and returns in the second suite.

Suite No. 2, songs from the opera, begins with the furtive *Marche des Contrebandiers* (*March of the Smugglers*). The *Habanera*, arguably the opera's most famous music, is an orchestration of Carmen's great Act I aria, *L'amour est un oiseau rebelle*, in which

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she warns that love is untrustworthy. The *Nocturne* is an orchestration of Michela's aria, *Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante*, (*I say that I'm not afraid*) from Act III, about her fear at meeting Carmen. During the *Chanson du Toréador* (*Toreador Song*), Escamillo celebrates his own machismo in a boastful account of his bullfight. An offstage trumpet opens *La Garde Montante*, music that accompanies the changing of the guard in Act I, as street kids parody a military march. The Suite concludes with the graceful but sizzling *Danse Bohème* (*Gypsy Dance*), a ballet dance early in Act II.

Carmen eventually became the most beloved of Bizet's works, which he never lived to know. Every moment is sublimely orchestrated with a sense of musical perfection. Tchaikovsky, Debussy, and Saint-Saëns all recognized its brilliance, but it took the critics longer to come to the same conclusion.

Program Notes by Jayce Keane

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Questions about the music? Email us at info@LongBeachSymphony.org