

# Igor Stravinsky, Spanish Catholicism and *Generalísimo* Franco

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Igor Stravinsky's numerous visits to Spain between 1916 and 1955 coincided with a turbulent period in Spanish history and the marked politicisation of culture. In the aftermath of the disastrous Spanish-American war of 1898, debates on identity extended to the field of music and these intensified during the course of the next forty years. While Stravinsky's Russian and neoclassical styles were emulated by liberal and pro-Republican Spanish musicians throughout the 1920s and 1930s, his political and religious pronouncements increasingly struck a chord with conservatives and Right-wing nationalists. For the latter group Stravinsky's religious conviction became the prism through which his output was interpreted. This paper will explore changing Spanish perceptions of Stravinsky's music in response to the composer's evolving style and public declarations. Examination of the cultural politics surrounding Stravinsky's closest Spanish colleague Manuel de Falla will also serve to contextualise these interpretations.

Stravinsky's first encounter with Spain in 1916 was a memorable one, as much for the exotic impressions afforded by the country as for the exhilaration of his first extra-marital affair—with Lydia Lopokova.<sup>1</sup> He perceived many similarities between Russia and Spain which distanced them from the monotonous equality of much of Europe. Chief among these common traits were the prevalence of folk characteristics: vivid ornamental colours, the popular fairs, and the expression of religiosity—he even went so far as to compare the plains of Castile with the Russian steppes.<sup>2</sup> Stravinsky emphasised Spain's Otherness by privileging the Oriental substratum which tied it to Russia, and he found this influence present in various elements of flamenco music and certain Russian songs.<sup>3</sup>

Manuel de Falla had already begun to shape Stravinsky reception in Spain in 1916 by outlining his role as a nationalist and musical revolutionary, as well as referring to the concept of 'pure music' in relation to his scores.<sup>4</sup> In his first interview in Spain in 1921,<sup>5</sup> Stravinsky was

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<sup>1</sup> Igor Stravinsky, *An Autobiography* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1975) 62 [Originally published in French as *Chroniques de ma vie* (Paris, 1935)]; Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* (London: Hutchinson, 1979) 141–43.

<sup>2</sup> Manuel de Falla, 'Rusia en España,' unpublished notes, Archivo Manuel de Falla, Granada (hereafter, AMF).

<sup>3</sup> Igor Stravinsky published 'Les espagnoles aux ballets russes,' *Comoedia* 15 May 1921.

<sup>4</sup> Manuel de Falla, 'El gran músico de nuestro tiempo, Igor Stravinsky,' *Tribuna* 5 June 1916.

<sup>5</sup> P. Victory, 'Una conversación con Strawinsky,' *La voz* 21 March 1921.

eager to present himself less as a primitivist revolutionary and more as an artisan working with 'acoustic sensations' who was reacting against Romantic German formal and philosophical ideals. While still espousing the importance of folk traditions, which he no longer presented in such exotic terms, in contemporary remarks Stravinsky went so far as to define flamenco as an essentially classical art of composition.<sup>6</sup> In the wake of Stravinsky's 1921 visit the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset made his first remarks concerning the objective nature of Stravinsky's music.

This music is a distant object perfectly located outside of ourselves ... We enjoy new music by contemplating externally ... It is the object that interests us, not the resonance it creates within us.<sup>7</sup>

