**JOAQUÍN RODRIGO: AN ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION**

**THE GUITAR AND BEYOND**

**HISPANIC SOCIETY MUSEUM AND LIBRARY**

**April 4, 2019**

**Lecture: 6:30 PM**

**Concert: 7 PM**

**Pre-Concert Lecture, April 4, 2019, Hispanic Society, Isabel Pérez Dobarro and Douglas Riva**

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to the second concert of the New York Joaquín Rodrigo Festival. 2019 marks the 20th anniversary of Maestro Rodrigo’s death and provides a unique opportunity to re-discover and re-evaluate his contributions to the musical world and explore his lesser known masterpieces. The Hispanic Society Museum and Library along with the Foundation for Iberian Music of the Graduate Center at the City University of New York and the King Juan Carlos Center at New York University are joining together to organize a city-wide Rodrigo Festival which began last December with a brilliant chamber music concert here at the American Academy of Arts and Letters and continues in 2019. The festival is titled Joaquín Rodrigo: An Anniversary Celebration—The Guitar and Beyond. The organizing committee is comprised of myself, Isabel Pérez Dobarro and Dr. Antoni Pizà, Director of the Foundation for Iberian Music. Events include this three- concert series organized by the Hispanic Society, an international round table discussion and concert at NYU next Tuesday, April 9, a similar event at Harvard University on Thursday, April 11, as well as other programs still being planned. On May 4 here at the American Academy of Arts and Letters we will present the final concert of the Hispanic Society Rodrigo series including works for guitar, voice and classical Spanish dance.

Tonight, we are greatly honored and delighted to have Maestro Rodrigo´s daughter, Cecilia Rodrigo Khami and his granddaughter Patricia León Ara here with us. Their work with the Foundation Victoria and Joaquin Rodrigo continues the important legacy of their father and grandfather. Douglas and I are going to briefly comment about the music we are performing tonight. Later, Cecilia and Patty, the Maestro´s daughter and granddaughter, have graciously agreed to share some recollections of their father and grandfather and his work with you before the concert begins.

Joaquín Rodrigo, one of the most important composers in the history of Spanish music, is revered throughout the world for his hauntingly beautiful guitar concerto, *Concierto de Aranjuez*, one of the most popular concertos of all time.

This concerto is so beloved that it is almost a certainty that either consciously or not almost everyone here tonight will have heard it at some time. It is one of the most performed and recorded compositions in music history, comparable in popularity to Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons.* In addition, Rodrigo composed 10 other concertos for solo instruments and orchestra several of which are also spectacularly popular. Wonderful as these compositions are their beauty and popularity has eclipsed many other of his masterpieces and in a sense has prevented them from receiving the attention that they deserve. In this concert series we wanted to present as many of the lesser-known works as possible along with others that are more frequently performed.

Joaquín Rodrigo was born in Sagunto, Valencia, Spain on November 22, 1901. Rodrigo triumphed against remarkable odds. At the age of 3 diphtheria severely impaired his eyesight and only a few years later he became completely blind. The family moved to Valencia so that Joaquín could receive a fine education in Braille as well as music. Blindness did not prevent him from living a full and happy childhood. In an interview for Spanish National Television in the 70’s Rodrigo recalled that his childhood had been “very happy”, adding that although he could not see he had a large and loving family, music, literature and many friends. He began music study at age 8 and by the 1920´s he was already an excellent pianist and had begun composing. Rodrigo wrote his compositions in Braille and later dictated the score note by note to a copyist for notation in a manuscript. Probably due to his blindness Rodrigo developed an astonishing memory which was essential to this process.

His first orchestral works written in 1923 and 24, *Juglares* and *Cinco piezas infantiles* were highly successful. Following this early success Rodrigo decided to continue his studies in Paris with the famed composer Paul Dukas. Rodrigo arrived in Paris as a fine pianist with a thorough knowledge of and respect for Spanish music, especially the music of the great Spanish composers immediately preceding himself, Enrique Granados, Isaac Albéniz and Manuel de Falla as well as the music Domenico Scarlatti composed during the many years he lived in Spain. In addition, Rodrigo had great admiration for the music of Maurice Ravel and other contemporary French composers. Much as he admired all of them Rodrigo wanted to find his own musical language, one that did not imitate his predecessors. He developed a highly personal, distinctive and cultured idiom based on melody with tonal, but original and modern harmonies. His works are very colorful and often use dissonance as a tone color. The clear uncluttered textures found in his music are often described as Neo-Classical but in reality, his music is actually more complex and modern.

As musicians we admire Rodrigo´s formidable skill as a composer. His formal structures are always perfect and balanced. His sonorities and tone colors are beautiful and highly refined. As a listener, at times you might become aware of the introduction of a completely new and often contrasting element being suddenly introduced into the music only to hear it again later perfectly incorporated within the previous themes. But, one need not dwell on these technical aspects to enjoy the tremendously expressive and natural flow of emotions that fills his music.

In Paris Rodrigo met the Turkish pianist Victoria Kamhi and they were married in 1933. Victoria Kamhi was an excellent pianist and decided to give up on her professional career in order to dedicate herself to her husband. The couple lived France, Germany, Austria and Switzerland before returning to Madrid in 1939. In the following year, 1940, Rodrigo’s *Concierto de Aranjuez* was premiered in Barcelona, bringing him world-wide fame. From that point Rodrigo was immersed in composing and attending premieres of his works throughout the world. Also, he was engaged in numerous other artistic activities including being Professor of Music History at the Complutense University in Madrid, a position he held for over 30 years. He was also Head of Music Broadcasts for Spanish National Radio, music critic for several newspapers, and Head of the Artistic Section of the Spanish National Organization for the Blind.

