

Joaquín Turina Pérez

Spain enjoyed a musical “Golden Age” during the Renaissance after which it was largely overshadowed on the international stage by the prevailing European styles from Italy, France, and German-speaking countries. Spain found its voice once again with the rise of musical nationalism in the late 19th century and the first of its modern masters: Albéniz, Granados, and de Falla.

It was Albéniz who provided the necessary connections for Joaquín Turina to study in Paris under d’Indy and to publish his first work, a piano quintet. While in Paris, Turina came to know some French masters, including Debussy, Ravel, and Fauré, which left a profound influence on his music.

Written in 1933, Turina’s *Piano Trio No. 2 in B minor, Op. 76* is one of his three mature piano trios. Lively, sparkling, evocative and concise, it is refreshing for its time, associating on one hand with the classical and romantic piano trio traditions and, on the other, with the harmony, color and relaxed form of the more recent French and Spanish composers.

Distinctively Spanish elements pervade its vocabulary in the form of melodic intervals, harmonic chord progressions, and rhythmic patterns, including the middle movement scherzo written in a characteristic Spanish dance meter of 5/8. Even where Turina reminds one of the modern French composers who influenced him, it is worth remembering that both Debussy and Ravel were captivated by the sounds of Andalusia, the flavors and idioms of which Turina could “borrow” back quite naturally and authentically.

All three of Turina’s mature piano trios use a three-movement form hailing back to the first classical piano trios of Haydn and Mozart. The first movement follows a sonata outline with clear, contrasting themes first in minor, then major keys, followed by a developmental interlude introducing fresh melodic material. The second movement is a brief but dense scherzo based on a spicy dance rhythm, a bright countermelody, and a languid trio.

The finale is a majestic landscape miniature with all the poetry and perfume of great Spanish music! A rondo, it visits a number of vivid scenes between recurring refrains of a dark, masculine cast. Using a technique that Turina likely acquired from his French schooling, he takes a cyclic look backward in the final episode, recalling all the themes from previous movements before a dazzling entrance into the final, wonderfully elaborated refrain.

Kai Christiansen (www.earsense.org)
edited by Jeff Gallagher

Ástor Piazzolla

The *Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas*, also known as the *Estaciones Porteñas* or *The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires*, are a set of four tango compositions written by Ástor Piazzolla. They were originally conceived, composed, and treated as different compositions rather than a single suite, although Piazzolla performed them together from time to time.

They were scored for his quintet of violin (viola), piano, electric guitar, double bass, and bandóneon. By including the adjective “porteño” (referring to those born in the Argentine capital city, Buenos Aires) Piazzolla gives an impression of the four seasons specifically there.

As a youth Piazzolla established himself as a working musician and performing musician working with many popular ensembles before forming his own tango orchestra, Orquesta del 46, in 1946. In 1950 he disbanded his orchestra to better dedicate his time to composition, and in 1953 he produced his first music for symphonic forces.

The following year he received a grant from the French Government to travel to Paris, where he studied with Nadia Boulanger. She urged him to develop his language as a composer on the foundation of a strictly Argentine sound. “Up to then,” he recalled, “I had composed symphonies, chamber music, string quartets; but when Nadia Boulanger analyzed my music, she said she could find nowhere any Piazzolla. She could find Ravel and Stravinsky, also Béla Bartók and Hindemith — but never Piazzolla. ... Nadia made me play a tango to her and then she said, ‘You idiot! That is the real Piazzolla!’ So I threw away all the other music and, in 1954, started working on my New Tango.”

The tango Piazzolla inherited was an overtly sexy dance, born in the back alleys and brothels of Buenos Aires. He injected a sense of modernity into the genre that was so utterly transformational that his music (and that of his colleagues and followers) defines the New Tango in contradistinction to the classic dance form, which is referred to as *tango de la guardia vieja*.

While the classic tango remains recognizable as the root of his music, his pieces also reflect aspects of jazz as well as classical developments. Piazzolla created a completely new genre!

