
RESEARCH REPORT

'Invasion of the Barbarians:' Spanish Composers and Challenges to Exoticism in *belle-époque* Paris

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Writing on Spanish music at the Universal Exposition of 1889, Julien Tiersot complained that Spain was everywhere, with Paris hosting 'bullfights to right and left; Spanish choral societies here, Spanish soirées there; at the Cirque d'hiver Spanish fiestas, orchestra, dance, estudiantina; at the Exposition the gypsies from Granada.'¹

This plethora of Spanish attractions in Paris was not a new phenomenon, for the French had been fascinated by the exotic culture south of the Pyrenees throughout much of the nineteenth century. The number of Spanish musicians in Paris rose markedly during the reign of Napoleon III, when Spanish culture was fostered by his Spanish wife, the Empress Eugenie (Eugenia de Montijo). These immigrants gave further impetus to the fabrication and proliferation of the *espagnolade*, or foreign evocations of Spain, by French composers, a style that became increasingly popular in the wake of Bizet's *Carmen* (1875).

The Parisian *espagnolade* was a unique manifestation of exoticism because it resulted from continuous cultural exchange. Spanish musicians in Paris both informed the *espagnolade* and were inspired by it. Therefore the perpetrator and subject of this form of exoticism were engaged in a constant, if uneven, dialogue. This project explores aspects of exoticism in relation to Spanish composers living in *belle-époque* Paris and the rise of Hispanic musical nationalism.² In fact Paris at the time was host to multiple co-existing and interacting representations of Spanish music, employing styles from popular through to Romantic and Modernist.

¹ Julien Tiersot, *Promenades musicales à l'Exposition* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1889) 276.

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Andalusia, and especially the cities of Granada and Seville, had shaped Romantic perceptions of Spain. While Prosper Mérimée exalted Sevillian Costumbrismo, with its emphasis on bandits and bullfights, texts by François-René de Chateaubriand, Victor Hugo and Théophile Gautier also disseminated the idea of Alhambrism, the nostalgic vision of Granada, and by extension Spain, as the last European refuge of Arab culture (often presenting its gypsy dwellers as their exotic substitutes). These perspectives were not restricted to European constructions of Spain as exotic Other, but were also adopted as legitimate expressions of nationalism within Spain.³ Scores indebted to both of these currents make extensive use of the rhythmic, melodic and harmonic tropes of Spanish folk music (often in tandem with evocations of the guitar) that had been in vogue throughout much of the nineteenth century.

By the turn of the twentieth century, projections of Madrid's urban musical culture⁴ were also making their mark in Paris through the popularity of the *zarzuela* (or Spanish *opéra-comique*), particularly in its one-act guise (*zarzuela chica* or the *género chico*). Federico Chueca's *La gran vía* (1886) was a huge success when it was performed in Paris a decade after its Spanish premiere.⁵ This masterpiece of the *género chico* is marked by its use of urban popular music in the guise of *habaneras* and *pasodobles*, alongside Hispanicised European dances such as the mazurka and the *chotis* (schottische). Song styles arising from the fin-de-siècle *zarzuela*, in Madrid include the *cuplé*,⁶ which had numerous Spanish exponents in Paris, from dancer/courtesans such as La Belle Otero to famous music-hall singers such as La Fornarina.

Spanish dance was also a key element in the dissemination of Hispanic tropes and this was represented throughout the range of entertainments available in the French capital: from Rosita Mauri at the Ópera to La Belle Otero at the Folies Bergère. The Spanish colony of performers in Paris also played an important role in the dissemination of Latin-American dance styles such as the Brazilian *maxixe* and the Argentine tango. By the early years of the twentieth century there was also a proliferation of gypsies performing the new flamenco styles (which had first come to the attention of the Parisian public at the 1889 Exposition). These acts furthered the popularity of the modern guitar as an accompanying instrument,⁷ although Paris was also an important site in the modern guitar's classical revival with Spanish performer-composers such as Jaime Bosch, Miguel Llobet and Ángel Barrios residing there.

One of the principal figures in fin-de-siècle Spanish music and its acceptance by Parisian elites was Isaac Albéniz, whose performances in Paris in the 1880s had attracted widespread attention. In 1894 he settled in Paris, and while he studied and taught at the Schola Cantorum, he formed intimate friendships with Ernest Chausson, Paul Dukas and Gabriel Fauré, and was fascinated by the music of Claude Debussy. Albéniz's musical language evolved rapidly, displaying a variety of contemporary French traits, and his landmark four-volume piano

³ Celsa Alonso, *La canción lírica española en el siglo XIX*, (Madrid: ICCMU, 1998); R. Sobrino, *Música sinfónica alhambrista: Monasterio, Bretón, Chapí*, (Madrid: ICCMU, 1992); Gerhard Steingress, *...Y Carmen se fue a París* (Cordoba: Almuzara, 2006).

