

# Manuel de Falla's homage to Debussy . . . and the guitar

Michael Christoforidis

The great Catalan guitarist, Miguel Llobet, was a very good friend of Falla . . . . He had repeatedly asked Falla to write a work for the guitar, and Falla finally agreed. Debussy had recently died, and one day at a concert in Paris, Falla met Henri Prunières, who told him that he was going to devote an issue of his *Revue Musicale* to Debussy's memory and asked Falla to write an article for it. Falla would much rather have written some music . . . . Eventually he did both. With regard to the music, he had only one fixed idea, that it should end with Debussy's *Soirée dans Grenade*. Then it occurred to him that he could make it a work for the guitar, thus satisfying Llobet at the same time.<sup>1</sup>

The above account of the conception of Falla's *Homenaje* (Homage) (1920),<sup>2</sup> in the anecdotal style of Falla's last approved biographer, Jaime Pahissa, gives some idea of the close relationship between the article and the guitar piece published in *La Revue Musicale* on 1 December 1920. The high esteem in which Falla held Debussy, along with the enormous influence the guitar had exerted on his own musical language, combined to form a sort of double homage.

Debussy's importance to Falla's output and his Paris years (1907-1914) is inestimable. The French composer had been important in introducing Falla to the wider Parisian musical establishment as well as recommending his works for publication. Their initial contact was through a letter from Falla, courteously answered by Debussy<sup>3</sup>, in which the Spaniard asks for advice on the interpretation of the *Danse sacrée et danse profane*, which he was to perform in his piano adaptation of the harp part in Madrid.<sup>4</sup> When the two men met in late 1907, Debussy was at work on the second of his orchestral *Images, Ibéria* (1905-1908). He had already composed the Spanish-inspired *Soirée dans Grenade* (1903) and was yet to write the two hispanically-tinged preludes, *La sérénade interrompue* (1910) and *La puerta del Vino* (1913). The latter is said to have resulted from a postcard depicting the famous Moorish gate of Granada sent to Debussy by Falla.<sup>5</sup>

In Paris Falla had the opportunity of hearing most of Debussy's mature works<sup>6</sup> and a clear influence upon his own works can be traced, particu-

larly so in *Noches en los jardines de España* (1911-1915), *Trois mélodies* (1909) and the *Montañesa* from the *Cuatro piezas españolas* (1902-1908).<sup>7</sup> He possessed scores of most of Debussy's major works which in the majority of cases he annotated. Orchestral textures and harmonic devices, including extended pedals, are signalled. Examples of rhythmic counterpoint are transcribed along with keyboard reductions of sections of pieces. Particular regard is given to use of specific instruments with the harp coming in for especially close scrutiny.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly the guitar, in its Andalusian style of playing, had been crucial to Falla's development to 1920. He had incorporated the instrument accompanying a flamenco singer, in simple strumming fashion, in *La vida breve* (1905-1913) and had provided similar accompaniments to a set of folksongs he had collected.<sup>9</sup> The works from this period abound with guitar-like figurations. Several numbers from *El amor brujo* (1914-1915) and *El sombrero de tres picos* (1919) give a more stylised translation of guitaristic effects. The fullest adaptation and distillation of the instrument's rhythmic and harmonic possibilities was achieved in the strident *Fantasía Baetica* for piano (1919), which is the work immediately preceding the *Homenaje*. Apart from the abovementioned accompaniments, all that remains by Falla for the instrument to that date is an eight-bar fragment entitled *Copla de Soleá*,<sup>10</sup> which is strongly reminiscent of the guitar scores of Julián Arcas and Rafael Marín, scores which are amongst those heavily annotated in Falla's possession.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly Falla chose not to write for the instrument in a blatantly Spanish manner in the *Homenaje*. The composition of a work inspired by Debussy must have encouraged him not to be obviously folkloristic with the instrument which had provided him with such fecund material.

