

Walter Aaron Clark and William Craig Krause.
Federico Moreno Torroba: A Musical Life in Three Acts
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Reviewed by Ken Murray

The Spanish composer Federico Moreno Torroba was born in 1891 and lived through the Spanish Civil War, the years of the Franco dictatorship and the restoration of democracy that occurred in the years before his death in 1982. His life spanned a period of extreme political and social change, but his musical style and interests remained remarkably consistent throughout his long career.

Federico Moreno Torroba: A Musical Life in Three Acts is the first full-length monograph devoted to the composer. Walter Aaron Clark and William Craig Krause have written a musical

biography notable for the depth of historical and political detail woven around the story of Torroba's life. Clark brings a wealth of experience to this enterprise as the author of definitive biographies of Isaac Albéniz and Enrique Granados, as well as being the editor of the Oxford University Press series, *Currents in Latin American and Iberian Music*, in which this book appears.¹ Krause completed his PhD dissertation on Torroba in 1993 and much of his research has been incorporated into this groundbreaking work.²

Internationally Torroba is best known for his guitar works, and in the Spanish-speaking world he is famous for his zarzuelas (Spanish operettas), most notably *Luisa Fernanda* (1932), one of the most popular twentieth-century examples of the genre. The importance of the theatre in his musical life inspired the authors to divide the book into three broad sections labeled 'Acts,' mimicking the form of the zarzuela grande. Act I covers Torroba's youth and ends just before the Spanish Civil War in 1932. Act II covers the years of the Civil War and the ensuing dictatorship, offering a detailed examination of Torroba's political affiliations in the period until 1960. In the final act, the considerable achievements of his productive last two decades are examined. The book is more than a simple chronological survey as each act is split into three 'scenes,' the first providing historical context to the period, the second examining Torroba's life and times, and the final scene devoted to an analysis of relevant compositions. The book is beautifully presented with over fifty musical examples and twenty-nine illustrative plates.

Federico Moreno Torroba provides an in depth but eminently readable survey of Spanish political and cultural life in the twentieth century. Like his contemporary Joaquín Rodrigo, Torroba remained in Spain and pursued a successful career during the Franco dictatorship. The conservative nationalism of his music was compatible with Francoist ideals and, subsequently, his reputation has been tainted by his perceived affiliation with the regime. While this is a murky topic, Clark and Krause argue that Torroba's alignment with the state was not the product of a natural affinity with Franco's philosophies, rather that 'the roots of his style and its philosophical underpinnings were utterly alien to Franco's prejudices and predilections' (p. 134). They assert the case for Torroba's political neutrality and his ability to make artistic decisions independently of political considerations.

Torroba's musical style changed very little during the course of his professional life. Richly melodic with many features of Spanish national style, his harmonic language was conservative and, as described by Clark and Krause, 'rooted in the nineteenth century' (p. 134). In their discussion of Torroba's musical influences, the authors point to French music such as Bizet's *Carmen*, Puccini's *La Bohème* and the music of Ravel (p. 86–87). On the Spanish side, a wide range of folk idioms were assimilated by Torroba and he admired the three important pillars of twentieth century Spanish music—Granados, Albéniz and Falla—while maintaining a strong love for the zarzuela repertoire. Musically, the focus of this book is on the two main areas of Torroba's output: works for the zarzuela and music for the classical guitar.

Throughout his career Torroba retained a close connection to the zarzuela as impresario, composer, conductor and advocate. Clark and Krause document the changing fortunes of the zarzuela in the twentieth century and demonstrate the strength of Torroba's commitment to

¹ Walter Aaron Clark, *Isaac Albéniz: Portrait of a Romantic* (Oxford: OUP, 1999); *Enrique Granados: Poet of the Piano* (Oxford: OUP, 2005).

