

Reno Chamber Orchestra
Program Notes for
Alegría
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By Chris Morrison

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Teresa Carreño

Born: December 22, 1853, Caracas, Venezuela

Died: June 12, 1917, New York City, New York

In a career that spanned over five decades, Teresa Carreño became famous as a pianist – she was dubbed the “Valkyrie of the Piano” – as well as composer, singer, and conductor. Carreño received early musical instruction from her father. Her talent was such that, after her family moved to New York City in 1862, Carreño started presenting concerts that brought her much attention. At ten, she even performed for Abraham Lincoln at the White House. She subsequently played concert tours in North America and Europe, and even sang in operas after studying voice with Gioachino Rossini. Through the 1870s and 1880s, she performed all over the United States alongside then-famous musicians like singer Adelina Patti. Much of the 1890s was spent playing concerts in Europe. Then she returned to America, which served as her home base as she continued performing all over the world. Along with her spectacular piano playing, Carreño composed dozens of songs, piano and chamber works, and orchestral pieces. Her ongoing fame inspired a 2018 Google Doodle in celebration of her 165th birthday.

Serenade in E-flat major

Composed: 1895

Duration: 21 minutes

Instrumentation: strings

Teresa Carreño completed her Serenade for String Orchestra during a summer vacation in Pertisau, a small village in the Austrian Tyrol. It had been a turbulent time for her – along with her busy schedule of concerts and teaching, she was in the midst of a messy divorce from pianist Eugène d’Albert, whom she had married in 1891. She found some distraction from events in a bout of composing, writing both the Serenade and a string quartet during that summer. She had been living in Berlin for a few years at that point, and her interactions with the brilliant musicians she encountered throughout Europe may have inspired her return to composing after several years. The Serenade seems not to have been performed during Carreño's lifetime.

A warm and shapely melody opens the first movement. A short *pizzicato* passage heralds a new theme tinged with nostalgia. The world of Piotr Tchaikovsky's and Antonín Dvořák's

well-known String Serenades is not far away, although there are some surprising twists and turns in the melodies and harmonies that are Carreño's own. At the end of the movement, the opening melody returns, having moved from the minor to the major. The second movement Scherzo contrasts a skipping opening melody, with more than a hint of fire and drama, and a flowing second.

Solo cello opens the third movement, the emotional heart of the work, with a striking, rather jagged recitative, punctuated by short phrases by the rest of the strings. Then a heartfelt, almost operatic theme is introduced by the cello, soon taken up by the rest of the strings. The theme continues to spin itself out, becoming more passionate as it goes. The tempo increases, and a dramatic new idea emerges. It isn't long, however, before that storm passes and the tempo slows again. Solo cello and violin play a brief duet, then provide delicate embellishments as the main theme returns.

A stern little figure from the low strings introduces the main theme of the fourth movement, marked *Tempo di marcia*. That idea contrasts greatly with a more genial idea introduced by the violins. Soon the march rhythm returns, with agitated arpeggios from the violins added to the mix. A final statement of the march leads into a slight increase in tempo for the work's affirmative conclusion.

Manuel Ponce

Born: December 8, 1882, Fresnillo, Mexico

Died: April 24, 1948, Mexico City, Mexico

Often considered one of the founders of Mexican classical music, Manuel Ponce started taking informal music classes as a youth. At nineteen he entered the National Conservatory of Music in Mexico City, already having established a reputation as a composer and pianist. After subsequent studies in Italy and Germany, he returned to Mexico and the National Conservatory as a teacher, serving there from 1909 to 1915 and from 1917 to 1922. In 1933, he again returned to the Conservatory as its director. From a young age Ponce had a fascination with Mexican popular and traditional song, reflected in many of his compositions. After studying in Paris in the 1920s, he developed a style that embraced French Impressionism as well as modern techniques, while never abandoning his Mexican musical heritage. His song "Estrellita" is still performed all over the world, having been recorded by performers as diverse as Benny Goodman and Jascha Heifetz. Ponce also wrote music for solo instruments, chamber ensembles, and orchestra.

Concierto del Sur

Composed: 1941

Duration: 28 minutes

Instrumentation: solo guitar, flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, timpani, tambourine, strings

Among the most important musical connections Manuel Ponce ever made was with the Spanish guitarist Andrés Segovia. Segovia (1893-1987), who became famous as the person

who almost single-handedly revived the role of the guitar in classical music, not only performed the guitar works of the past but commissioned new pieces from composers like Joaquín Turina, Heitor Villa-Lobos, and Federico Moreno Torroba.

Segovia and Ponce first met in 1923, after Ponce, in his role as music critic, wrote a review of one of Segovia's concerts that impressed the guitarist. Before long, Ponce was himself writing works for Segovia, including a colorful *Sonata Mexicana* (1925). When Ponce decided to move to Paris to continue his studies, he reconnected with Segovia, resulting in several new compositions in the 1930s and 1940s, including the *Concierto del Sur* (Concerto of the South). Ponce had thought about writing a concerto for Segovia for years. It was apparently only after the premiere in 1939, with Segovia as soloist and Ponce conducting, of another work written specially for Segovia, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's Guitar Concerto No. 1, that Ponce really set to work.