Falla was quick to pay tribute to Debussy after the French composer's death. On 27 April 1918 he took part in a concert dedicated to Debussy which was organised by the music section of Madrid's *Ateneo*. Falla delivered a speech entitled, 'El arte profundo de Claudio Debussy' ('The profound art

of Claude Debussy'), parts of which he was later to use in his article, 'Debussy and Spain'. He then accompanied Aga Lahowska, who sang five of Debussy's songs that they had performed many times in the previous two years. Arthur Rubinstein also took part and the *Soirée dans Grenade* was amongst the works he played. In previous years Falla had performed several of Debussy's works for piano, including the *Deux arabesques* and some of the *Préludes*, and there is a reference in Ricardo Viñes's diary that on 3 April 1909 he accompanied Falla to Mrs Brooks's *matinée musicale* where Falla played some of his works as well as recent pieces by Debussy.<sup>12</sup> On 24 May 1911 he played at Franz Liebich's concert of Spanish music at the Aeolian Hall in London which ended with Debussy's *Soirée dans Grenade* and a four-hand piano transcription of *Ibéria* by André Caplet. The notes for the concert were written by Mrs Franz Liebich, Debussy's first biographer, and outline some similar ideas to those aired in Falla's article almost a decade later.

In a letter dated 4 February 1920, Henry Prunières asked Falla to contribute to the new series of *La Revue Musicale* in which he was thinking of including an issue dedicated to Claude Debussy. As editor of this journal he suggested that Falla could possibly write something on Debussy and Spain. In April of that year Falla was to perform several works by Debussy in Madrid. Adolfo Salazar, the music critic who was a close friend and musical ally of Falla, reviewed a performance of Debussy's Sonata for flute, viola and harp in the Madrid newspaper, *El Sol*, on 23 April, in which Falla played his own adaptation of the harp part on piano. The *Soirée dans Grenade* along with the three preludes and two arabesques by Debussy were given by Falla at a concert of Sociedad Nacional de Música in Madrid on 24 April. He was preceded by the guitarist Regino Sainz de la Maza playing a bracket of mainly Spanish works from the sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries. The notes for this concert included an article by Felipe Pedrell, Falla's first influential teacher, entitled *Obras para vihuela y guitarra de autores españoles antiguos y modernos* (Works for vihuela and guitar by ancient and modern Spanish composers). Pedrell had drawn Falla's attention to the guitar and the instrument is

referred to and employed in Pedrell's *Cancionero* which Falla was consulting at the time.<sup>13</sup> The thought of writing the Debussy piece for guitar may have been prompted by this coincidence.

Towards the end of May and early June of that year Falla was in Paris and the meeting with Prunières which Pahissa mentions in the opening quotation probably dates from this period.<sup>14</sup> The recently discovered guitar manuscript of the *Homenaje* is dated '27 VII-8 VIII 1920'. This is the first reference and cursory study of the original manuscript and related sketch material.<sup>15</sup> Prunières claims to have received a copy of the guitar piece in a letter of 6 October, but asks after the article. In the second number of *La Revue Musicale*, 1 December 1920, the *Homenaje* is dated Granada, August 1920, while the article is given as Granada, 8 November 1920.<sup>16</sup>

It is interesting to read the article as an apologia for the composition or even as an outline of Falla's own aesthetic development and personal concurrences with Debussy.<sup>17</sup> Falla advocates a wider 'Spanishness' for Hispanic pieces. Debussy's songs, *Fantoches* and *Mandoline*, as well as the piano *Masques*, the *Danse sacrée et danse profane* for harp and string orchestra and the second movement of the string quartet are thus characterised, although Falla goes out of his way to state that when 'Debussy was questioned about this matter he declared that no such idea was ever in his mind'.<sup>18</sup> This similarity is however partially explained by Falla as resulting from the relationship between Spanish folk music and the liturgical music and modal inflections Debussy was so fond of.

There is also praise for Debussy's avoidance of literally quoting Spanish folk music and 'creating music of his own based on the essential elements of folk music'.<sup>19</sup> This is Falla's own declared position though he was occasionally prone to quoting folk material. He makes reference to Debussy evoking the flamenco *cante jondo*, elements of which are present in numerous of Falla's scores, especially the *Fantasia Baetica* of the previous year, and which continued to fascinate him in the following year. Falla's defence of *Ibéria* is also apocryphal in that he says that 'Debussy strove at all costs never to repeat himself. "One's own technique must be constructed

afresh according to the demands of each work", he truly remarked'.<sup>20</sup> Falla was himself in the midst of composing *El retablo de Maese Pedro* (1919-1922) which represented a radical shift from his Andalusian musical idiom largely due to the demands of adequately setting the episode from *Don Quixote*.