⁴ This was often couched in terms of *Casticismo*.

⁵ The Paris premiere took place at the Olympia on 25 March 1896.

⁶ Also drawn from parallel genres such as the *revista* and the *género ínfimo*.

⁷ The 'modern' Torres-style six-string acoustic guitar introduced in the second half of the nineteenth century.

work *Iberia* (1905–1908) was embraced by Parisian critics, as a masterpiece of both Spanish nationalism and of French piano literature.⁸

Albéniz's music radically transformed French representations of Spain; this is especially evident in the Hispanic music of composers such as Debussy. It also paved the way for the incorporation of folk music by some French regionalist composers working at the Schola Cantorum—most notably in the music of Deodat de Séverac. Albéniz's impact upon French music also included his promotion of its performance and publication in Germany and Spain. His premature death in 1909 contributed to his artistic consecration in France.⁹ This in turn initiated a process by which Spanish musical nationalism became reliant on French publication and critical approbation for its international recognition. French critics and composers assumed a somewhat paternalistic role, and music by Paris-based Spanish composers was subsumed into the discourse and aesthetic debates relating to modern French music.

In this context it is also valid to ask whether composers such as Albéniz indulged in a degree of auto-exoticism in their assimilation of French musical styles and adaptation of some of the key Romantic constructions of Spain. This question is even more complex if we consider that Albéniz and the overwhelming majority of Spanish artists in fin-de-siècle Paris were Catalans.¹⁰ The stylistic traits of Catalan music and their strong regional identity differed markedly from the Andalusian tropes that had informed the *espagnolade* over the previous century.

However, it can be argued that even into the early twentieth-century Catalan artists maintained an exoticising attitude towards their Southern compatriots and saw themselves as guardians of good taste. Albéniz had been enamoured of Granada since his first visit in 1885 and had often stated his intention of making Barcelona more Grenadine in spirit. In a letter from 1907 he stated:

It makes one think. Consider: Malats, a Catalan, interprets like an Andalusian: Granados, from Lerida,¹¹ assimilates like nobody else the melancholy of the Andalusian fields [...]. I write for Andalusia [...] and I have created four works based on Granada in about twenty years. What is it about Granada that gets inside Catalan artists? ... Santiago Rusiñol¹² claims [...] that we Catalans are the true guardians of art in the North of the Peninsula, and that to protect the soul of Granada against cheap reconstructions of the Alhambra we take up pen, brush and solfa.¹³

So we are faced with yet another level of exoticism, this time within Spain, which in turn blurs the notional distinctions between Spanish music and the *espagnolade* in Paris. This had become a marked issue by 1907, when there were a number of Andalusian composers residing in Paris, the most prominent being Joaquín Turina and Manuel de Falla. They had arrived in Paris from Madrid where they had promoted both Spanish musical nationalism and the

⁸ On the Parisian reception of Albéniz's *Iberia*, see Walter Aaron Clarke, *Isaac Albéniz: Portrait of a Romantic* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 220–67.

⁹ Albéniz was awarded the Legion of Honour in that year.

¹⁰ Northern Spaniards, principally from the Barcelona region. Montserrat Bergadá, *Les pianistes catalans à Paris entre 1875 et 1925*, thèse doctorat, Université François Rabelais, Tours, 1997.

¹¹ A Catalan town.

¹² A Catalan author and artist.

¹³ From a letter to Enrique Moragas, quoted in Rafael Moragas, 'Epistolario inédito de Isaac Albéniz,' *Música* 5 (May-June 1938): 44.

definition of Andalusian regional identity, a movement that had gained impetus in the final decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ In Paris, both composers integrated techniques associated with different French schools: Turina studied at the Schola Cantorum, while Falla studied with Debussy and formed part of the Apaches' circle. In their works they also consciously emulated the technical and poetic means employed by French composers to evoke Spain.

