

La Folia de España: Dances for Guitar

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CD Liner Notes, with a Selected Bibliography

La Folia de España, a dance whose name is tied to madness and foolishness, has had a long and rich history which has attracted composers for over 500 years. Originating in Portugal in the late 15th century, the *folia* quickly became popular in Spain as well, as a fast, wild and noisy dance. During the 17th century the *folia* was refined in Italy and France into a more stately and dignified musical form and to a large extent it has remained so to this day. However, the influence of the *folia's* roots remain, with a certain dramatic flair that is decidedly Iberian in flavor.

The guitar as it was known in the baroque era was a comparatively small bodied instrument with five courses, or sets, of strings. Various tuning systems were used, but most placed the lowest pitched string somewhere in the middle. This combination of a small resonating chamber, double-strings and re-entrant tunings make for a very light and clear sound, especially when compared with later guitars. Both solo and accompaniment music for the guitar from the early 17th century emphasized the *rasgueado* (strummed) capabilities of the instrument. In the 1630's Italian guitarists started borrowing plucked lute technique and pioneered a playing style that mixed *rasgueado* and *punteado* (plucked) techniques.

Spanish guitarist and composer Gaspar Sanz was exposed to this new style when he went to Italy to study organ and guitar. He then returned home and published the first collection of mixed *rasgueado* and *punteado* guitar solos in Spain in 1674. Sanz's *Folia* is the quintessential baroque form: a set of melodic and rhythmic variations on a chord progression, that is both dramatic and stately in feel. This particular piece has a very unusual feature: one of the variations has the phrase "*esta glosada toda se corre*" (This variation always is running) engraved at the beginning. This seems to be some sort of performance direction, perhaps indicating that this passage should have a faster tempo, which alludes to the wilder roots of the *folia* in Spain. The *Espanoletas* is a more refined dance of Italian origin, where Sanz shows his abilities in a more expressive light. In contrast, the rough-edged *Canarios* is an energetic and syncopated dance that came to Spain from the Canary Islands.

One of the Italian guitarists that Sanz mentions in the preface to his book is Francesco Corbetta, calling him "*el mejor de todos*" (the best of them all). This was not a trite overstatement, as Corbetta was probably the greatest guitar virtuoso of his time and a sophisticated composer as well. His contribution to the guitar was remarkable in that he focused exclusively on the guitar, traveling extensively outside of Italy where the guitar was already well established. His charismatic virtuosity was especially recognized in the English and French courts, where the once lowly guitar became extremely fashionable among the nobility. Corbetta's *Follia* is from his second book, published in Italy in 1643. This *folia* predates Sanz's version by over 30 years, yet it is very progressive for the time. Corbetta is credited with both influencing the development of the *folia* form, and with introducing it to the French. The rest of the pieces recorded here are from his 1671 book, which was dedicated to the

English king Charles II, but published in France. These works have a strong French influence, as evidenced by the improvisatory mood of the *Prelude* and the inclusion of a *Menuet*, a light triple dance very popular in the French court. The *Chacone* is an interesting mix of styles, with French ornaments and delicate gestures interspersed with Italian bravura.

The dances by the Spanish composer Santiago de Murcia are from a manuscript found in Mexico, known as the Saldívar Codex No. 4, which exhibits the mix of Spanish, Indigenous and African influences on music of the New World. The *Cumbees* and *Zarambeques* are both African in origin, and while the *Fandango* was cultivated in Spain, its birthplace is actually the West Indies. Each dance has its own chord progression formula that repeats with *diferencias*, or variations. Despite following this traditional baroque Spanish formula, some of the unexpected harmonies of these pieces are quite unlike anything found in European repertoire of the same era.

Three important transitions took place for the guitar to reach the form it took in the 19th century: the addition of a sixth string, moving from double to single strings and developments in bracing that allowed for a larger top. The combination of these changes resulted in an instrument similar to the modern guitar, though still somewhat smaller and therefore with a lighter tone, faster response and less ability to sustain.

Thanks to the efforts of several very successful guitarists who also composed, the guitar enjoyed a resurgence in popularity in the early 19th century. The Spaniard Fernando Sor was such a guitarist, and was also one of the better composers. Although Sor actively performed and was considered a virtuosic guitarist, he also devoted himself to composition, producing several successful operas, ballets, symphonies, and various chamber pieces in addition to his works for guitar. Perhaps as a result, his guitar compositions are in a sophisticated style that goes beyond merely showcasing the instrument's idiomatic capabilities. Published in Paris in the early 1820's, Sor's version of the *folía* exhibits a classical approach to the theme and variation form, with each variation serving as its own entity, often in sharp contrast in mood from the others. Since *folías* are by definition always in a minor key, Sor is unable to include a major variation as further contrast, a common practice of the time. This may be why he chose to end the composition with this charming *Menuet* in the parallel major.

