

A PORTRAIT  
**Joaquín Rodrigo**



1901–1999

## Preface

The life of Joaquín Rodrigo was one of unremitting struggle to bring into being the compositions thronging incessantly in his imagination. As a blind man, it was never easy (even with the help of a Braille machine) for him to articulate in written scores the subtleties of his orchestral, choral and instrumental output of nearly 200 pieces. That he succeeded so triumphantly is a tribute to his determination and persistence enlisted in the service of unique musical capabilities. As well as being a composer, he was also concert pianist, writer, critic, broadcaster, lecturer, teacher, academician and an administrator on behalf of the blind. To those who knew him intimately, Rodrigo was a man of heroic stature and a generous and sympathetic disposition, always striving to rise above the difficulties of disability or adversity. In his youth he was inspired by the art of Manuel de Falla. From 1939 onwards, following his return to Madrid after years spent abroad, Rodrigo soon became recognised as a titanic force in Spanish culture, never ceasing from his own creativity yet always inspiring and encouraging fellow musicians and the public to revere and cherish the great traditions of Iberia. This portrait is intended to indicate the variety and quality of his musical contribution to both the artistic history of Spain and the wider perspectives of twentieth-century music.

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## Track List

### CD I

- |             |  |             |
|-------------|--|-------------|
| <b>[1]</b>  | <b>Cançoneta for violin and string orchestra</b>                                     | <b>3:35</b> |
|             | Mikhail Ovrutsky, violin / Castille and León Symphony Orchestra / Max Bragado Darman | 8.555840    |
| <b>[2]</b>  | <b>Juglares (Ensayo sinfónico) (Jugglers, Symphonic Essay)</b>                       | <b>5:14</b> |
|             | Castille and León Symphony Orchestra / Max Bragado Darman                            | 8.557101    |
|             | <b>Cinco piezas infantiles (Five Children's Pieces)</b>                              |             |
| <b>[3]</b>  | <b>I: Son chicos que pasan (Children pass by)</b>                                    | <b>1:36</b> |
| <b>[4]</b>  | <b>II: Después de un cuento (After a story)</b>                                      | <b>3:31</b> |
| <b>[5]</b>  | <b>III: Mazurka</b>  | <b>2:00</b> |
| <b>[6]</b>  | <b>IV: Plegaria (Prayer)</b>   | <b>2:32</b> |
| <b>[7]</b>  | <b>V: Gritería final (Shouting)</b>  | <b>2:32</b> |
|             | Asturias Symphony Orchestra / Maximiano Valdés                                       | 8.555844    |
| <b>[8]</b>  | <b>Canción y Danza (Song and Dance)</b>  | <b>7:12</b> |
|             | Artur Pizarro, piano   | 8.557923    |
| <b>[9]</b>  | <b>Zarabanda lejana (Distant Sarabande)</b>  | <b>3:58</b> |
|             | Asturias Symphony Orchestra / Maximiano Valdés                                       | 8.555844    |
| <b>[10]</b> | <b>Preludio al gallo mañanero (Prelude to the Dawn Cockerel)</b>                     | <b>4:12</b> |
|             | Artur Pizarro, piano   | 8.557923    |
| <b>[11]</b> | <b>Serenata española (Spanish Serenade)</b>  | <b>5:00</b> |
|             | Artur Pizarro, piano   | 8.557272    |

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|----|---|----------|
| 12 | <b>Cántico de la esposa (Canticle of the Wife)</b>                        | 3:37     |
|    | Raquel Lojendio, soprano / Asturias Symphony Orchestra / Maximiano Valdés | 8.555845 |
| 13 | <b>Per la flor del lliri blau (For the Flower of the Blue Lily)</b>       | 19:01    |
|    | Castile and León Symphony Orchestra / Max Bragado Darman                  | 8.555962 |
|    | <b>Concierto de Aranjuez</b>  |          |
| 14 | <b>Movement 2: Adagio</b>   | 11:08    |
|    | Ricardo Gallén, guitar / Asturias Symphony Orchestra / Maximiano Valdés   | 8.555841 |

**TT 75:49**

## CD 2

### **Concierto de estío (Summer Concerto) for violin and orchestra**

- [1] Movement 1: Preludio: Allegro molto leggiero 7:12  
Mikhail Ovrutsky, violin / Castile and León Symphony Orchestra / Max Bragado Darman 8.555840

### **Concerto in modo galante (Concerto in Galant Style) for cello and orchestra**

- [2] Movement 3: Rondo: Giocoso 5:48  
Asier Polo, cello / Castile and León Symphony Orchestra / Max Bragado Darman 8.555840