Although they were welcomed by other Hispanic artists residing in Paris, Falla and Turina were wary of the domination of Catalan musicians and their ubiquitous representations of Spain and Andalusia. The need to define their regional origin and promote the legitimacy it lent to their compositions even led them to aim disparaging remarks at the exoticising Andalusian music of some of their Catalan compatriots, although Albéniz was normally exempted from such criticism. Writing to the French critic Georges Jean-Aubry in 1909, Turina emphasised the importance of their provenance:

[T]hat's right, Falla and I are Andalusians, completely different in temperament and character to the Catalans, and not at all revolutionaries. Albéniz was Catalan but his soul was completely Andalusian, as he proved in *Iberia*, in which 10 of the 12 pieces are of profoundly Andalusian sentiment.¹⁵

The meeting between Albéniz and Turina and Falla took place at a concert of the Société Nationale de Musique in 1907 that featured Turina's piano quintet. Albéniz immediately embraced both composers and implored them to pursue their Andalusian heritage, an event that is perceived as a milestone in Spanish musical nationalism. The encounter was observed by Vincent D'Indy who reportedly declared it an 'invasion of the barbarians.'¹⁶

At the insistence of Albéniz, Turina sought ways of evoking Spain and its folk music in his works. This was begun in the three piano pieces that comprise *Sevilla* (1908), which are clearly indebted to the musical language and poetic framework of Albéniz's *Iberia*. In the pre-publicity and the programme note for the *Sonata romántica* (1909) Turina highlighted the legacy of Albéniz in his attempt to fuse the formal principles of the Schola Cantorum with a Debussyste harmonic orientation.¹⁷

Falla's first Parisian work, the 'Montañesa,' is even more directly linked to Albéniz, to whom it is dedicated, even though it does not draw on Falla's Andalusian heritage. Albéniz's impressionist setting of a Northern Spanish folksong in 'Evocación,' the opening piece from *Iberia*, provides the principal model. Added to this are the bell-like effects inspired by Maurice Ravel's 'La vallée des Cloches,' which Falla had recently heard the French composer perform.

It was not only Albéniz's musical language but also his poetic conception and evocation of musical landscape that resonated with his Parisian contemporaries. Much of Falla's early salon music and even passages of his first opera, *La vida breve* (1905), which is set in Granada,

¹⁴ There was a clear aspiration to self-government, coinciding with the rise of federalist models and the rise of regionalisms/nationalisms in Spain. These ideas led to the *First Charter of the Andalusian Country* (1883), which proposed a federation of the Andalusian provinces. However, the Andalusian identity in Falla and Turina's early works was modelled upon exotic elements in Romantic salon music and the Madrid-based *zarzuela*.

¹⁵ Copy of undated letter held at Archivo Joaquín Turina, Madrid (AJT).

¹⁶ Cited in Alfredo Moran, *Joaquín Turina a través de sus escritos* (Madrid: Alianza, 1997) 127.

¹⁷ Moran, *Joaquín Turina*, 156.

are indebted to the means employed by Spanish alhambrist and foreign exoticist compositions. In Paris, Albéniz's influence was crucial in orienting Falla's musical constructions of Granada. Despite his Andalusian origins, Falla had never visited the town and had relied on folksong collections, poetic descriptions, postcards and reminiscences of friends when writing his opera. Albéniz's influence was decisive in the creation of *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* and Falla's emerging interest in living in Granada (which he realised a decade later).

La vida breve also acted as Falla's introduction to Paris. The shared fascination with Granada and its exotic resonances not only facilitated his friendship with Albéniz, but paved the way for his close association with Debussy. François Lesure has used the term 'Granada syndrome' to describe Debussy's fascination with the Andalusian town.¹⁸ His early works in this genre ('*La Soirée dans Grenade*' and *Lindaraja*) were indebted to Albéniz's poetic construction of Granada and when meeting Falla he was in the process of writing his own *Ibéria*, which has Alhambrist allusions. Falla fostered a sense of verisimilitude and even sent Debussy a postcard of Granada (one of the many that he had bought when composing *La vida breve*) that later inspired Debussy to write the prelude 'La puerta del Vino'.¹⁹

Falla praised Debussy for achieving 'truth without authenticity' and claimed that:

Debussy has written Spanish music without knowing Spain; actually, without having been to Spain, which is quite a different matter. Claude Debussy knew Spain through his reading, through paintings, and through songs and dances performed by authentic Spaniards.²⁰

This is also an apt description of Falla's own work process at the time, one that parallels Parisian exoticist strategies in many respects.

Another complicating factor with regards to Hispanic music in fin-de-siècle Paris is the French fascination with Russian exoticism and its tradition of 'Spanish' orchestral scores. This tradition dates back to Mikhail Glinka's Spanish sojourn of the 1840s. On reporting from the Universal Exposition of 1889, Julien Tiersot claimed that the most rewarding Spanish music was Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's *Capriccio Espagnol* (1887), a work that was regularly performed in Paris to World War I. This work served as a model for the orchestral technique of Turina's *La Procesión del Rocio* (1913), and for the revised orchestration of the dances in Falla's opera *La vida breve* (1913).