Although the Spaniard José Ferrer y Esteve wrote a handful of larger concert works, the bulk of his compositions are charming miniatures, many of which are in the form of a popular dance. Also referred to as salon music, the emotional impact of these pieces rely on distilling musical ideas into a small package with quickly shifting moods and motives. Published in Paris during the thirteen-year period Ferrer lived there, *Brise d'Espagne*, *Valse Caractéristique* (Breeze of Spain, Characteristic Waltz) is strongly nationalistic—an increasingly common compositional theme of the late 19th century. While the *Valse Caractéristique* is still clearly connected to the ballroom waltz, Ferrer's *Vals* is a looser setting of the same dance, which in this case is used as a vehicle for guitaristic flourishes. His languid *Tango* is an excellent example of the *tango-romanza*, a form that was popular in Spain for both songs and instrumental works. In the *Sicilienne*, a light Italian dance, a middle section set in minor and in a low register creates contrast.

The movement from more intimate performance settings for the privileged few into more spacious concert halls with larger audiences is generally credited with a parallel movement in instrument building toward louder instruments. For the guitar this change started taking place at the end of the

nineteenth century, with further development of the bracing system of the top. In 1946 another major innovation occurred with the invention of nylon strings to replace gut strings.

In 1932 Antonio Lauro saw the Paraguayan virtuoso guitarist Agustin Barrios Mangoré in concert and was convinced to drop his piano and violin studies to focus on the guitar. Lauro was driven to express his nationalism through composition, and was continually drawn to the Venezuelan *valse* as a means to that end. The three *valses* on this recording are typical of Lauro's output; they are harmonically straightforward and very lyrical, with subtle rhythmic complexities. The intimate character of these works is enhanced by their titles. *El Negrito* (little dark haired one) refers to Lauro's youngest son Luis. Lauro paired this waltz with *La Gatica* (the little kitty), which seems to illustrate feline antics, but was also a nickname for his wife. *Andreina*, which has also been published as *Valse Venezolano no. 2*, is named after Lauro's niece.

The Mexican Manuel Ponce is the only composer on this recording who was not also a guitarist. The guitar can be a challenging instrument to write for, and most composers have only done so with significant prodding from a guitarist. In this case, the legendary Spanish guitarist Andrés Segovia was the inspiration for a large number of works featuring the guitar as the two musicians developed a long-standing friendship. *Prelude No. 24*, which has the subtitle *Chant populaire espagnol* (popular Spanish song), is a fine example of why Ponce is revered as a master of melody. His constant use of a drone on the open A string generates a gentle push and pull as the piece passes through harmonies that create dissonance with the A, before resolving. In contrast, Ponce's *Rumba* is dominated by the infectious rhythms of the popular Cuban dance. As Segovia remarked in a letter to Ponce, "The *rumba* is now in my feet and moving my chest. And everyone in the house does the same when hearing it." *Scherzino Mexicano* is a very lyrical piece, which Ponce has imbued with playfulness with the use of shifting rhythmic stresses that gives it a dance-like character. This may be a reflection of the *scherzo's* history, which is tied to the minuet.

Although he started his career as a successful concert guitarist, Leo Brouwer has truly made his mark as a composer. Like Sor, Brouwer has not restricted himself to writing for the guitar, and his compositional style ranges from the formal fugue to the very avant-garde. He also has a keen interest in traditional music, particularly that of his native Cuba. *Danza del altiplano* is his arrangement of Indigenous Peruvian music, liberally infused with Brouwer's keen understanding of idiomatic guitar techniques.

Bryan Johanson is a native of Portland, Oregon, and is a Professor of Music and founder of the guitar studies program at Portland State University. His catalogue of over eighty compositions reflects a wide variety of interests that extends far beyond the guitar. He has written several substantial works for solo guitar, and in recent years has focused a major portion of his energy on writing chamber music for the guitar. Of his version of the *folía* Johanson writes, "*La Folia Folio* (1995) was commissioned by Canadian guitarist Harold Micay. He wanted a work that he could splash around in. The result is a set of variations based on the chord progression from the famous theme *La Folia d'España*. I have tried to stress the dance nature of the theme by using only the harmonic progression, omitting the melody altogether, though there is a weird paraphrase of it about halfway through." This emphasis on the harmonic progression is most similar to the *folía* settings by Corbetta and Sor, where the inherently chordal and rhythmic nature of the guitar is showcased. Although *La Folia Folio* is clearly in a modern

idiom, the faster tempo and many special effects evokes the wildness of the earliest *folías*. According to Johanson, “The work is a blast to play and I enjoy splashing in it as often as I can.”

—Notes by Elizabeth Brown

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