### **Tres piezas españolas (Three Spanish Pieces)**

- [3] Movement 1: Fandango 3:47  
Jeffrey McFadden, guitar 8.553401

### **Fantasia para un gentilhomme (Fantasia for a Gentleman)**

- [4] Movement 4: Canario 4:56  
Ricardo Gallén, guitar / Asturias Symphony Orchestra / Maximiano Valdés 8.555841

### **Invocación y Danza (Homenaje a Manuel de Falla) (Invocation and Dance, Homage to Manuel de Falla)**

- [5] Antigoni Goni, guitar 8:22  
8.553774

### **Adagio para instrumentos de viento (Adagio for Wind Instruments)**

- [6] Asturias Symphony Orchestra / Maximiano Valdés 10:02  
8.557801

7	<b>A la busca del más allá (In Search of What Lies Beyond)</b>	15:54
	Castile and León Symphony Orchestra / Max Bragado Darman	8.555962

8	<b>Cántico de San Francisco de Asís (Canticle of Saint Francis of Assisi)</b>	18:31
	Orchestra and Chorus of the Comunidad de Madrid / José Ramón Encinar	8.557223

**TT 75:04**



*An audience for Joaquín Rodrigo and his daughter Cecilia, with King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofía at the Palacio de La Zarzuela on the occasion of Rodrigo's investiture as Marqués de los Jardines de Aranjuez (Marquis of the Gardens of Aranjuez), April 1991*



# **Joaquín Rodrigo: A Portrait**

by

Graham Wade

## Introduction

Joaquín Rodrigo is internationally renowned as the composer of the most celebrated guitar work of the twentieth century, the *Concierto de Aranjuez*, premiered in 1941. This composition has been recorded many times, performed worldwide, improvised on by jazz musicians such as Miles Davis, featured in various films, and sung as a theme in popular versions. It remains one of the perennial masterpieces of the last century, universally admired and loved by an immense audience.

Over recent years, and especially since the centenary of his birth in 2001, the public has become increasingly aware that Rodrigo was not just the composer of one popular concerto. He was actually a prolific artist, writing almost 200 compositions which comprise a variety of orchestral pieces, concertos, songs and choral works, as well as pieces for piano, violin, guitar, cello and other instruments. The magnitude of his musical achievement and his total contribution to Spanish culture are still being assessed. In recent years almost his entire output has been recorded, while new scholarly and biographical studies reveal his life and work to be of absorbing interest and international relevance.

In the twentieth century, Spain was often regarded as politically and culturally apart from northern Europe, a view maintained after the end of World War II in 1945, as Franco's dictatorial regime continued for several more decades. Moreover, many of the leading Spanish composers such as Manuel de Falla (1876–1946),

Joaquín Turina (1882–1949), Federico Moreno Torroba (1891–1982), Federico Mompou (1893–1987), as well as Joaquín Rodrigo, eschewed the experimental and atonal dissonant approaches to composition of the Viennese School of Schoenberg, Berg and Webern, which have come to be academically regarded as the main focus and identity of 'twentieth-century music'.

Thus leading Spanish composers continued to write in their traditional styles, laying emphasis on melodic lyricism, tonal harmony, and impressionistic or romantic philosophies. In this they may occasionally have missed opportunities for certain kinds of progressive development, but at the same time they avoided some of the false turnings and blind alleys that characterised composers of other nationalities during these years of frenetic modernism that frequently alienated concert-goers.

The pendulum has now swung back towards appreciation of the solid achievement that twentieth-century composers writing in traditional styles and forms quietly created. In the United Kingdom, for example, the public has grown to love the genius of Edward Elgar and Malcolm Arnold, whose music fell into disfavour during the post-war years. At that time undue emphasis was placed by influential authorities (including broadcasting and academies, as well as university music departments) on avant-garde experimentation.

Awareness of Rodrigo's music was for decades subject to some distortion, viewed almost entirely through the prism of the *Concierto de Aranjuez*. The composer was also misunderstood in terms of his life and personality. It is now

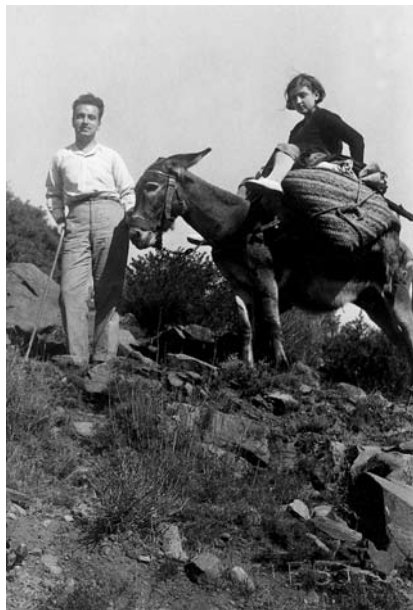
apparent that his apprenticeship years were a time of immense struggle and deprivation, augmented by the fact that he was blind from the age of three. Thus in the first half of his long life, he experienced disability, poverty, rejection, hardship, displacement through civil and imminent world war, virtual exile, uncertainty and desperation. The road to his personal summit was difficult almost beyond belief. Yet, with enormous courage and the inspiration of genius, Rodrigo overcame all obstacles heroically and achieved his artistic destiny.