NYPhil Program Notes
edited by Jeff Gallagher

Anton Dvořák

Many regard Dvořák’s *Piano Trio No. 3 in F minor* as a milestone. It is uncharacteristically serious, stormy, and fraught with tragic conflict, unusual for a man generally regarded as sanguine, uncomplicated, and most un-neurotic.

It is supposed that Dvořák was venting his grief after recently losing his mother. But the trio seems to have arisen from another crisis as well: the pleading of friends and colleagues to move beyond his

obsession with folk-oriented Slavic nationalism in music, to achieve a more cosmopolitan European style and a reputation beyond provincialism.

Yet a third aspect of this turning point was surely Dvořák's "natural" development: because of, or simply simultaneous with these other events, Dvořák, at forty-two, achieved a new level of maturity as a composer. With the first international success of his *Slavonic Dances* a few years behind him and his fateful trip to America still a decade away, Dvořák produced his first complex chamber music masterpiece, a stunning epic that seemed to gather all these challenges into a forceful amalgam.

For a number of years, Dvořák received support, mentorship, and inspiration from Brahms, who was seven years his senior. The *Piano Trio in F minor* has been called Dvořák's most "Brahmsian" work. Yet both composers worked contemporaneously, turning out trios, piano, and string quartets neck and neck. It is possible that influence passed in both directions and that they simply shared a musical culture of time and place, the Viennese style being a hybrid of Austrian, Hungarian, and Bohemian origins since Haydn's early years. Regardless, Dvořák's third piano trio is a magnificent work, itself a hybrid of "European" classicism, potent arch-Romanticism, Slavic nationalism as well as the unique musical personality of Dvořák himself.

The first movement Allegro is an epic sonata, elegiac with its complexity of moods, its stages of realization from shock and restless agony to bright, aching nostalgia and supplication. Fleeting moments of shining triumph are soon swallowed by despair. The dark themes are strongly Slavic with their rhythms and melodic intervals, while the bright ones are lyrical, more universal in their haunting simplicity. As elsewhere in the trio, the multitude of themes is unified by a variety of underlying kindred relationships suggesting a process of thematic variation, another technique ascribed particularly to Brahms and Liszt.

The Allegretto grazioso is the scherzo, a masterful construction like nearly all of Dvořák's chamber dance movements. Written in 2/4 with heavy accents and strong cross-rhythms created by subdividing the pulse into both two's and three's (piano against strings), this is one of Dvořák's many examples of the furiant, a bold and fiery Bohemian dance with a pronounced Slavic character. The first part of the scherzo form normally comprises two reprises, each repeated. Dvořák uses no repeats; instead, he through-composes each section to emulate the effect of a repeat while delicately lacing the apparent recurrence with deliciously subtle variation.

The slow movement is the true heart of the trio as the wild, conflicted energies of the first two movements settle into an elegy of supreme grace and radiant affection, perhaps a sensitive man tenderly recalling his departed mother without struggle or remorse, simply love. Dvořák blends majesty and sorrow, exquisitely long and flowing sequences with nursery rhymes, swells of nostalgia sinking again into wistful but reverent sadness. A soaring melody in the violin rises like a haunting swan song, a disembodied spirit carried aloft by an angel to a forever inaccessible oblivion. This Adagio is surely some kind of final goodbye in mood if not literally in a programmatic sense.



