

Avant-garde Musical Exchange between the Americas and Spain

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In 1963, The Kennedy administration renewed the Pact of Madrid, a U.S.-Spanish agreement negotiated during the Eisenhower era. This renewal brought the U.S. and Spain into a closer rapport as well as strengthened Spain's connection to the Organization of American States (OAS). No longer politically isolated, Spain began to host inter-American exhibits of music and art to promote more amicable relations with the American republics. One such event, the Festival of Music of the Americas and Spain, held in Madrid in 1964 and sponsored by the OAS and the Institute for Hispanic Culture, showcased the latest avant-garde music of the U.S., Latin America, and Spain. Recently, various scholars have asserted that during the Cold War, the U.S. exported avant-garde music, especially that employing serial techniques, to promote the ideology of freedom, anti-Communism, and scientific exploration. However, I would argue that post-war serialism, in the context of this inter-American festival, played a slightly different role. For the U.S., the festival presented an opportunity to strengthen its inter-American relations by creating a triangle between itself, Latin America and Spain. Despite the conservative, nationalistic aesthetic of the Franco regime, its promotion of serial works by native composers can be read as an attempt to enter the European cultural milieu once more, and to rehabilitate its international reputation in order to secure needed economic assistance from Western Europe and the U.S. The cooperation of the U.S. and Spain for this festival allows us to question the myriad uses of music, from promoting freedom to fascism.

The re-negotiation of the Pact of Madrid represented another turning point in U.S.-Spanish relations. Like its 1953 predecessor, this agreement took several years and much diplomatic maneuvering to come to fruition. Although Spain failed to receive all of its concessions in this new agreement, Franco touted it as a major victory. What Spain lost in economic aid was offset by its increase in world status. Every major newspaper from Paris to Moscow covered the signing of the renewal. The U.S. press coverage expressed some misgivings about a closer alliance with Spain. The *Washington Post* stated, "The large print in the agreement makes clear that the shrewd Caudillo of Spain has gotten what he wanted most from the United States—a new status as a partner."¹ The press also attributed Franco's diplomatic victory to increasing Leftist activity in Europe. As the *Washington Post* also observed, "The twenty-five percent Communist vote in Italy in the spring, the instability in Turkey, Algeria, and Morocco, the worsening strains between French President Charles de Gaulle and Kennedy Administration combined to strengthen Franco's hand in the negotiations now concluded."²

¹ "Bases in Spain," *The Washington Post*, October 10, 1963, 3.

² Richard Scott Mowrer, "U.S. Bases Deal Hailed in Spain as an Alliance," *The Washington Post*, October 6, 1963, 7.

Yet some press coverage presented a complimentary assessment of the agreement. *The Tablet*, a Catholic newspaper, felt that Franco had accomplished much as a leader, proclaiming, “In every way the country has advanced. Its leadership, which so signally defeated the Communist threat and those who from abroad have continually sought to misrepresent and subvert a nation friendly to God, to peace, and orderly progress, has been remarkable and successful.”³ The *Standard Times*, a newspaper out of New Bedford, Massachusetts, also reacted favorably toward Spain, stating, “Spain is deserving of all. Long before many nations in Europe dared to antagonize the Soviet Union, Franco was pledging anti-Communist support and a haven for U.S. defense forces.”⁴

While defense and economic assistance remained vital to the new agreement, a new section on cultural exchange hoped to strengthen the U.S.-Spain alliance. In a letter to Dean Rusk, the U.S. Secretary of State from the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Fernando Castiella, Castiella remarked, “It is also of our opinion that exchanges in the field of art and literature, visits of authors and artists, and the mutual diffusion of their works, can make a vast contribution to mutual understanding and appreciation between our peoples.”⁵ Spanish newspaper *ABC* described the signing of the new agreement thus, “In a ceremony held at the State Department, Sr. Castiella signed with Dean Rusk, the documents in which the United States and Spain declare their intention to intensify, in the immediate future, a vast program of cultural exchange.”⁶ The correspondent asserted that “today has been a great day in Spain’s relations with the two Americas.”⁷ He additionally quoted the former president Eisenhower’s words. As the *ABC* journalist stated, “Not for nothing did President Eisenhower observe one day to a Spanish ambassador: ‘Mr. Ambassador: your country must help us in the job of uniting the Americas. There is no other country better placed to do so.’”⁸