Segovia had a house in Montevideo, Uruguay, and throughout the composing process, Ponce sent Segovia the concerto's manuscript. It was in Montevideo that the *Concierto del Sur* received its premiere on October 14, 1941, with Segovia as soloist and Ponce conducting. The work was a hit from the start, and since then, the *Concierto* has become a standard part of the guitar repertoire. Segovia called the work "the most precious jewel of my repertoire."

The concerto makes frequent reference to Spanish music - in fact, the "Sur" in the title refers to southern Spain, in particular the region of Andalusia. Oboe phrases are answered by other instruments at the beginning of the first movement. Strums from the guitar lead into its introduction of the vaguely melancholy first main theme. Woodwind flourishes precede another mellow dance-like theme from the guitar. The orchestral sound is transparent, often colored by the winds, and the guitar part is, unsurprisingly, virtuosic, with fast arpeggios and passagework. While there are passages of more relaxed lyricism and some mystery, the first movement tends toward a feeling of drama and urgency. The fast-paced, arpeggio-filled solo cadenza for the guitar includes one section with delicate harmonics.

Pizzicati from the low strings, phrases from muted violins, and a quiet theme from the guitar begin the slow second movement. Woodwinds add colors to the gentle flow of the music. Clarinet doubles the guitar in a sweet song in the movement's central section. Then the opening theme returns, the movement ending delicately with single notes from the guitar and timpani.

Marked *Allegro moderato e festivo*, the third movement is a dance in triple meter that is restrained at first, but builds energy as it goes. Almost Impressionistic harmonies from the strings accompany the guitar, which moves easily from delicacy to, in the work's final minutes, more propulsive phrases that bring the work to a rousing conclusion.

Juan Crisóstomo Arriaga

Born: January 27, 1806, Bilbao, Spain

Died: January 17, 1826, Paris, France

Juan Crisóstomo Jacobo Antonio de Arriaga y Balzola was at one time nicknamed “the Spanish Mozart,” although as a composer from the Basque country who became an important symbol for Basque nationalism, that nickname has been changed by many to “The Basque Mozart.” Both Arriaga and Mozart were noted child prodigies who died young. They also shared January 27 birthdays, fifty years apart. Arriaga received his first musical training from his father and brother. After showing great talent, in 1821 his family sent Arriaga to Paris to continue his studies at the Paris Conservatoire. He made a considerable impression on his teachers, and by age eighteen had become an assistant professor at the Conservatoire. Sadly, he died ten days before his twentieth birthday of a combination of tuberculosis and exhaustion. Despite such a short life, Arriaga still managed to produce a number of compositions, including an opera, *Los esclavos felices* (The Happy Slaves) at age fourteen, three string quartets at sixteen, several chamber and sacred choral works, and his one and only symphony at eighteen.

Symphony in D major

Composed: 1824

Duration: 28 minutes

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings

To date, the only English-language biography of Arriaga is Barbara Rosen's *Arriaga, The Forgotten Genius: The Short Life of a Basque Composer*, published by the University of Nevada Press under the auspices of the Basque Studies program at the University of Nevada, Reno. Even it, however, can provide but little information as to the origins of Arriaga's sole Symphony. The Symphony in D major seems only to have won its first performance in 1888, long after the composer's death, and it only appeared in published form, with cuts and changes, in 1933. The work certainly seems to indicate Arriaga's awareness of the music around him, including models from the past such as the dramatic *Sturm und Drang* compositions of Haydn and Mozart as well as the music of Beethoven and other early examples of musical Romanticism.

A lengthy slow opening to the first movement, with short melodic phrases from solo and massed woodwinds, establishes a portentous tone. Low strings eventually propel the music forward as the tempo speeds. Surprisingly for a symphony in a major key, much of this fast music is in an anxiety-laden minor key. That changes with the graceful second main theme in the major. As these themes are developed, the minor key is reestablished. After the main ideas are reprised, the tempo speeds again to Presto for the movement's dramatic close.

The slow second movement opens with a graceful idea, with woodwinds, as in the first movement, taking a prominent role, both solo and in groups. A second theme unfurls elegantly. Both ideas take brief dramatic turns, hinting at darker undercurrents. Much the same is true of the movement's central section, in which a new theme is introduced. But for the most part, the music is songful, at its ease.

Though called a Minuetto, the third movement has something of the more aggressive character of the scherzo that Beethoven introduced and made popular. A gentle, pastoral flute, along with other woodwinds, takes over for the central section, accompanied by solo strings. Rounding out the movement is a return of the opening music.

Opening the fourth movement is an agitated theme, once again in a minor key, with dramatic flourishes from the orchestra. A more playful, yet subdued, second idea brings back the major key. Contrapuntal exchanges between the string choirs lead to a return of the opening theme. After a repeat of the second theme, a sequence of closing gestures bring the work to a powerful, major key finish.