

## CHAPTER 4

### SHORT BIOGRAPHY AND “LA VIHUELA Y LOS VIHUELISTAS EN EL SIGLO XVI”

#### Biography of Joaquín Rodrigo: 1901-1936

##### Early Childhood Years

Joaquín Rodrigo Vidre was born on 22 November 1901 in Sagunto, in the Valencian province of Spain. The following inscription appears above the door of his birth home, written on a bronze plaque:

In this house was born, on 22 November, St. Cecilia Day, the Patron Saint of Music, the genial composer Joaquín Rodrigo. Sagunto, with pride and love, dedicates this remembrance to its favorite son on 30 July 1953.<sup>1</sup>

Born to Vicente Rodrigo Peirats and Juana Vidre Ribelles, Joaquín lived in Sagunto with nine siblings and step-siblings.<sup>2</sup> At age three Joaquín contracted diphtheria, resulting in blindness.<sup>3</sup> Although eye surgery the following year enabled him to see some light and distinguish colors, Joaquín’s eyesight gradually deteriorated into a complete loss of vision by his late forties.

Joaquín Rodrigo was exposed to music at an early age and maintained a high interest in music. Because of his handicap, Rodrigo entered the *Colegio de Ciegos* (School for the Blind) in Valencia at age seven. Apart from elementary studies, he also studied piano. As a child, he would often attend musical and theatrical performances at

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<sup>1</sup> Vicente Vayá Pla, *Joaquín Rodrigo: su vida y su obra* (Madrid: Real Musical, 1977), p. 17. Translated by the present author. The Spanish inscription reads: “En esta casa nació el 22 de Noviembre de 1901, festividad de Santa Cecilia, patrona de los músicos, el genial compositor Joaquín Rodrigo. Sagunto, con orgullo y cariño, dedica este recuerdo a su hijo predilecto 30 de Julio de 1953.”

<sup>2</sup> Pla, p. 18. Joaquín’s father had four children from a previous marriage and had five more children with Juana Vidre.

<sup>3</sup> Pla, p. 19. Fortunately for Joaquín, his blindness was his only handicap as a result of contracting the disease, which was an epidemic that had spread throughout Sagunto in 1903. Other children in Sagunto who contracted diphtheria lost their lives.

the local theater, accompanied by friends and family.<sup>4</sup>

### **Early Musical Education**

At age sixteen, Rodrigo's formal instruction in music began at the Valencia Conservatoire, even though he was not officially enrolled at the institution. He studied harmony and composition with Francisco Antich, and also became a close associate to two other musicians, Enrique Gomá and Eduardo López Chávarri, professors who allowed Rodrigo to audit their classes.

Because Rodrigo was unable to perform duties that required eyesight, his father hired Rafael Ibañez to attend to Rodrigo's needs. Ten years Rodrigo's senior, Ibañez assisted Rodrigo, read books to him about philosophy, novels, articles, and monographs on diverse subjects, and copied Rodrigo's first musical works. Ibañez was instrumental in keeping Rodrigo updated on all current events. Ibañez would remain by Rodrigo's side through Rodrigo's travels to Paris and until Rodrigo married in 1933.<sup>5</sup>

From the early to mid 1920s, Rodrigo composed several compositions for small musical ensembles, for a variety of musical media. His first compositions date from 1923, beginning with *Dos Esbozos* (Two sketches) for violin and piano, followed by the *Suite Para Piano*, *Cançoneta* for violin and string orchestra, and *Ave Maria* for voice and organ. In that same year, Rodrigo composed his first work for large orchestra, *Juglares* (Jongleurs), which was premiered by the Orquesta Sinfónica de Valencia in 1924.<sup>6</sup> Well received and triumphant with *Juglares*, the ambitious and confident Rodrigo entered the Concurso Nacional de Composición--a national composition competition--in 1925, presenting his *Cinco Piezas Infantiles* (Five Children's Pieces). He received an honorable mention for the composition, which was premiered two years later.<sup>7</sup>

In 1926 Rodrigo produced the compositions that brought him early fame and respect among composers. The first of these was the *Preludio al Gallo Mañanero* (The

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<sup>4</sup> According to Pla, Rodrigo's nurse stated that it was impossible to start a conversation with Rodrigo because he was so engaged once the performance began. She also claimed that he would constantly ask her if she had bought tickets for the following event. The performances Rodrigo attended were performed at the *Apolo* Theater, which no longer exists. Pla, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Pla, p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> Rodrigo dedicated this work to Chávarri and Gomá, Pla, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> First prize went to Ernesto Halffter's *Sinfonietta* (1925). Pla, p. 30.

Prelude to the Dawn Cockerel) for solo piano. A couple of years later while Rodrigo was studying in Paris, a portion of this difficult piece was later published in a July 1928 issue of *Le Monde Musical* in which the following note appeared:

With this fragment we give an example of the talent of this notable musician, a pupil of Paul Dukas at the Ecole Normale de Musique, who will soon prove himself the successor of Albéniz and of Manuel de Falla, although in his work the influence of folk melodies is not as great as in his illustrious compatriots.<sup>8</sup>

The second piece is his first published composition for solo guitar *Zarabanda Lejana* (Distant Sarabande). This piece was dedicated to the *vihuela* of Luis Milán. Although Milán never composed a *sarabande*, this dedication is an early example of the interests Rodrigo had in composers and compositions of the past.