By claiming that Debussy 'became spellbound by an imaginary Andalusia', Falla may have been reflecting his own state of mind.<sup>21</sup> Falla was certainly aware of the 'Granada syndrome' in Debussy's 'Spanish' works and was in the process of setting up his residence in that picturesque town in 1920.<sup>22</sup> He could now fulfil his ambition of savouring the Granada he had so often evoked, and return to Andalusia. The quotation of a fragment from *Soirée dans Grenade* in the *Homenaje* is hardly mere coincidence given that it is his first composition in these new surroundings.

Debussy's preludes, *Les parfums de la nuit* and *La puerta del Vino* are placed by Falla in the same harmonic category as the *Soirée dans Grenade*. These works also employ the habanera rhythm which is prevalent in the *Homenaje*. Falla does not seem to have been familiar with Debussy's *Lindaraja* (1901) for two pianos, again inspired by Granada.<sup>23</sup> This work is also dominated by the habanera rhythm which Falla is at pains to define as 'a sort of Andalusian tango'.<sup>24</sup>

Finally Falla links Debussy to the guitar through his incorporation of the harmonies suggested by the Andalusian strumming of the instrument and its inherent tuning.

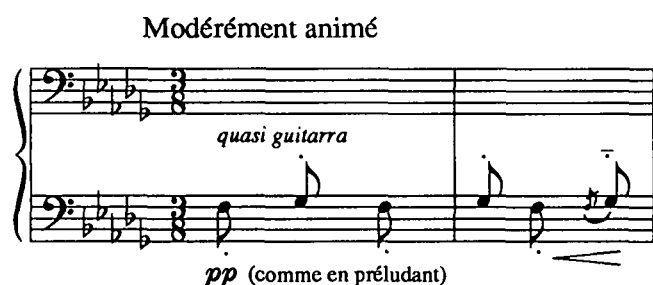
Curiously enough the Spanish musicians have neglected and even despised these effects. They considered them primitive. At most, Spanish composers were able to incorporate guitar figurations in works of conventional harmonic or melodic design. It was Debussy who showed how these guitar figurations were to be used with imagination.<sup>25</sup>

Debussy's interest in the guitar is no whimsical connection on the part of Falla. Apart from *La sérénade interrompue* being headed 'quasi guitarra' this interest is expressed as early as 1895, prior to the composition of his 'Spanish' works, in a letter from Debussy to Pierre Louÿs who was then living in Seville,

I look forward to hearing whether so many centuries of civilisation have tamed the celebrated 'Spanish arrogance', but whatever you do bring me back a guitar so that whenever I strike it it gives off a kind of subtle, sonorous dust, the relic of its savage melancholy of old.<sup>26</sup>

An examination of the guitar manuscript of the *Homenaje* and sketch material reveals the incorporation of a fragment from *Soirée dans Grenade* as an early idea even though it occurs towards the end of the *Homenaje* (Example 1). The crucial importance of the open string tuning of the guitar is also evident. Falla seems to toy with the harmonic clashes resulting by sounding open strings simultaneously with a moving melodic line. The habanera rhythm, alluded to along with these other ideas in the article, is a generating force. The *Homenaje* is also related to Debussy's habanera

Example 1a: Debussy, *Soirée dans Grenade*, bars 16-19: 1b: Falla, *Homenaje*, bars 63-66.



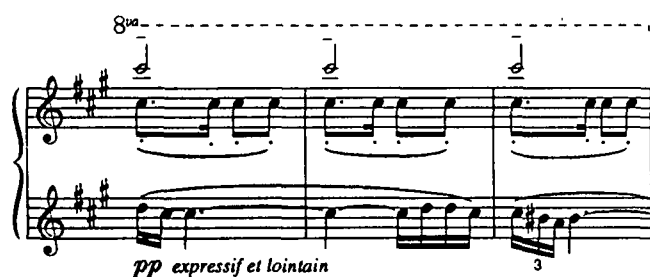
Example 2a, *La sérénade interrompue*, bars 1-2.

pieces in its use of mainly conjunct movement in the melodic line as well as its modal character. The initial semitonal wavering is also reminiscent of the opening of *La sérénade interrompue* (Example 2a) and the first melody of *Soirée dans Grenade* (Example 2b).

