A letter on the music of Joaquin Rodrigo

10 August 1999

The WSWS *received the following letter in response to our July 13 obituary of the Spanish composer Joaquin Rodrigo.*

Your article on the death of Joaquin Rodrigo stirred ancient memories for me. A recording of his famous *Concierto de Aranjuez* was one of my earliest introductions to the classical guitar and led me to pursue that instrument.

It would be some time before I would even attempt to read through the score due to the musical and technical demands it places on the performer. But I imagine no guitarist can resist its pull. While I would never perform the piece, I often played the cadenza from the middle movement as an etude for my own enjoyment and development.

It was sometime in the middle 70s that Andres Segovia, the great Spanish master of the guitar, toured the city where I lived. His performance fell upon his birthday and those of us who comprised the local guitar society threw a birthday party for him. We asked him about his collaboration with many great composers such as Manuel M. Ponce and Heitor Villa-Lobos. When asked about Rodrigo, Segovia delivered a witty and yet profound response: "He is blind .... but he sees very well."

Segovia noted that Rodrigo had composed the *Fantasia para un Gentilhombre* for guitar and orchestra for him. When we pressed him about the celebrated *Concierto de Aranjuez*, he amazed us by relating that in a meeting with Rodrigo he had been very critical of several passages in the concerto that were either in the wrong key or octave and consequently made the guitar sound like a mandolin. "And I don't like the sound of a mandolin," he added.

None of us dared press Segovia for any specifics about his criticisms even though we were all intimately familiar with the work. At the time I wondered if Segovia was bothered more by the fact that it was the product of a collaboration with the guitarist Regino Sainz de la Maza rather than himself. If so, Segovia's regret that he was not the recipient of the dedication is testimony enough of the greatness of this work and its unique composer.

CJ

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