As Rodrigo's wife, Victoria Kamhi de Rodrigo, stated, these two compositions were the key to her husband's early success. In 1927 during a visit to Paris in which Manuel de Falla was made a member of the elite *Légion d'Honneur*, a ceremony was organized in celebration of his membership and several pieces by Falla and other Spanish composers were scheduled for performance. At the ceremony, Rodrigo played his *Preludio al Gallo Mañanero* and *Zarabanda Lejana* on harpsichord.<sup>9</sup>

### **In Paris with Paul Dukas**

In 1927 Rodrigo began his studies in composition with Paul Dukas at the *Ecole Normale de Musique* in Paris. In the following five years, Rodrigo would create more friendships and business associates than compositions. It was during this time that he met and worked with the finer Spanish and French composers and musicians. It was also during this time that he met his wife and life-long partner, Victoria Kamhi.

After courting for four years, Rodrigo married Kamhi in 1933. She assisted him

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<sup>8</sup> Victoria Kamhi de Rodrigo, *Hand in Hand with Joaquín Rodrigo: My life at the Maestro's side*, translated by Ellen Wilkerson (Pittsburgh: Latin American Literary Review Press, 1992), p. 61.

<sup>9</sup> Kamhi, p. 67-8. Although the original plan was to perform pieces only by Falla, Falla requested that the program include pieces by other Spanish composers, such as Ernesto Halffter and Joaquín Turina. Kamhi claimed that the ceremony was performed before the "French intelligentsia" and was a great success for her husband, who soon received several contracts to publish for the Maison Eschig and the Maison Rouart & Lerolle publication companies.

in most professional matters similar to the way that Ibañez assisted him. An excellent pianist, she was also instrumental in the creation, interpretation, and copying of his compositions.<sup>10</sup> She helped him greatly during negotiations by working as his translator.<sup>11</sup> Clearly Kamhi's support of her husband's career helped him greatly in achieving worldwide fame and popularity.

The couple moved to Valencia after he finished his studies in Paris. While Rodrigo composed few works compositions between 1932 and 1935, he did produce two fine compositions in 1934, *Cantico de la Esposa* (Canticle of the wife) and *Per la Flor del Lliri Blau* (The Blue Lily). The former composition is a song with words by St. John of the Cross; the latter composition--a large-scale symphonic poem for orchestra based on the folklore of a Valencian king--won him a *Círculo de Bella Artes* prize in Valencia.

In 1934 Rodrigo and his wife decided that it would be a good idea for him to proceed with his studies in music. Rodrigo applied for the *Conde de Cartagena* scholarship--a scholarship offered by the *Real Academia de Bellas Artes* (Royal Academy of Fine Arts) every two years to musicians, painters, sculptors, and other artists. The couple immediately began a campaign in order to win the scholarship. They lobbied for votes from the more popular Spanish composers and musicians. Much to the couple's dismay, they heard, while gathering with Rodrigo's delegates in a café, that a violinist patronized by one of Rodrigo's supporters would probably land the scholarship. According to Kamhi, the composer Enrique Fernández Arbós (1863-1939) told Rodrigo that he had to vote for his student violinist; however, he would vote for Rodrigo, if Rodrigo were to apply for the scholarship at another time.<sup>12</sup>

Strangely enough, Kamhi wrote a letter to Enrique Arbós's wife, Berenjela, asking her if there were any way Berenjela could help Rodrigo. While in a concert two days later, Berenjela told Rodrigo and Kamhi that he should ask for Manuel de Falla's support. The couple wrote a letter asking for his help in Rodrigo's obtaining of the scholarship. Not long after, Falla sent a letter to the Count of Romanones, director of the Academy, urging him to vote for Rodrigo and that the Count exert his influence over

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<sup>10</sup> Kamhi wrote many lyrics to his songs.

<sup>11</sup> Kamhi was fluent in five languages including Spanish, English, French, German, and Hebrew.

<sup>12</sup> Kamhi, p. 83.

others on the board. Rodrigo received the scholarship. However, Falla did not follow through on his promise to give a speech in support of Rodrigo's membership to the Academy.<sup>13</sup> In March 1935, Rodrigo and his wife left for Paris.

### **Back to Paris: Musicological studies at the Sorbonne**

While in Paris, Rodrigo studied several different subjects in several institutions throughout the city. He attended courses at the *Instituto de Estudios Hispánicos de la Universidad de Paris* (Institute of Hispanic Studies at the University of Paris); he also studied the history of opera from Monteverdi to Lully and Rameau at the National Conservatory with the music history professor, Maurice Emmanuel; Rodrigo also attended music history courses focusing on the music of Orlando de Lassus taught by André Pirro at the Sorbonne. Although Dukas died in 1935, Rodrigo was able to attend a few of his composition courses. Kamhi also enrolled in classes given at the same institutions. She stated that, although the "topic [of Lassus] was somewhat arid for nonprofessionals . . . they seemed extremely interesting, and it amazed me that there were only four of us in the class."<sup>14</sup> The Rodrigos were taking advantage of their time in Paris by receiving all the education they could afford.