## **Chapter I – Early Years in Valencia**

Joaquín Rodrigo was born at 17 Plaza de la Glorieta, Sagunto, in the province of Valencia, on 22 November 1901 (Saint Cecilia's day, the patron saint of music). His father, Vicente Rodrigo Peirats, was a businessman and landowner from Almenara, Castellón. His mother, Juana Vidre Ribelles, Vicente's second wife, was from Cuartell de Los Valles, a small village in the Sagunto area. Vicente had four children from an earlier marriage, and Juana gave birth to six more children, Joaquín being the youngest. In 1905, the family moved to Valencia, the capital of the province. During that year there was a serious epidemic of diphtheria, an acute infection from which many children died. Rodrigo survived but his eyes were damaged by the disease. Despite efforts by the best eye surgeons, his sight gradually diminished till eventually he could not even distinguish light from dark.

At the age of seven, Joaquín entered the School for the Blind in Valencia, and began learning violin and piano. He attended concerts and the family acquired a gramophone and pianola. In a short time he became an excellent pianist but did not commit himself to composition until he was sixteen. Rodrigo was tutored in harmony and composition by Francisco Antich Carbonell (1860–1962), organist at the local parish church, and also influenced by Eduardo López-Chavarri, the distinguished patriarch of Valencian music, composer, scholar and writer.

The young man's Opus 1 (the only one of his works to be given an opus number) was *Dos esbozos* ('Two Sketches') of 1923 for violin and piano. In that



*Rodrigo with donkey and rider near San Antonio de Requena, 1918*

year Rodrigo began exploring string textures and the complexities of orchestral writing, his first efforts in this genre being *Cançoneta* for violin and string orchestra (**CD 1, track 1**) and *Juglares* (*Ensayo sinfónico*) ('Jugglers, Symphonic Essay') (**CD 1, track 2**). Rodrigo described *Cançoneta* as 'enveloped in a sweet poetic aura of the Mediterranean, a concise composition during which the violin plays one short melody three times'. *Juglares*, a slightly more ambitious work, has an ABA structure, the first part evoking the *juglares* ('minstrels, jongleurs, jugglers, tumblers, entertainers') of the title, the second being a poignant *largo*, followed by the return to great animation before a concluding reflective coda marked *molto lento*.

In 1924, Rodrigo composed *Cinco piezas infantiles* ('Five Children's Pieces') (**CD 1, tracks 3–7**) for full orchestra, and the work was duly entered for the 1925 National Music Competition. Though it did not win first prize, one member of the distinguished panel of judges commended the composition for 'its spirit of youth and freshness, an ingenuity of development, both original and with influences of the best kind, a clarity and joy of soul full of attractiveness'.

The five movements proceed much in the manner of an eighteenth-century suite, with two reflective slow sections contrasted against evocations of the boisterous vitality of childhood. The orchestral writing shows Rodrigo's love of instrumental colour; his sense of humour and his adept choice of material to express vivid effects. The sections reveal a wide range of mood, texture and tempo.

In 1925, Rodrigo wrote *Canción y Danza* for piano (**CD 1, track 8**). This work was lost for many years, ultimately being premiered on 22 November

1996 (the occasion of Rodrigo's 95th birthday) by the pianist Ana Vega Toscano. The composition represents an uncharacteristic attempt at experimentation as contrapuntal lines of music combine and clash with startling dissonant polytonal effects. In the *Danza*, clusters of demisemiquavers, grouped in complex timing patterns, are set against each other. It is possible that Rodrigo saw here an area of development that he did not wish to investigate further. Thus *Canción y Danza* was discarded from his catalogue of works until revived by a later generation.

*Zarabanda lejana* ('Distant Sarabande') (1926) has proved popular as the composer's first guitar publication, as well as for piano solo and for string orchestra (**CD 1, track 9**). Dedicated *To the vihuela of Luis Milán*, the sarabande pays tribute to one of the great maestros of the vihuela (the sixteenth-century Spanish guitar). Rodrigo's homage to Luis Milán and his epoch is a contemporary commemoration of Spain's golden age. This awareness of the glorious past and a desire to recreate its splendours in twentieth-century vocabulary was, throughout Rodrigo's life, the source of much inspiration for the composer.



This is the introductory chapter of Joaquín Rodrigo: A Portrait.  
The full biographical essay, illustrated with photographs, is available to buy.  
For more details, please visit [www.naxos.com](http://www.naxos.com).