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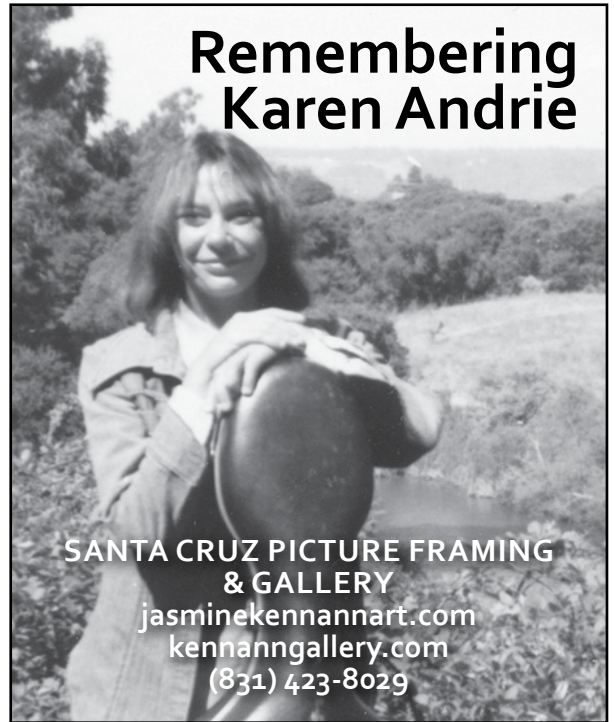
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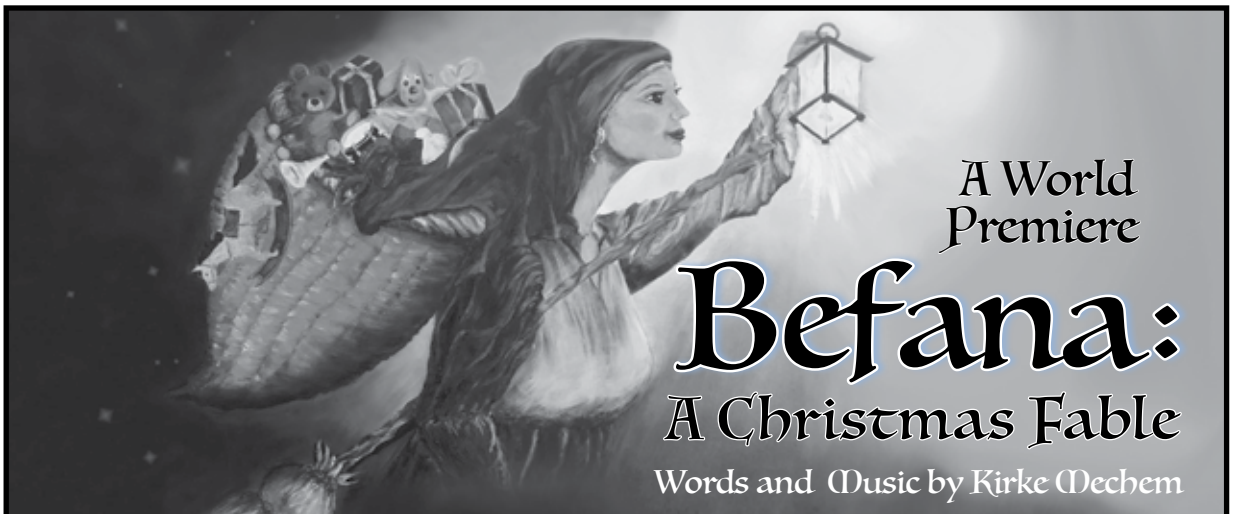


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The finale begins with a powerful return of energetic darkness, a combination of sonata and rondo forms with the rhythmic ferocity of the furiant and its thematic variation as a softer, swaying waltz in a conflicted swirl that some have likened to Brahms' famous "Gypsy" finale from his *Piano Quartet in G minor* written many years earlier. Back are the heavy textures, the daunting power of the galvanized piano trio, and a driving forward momentum broken only fleetingly by feeble pleas. But the ending holds a few surprises: a sudden recall of the first movement's opening theme and a recasting of the rondo's sharp refrain into yet another lovely variation recalling the sublime slow movement. As if the spell of the entire trio had somehow broken, the theme permutes one last time into a dashing flourish, vibrant in F Major with a fresh vitality finally and cathartically restored.

Kai Christiansen and Music at Kohl Mansion
edited by Jeff Gallagher



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