The renewal of the Pact of Madrid also opened up an opportunity for Spain’s cultivation of its inter-American interests. During Castiella’s visit to the U.S., he stopped by the OAS to deliver a bust of Father Francisco de Victoria, the “father of international law.” Noted Spanish artist Victorio Macho sculpted the bust on commission from the Institute of Hispanic Culture. As *ABC* reported, “For the first time, a Spanish Foreign Minister has been formally received in the headquarters of the Organization of American States. Before that high inter-American senate, where some of the most illustrious personalities of Hispano-America meet together, our minister spoke of the Hispanic community of nations, of all that unites us to that great intellectual and political history

³ “Spain and U.S. Renew Pact for Five Years,” *The Tablet*, October 3, 1963, 12.

⁴ “Spain Wins a Round,” *The Standard Times*, September 30, 1963, 7.

⁵ “Text of the letter of the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sr. Castiella, to the United States Secretary of State, Mr. Rusk, on Cultural Affairs,” in *Spain and United States: 26 September 1963* (Madrid: OID, 1964), 27.

⁶ “España y Norteamérica suscriben un acuerdo de cooperación cultural,” *ABC*, October 9, 1963, 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

which is the common patrimony of Hispanic men on both sides of the Atlantic.”⁹ Castiella’s speech to the OAS was warmly received. As the *ABC* commentator continued, “Amid an atmosphere of high psychological temperature, in the same place where formerly the relationship between Spain and Spanish-speaking America had been marked by reserve and occasions by coldness, Dr. Mora said: ‘I am sure that I voice the feeling deeply rooted in all sons of America when I express our faith in the happy future of that Spain, which has shared so many exploits and so many glories.’”¹⁰ Renewing the Pact of Madrid thus formally strengthened relations between the U.S. as well as between Spain and the OAS.

A year later, Spain played host to a lavish festival featuring composers from the Americas and Spain. On a grand scale, it led Enrique Suarez de Puga to exclaim, “For a few days, Madrid will be converted into the musical capital of Europe.”¹¹ The festival ran from 14 October to 31 October 1964, jointly sponsored by the OAS and Institute of Hispanic Culture. Most of the American compositions had already been successfully premiered at the Inter-American Music Festivals of 1958 and 1961, held in Washington, D. C. The majority of these compositions featured some incorporation of serial techniques. The Madrid festival commissioned two new works, one by Alberto Ginastera, for his *Don Rodrigo* Symphony and one by Ernesto Halffter, for a cantata honoring the late Pope John XXIII, the initiator of the Second Vatican Council. Additionally, the festival mounted an exposition on Manuel de Falla, displaying photographs, manuscripts and other memorabilia as well as a performance of Falla’s *El Retablo de Maese Pedro*, his neo-classical puppet opera. Lastly, the festival included a conference series entitled, *Conversaciones de Música de América y España*, and featured talks by Enrique Franco, Oscar Esplá, Aurelio de la Vega, Virgil Thomson, Federico Sopena, and Gustavo Becerra.

Unity was one of the main themes of festival; indeed, it permeated the discourse. Gregorio Marañón Moya, the director of the ICH, opened the festival, proclaiming, “With this first festival, the Institute for Hispanic Culture opens its doors to the current American music, whose echo reaches us from there like a bond, cultural and living, which unites these wonderful people with Spain.”¹² Enrique Franco, music critic for *Arriba*, also commented, “Its importance is enormous in two ways. One, because it offers a superb contemporary musical anthology of the Americas and Spain and for being the first step toward an understanding among so many with common musical affinities, which merits enhancement.”¹³ Falla often served as an exemplary touchstone of this bond. Franco gave a talk entitled, “Manuel de América y España” that highlighted Falla’s status as both a Spanish and American composer. His cantata, *Atlántida*, later finished by Ernesto Halffter, became a symbol of inter-American unity during the festival.

⁹ “España y America,” *ABC*, October 17, 1963, 27.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Enrique Suárez de Puga, *Boletín del Festival de América y España*, n4 (1964), 3.

¹² Gregorio Moya, *Boletín de I Festival de Música de América y España*, n4 (1964), 1.