This interpretation of Stravinsky's music and the language of his early neoclassical works resonated with Falla and Spain's foremost modernist critic, Adolfo Salazar. Their promotion of Stravinsky's music in the 1920s shaped the aesthetic outlook and style of the younger composers of the Generation of 1927,<sup>8</sup> and especially Madrid's *Grupo de ocho* [Group of Eight], most of whom became actively involved in the cultural programs of the Left-wing governments of the Second Republic in the 1930s. Rodolfo Halffter, one of the leading figures of this group, claimed that through Falla and the Neoclassical ideals reflected in his music the Generation of 1927 found the means to 'renew Spanish musical language and to tie ourselves to the currents of European thought.'<sup>9</sup> These musicians were among Stravinsky's foremost supporters throughout the 1920s and with the politicisation of the cultural sphere their music was principally embraced by liberal and pro-Republican sympathisers and organisations. These included the Sociedad Nacional de Música, the Ateneo de Madrid and new liberal national dailies like *El Sol*. This also seemed to be the natural constituency for Stravinsky's post-war music, which had often received cool and even hostile responses in Spain during the 1920s, especially from the bourgeois audiences of Barcelona's opera house, the Liceo.<sup>10</sup>

Wary of being labeled, Stravinsky in his 1924 interview with the Spanish monarchist paper *ABC* stated he did not want to 'wear a medal on my chest with the inscription "I am an objective musician".'<sup>11</sup> He did, however, claim to be more objective than subjective and more constructive than lyrical. By this stage Stravinsky presented himself as a classicist who was openly rejecting Oriental elements in Russian kuchkist scores as music wearing kaftans. In 1928 he extended the notion of a 'well-understood classicism' to include earlier works like *Petrushka*, and insisted that he did not see himself as a 'modern.'<sup>12</sup> Stravinsky thus attempted to reconstruct his artistic

<sup>6</sup> Stravinsky, 'Les espagnoles aux Ballets Russes.'

<sup>7</sup> José Ortega y Gasset, 'La música nueva,' *El Sol* March 1921. All translations are by the author unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>8</sup> Although this denomination is more frequently employed to denote the generation of authors, it has become increasingly common to extend its employment to the field of music. The principal members of this generation in music were Madrid's *Grupo de ocho*: Salvador Bacarisse, Julián Bautista, Rosa García Ascot, Ernesto and Rodolfo Halffter, Gustavo Pittaluga and Fernando Remacha. Other contemporary figures, like Barcelona's Roberto Gerhard, Manuel Blancafort and Eduardo Toldrá are also usually included in this classification. (Some authors also include composers like Federico Mompou and Joaquín Rodrigo.)

<sup>9</sup> Rodolfo Halffter, 'Manuel de Falla,' reproduced in Antonio Iglesias, *Rodolfo Halffter* (Madrid: Alpuerto, 1978).

<sup>10</sup> This was especially the case during his appearances in Barcelona in March 1924 and March / April 1925.

<sup>11</sup> 'Un gran compositor: Igor Strawinsky y la música moderna,' *ABC* [Madrid] 25 March 1924.

<sup>12</sup> J. Ferran i Mayoral, 'Conversant amb Strawinsky,' *La veu de Catalunya* 25 March 1928.

persona as a moderate at a time when he was still attracting critical jibes of musical anarchy. It was in this context that religion became a conduit for conservative acceptance and a prism through which his music was interpreted, both by critics and even Stravinsky himself.

From his first visit to Spain Stravinsky had been impressed by the mysticism and artistic legacy of its Catholicism; marveling at El Escorial (The monastery/palace of Phillip II) and the austerity of the icons at the Cathedral of Segovia.<sup>13</sup> Perceptions of the religiosity of the people were reinforced through his contacts with Falla, who he claimed had the most unpitiably religious nature he had ever known,<sup>14</sup> and from the 1920s they headed their letters to each other with the word 'PAX.' By 1928, two years after Stravinsky had rejoined the Russian Orthodox Church, Ferran i Mayorall of *La veu de Catalunya* highlighted Stravinsky's well-known religiosity in an interview with the composer.<sup>15</sup> Stravinsky expounded on his intellectual and spiritual affinity with St Thomas Aquinas, and a growing interest in the Spanish mystics (St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila). He also commented on his friendship with Jacques Maritain, the great French Scholastic who was well known to Spanish audiences. It was during his next visit to Spain in 1933 that conservative audiences and Right-wing critics became fully reconciled with Stravinsky's music and this was largely due to the reception of the *Symphony of Psalms*. Several critics writing in the Right-wing press underlined the intense sincerity of its religious expression and in the next three years the work received numerous performances with Spain's Orfeón choral societies.<sup>16</sup>