Certain genres of Hispanic works performed in Paris seem to have extended lineages, often of very mixed origins. For instance, in creating the finale of *The Three-Cornered Hat* (1919) at the behest of Serge Diaghilev, Falla would refer to an extended lineage of orchestral *españolades*—these include Glinka's *La jota aragonesa* (1845), Emmanuel Chabrier's *España* (1883) and the 'Feria' from Ravel's *Rapsodie Espagnole* (1907–08). The following features are reconfigured and evolve in these scores: the presentation of the *jota*, the juxtaposition of rhythmic motives, the generation of rhythmic counterpoints and the brilliant employment of the brass and percussion sections. It could be argued that many of the Hispanic scores performed in fin-de-siècle Paris incorporate systems of extended referentiality to a range of Spanish traits as well as to specific Spanish scores and *españolades*.

¹⁸ François Lesure, 'Debussy et le syndrome de Grenade,' *Revue de Musicologie* 28 (1982).

¹⁹ François Lesure, *Iconographie musicale: Debussy* (Geneva: Minkoff, 1980) 180.

²⁰ Manuel de Falla, 'Claude Debussy et l'Espagne,' *La Revue musicale* 2 (December 1920): 206–10.

The performance of a series of major new Hispanic works by French composers between 1908 and 1910,²¹ coinciding with the death of Albéniz, brought the issue of Spanish music to the fore. Writing in 1910, Turina had observed French debate over Spanish music, claiming that Jules Ecorcheville 'believes that Spanish music should be composed by Spanish composers, but according to [Michel-Dimitri] Calvocoressi such music is not less French even when it bears Spanish names.'²² This period also saw the rise of the specialist critic and there were several who focused on Spanish music, including Calvocoressi, Georges Jean-Aubry and Henri Collet. Spanish composers were initially wary. Writing in 1910 Turina claimed to be:

stupefied in reading the words of a [French] correspondent from Malaga, signing with the initials H. C. who declares that apart from Albéniz, Spanish music doesn't exist; that up to now Lalo, Bizet and Saint-Saëns are the only ones who have hit the nail on the head with respect to 'Spanishness' [...] Has he taken Falla and myself to be a pair of Russian coffee makers?²³

However, Spanish composers also saw the advantages of such critical promotion of their music—often beyond the boundaries of France.²⁴ It contributed to the dominance of Paris-based Spanish composers in the debates surrounding musical nationalism in Spain during World War I. Writing from Madrid in 1916 Falla publicly thanked Jean-Aubry and Collet for their efforts in disseminating Spanish music and called on the Spanish government to recognise their work.²⁵

By viewing Spanish music almost as a sub-genre of French music, Parisian critics felt that they had an obligation in shaping its construction in the context of contemporary debates on French music. In his review of Turina's *La Procesión del Rocio*, Debussy makes a thinly veiled attack on the Schola Cantorum, presenting its procedures as inappropriate for Spanish music.²⁶

Turina's work had been performed as part of a series of Spanish concerts marking the official visit of King Alfonso XIII of Spain to Paris in the late Autumn of 1913. This visit reflected the increasing strength of Franco-Spanish relations, especially in the light of recent alliances relating to the situation in Morocco. After struggling for years to get a hearing for *La vida breve* from French impresarios, Falla was courted by both the Théâtre des Champs Élysées and the Opéra-Comique for the rights to his work. In December 1913 it would become the first work by a Spanish composer to be performed at the Opéra-Comique. In 1914 Enrique Granados was also awarded the Legion of Honour and his opera *Goyescas* was to receive its premiere at the Paris Ópera.²⁷

²¹ These include Ravel's *Rapsodie espagnole*, Debussy's *Ibéria*, Massenet's *Don Quichotte* and Laparra's *La habanera*.

²² *Revista Musical* (Bilbao) 2.3 (1910).

²³ Document housed at AJT.

²⁴ For example, Jean-Aubry did much to promote Spanish music in England.

²⁵ 'Prólogo a la música francesa contemporánea de G. Jean-Aubry,' *Revista Musical Hispano-Americana* (July 1916).

²⁶ In Debussy's article on Spanish music in the journal *Société Internationale de Musique* (1 December 1913), reproduced in François Lesure and Richard Langham Smith (eds), *Debussy on Music* (New York: Cornell UP, 1988) 300–3.

²⁷ In the end it was not produced in Paris till after World War I.

Paris had witnessed the beginnings of a shift in the landscape of Hispanic exoticism. The mass dissemination of Spanish song and dance styles during this period meant that the vision of Spain as exotic Other persisted, and even gained impetus, in the popular domain. However, the French also gradually adopted the role of benevolent godfather to an emerging Spanish national school, albeit one that was based in Paris and in tune with French musical tastes.