The Music Of Spain: Influence Of The Guitar And The Piano On Spanish Music

Throughout the centuries, music has been composed and performed in Spain. During the ‘Siglo de Oro’ (Golden age) of 1500-1700, the vihuela (a predecessor to the guitar) began to take a larger role in the music of the time. From then on, the guitar, and its earlier forms had an integral role in the music-making of Spain all the way through to its peak in the late 19th century. This raises the question; how did the guitar influence composition for instruments such as harpsichord and piano in Spain. To determine this, one can look into the works of Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757), Enrique Granados (1867-1916) and Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909).

Giuseppe Domenico Scarlatti was an Italian harpsichordist and composer who was born in Naples.[footnoteRef:1] Whilst not born in Spain, Scarlatti wrote many works with Spanish elements as he worked in the courts of Seville and Madrid from 1729 until his death in 1757[footnoteRef:2]. In ‘A History Of Spanish Piano Music’, Linton Powell poses that though not Spanish-born; Scarlatti’s compositions have influenced most Spanish keyboard composers who followed including Enrique Granados and Isaac Albéniz.[footnoteRef:3] This makes Scarlatti’s compositions a good starting point in showing the influence guitar has had on compositions made in Spain. [1: Malcolm Boyd and Roberto Pagano, 'Scarlatti, (Giuseppe) Domenico', Oxford Music Online, 2001] [2: Peter Manuel, 'From Scarlatti To “Guantanamera”: Dual Tonicity In Spanish And Latin American Musics', Journal Of The American Musicological Society 55, no. 2 (2002). 314] [3: Linton Powell, A History Of Spanish Piano Music Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980. 3]

During his time in Spain, particularly Seville in Andalusia, Scarlatti “drew extensively upon folk songs and dances, urban popular music, and the exuberant Spanish rhythms” for his compositions.[footnoteRef:4] Features of these folk songs and dances such as the Fandango include many guitarlike elements such as pedal points, triple metres and strum like patterns.[footnoteRef:5] To achieve the sense of a guitar strumming in his sonatas, Scarlatti uses chords with quick repetition.[footnoteRef:6] Scarlatti also makes use of repeated bass figures and accented dissonances to further evoke the percussive effects of the guitar.[footnoteRef:7]This is a direct way the guitar has influenced Scarlatti’s works. [4: Yoon Soo Cho, 'The Spanish Guitar Influence On The Piano Music Of Isaac Albéniz And Enrique Granados' DMA Treatise, The University of Texas at Austin, 2006. 7] [5: Manuel, 314] [6: Cho, 7] [7: Ibid.]

In his journal “From Scarlatti To “Guantanamera…”, Peter Manuel draws the similarities between the harmonic structure of Scarlatti’s Fandango based keyboard sonatas (e.g. Sonata K.492), with that of the Fandangos of Spanish guitarist Santiago de Murcia (1673-1739).[footnoteRef:8] One particular harmonic feature that exists in both composers works, is the final cadence ending on the dominant (i.e. I-V), rather than a usual perfect cadence (V-I) for pieces of the baroque period. Manuel mentions, however, that is only the case if one analyses this piece in a tonal sense.[footnoteRef:9] He states, “these fandangos must be understood in the context of other forms of Spanish and especially Andalusian music-including the Andalusian fandango forms that employ the distinct … Phrygian modal harmony.”[footnoteRef:10] This is evidence that through the forms of Spanish folk music of the

time, guitar influenced the compositions of Scarlatti during his time in the courts of Spain. [8: Ibid. 315] [9: Ibid. 318] [10: Ibid.]

A composer that was influenced by Scarlatti and, in turn, the guitar, was Catalan pianist Enrique Granados (1867-1916). Following lessons from various pianists such as Joan Baptista Pujol (1835-1898) in 1880, Granados began to also learn composition and harmony with Felipe Pedrell (1841-1922).[footnoteRef:11] Walter Clark states that “Pedrell firmly believed that Spanish composers should use the musical heritage of their own country, [particularly folklore and popular styles], as a basis for their concert music”.[footnoteRef:12] This eventually led to the creation of Granados’ set of twelve pieces for solo piano called Danzas espanolas (Spanish Dances), in 1890.[footnoteRef:13] Clark mentions that this composition was well received with leading musicians such as Jules Massenet, Camille Saint-Saëns and Edvard Grieg finding the originality “outstanding”.[footnoteRef:14] Each of the twelve pieces, as the name suggests, is based on a Spanish dance or region.[footnoteRef:15]Whilst influences of the guitar can be found throughout the twelve dances, it is in Dance No. 5, where it is most notable. [11: Mark Larrad, 'Granados (Y Campiña), Enrique', Oxford Music Online, 2001] [12: Walter Aaron Clark, Enrique Granados New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 28] [13: Clark, 2011. 30] [14: Ibid.] [15: Larrard, 2001]

Dance number five is titled Andaluza.[footnoteRef:16] Clark writes, “No. 5 is without a doubt the most popular and well-known numbers in this collection, even in [Granados’] entire output”.[footnoteRef:17] Clark declares that this popularity is likely due to Andaluza becoming a “staple in the guitar repertoire”.[footnoteRef:18] With a form of ABA, Dance No.5’s section A has the most evident “guitar flavour” with Yoon Soo Cho stating [16: Ibid.] [17: Clark, 2011. 33] [18: Ibid.]