The proclamation of the Second Republic in Spain in April 1931 had dramatically altered the political landscape. The burning of churches and monasteries in May of that year by anarchic groups was thought to have been encouraged by the anti-clerical stance of the new leftist government. Even Catholic intellectuals like Falla, who espoused a separation of the Church and State and had initially embraced the Republic, were outraged by the course of events. Falla's perception of the anti-religious attitude of the Republic led him to reject all official honours, and he was commended on his decision by Maritain.<sup>17</sup> Progressive Catholic intellectuals, including Falla, founded the cultural journal *Cruz y Raya* in 1933 because of their estrangement from the first Republican government, although many did not support the predominantly conservative cultural politics of the ensuing Right-wing government (1933–36) with its centralism and appeal to the great traditions of the Spanish race. In 1936 Falla was courted by Ramiro de Maetzu in his attempts to form a Spanish counterpart to Charles Maurras's Action française, with similar calls to tradition. Falla refused to collaborate, as had Maritain in France,<sup>18</sup> claiming that:

[The] solution is not a conservative counter-revolution, which would certainly retain the execrable, but rather another deeper and more noble revolution, guided by the

<sup>13</sup> Falla, 'Rusia en España.'

<sup>14</sup> Igor Stravinskyn and Robert Craft, *Memories and Commentaries* (London: Faber, 2002) 168.

<sup>15</sup> Ferran i Mayorall, 'Conversant amb Stravinsky.'

<sup>16</sup> See U.F. Zanni, *La Vanguardia* 17 November 1933; J. Llongeras, *La veu de Catalunya* 18 November 1933, and compilation of reviews for the *Symphony of Psalms* published in *Orfeo Gracienc* 160 (December 1933): 651–53.

<sup>17</sup> The Catholic intellectual Jacques Maritain commended Falla on his decision in a letter of 20 January 1932, *AMF*.

<sup>18</sup> Even Pope Pius XI had condemned Action française as an unacceptable use of religion to political ends in 1926.

love of God ... Until this comes about it is useless to resort to tradition, a word which exercises an almost magical effect on some sections of the Spanish public ... [N]ationalist traditionalism will finish, like any exaggerated nationalism, by opposing Christ's genuine teachings.<sup>19</sup>

Falla believed that Maetzu's idea of nationalism opposed the reconciliation of modernity and Catholicism presented in Maritain's seminal work of 1919, *Art et Scholastique*, which had deeply impressed both Falla and Stravinsky.<sup>20</sup> In this respect it is interesting to note that in the April 1935 edition of *Cruz y Raya* Maritain praised Falla's *Concerto* [for harpsichord and five instruments] for going beyond a nationalism steeped solely in the traditions of folklore, a statement which reflected precisely Igor Stravinsky's contemporary remarks in his autobiography [*Chroniques de ma vie*].<sup>21</sup> This was the characteristic stressed by Salazar and leftist commentators, whereas conservative critics tended to focus on the *Concerto's* use of Castilian polyphonic sources from Spain's Golden Age and the religiosity of the Catholic procession evoked in its second movement.

By the time of his 1936 visit to Spain, Stravinsky's ideas on music had received greater dissemination through the recent publication of his autobiography in Spanish.<sup>22</sup> It was at this time that he explicitly tied his aesthetics (and even his political leanings) to his religious beliefs, in an interview published under the headline: 'Stravinsky and Surrealism. "Art is begotten by the pure dialectic of Christianity"',<sup>23</sup> Stravinsky stated:

I cannot coincide with [Surrealism], because I do not work with subjective elements. My artistic aim is to construct an object, although it is clear that it will also include something of myself. I believe in the object because God makes me create it, just as he created me. My art is begotten of the pure dialectic of Christianity. This is another reason why I cannot accept surrealism, just as I cannot accept communism ... I am an Orthodox Christian, sympathetic to Catholicism.<sup>24</sup>

Stravinsky claimed that he could not accept the materialism of the surrealists and the Communists, stating that 'my religious faith has made me a dualist, seeking in everything the ideal fusion of the material and the spiritual.'<sup>25</sup> Asked about Schoenberg, who had spent several months in Barcelona a few years earlier, Stravinsky stated that he was 'more of a musical chemist than an artistic creator [and] that the chromatic scale upon which his school base their music exists only scientifically and, therefore, the dialectic from which it is derived is artificial.'<sup>26</sup> According to Luis de Góngora, who conducted the interview, Stravinsky had

<sup>19</sup> Letter from María del Carmen de Falla, written on behalf of her brother Manuel, to Ramiro de Maetzu, 8 July 1936, copy held at AMF.

<sup>20</sup> Both Falla and Stravinsky had maintained contacts with Maritain since the mid 1920s and it is probable that they knew of Maritain's *Art et scholastique* before this date (Falla's prior knowledge of the work is implied in a letter from the composer to Maritain dated 26 May 1928).

<sup>21</sup> In his autobiography of 1935 Stravinsky concluded that: 'In my opinion [*El retablo* and the *Concerto*] give proof of incontestable progress in the development of his great talent. He has, in them, deliberately emancipated himself from the folklorist influence under which he was in danger of stultifying himself.' Stravinsky, *An Autobiography*, 133.

<sup>22</sup> Igor Stravinsky, *Crónicas de mi vida*, trans. Leopoldo Hurtado (Buenos Aires: Sur, 1935).

<sup>23</sup> Luis de Góngora, 'Igor Strawinsky y el Surrealismo,' *La Noche* 12 March 1936.

<sup>24</sup> Góngora, 'Igor Strawinsky y el Surrealismo.'

<sup>25</sup> Góngora, 'Igor Strawinsky y el Surrealismo.'

<sup>26</sup> Góngora, 'Igor Strawinsky y el Surrealismo.'

great admiration for the work of Falla, to whom he was joined, despite differences in dogma, by a bond of religious faith. Stravinsky claimed that in the *Concerto* Falla approached the great contrapuntalists, and he affirmed that Falla's music was now essentially Catholic. Despite Stravinsky's clear identification with Catholic interpretations of the Right, he concluded by stating that he had a keen interest in the young Spanish school of musicians, including members of Madrid's Grupo de ocho—who, as he was aware, were involved in projects of the new Popular Front Republican government.

Prior to 1936 Stravinsky's only public remarks on Spanish politics had related to his sympathy for the monarchy of King Alfonso XIII in the 1920s,<sup>27</sup> while privately he had also expressed his approval of the dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera. It is unclear to what extent the Spanish public were aware of Stravinsky's fascination with Mussolini and the Italian fascist state in the 1930s.<sup>28</sup> However, after leaving Spain in 1936 Stravinsky traveled to Argentina, and his comments in Buenos Aires on his anti-democratic leanings created a furore, and were widely reported in the Hispanic world.<sup>29</sup> While Stravinsky was concerned that 'there be no publicity' of his support for Falangist Spain,<sup>30</sup> his anti-Communist and anti-parliamentarian remarks defined his political preferences for Hispanic audiences on the eve of the Spanish Civil War, an event which further polarised Spanish society.