Curiously, the *Homenaje* had a chequered early history. Its premiere was actually given by Marie-Louise Caradesus on harp-lute in a concert organised by *La Revue Musicale* to perform the pieces dedicated to Debussy in their commemorative issue. Henry Prunières wrote to Falla on 13 December 1920 asking him if he knew of a guitarist living in Paris, amateur or professional. On 6 January 1921 he wrote again to say that, due to the lack of a guitarist, the première of the work on 24 January would be given on harp-lute, as the sound of this instrument is closer to that of the guitar. Falla had sent Prunières the piano arrangement of the *Homenaje*, which he completed after the guitar version, and is dated August 1920 on the manuscript.<sup>27</sup>

Contrary to some commentators' beliefs, the piano arrangement is not closer to the work's original conception by the composer, as not only does it post-date the guitar version, but the sketch material clearly indicates idiomatic conception and contemplation of the guitar's possibilities.<sup>28</sup> Falla even went as far as drafting guitar tablatures to check on the feasibility of his chordal formations. The piano version may have been produced by Falla to overcome the work's viewed limited performance possibilities as was the case when he later allowed the use of the piano in place of the harpsichord in the *Concerto*.

Assistance in his exploration of the guitar's possibilities may have been provided by Angel Barrios, the guitarist and composer from Granada,



Example 2b: *Soirée dans Grenade*, bars 7-9.

who was the catalyst in Falla's moving to the town. J. B. Trend, the *Times* critic and close friend of Falla, claims that the first realisation of the work was given at the Granada home of a convalescing Falla during the autumn of 1920.<sup>29</sup> Barrios may have also helped with guitaristic suggestions and corrections after the completion of the manuscript as there is a corrected proof copy amongst the Barrios papers.<sup>30</sup> Falla was later to entrust Barrios with the editing and adaptation of the guitar parts to his incidental music for Calderon's *El gran teatro del mundo*.<sup>31</sup>

The score was however sent to Miguel Llobet after its completion in August 1920, and he returned to Falla an edited and fingered version, ready for printing with a letter dated 29 December 1920. This is obviously not the version which appears in *La Revue Musicale*. Somehow Miguel Llobet seems to have been written out of the history of the work after its conception. The literature refers to the first performance of the work on guitar as that given by Emilio Pujol in Paris on 2 December 1922.<sup>32</sup> Strangely enough, this guitarist had performed the work in Barcelona in April 1921.<sup>33</sup> However, the premiere of the work on guitar was actually given by Llobet at Madrid's Comedia theatre on 8 March 1921, shortly after having visited Falla in Granada to get his advice and approval on two transcriptions from *El amor brujo* and the interpretation of the *Homenaje*. Adolfo Salazar gave a glowing review in the following day's edition of *El Sol*.

At this time Falla was intrigued by the guitar and its possibilities. A letter from Llobet on 27 August 1920 indicates his plans to continue writing for it:

Querido Falla,  
loco de contento al saber que está V.

componiendo dos obras más para la guitarra!!—  
Escribame si alguna duda tiene—

(Dear Falla,

mad with joy on finding out that you are  
composing two more works for the guitar!!—Write  
to me if you have any queries—)

A letter from J.B. Trend, upon his return to England after spending time in Granada and dated 4 November 1920, further demonstrates this interest.

Friedman está aquí tocando el piano—una prueba más que v. tiene razón diciendo que el piano moderno es un instrumento de orquesta; y que el futuro es la guitarra o la orquestilla de guitarras y bandurrias.