“The narrow range of the melody is a characteristic of guitar music. If the melody were to be played on the guitar, it could be played on one string so that the melody has a legato effect. The simple melody, not dry or monotonous but full of expression and elegance, with the accompaniment strumming the consistently-repeated notes or chords, is typical of guitar-writing”.[footnoteRef:19] [19: Cho, 2006. 98]

This why Dance No. 5 is also effectively performed on guitar.

Clark believes that Andaluza creates a scene in which an Andalusian performer is accompanied by a guitar. He explains that the syncopations give a sense of excitement and the contour of the melody evokes a flamenco singer (figure 1).[footnoteRef:20] With the guitar being an essential part of Flamenco, this is a testament to the impact of the guitar on the work. This impact is further shown as though it is a piano composition, Spanish Dance No. 5 Andaluza translates well when transcribed and performed on guitar due to similar techniques in the style of the melody and accompaniment. [20: Clark, 2011. 34]

Figure 1: Enrique Granados, 'Danzas Españolas No. 5' (mm 3-5)[footnoteRef:21] [21: Ibid.]

Another composer influenced by the guitar was Spanish pianist Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909). A contemporary of Granados, Albéniz also studied with Felipe Pedrell.[footnoteRef:22] Pedrell, as a Spanish music nationalist, recommended Albéniz compose in a Spanish style, specifically relating to folk music.[footnoteRef:23] Cho explains that this is the main reason for Albéniz’s change in compositional style in 1885.[footnoteRef:24] In the context of Spanish folk music, the

guitar has great importance, for this reason, there are elements of guitar composition that impact the piano works of Albéniz.[footnoteRef:25] In his study of Albéniz's compositions, Domantas Milius states that the most distinctive guitar playing techniques emulated in Albéniz's works are 'Punteado' (plucking) and 'Rasgueado'(strumming).[footnoteRef:26] This can be seen in Albéniz's El Puerto (From Iberia suite, 1905-1909), through the alternating chords of both hands emulating the strummed chord of a guitar(Figure 2).[footnoteRef:27] [22: Frances Barulich, 'Albéniz, Isaac', Oxford Music Online, 2001] [23: Cho, 2006. 46] [24: Ibid.] [25: Domantas Milius, 'Isaac Albéniz' - Musical work Asturias in the context of Spanish piano music evolution', Spaces Of Creation 24, no. 14 (2016): 6-19.] [26: Milius, 2016. 15] [27: Ibid.]

Figure 2: Isaac Albéniz 'El Puerto' from 'Iberia'(1905-1909) mm. 43-44[footnoteRef:28] [28: Ibid. 8]

Another work of Albéniz that has aspects of guitar composition is his 1886 composition, Suite Espanola (Spanish suite). Originally a four-piece suite, the full eight-piece version that exists today was posthumously published by German publisher Hoffmeister in 1911.[footnoteRef:29] Each piece in the suite was given the name of the Spanish region it intends to evoke.[footnoteRef:30] The most famous movement, now known as Asturias (Leyenada) employs many guitar related effects. The result, however, relates more to the Andalusian style than that of Asturias.[footnoteRef:31] Milius states that "this misunderstanding was due to the publisher's unawareness of the features of Spanish geography and national cultural music".[footnoteRef:32] Composed after studying with Pedrell, Asturias features the folk idioms of music that also exist in the guitar and flamenco tradition of Andalusia. In a similar way to Spanish dance No.5 by Granados, Asturias uses aspects of composition that are idiomatic enough to the guitar that transcriptions are just as well known, if not better, than the original piano version.[footnoteRef:33] The general form of the work is ABA with a coda. The A section consists of a motoric twelve beat cycle which relies on a pedal note.[footnoteRef:34] This links to guitar music in two ways: First the pedal note acts much like an open string would. This combined with the twelve-beat cycle links the piece to the flamenco form known as 'Solea'.[footnoteRef:35] As this cycle continues rolled chords are added to evoke a 'rasgueado' (Figure 3). This is clear evidence of the influence of guitar on the composition of Albéniz. [29: Barulich, 2001] [30: Ibid.] [31: Milius, 2016.16] [32: Ibid. 17] [33: Cho, 2006. 73] [34: Ibid. 75] [35: Ibid.]

Figure 3: Albéniz, 'Asturias (Leyenda)' from 'Suite Española' mm. 33-36[footnoteRef:36] [36: Ibid. 76]

With the guitar playing a prominent role in the music-making in Spain, it is evident it had an impact on other forms of music, particularly works for piano and harpsichord. This influence can be seen in the harmonic structure of Domenico Scarlatti's Sonatas; the accompaniment style chords of Enrique Granados' Danzas espanolas and the guitar-like writing of Isaac Albéniz's Suite Espanola. Felipe Pedrell's nationalist ideas of looking to folk traditions for Spanish music-making have also played a large part in the effect of guitar, as regional traditions, such as Flamenco in Andalusia, also rely on its versatility. Considering these influences, one can see the power guitar has over Spanish music.

References

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