¹³ Enrique Franco, *Boletín de I Festival de Música de América y España*, n6 (1964), 8.

Universalism versus nationalism constituted another theme of the festival's discourse. Washington Roldán, an Uruguayan music critic who worked at the Uruguayan embassy in Washington from 1962 to 1970, gave an interview about his opinions concerning modern music. Roldán surmised that the younger generation "is trying to break away from folklorism and have turned toward the Viennese school and its serialism."¹⁴ The interviewer followed up this statement with a question, asking, "Which of these two musical trends, folklorism or universalism, dominates in South America?" Roldán replied that neither had triumphed over the other and he felt both trends were valid. However, he stated that he looked forward to hearing Hector Tosar's *Te Deum*, "a work that displays universal tendencies."

Rodolfo Halffter, a Spanish composer living in Mexico since the end of the civil war, voiced a similar opinion about the next generation of Spanish composers, stating, "The younger composers create universal music that can be understood by all, although the audience continues to perceive their Spanish roots in the texture."¹⁵ Blas Galindo echoed the same sentiment about the new generation of Mexican composers. As he said, "In my country, musical nationalism has been exceeded. Now, we are interested in universal tendencies."¹⁶ Panamanian composer Roque Cordero agreed. He thought the festival offered a chance to show the current musical trends of Americas, "especially since it seems to me that the impression abounds that the Latin American composer is still immersed in folklore. That idea is truly outdated."¹⁷

Both Spanish and Latin American composers involved in the festival expressed their opinions that overt musical nationalism was indeed outdated. The shift away from musical nationalism toward more universal techniques, such as serialism, began in the mid-1950s. Arthur Custer, an American composer who worked for the United States Information Service as the music consultant to Casa Americana in Madrid, commented upon this stylistic turn. As he stated:

Current musical practice in Spain finds its focus in a concern for the "universalization" of Spanish music. Since 1958, the year of formation of the Grupo Nueva Música, this ideal has been manifested in a militant rejection of folkloric elements. . . . Spanish musicians today strive for "liberation from explicit nationalism," in an attempt to speak a universal language. Their syntax is serialism.¹⁸

Interestingly, Custer drew upon militarily tinged language to convey his message. The effect of this passage suggests that Spanish composers were almost in a war against oppressive folklore as they "militantly rejected" these elements and fought for their

¹⁴ Washington Roldán, *Boletín de I Festival de Música de América y España*, n5 (1964), 6.

¹⁵ Rodolfo Halffter, *Boletín de I Festival de Música de América y España*, n7 (1964), 2.

¹⁶ Blas Galindo, *Boletín de I Festival de Música de América y España*, n8 (1964), 7.

¹⁷ Roque Cordero, *Boletín de I Festival de Música de América y España*, n9 (1964), 2.

¹⁸ Arthur Custer, "Contemporary Music in Spain," *Musical Quarterly* 48 (1962), 1.

liberation and right to speak a universal serial language. John Haskins, critic for the *Washington Star*, put the matter differently. As Haskins explained, “The reason for this musical cooperation is that we are not as in the nineteenth century, an era of nationalisms and isolated compartments, because the actual musical world now exists without borders. The composer from Buenos Aires, New York, Madrid, Stockholm, today creates with an international language. Music, in our times, is characterized by its genuine universality.”¹⁹

Like the Inter-American Music Festivals of Washington, D.C., the Festival of the Americas and Spain promoted solidarity by focusing on the shared musical heritage of the nations involved. Its emphasis on these common musical bonds could additionally strengthen political relations. To the U.S., the threat of communism in Latin America presented a constant battle. The Cuban Revolution and the ensuing problems with Castro’s regime highlight this problem. Yet, a State Department study on Latin American communism, issued less than a month after the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, stated, “If the island of Cuba should sink beneath the waves tomorrow, we would still have to face a significant and steadily growing communist threat in the hemisphere.”²⁰ Although the U.S. had its own means of dealing with communism, the OAS also served as a bulwark against the spread of communism. In memorandum dated 23 October 1964, Rusk reminded all overseas diplomats of the “clear anti-Communist stand of the OAS.”²¹ He further encouraged them “to notify the State Department of assignments, proposed assignments, transfers, etc., of Communist and Communist sympathizers in inter-American and other international organizations.”²² Franco’s Spain, although an unpalatable ally, was stringently anti-Communist and could be counted on to influence other Latin American countries to remain free of Communist influences.