(Friedman is here playing the piano—one more proof that you are correct in saying that the modern piano is an orchestral instrument and that the future lies with the guitar or the miniature orchestra of guitars and bandurrias.)<sup>34</sup>

Some sketches for the proposed guitar works remain but these plans did not come to fruition. Falla's illness in the latter part of 1920 and the change of direction brought about by his work on *El retablo de Maese Pedro* may have restricted his further exploration of the instrument, though he was to cite works by the seventeenth century guitarist Gaspar Sanz and sixteenth century vihuelists in several of his neoclassical works of the 1920s. The harpsichord and harp came to dominate in this search for a plucked sonority in line with his new orientation. Amongst his writings the importance of the guitar is stressed in the final section of his work on *Cante jondo* (1922)<sup>35</sup> and there is a tribute to the instrument in his prologue to Pujol's *Escuela razonada de la guitarra* (1933).<sup>36</sup>

Debussy was to continue exerting influence over Falla with the latter making an arrangement for chamber orchestra of *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* for the Orquesta Bética de Cámara in 1924.<sup>37</sup> Falla's library includes a copy of the 1927 edition of Debussy's 'Monsieur Croche' writings with various annotations. Amongst the sections marked are passages making reference to Wagner. Falla was to incorporate Debussy's notions in his *Notas sobre Wagner en su cincuentenario* (1933).<sup>38</sup>

While the fascination with Debussy and the

guitar was to continue throughout Falla's life, the nexus between the two in the *Homenaje* was to be made clearer when in 1939 Falla formed an orchestral suite, *Homenajes*, out of the various musical tributes he had composed. The guitar piece was orchestrated and renamed 'à Cl. Debussy' with the subtitle in brackets, *Elegia de la guitarra*.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jaime Pahissa, *Manuel de Falla: His Life and Works*, trans. Jean Wagstaff (London: Museum, 1954), p. 112. *La soirée dans Grenade...* is the original title of the Debussy work.

<sup>2</sup> The title of this piece is often given in various forms though originally *Homenaje. Pièce de guitare écrite pour «Le tombeau de Claude Debussy»*. The titles of works by Falla will be given in their Spanish form in this article unless they were only known in a title of a distinct language.

<sup>3</sup> This letter is dated 13 January 1907 and is reproduced in François Lesure and Roger Nichols, eds, *Debussy Letters*, trans. Roger Nichols (London: Faber, 1987), p. 176.

<sup>4</sup> Performed on 4 February 1907 with Tomas Bretón conducting.

<sup>5</sup> François Lesure, 'Debussy et le syndrome de Grenade', *Revue de Musicologie* 28 (1982), p. 106. Lesure points out that Ricardo Viñes claimed in his diary to have sent the postcard.

<sup>6</sup> Concert programs from 1907-1914 belonging to Falla and housed at the Manuel de Falla Archive in Granada attest to this.

<sup>7</sup> The relationship between the *Montañesa* and Debussy's String Quartet is outlined in Antonio Gallego, *Piezas Españolas: Montañesa (Paisaje) y Andaluza* (Granada: Ayuntamiento de Granada, 1991), pp. 3-4.

<sup>8</sup> Many of the scores of works by Debussy preserved at the Manuel de Falla Archive include pencil annotations by Falla. Of interest, in the light of this article, are his markings of the *Estampes* with his fingering and underlining of sections of *Soirée dans Grenade*, *La puerta del Vino* and the numerous notes on *Ibérica* especially related to the use of the harp in *Les parfums de la nuit*.

<sup>9</sup> These are entitled *Cantares de nochebuerra* and numbered XXXIV in Antonio Gallego, *Catálogo de Obras de Manuel de Falla* (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1987), pp. 60-63.

<sup>10</sup> This is possibly the accompaniment to a Soléa Falla composed as incidental music for Martínez Sierra's *La Pasión*, which was produced in Madrid in November 1914. In 1946 the leading lady of that production, Catalina Bécena, gave an interview along with Gregorio Martínez Sierra in memory of Falla in which she claimed that Falla rehearsed the song, accompanying her on the guitar, every day during the rehearsal period. This is the only reference to Falla playing the guitar (Valentín de Pedro, 'Catalina Bécena y Martínez Sierra recuerdan al Maestro Falla', *¡Aquí está!* 11 [Buenos Aires, 1946], p. 3).

<sup>11</sup> Annotated scores of the *Soléa*, *Rondeña* and *Malagueña* by the mid-nineteenth-century guitarist Julian Arcas and six of the *Aires Andaluces* by Rafael Marín dating from the early

years of this century are amongst the guitar scores preserved at the Manuel de Falla Archive.