² William Craig Krause, 'The Life and Works of Federico Moreno Torroba' (PhD thesis, Washington University, 1993).

a distinctively Spanish form of entertainment. He wrote his first zarzuela in 1925 and spent the next forty years closely involved in writing and producing new works. *Luisa Fernanda* was his most successful zarzuela by some margin, although Torroba believed the best works in the genre to be *La Chulapona* (1934) and *Monte Carmelo* (1939). Torroba was clearly troubled by the decline of the fortunes of the art form in the 1950s and 1960s in Spain, although he was still able to tour to Latin America many times on the back of the continued popularity of his works among the creole classes. The authors analyse Torroba's zarzuelas with support from well-chosen musical examples and incisive commentary to illuminate the key elements of Torroba's writing for the stage.

The guitar is the instrument most commonly associated with Torroba and, although he did not play the guitar, he had a natural affinity for writing for the instrument, honed through his numerous collaborations with the Spanish virtuoso Andrés Segovia. Both Clark and Krauss trained as guitarists and devote considerable attention to Torroba's substantial output for the guitar. Torroba wrote his first piece for Segovia, the *Danza in E* (later to become the third movement of the *Suite Castellana*) in 1920. Along with Manuel de Falla's *Homenaje a Debussy* (1920), this was one of the earliest twentieth century compositions by a non-guitarist for the burgeoning classical guitar repertoire. One of Segovia's primary aims was to bring the classical guitar to international prominence and as part of this quest he commissioned many new works from composers. Segovia's tastes were very conservative and he rarely performed dissonant or modernist music, and Torroba's style matched the conservative Spanish nationalist approach Segovia favoured. Perhaps the most widely performed of his guitar works is the three movement *Sonatina* (1923), which impressed Ravel when he heard Segovia perform the work in Paris in 1926 (p. 70). Torroba later wrote numerous collections made up of short pieces, often with evocative titles such as *Las Puertas de Madrid* or *Castillos de Españã*. While their collaboration was mutually beneficial, Segovia could be mean spirited, and in correspondence with the Mexican composer Manuel Ponce mocked Torroba's inability to compose more substantial, larger scale works (p. 277).

In the later decades of Torroba's life the Romero family of guitarists were great advocates of his music and he wrote several works for them. Celidonio Romero and his three sons, Pepe, Angel and Celín, left Spain due to political pressures in 1957 and settled in southern California. They formed a guitar quartet and Torroba wrote them the *Concerto Ibérico* in 1976, a concerto for guitar quartet and orchestra. The three Romero brothers contributed the foreword to this book and numerous anecdotes, particularly from Pepe, are quoted throughout. A companion website for this monograph contains interviews with the authors and musical extras, including an adroit performance of Torroba's *Suite Castellana* by Pepe Romero.

The writing style is colourful and engaging, aimed at an audience interested in Spanish music and history in addition to readers in academia. Clark and Krause assert that Torroba's legacy has not yet been fully appreciated and a number of his works, particularly some of the lesser-known zarzuelas, deserve greater public attention. The authors argue enthusiastically for a reassessment of Torroba's position in Spanish music history. In the final section of the book, the authors declare that Torroba was unique among zarzuela composers because his music also gained recognition in the concert hall, citing a 1890 review by George Bernard Shaw that scorned concert works by Ruperto Chapí and Tomás Bretón (p. 292–3). This was a review of a concert organized by Isaac Albéniz with the aim of introducing a greater variety of Spanish music to

the London public, and much of the negative criticism was due to preconceived notions of what constituted 'true' Spanish music being challenged by some items in the program. Bretón also moved successfully between the world of the zarzuela and the concert hall and a number of his concert works, such as the symphonic serenade *En la Alhambra*, have been revived in recent years. However, this is a minor quibble in the context of a wide-reaching exploration of the Spanish musical identity and politics in the twentieth century.

While the revival of his zarzuelas will depend on the fortunes of the genre in the coming decades, a new generation of performers have shown a keen interest in the guitar music of Torroba and this repertoire might be his greatest legacy. With this book, Clark and Krause not only offer a welcome reappraisal of Torroba's life and music, but also illuminate a misunderstood and neglected period in Spanish music history.