As mentioned, the U.S. alliance with Spain presented some unpleasant realities. A segment of the U.S. public opposed closer ties with Spain, as well as some government officials. Muna Lee, a poet and noted State Department official detailed her conversation with Robert F. Woodward, U.S. ambassador to Spain, concerning U.S. and Spanish cooperation. As she wrote:

I have talked informally with Ambassador Woodward about the continued efforts of the Spanish Government—often with approval and even aid from some of our own diplomats and USIS officers—to have the U.S. and Spanish governments cooperate on some aspects of the Hispanidad program. The Spaniards can make this sound very attractive and most reasonable. But the fact is that Hispanidad, as regards to the OAS, is incurably divisionist: its basic purpose is to unite the Spanish-speaking republics with Spain and turn them away from the United States (even though in the process the U.S. and Spain might come, or seem to come,

¹⁹ John Haskins, *Boletín de I Festival de Música de América y España*, n9 (1964), 7.

²⁰ State Department Study, “Cuba and Communism in the Hemisphere,” May 3, 1961, 4.

²¹ Dean Rusk, “Communists in Inter-American Organizations and in International Organizations in Latin America,” State Department Memo, October 23, 1964, 1.

²² *Ibid.*

close together). Ambassador Woodward said, in effect, he had the wiles of Hispanidad well in mind and wouldn't be hoodwinked.²³

Rhetoric about unity, while sounding eloquent on the surface, conceals a murkier debate. The discussion over the merits of nationalism versus universal may also tie into a larger context. Obviously, for many composers, exploring serial or techniques deemed universal remained a personal choice, motivated by creative expression. Yet avant-garde music in general and serialism in particular has taken on external connotations. Scholar Anne Schreffler, writing on serialism and the Congress for Cultural Freedom, explains extra-musical meaning thus. As she writes, "In Europe, advanced styles continued to be conceived as oppositional to Fascism (i.e., on the Left), whereas in the U.S., they were part and parcel of an anti-Communist, high-technology, scientific Cold War ideology."²⁴ For Spain, the serial works showcased at the Madrid festival, such as *Cesuras* by Luis de Pablo, *Constantes rítmicas en el modo primero* by José Soler, and *Secuencias* by Cristóbal Halffter, demonstrated that the new generation of Spanish composers had absorbed contemporary techniques.

According to some Latin American composers, use of universal techniques raised their work beyond certain nationalistic stereotypes. In response to the first inter-American music festival of Washington, D.C., Aurelio de la Vega noted that, "A great majority of the critics happily pointed out the total absence of the old, usual type of third-rate Latin-American music (so poignantly labeled as 'music of Rum and Coca-Cola') which for many years has been presented as the genuine representation of Latin-America's national soul."²⁵ During the Cold War, there was also the possibility that nationalistic music could be equated with musical aesthetics of the Soviet Union. As De la Vega stated, "In countries with an underdeveloped culture the orthodox and formulistic preoccupations, which typify musical nationalism, make themselves present. . . . In countries where culture has attained a higher level, the above mentioned nationalistic problem has been reduced almost to nothing, or, still better, is accepted as an individual expression of the composer's idiosyncrasy and never as a vital, unavoidable condition following similar collective patterns as the ones established by the Soviet Union."²⁶

The Festival of Music of the Americas and Spain offers a multifaceted perspective on the nuanced relationship between art and politics. On one hand, the organizers of the festival portrayed it as an event emphasizing new music and neighborly unity. Yet, when considered against the backdrop of the Cold War, the use of serialism to promote solidarity, takes on a greater significance that warrants further exploration.

²³ Muna Lee, "Hispanidad," State Department Memorandum, April 20, 1962, 1.

²⁴ Anne C. Schreffler, "Ideologies of Serialism: Stravinsky's *Threni* and the Congress for Cultural Freedom," in *Music and the Aesthetics of Modernity*, ed. Karol Berger and Anthony Newcomb (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 238.

²⁵ Aurelio de la Vega, "Trends of Present-Day Latin-American Music," *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 1 (1959), 98.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.