<sup>12</sup> Taken from transcripts of the diary of Ricardo Viñes at the Manuel de Falla Archive.

<sup>13</sup> References to consultation of the *Cancionero* are made as early as January 1919 in the correspondence between Falla and Pedrell.

<sup>14</sup> It may also refer to a visit by Falla to Paris in January of that year. The earlier date is more in line with Prunières's written request of 4 February 1920, but not consistent with the rest of Pahissa's account, especially in that it refers to the rapid completion of the work thereafter.

<sup>15</sup> Jorge de Persia came across several documents and musical sketches, including the manuscript of the *Homenaje* amongst the papers at the Casa Museo Manuel de Falla and they have subsequently been transferred to the Archive.

<sup>16</sup> In *La Revue Musicale* the title is misprinted as *Homenaja*. Other composers who contributed to this issue include Dukas, Roussel, Malipiero, Eugene Goossens, Bartók, Florent Schmitt, Stravinsky, Ravel and Satie.

<sup>17</sup> Manuel de Falla, 'Claude Debussy et l'Espagne', *La Revue Musicale* 2 (December 1920), pp. 206-10, trans. Edward Lockspeiser in *Debussy: His Life and Mind* rpt (London: 1962-65; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), II, pp. 255-61.

<sup>18</sup> Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, II, p. 257.

<sup>19</sup> Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, II, p. 260.

<sup>20</sup> Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, II, p. 259.

<sup>21</sup> Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, II, p. 257.

<sup>22</sup> As outlined in Lesure, 'Debussy et le syndrome de Grenade'.

<sup>23</sup> This work for two pianos by Debussy was published posthumously in 1926 and was not performed during Debussy's lifetime. The title refers to one of the patios of the Alhambra.

<sup>24</sup> Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, II, p. 257.

<sup>25</sup> Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, II, p. 260.

<sup>26</sup> Lesure and Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, p. 76.

<sup>27</sup> Its date is given as 8.IX.1920 in Gallego, *Catalogo*, p. 105 though the manuscript reproduced on page 134 of *Poesía* 36 and 37 (Madrid, 1991) indicates the date as August 1920.

<sup>28</sup> The most recent expression of this viewpoint is found in Gallego, *Catalogo*, p. 178.

<sup>29</sup> J.B. Trend, 'Falla in "Arabia"', *Music and Letters* 2 (April 1922), p. 135.

<sup>30</sup> These papers are now housed at the Centro de Documentación Musical de Andalucía in Granada.

<sup>31</sup> Refers to a letter from Falla to Barrios dated 30 May 1927.

<sup>32</sup> Most recent reference to this date is given in the journal *Poesía* 36 and 37, p. 133 in an issue dedicated to Manuel de Falla. Only Ronald Purcell in his introduction to the Chantarelle edition of the *Homenaje* (London, 1988) seems to cast doubt on this date.

<sup>33</sup> Review in *Associació de Musica*, 15 April 1921.

<sup>34</sup> Small bands made up of guitar, steel-strung Spanish lute and bandurria were common in Granada at that time. This reference probably relates to the 'Trio Albéniz' which included transcriptions of pieces by Debussy and Falla in their repertoire.

<sup>35</sup> *El «Cante jondo» (canto primitivo andaluz) en colaboración* (Granada: Urania, 1922).

<sup>36</sup> Emilio Pujol, *Escuela razonada de la guitarra* (Buenos Aires: José B. Romero e hijos, 1935). Federico Sopeña mistakenly reproduces Pujol's introduction to the method instead of Falla's prologue in his fourth edition of Manuel de Falla, *Escritos sobre música y músicos* (Madrid: Espasa-Cape, 1988).

<sup>37</sup> In 1989 I encountered five pages of notes in Falla's hand inside his copy of the orchestral score of Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* which indicated the reductions which needed to be made and the redistribution and reworking of parts. A copy of the written out arrangement was subsequently encountered in the Archive of the Orquesta Bética de Cámara.

<sup>38</sup> Manuel de Falla, 'Notes sobre Wagner en su cincuentenario', *Cruz y Raya* 7 (September 1933).