

# The Three-cornered Hat

M. de Falla

Manuel de Falla was born 1876 in Cádiz, Andalusia and died 1946 in Alta Gracia, Argentina.

The music score of *The Three-cornered Hat* (*El Sombrero de Tres Picos*) was first performed at the Eslava Theatre in Madrid on April 7, 1917 and later the score was first danced as a ballet at the Alhambra Theatre in London, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 1919, conducted by Ernest Ansermet. As in the case of the first performances of Stravinsky's ballets, *The Three-cornered Hat* was presented by a true constellation of stars. The set and costumes were designed by Pablo Picasso, the choreography by Leonid Massine and the lead roles of the ballet were danced by Massine himself and Tamara Karsavina. The opening of *The Three-cornered Hat* was successful and the Diaghilev Company took the ballet to Madrid, Paris and Berlin. In these cities it was well received by the audience and the critics. From the score of the complete ballet Falla extracted two concerto suites, which include several pieces of the original dancistic continuity. The corresponding libretto was created by the pen of Gregorio Martinez Sierra.

In the first part of the ballet, the composer asks for a moderate size orchestra, almost a chamber orchestra and for the second part the orchestra has grown to a truly symphonic size. As he is very interested in nationalistic issues, Falla uses various themes from Andalusian folk music in *The Three-cornered Hat*, and through them he is able to obtain good portrayals of the ballet's characters and situations, assigning to each of them an accompanying melodic phrase or leitmotiv, similar to the way Richard Wagner did. In an article published in Havana in 1930, the writer and music critic Alejo Carpentier wrote the following:

“After the *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (*Noches en los Jardines de España*) and *Love the Magician* (*El Amor Brujo*), productions full of Impressionism, say what they may, Manuel de Falla knew how to present us with the nervously witty and so very personal *Three-cornered Hat*, showing us a Falla capable of laughter and of being an in-depth humorist.”

The original humor of Alarcón's narration drew the attention of more than one composer. More than 20 years before the opening of Manuel de Falla's ballet, the opera *Corregidor* (*Der Corregidor*) was first performed in Mannheim in 1896, as an original work by Hugo Wolf and based on the same text as the ballet by the Spanish composer.

According to a note by Juan Arturo Brennan.

## Fantasy for a Gentleman

J. Rodrigo

Joaquin Rodrigo was born in Sagunto in 1901 and died in Madrid in 1999.

For the celebration of Joaquin Rodrigo's 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary, a Spanish musicologist wrote the following: “The title of the work “*Fantasy for a Gentleman*” (*Fantasia para un Gentilhombre*), according to what Rodrigo told me, is a play on words, because it actually did not only allude to Gaspar Sanz (17<sup>th</sup> Century) but also to another gentleman of our times, Andrés Segovia (a great Spanish guitarist). From amongst the pieces by Gaspar Sanz that the guitarists up to day tend to perform in their concerts, Rodrigo picked those that, in his opinion, were the most attractive ones, in order to structure them in five movements. This labor of recreation is extraordinarily intelligent, because Rodrigo knew how to treat and develop the base material through a dialogue that sometimes is accompanied by a reduced-sized orchestra (piccolo flute, flute, oboe, bassoon, trumpet and strings), but large enough to sprinkle about this work of sweet and sour

harmonies, just like the strong spices that were so much to the liking of the taste buds of that time. *The Fantasy (Fantasía)* for guitar and orchestra, which is most often performed after the *Concierto de Aranjuez*, was premiered and recorded by Segovia with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, conducted by its music director, Enrique Jordá, also from Spain.

Carlos Chavez (1899-1978): *Sinfonia India* (Symphony No. 2)

One of Mexico's best known composers, Chavez was born in 1899, the youngest of six children in Popotla, a town near Mexico City. His father died when the boy was only five. The revolution of 1910 forced the family to relocate to Veracruz but they later returned to Mexico City after the hostilities had ended. Despite the turmoil, Chavez was well-educated by his school teacher mother and when his musical talent revealed itself early, he received thorough and excellent training in piano and harmony. In composition, however, he was self-taught.

Not enjoying success as composer in Mexico, Chavez decided to try his luck in New York City where he met and became friendly with Aaron Copland and Edgar Varèse. Those two famous composers recognized Chavez's talent and used their influence to help get his works performed. They were successful and Chavez was acclaimed. In 1928, his success assured, he returned to his wife and family in Mexico where he remained for many years, composing most of his major works. In the end, however, disappointed with the musical situation in Mexico, he returned to New York to spend his final days, dying in 1978.

Chavez's music is quite approachable and deserves wider hearing in this country. The *Sinfonia India* (Symphony No. 2), in one movement and composed in traditional sonata-allegro form, was named by Chavez for the indigenous peoples of Mexico (not for the Asian subcontinent). In it he incorporates three Indian themes, in immediate succession starting right from the top. The *Sinfonia* is tonal (mostly in B-flat) but perhaps in compensation for his friendly harmonies, Chavez uses rhythmic patterns that are at once complex and driving, giving it (and most of his music) a quality uniquely his own. Chavez was devoted to the music of Beethoven and Brahms and you can hear his tribute to them in his intensive motivic development, a feature found in most of the works of the two composers. Perhaps the most striking feature of the *Sinfonia*, however, is its rhythmically-charged 126-bar finale, also based on an Indian theme, repeated over and over, ostinato-like, up to the coda and providing a dramatic close to a grand and satisfying work.

Anthony Fountain

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## Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98

J. Brahms

Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 1833 and died in Vienna on April 3, 1897. For two summers, 1855 and 1884, Brahms worked on his last symphony. He had gone into retirement, in order to peacefully create in Mürzzuschlag, an Austrian village at the foot of the mountains and in a valley that, in spite of its green surroundings, lacks the charm and loveliness, which the lakes had offered to the composer during earlier summers.... Here came into being Brahms' most admirable work, but by no means the one most easy to understand. Nevertheless, the first performance was a great triumph. On October 25, 1885 the composer himself was the conductor of the magnificent orchestra of the Court of the Duke of Meiningen, which for five years had been conducted by Hans von Bülow.

La Vienna Philharmonic interprets it on March 7, 1897. It is the last concert Brahms attends. He dies a month later. It is the composer's technically most difficult symphony. The last movement is a complicated polyphonic web, which always requires a perfect orchestra and an excellent conductor. It shows great human maturity, great personality and

superior cultures. For this work two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timbales, triangle and strings are used.

Broad and noble is the first motif “Allegro non troppo”, yet, what so ever simple is its germ, its cell is nothing more than a third class interval, from which the sixth is gained by inversion, the rest is transposing and finding sequences that confer beautiful spaciousness to this movement.

Very different is the second movement with its broad, solemn motif that reminds of ancient melodies, in medieval ways.

“Allegro Giocoso” is the name of the third movement. Can there be a Brahms giocoso? On his color palette he also has the color of pleasant joyfulness and it is not precisely one of his brightest colors. It fulfills its purpose, but amidst timbales and triangles let loose, we something get the impression of a man, who wishes to hide his melancholy by sticking to a carnival group type music.

The culmination of a great symphony composer and of the symphony itself is the last movement: the composer is asking for energetic and passionate Allegro and he gives it a form that had fallen into disuse for almost two centuries: the *Chaconne*. Its monumental motif is repeated thirty one times during the movement, now as bass, then incessantly in other voices, as a scaffold, as a framework, which in contrapuntal times was called “cantus firmus” and develops a marvelous musical piece, the last great example of symphonic neoclassicism.