Clearly Rodrigo developed a proclivity for the academics of music during this time, absorbing all that he could about musicology and music history. In furthering his interests in musicology, the couple visited several places in Austria in 1935, serving as correspondents for the Summer Festivals held in that country. During this time Rodrigo met several festival coordinators and representatives who introduced him to German and Austrian musicology.<sup>15</sup>

Because the *Conde de Cartagena* is only a one-year scholarship, Rodrigo reapplied for it in 1936. Fortunately for Rodrigo, the cultural attaché and professor, Aurelio Viñas, a person with whom the Rodrigos developed a close friendship when they met in March 1935, interceded, providing a sound recommendation in favor of Rodrigo obtaining the scholarship which he received for one more year.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Kamhi, p. 83; Pla, p. 49.

<sup>14</sup> Kamhi, p. 87.

<sup>15</sup> Kamhi, pp. 88-9.

<sup>16</sup> Kamhi, p. 91. Although the scholarship is offered every two years, as stated above, a recipient may

In the spring of 1936, Viñas persuaded Rodrigo to write a paper and present that paper at a conference held at the Institute of Hispanic Studies in Paris in May of that year. Rodrigo wrote his unpublished work entitled “La Vihuela y los Vihuelistas en el Siglo XVI” (The *vihuela* and vihuelists in the sixteenth century) for this conference. The paper focuses on the importance of the *vihuela da mano* and the vihuelist composers during the sixteenth century. Furthermore, the paper was presented at the 400th anniversary celebration of the publication of Luis Milán’s *El Maestro*. It is evident that Rodrigo was now focusing his interests in Spanish musicology.

Additionally, Rodrigo had befriended the Catalanian guitarist and composer, Emilio Pujol (1886-1980), during Rodrigo’s first visit to Paris in 1927.<sup>17</sup> Pujol and Rodrigo collaborated in 1936 during the conference in which Rodrigo’s paper was presented.<sup>18</sup> Pujol performed pieces by Milán and other vihuelist composers on the vihuela as musical examples to Rodrigo’s text.

Pujol also had interests in Spanish musicology. After touring and performing extensively until the 1920s, he began transcribing and arranging works, nearly 300 in all, which were published in the *Bibliothèque de Musique Ancienne et Moderne*.<sup>19</sup> The compositions transcribed include Gaspar Sanz’s *Canarios* and *Españoleta*, both of which were quoted and orchestrated in Rodrigo’s *Fantasia para un Gentilhombre*. Pujol became professor of vihuela at Barcelona Conservatory in 1945 and taught frequently at Lisbon Conservatory (1946-9) and the Chigiana Academy in Siena (1953-63).<sup>20</sup>

Between 1936 and 1939 Rodrigo presented this paper in many conferences throughout Europe, including France, Austria, and Switzerland at the Hispano-Swiss Society of Zurich.<sup>21</sup> In Switzerland, the President of the Society invited Rodrigo to give a lecture and a performance in the Tonhalle. Rodrigo obliged and read his article while his wife performed the short musical examples on the piano. Among distinguished

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reapply for an extra year.

<sup>17</sup> Vayá Pla, p. 36.

<sup>18</sup> Vayá Pla, p. 36.

<sup>19</sup> The transcriptions and arrangements were published in Paris in 1927, Max Eschig Publications; Thomas F. Heck with Ron Purcell, “Emilio Pujol,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians II*, edited by Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), xx, 594-5.

<sup>20</sup> Heck, p. 595.

<sup>21</sup> Vayá Pla, p. 76.

guests and musicians, the President of the Swiss Republic attended the performance.<sup>22</sup>

In 1951 Rodrigo was invited to present the same *vihuela* paper in London. Accompanied by his wife, she played a few pieces by Renaissance composers that Rodrigo had transcribed and compiled as a suite for piano in 1938. The suite is titled *Cinco Piezas del Siglo XVI*. Each of the five pieces--four of which were originally for *vihuela*--was written by four Spanish Renaissance composers: one piece each by Antonio de Cabezón, Enríquez de Valderrábano, Alonso Mudarra, and two pieces by Luis de Milán. Rodrigo's article discusses the lives and works of the last three composers.

Rodrigo condensed forty years of *vihuela* treatises into five pages. While this paper may not be acceptable by today's musicological standards, Rodrigo's article brings attention to the importance of these treatises and composers and their place in Spanish musical history.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Rodrigo made it clear that he, along with Pujol, found value in researching the *vihuela* and the context in which it existed.

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<sup>22</sup> Kamhi, p. 93.

<sup>23</sup> All the names and spellings as written by Rodrigo are translated in the same manner. Corrections are given below in the analysis of the translation.