In February 1938 *The Spanish Press Services* (London) published Falla's declaration of support for the Nationalist cause, a statement which had been made under official duress. On 1 January 1938, without his prior consent, Falla was declared President of the regime's newly formed peak cultural body, the Instituto de España.<sup>31</sup> In the ensuing months he attempted to free himself from this position and his concern at being manipulated contributed to his departure from Spain after the end of the Civil War.<sup>32</sup> Stravinsky was far more amenable to accepting the honours bestowed by the regime. On 2 January 1938 Stravinsky was offered, and enthusiastically accepted, the position of foreign academy member of the Instituto de España.<sup>33</sup> A week later he was also named honorary academic of the now Nationalist-controlled Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, which cited Stravinsky's 'highest merits as a composer of modern music and his proven love of Spain.'<sup>34</sup> A few days after being notified of these honours Stravinsky received a letter from his old friend Juan Mestres (the impresario of Barcelona's Liceo during the 1920s). Mestres wrote:

Above all, I would like to send you dear friend my best wishes for the year of 1938. I would like to congratulate you with all my heart for the noble gesture of your adhesion to the great cause of our Spain... I would like then for you to accept coming [to Spain]

<sup>27</sup> Opinion first expressed in 1921 in interview with P. Victory, 'Una conversación con Stravinsky.'

<sup>28</sup> For an outline of Stravinsky's relations with Mussolini's Italy see Curt Sachs, *Music in Fascist Italy* (London: W.W. Norton, 1987) 167–69.

<sup>29</sup> 'Stravinsky es Enemigo de la Democracia,' *Crítica* [Buenos Aires] 25 April 1936; 'Opiniones de Stravinsky,' *ABC* [Madrid] 29 May 1936.

<sup>30</sup> Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* (London: Hutchinson, 1979) 552.

<sup>31</sup> See correspondence between Manuel de Falla and José María Pemán in F. Sánchez García, *La correspondencia inédita entre Manuel de Falla y José María Pemán* (Seville: Alfar, 1991).

<sup>32</sup> The first reference to a possible voyage to Argentina dates from a letter of 26 May 1938, although it is not until the end of that year that he began to make concrete plans.

<sup>33</sup> Stravinsky accepted the proposal of membership of the Instituto de España in a telegram dated 12 January 1938 (copy held at Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel).

<sup>34</sup> Conde de Romanones and M. López Otero, letter to Stravinsky, 10 January 1938 (Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel).

as guest of honour of Generalísimo Franco, [and] to take advantage of your stay among us to give two concerts of your 'chamber' music; one of the concerts here in San Sebastián ... and the other concert in Burgos, at the residence of Generalísimo Franco. These two concerts will be exclusively for the benefit of our soldiers and in your honour, and we would be grateful to accept your disinterested participation.<sup>35</sup>

Stravinsky replied on 16 January, cordially declining this kind offer, claiming that in 1938 his time was completely occupied with numerous tours and an important commission.<sup>36</sup> One wonders whether it was an aversion to visiting Spain in the midst of the Civil War or having to forgo a fee which prompted Stravinsky's refusal. The surviving newspaper cuttings held at the Stravinsky Archives in Basel suggest that he followed the course of the Nationalist advances in Spain with interest.<sup>37</sup>

Falla and Stravinsky's support for the Franco regime was abhorred by many artists whose sympathies lay with the Republic. There was difficulty reconciling such statements with perceptions of the progressive nature of their music. Writing from Republican Barcelona in March 1938, Enrique Casal Chapí claimed that: 'A statement can reveal much about man, but it can also damn him. Manuel de Falla has pronounced one of the latter.'<sup>38</sup> The author, however, concluded by encouraging his audience to continue to listen to contemporary music such as that of the Falla:

In these days we can live without a car and without so many material commodities, but we cannot do without all those things which have contributed and continue to contribute to our formation and spiritual life. But hearing these works can no longer be restricted to just an aesthetic experience for us.<sup>39</sup>

With the outbreak of World War II, Stravinsky sought refuge in the United States and radically transformed his political rhetoric. In an affidavit he made in July 1940 in support of his application for a visa as a non-quota immigrant he claimed that:

It is not my desire to nor have I ever been engaged at any time or any where in any political activity ... I admire the government of the United States of America. I love the liberty and freedom for which it stands. Justice and equality for all...beneath the flag of stars and stripes. Music must have freedom of expression ... and it is my humble opinion and belief that the future of the true Arts and Sciences of the world lies in the United States of America ... For this I thank God and for this I desire to become a good American citizen.<sup>40</sup>

Despite such expedient political realignments, Stravinsky continued to be viewed in Spain as a supporter of the Nationalists in the aftermath of the Civil War. In 1941, Federico Sopeña, a priest and one of the principal cultural ideologues of the Nationalists, reaffirmed the importance of Stravinsky as a model, linking his music to that of Joaquín Rodrigo, who became

<sup>35</sup> Juan Mestres Calvet, letter to Igor Stravinsky, 27 December 1937 (Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel).

<sup>36</sup> Igor Stravinsky, letter to Juan Mestres Calvet, 16 January 1938 (Copy held at Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel).

<sup>37</sup> Three photos from newspaper cuttings showing the Nationalist advances in Spain in 1938 are preserved among the Stravinsky Archives (Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel).

<sup>38</sup> Enrique Casal Chapí, 'Música en la guerra: Manuel de Falla,' *La hora de España* (March 1938): 95.

<sup>39</sup> Casal Chapí, 'Música en la guerra: Manuel de Falla,' 96.

<sup>40</sup> Copy held at Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel

the most feted composer of the regime in 1940 after the premiere of the *Concerto de Aranjuez* in 1940.<sup>41</sup> During the following decade the broader ramifications of this posture included the official sanctioning of nationalistically inspired neoclassical and archaising tendencies in the works of Spanish orchestral composers and the rejection of serial styles (which had continued in Cataluña due to the influence of Schoenberg and his students). Even the first volume of the journal *Música* produced by the National Institute for Musicology in 1952 was dedicated to Stravinsky's works, still extolling the composer's 'resolute stance when Spain began to rid itself of the plague of Communism.'<sup>42</sup>

Numerous attempts were made to attract Stravinsky back to Spain, but he did not return until 1955, after a US-Spanish military accord had been reached. By then Stravinsky refused to perform his pre-War works, despite official requests. In this context two works, the *Symphony in Three Movements* and the *Mass* (1943–48) were variously perceived as providing summations of Stravinsky's style. Federico Sopena viewed the *Symphony in Three Movements* as a work that embodied Stravinsky's Classicism and humanity in its 'maturity of thought and security of construction.'<sup>43</sup> While complementing the work's 'radical simplicity of motive and means' he sensed in it Stravinsky's optimistic message which countered the despair of the post-war Europe.

To coincide with Stravinsky's visit several articles appeared on his religious convictions and Radio nacional organised a performance of the *Mass*. In his program note Enrique Franco (composer of the Falangist hymn and still music critic of *El País*) also emphasised the composer's 'expressivity based upon his deeply felt religiosity,' while praising its allusions to primitive religious forms which provide a 'pathway to asceticism through austerity of means.'<sup>44</sup> In making these remarks he directly echoed Right-wing commentaries on Falla's *Concerto* and Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* since the 1930s.

The 1955 visit marked a high point in the regime's fascination with Stravinsky. It is difficult to calculate the impact of Stravinsky's subsequent adoption of serialism on his official reception as it coincided with radical changes in Spanish society. International recognition of the regime, and ministries dominated by technocrats opened up Spain's economy and tourism, and even tendencies of the Darmstadt avant-garde were tolerated in the music of the composers of the so-called Generation of 1951. In this new social and cultural context Stravinsky was no longer central to definitions of musical culture in Spain.

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<sup>41</sup> Federico Sopena, *Arriba* 12 December 1940.

<sup>42</sup> *Música: Revista trimestral de los conservatorios españoles* 1 (1952): 3.

<sup>43</sup> Federico Sopena, *Stravinsky* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1955) 156.

<sup>44</sup> Enrique Franco, Concert programme, Radio Nacional de España, 24 March 1955.