Although Rodrigo was a fine pianist he did not pursue a career as a soloist. However, his thorough knowledge of Spanish piano music gave him a unique perspective which lead him to create his own highly personal music for the piano. He commented that “in the 19th Century the piano was very important in expressing the emotional needs of musicians. However, for various reasons Spain did not have the same connection to the piano until later.” In the final decade of the century Enrique Granados was the composer who gave Spain a glorious period of late-Romantic piano masterpieces. In the first decade of the 20th Century Isaac Albéniz composed the suite *Iberia* which created an entirely new and modern concept of piano music with dense and highly complex pianistic textures. Rodrigo wanted to avoid what he called the “magnificent Albéniz piano” and he was inspired to create a distinct 20th Century piano style based on what he described as “elimination” leading to “much smaller and clearer textures”. For this Rodrigo looked to the music which Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757) composed during the many years he lived in Spain, commenting: “Inspired to some extent by this style of keyboard music and by the characteristics of the 20th Century piano, I have tried to write my own pieces for the piano.”

Douglas and I would like to briefly comment the works we are performing tonight. After our presentation Cecilia will share her very special perspective about the music.

Quite a number of great composers have written music recalling their childhood, Enrique Granados´ *Cuentos de la juventud* (Stories of Youth) and Robert Schuman´s *Kinderszenen* (Scenes of Childhood) immediately come to mind. These works were not intended for children to perform and in addition the emotions expressed in them are often nostalgic recollections of youth. However, Rodrigo composed works specifically conceived for children to perform and to express childhood emotions such as our opening work, Sonatina para dos muñecas.

**A l’ombre de Torre Bermeja (In the Shadow of *Torre Bermeja*)** is an emblematic work by Rodrigo for several highly interesting and unusual reasons. A number of composers wrote works as an homage to the memory of the great Spanish pianist Ricardo Viñes, who premiered numerous works by Debussy and Ravel as well as many Spanish composers. Rodrigo was inspired to base his contribution to the homage on a work that Viñes especially enjoyed performing, *Torre Bermeja* by Isaac Albéniz. Rodrigo decided to make his piece something of an intellectual exercise and composed a kind of commentary or paraphrase of Albéniz’s *Torre* Bermeja. There is not a note of Albéniz in the work, instead Rodrigo was inspired by the atmosphere of the Albéniz piece. The somewhat curious title, partly in French, partly in Spanish, recalls that Albéniz had used similar titles on occasion. At the end of the piece please listen for the sound of bells tolling in memory of Ricardo Viñes.

**Danza de la amapola** **(Dance of the Poppy)** was composed in 1972. This very brief and brilliant piece has a spare two-voice texture and a vibrant conclusion. You might be wondering about the meaning of the somewhat enigmatic title which Cecilia will explain.

The passionate, turbulent and mysterious ***Serenata española****,* composed in 1931, was the earliest masterpiece for piano in the composer’s mature style. In *Serenata española* Rodrigo used many of the recognizable elements of Andalusian music, modal harmonies, imitations of guitar techniques and a lyrical *copla,* all in his own highly personal manner.

The four pieces of ***Cuatro estampas andaluzas***, composed between 1946 and 1952, were also inspired by Andalucía. The brief *El vendedor de chanquetes* is a lively portrait of a street vendor selling *chanquetes*, fried immature fish. Rodrigo uses mild dissonance to enhance the mood. *Crepúsculo sobre el Guadalquivir* (Twilight over the Guadalquivir River) evokes an evening in Seville, beginning calmly and continuing with late night revelries. *Seguidillas del diablo* (The Devil’s Seguidillas) perfectly represents a wild satanic dance. The very beautiful *Barquitos de Cádiz* (Little Boats of Cádiz) begins with a calm and somewhat mournful *Adagio*, evoking a calm sea. The second section is in complete contrast. It opens with gentle rolling arpeggios that increase in intensity and tempo leading to a brilliant coda.

Rodrigo’s first orchestral work***Juglares***, was composed in 1923 and was premiered with great success the following year by the Valencia Symphonic Orchestra. At the same time Rodrigo wrote this arrangement for piano, 4 hands, which was forgotten for many years. Rodrigo dedicated this version to the piano duo of Miguel Zanetti and Fernando Turina, who re-discovered, premiered and recorded the work. *Juglares,* less than 5 minutes long, is in three-part form, opening with a vibrant Allegro followed by a melancholy Largo and then a return of the Allegro and concluding with a highly personal and brief slow Coda, a daring and highly unusual gesture for a young composer.

Rodrigo commented that the ***Four Pieces for Piano***are all in reality dances. Although they were published together as a group each piece could be played as an independent work.

There are many works by Rodrigo where humor and irony are given free reign. However, there is probably none more notable as a musical joke than the ***Gran Marcha de los Subsecretarios*** [Grand March of the Under-Secretaries]. The work was composed in 1941 and is an ironic parody of governmental bureaucrats. It was dedicated to two close friends of the composer who were accomplished amateur pianists and also career bureaucrats.

Throughout his life Maestro Rodrigo was honored by governments, universities, academies and other organizations in many different countries. In 1985 he was inducted as a member of the Hispanic Society in New York. In 1991, to celebrate his 90th birthday, Rodrigo was raised to the nobility by H. M. Juan Carlos I, King of Spain, with the title *Marqués de los jardines de Aranjuez*. Five years later, in 1996 he was awarded Spain’s greatest cultural distinction, the Prince of Asturias Prize, awarded to a composer for the first time. Rodrigo commented: ''I like to be an ambassador for Spain.'' Certainly, he brilliantly fulfilled his goal by bringing his unique vision of Spanish music to the entire world.

In spite of his great success he was ever modest saying: “In life you can never be first in anything. I only aspire to be an improved Joaquín Rodrigo.”

-----Douglas Riva