

*El amor brujo*

Manuel de Falla

*Born in Cadiz, November 23, 1876; died in Alta Gracia, Córdoba province, Argentina, November 14, 1946*

Falla was frustrated with Spanish institutions when the promised production of his opera *La vida breve* did not materialize, so he left for Paris in 1907. There he formed friendships with Debussy, Dukas, and Ravel that greatly influenced his career and his music. Forced to return to Spain in 1914 with the outbreak of World War I, the more-experienced Falla found greater success in his homeland. *La vida breve* and his *Siete canciones populares españolas* were soon performed in Madrid to great acclaim.

In 1914 and early 1915 Falla toured Spain with theatrical impresario Gregorio Martínez Sierra and his wife María Lejárraga, for whom he had written some incidental music. During their collaboration Martínez persuaded Falla to write a short entertainment for legendary Gypsy singer and dancer Pastora Imperio—the result was *El amor brujo* (Love the Magician). The composer was particularly attracted by the Andalusian songs sung to him by Pastora's mother, Rosario la Mejorana, which inspired many of his own original melodies for the work. The wonderful stories she told contributed to the plot of what became a sung ballet, the scenario of which is now thought to have been written by María rather than Gregorio.

Contrary to his normal slow-paced work habits, Falla completed *El amor brujo* in the relatively short space of four months. The first performance took place on April 15, 1915, in Madrid, sung and danced by Pastora in the lead role, with members of her family taking other roles and Moreno Ballesteros conducting the small eight-piece ensemble. Some critics chastised Falla's music for failing to sound Spanish enough because of his "obsession with the modern French school," while others thought it colorfully orchestrated and likely to become world

famous.

Falla revised and expanded the score for large orchestra, retaining the atmospheric piano part but adding no typically Spanish-sounding percussion, and this version was first performed unstaged on March 28, 1916, by the Orquesta Filharmónica, conducted by Bartolomé Pérez-Casas. The first staged performance of the revised version did not take place until May 22, 1925, in Paris, danced by the electrifying Antonia Mercé, “La Argentina,” and the famous Spanish dancer Escudero, conducted by the composer. In a fascinating cross section of history, Stravinsky’s *Histoire du soldat* also premiered on that program but met with failure, while *El amor brujo* was the hit of the evening.

The story of *El amor brujo* involves the beautiful Gypsy Candelas who is so haunted by the spirit of her jealous dead lover—despite his brutish and unfaithful nature—that she cannot accept the wooing of her new admirer Carmelo. The Introduction briefly and boldly suggests the fury of the jealous lover who will not release her. The mysterious atmosphere of the Gypsy cave in the dark of night (represented by mysterious horn, bassoon, and clarinet utterances over agitated strings) makes for wonderful contrast. The spirit of her former lover appears to her (in a muted but insistent trumpet call) and she reacts in the rhythmically patterned, escalating Dance of Terror.

Following Gypsy lore, Candelas draws a magic circle to exorcize the spirit (The Magic Circle: Romance of the Fisherman) and midnight quietly arrives as she begins her spells. She launches into the thrilling Ritual Fire Dance, which alternately wails and pounds but fails to exorcize the ghost. The free-flowing oboe and flute solos in an interlude (titled Scene) suggest that the spirit lingers.

Carmelo realizes that if they can prey on the dead man’s unfaithful tendencies by having

him captivated by the enchanting Lucía, then he and Candelas will be free to share the kiss that will defeat the evil spirit forever. A willing accomplice, Lucía dances the seductive Pantomime—the Cadiz tango movement that Falla had originally intended for his *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*—which saps the spirit’s power. The composer reveals this musically by contrasting the forceful presentation of the spirit’s theme at the outset with its faint reappearances later in the movement. The Dance of the Game of Love completes the exorcism, coming to a great climax as Candelas denounces her former lover (English horn in the instrumental version). The plan has succeeded—Carmelo and Candelas can now kiss in peace, and all can rejoice in the power of love as morning bells peal.

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