The Giant Guitar, Op. 91 (2006)
Miguel del Aguila (b. 1957)
notes by the composer

The Giant Guitar, Op. 91, was jointly commissioned by WNED-FM Radio of Buffalo, NY and by the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra for the 2006 JoAnn Falletta International Guitar Concerto Competition. It was premiered at Kleinhans Hall in 2006 by the Buffalo Philharmonic, conducted by JoAnn Falletta. A short, overture-like work inspired by the guitar and by Andean folk idioms, the opening theme and harmony originates from the guitar's open strings (E A D G B E). The Harp introduces this theme, as the strings, and later the horns, use the same notes to provide harmony. Having lived the first twenty years of my life in South America, I can't think of a guitar without associating its music to my early memories there. I often view South America as a "giant guitar"—friendly, sentimental, nostalgic, apparently weak, and yet concealing a great power, only suggested by occasional "rasqueado" chords or historical revolutions, as in the political events of the 1970s. Thus, this work starts in a somewhat nostalgic mood which seems to transport us to a place high in the Andes. After these few introductory bars the flutes re-introduce the guitar theme, now in a very rhythmic pattern resembling an Inca-Andean flute chant. The orchestra strings accompany the melody through rhythmically complex pizzicati, imitating a giant guitar or "charango". The drama begins almost unnoticed as the originally delicately strummed chords turn into violent bass drum and timpani hits. A final chord, from a third higher than the rest of the piece, offers a last note of defiance as it confronts a police siren, only to be quickly crushed by the overwhelming percussion.

Concierto de Aranjuez (1939)
Joaquín Rodrigo (1901-1999)
notes by Andrew S. Kohler

Joaquín Rodrigo is among the most acclaimed Spanish composers of the twentieth century. To say "of the twentieth century" in his case is particularly appropriate, as his life spanned almost that century's entirety (from 1901 to 1999; he died within five months of his ninety-eighth birthday). At the age of three, he lost most of his eyesight to diphtheria, but this did not prevent him from beginning musical studies at the age of eight, including composition as a teenager. He composed his scores in braille and then dictated them to a copyist. One can only imagine how much time and tedium this must have added to the already laborious process of musical notation, especially for large ensembles, and be glad that Rodrigo had such patience.

Like Manuel de Falla, one of the most prominent Spanish composers of the generation before his, Rodrigo spent time in Paris and studied composition with Paul Dukas, and like Falla wrote a piece commemorating his teacher's death in 1935. His reputation both as a pianist and a composer grew, and he became acquainted with such important composers of his day as Darius Milhaud, Arthur Honegger, and Maurice Ravel. He also came to know Falla, who became an important ally for him, and so it is fitting that the Manuel de Falla Chair of Music at the Complutense University in Madrid was created specially for him in 1947, the year after Falla's death. Rodrigo married the Turkish pianist Victoria Kamhi in 1933, and they enjoyed a marriage of artistic collaboration until her death, one year before his.

While Rodrigo's large output comprises approximately 170 compositions, in addition to a substantial collection of writings, he is primarily remembered for his Concierto de Aranjuez, composed in 1939, relatively early in his extraordinarily long career. The slow movement of this work has enjoyed especial popularity. Rodrigo was asked by the harpist Nicanor Zabaleta to arrange the concerto for his instrument, and Gil Evans arranged the slow movement for Miles Davis's album Sketches of Spain. This concerto is the first of five works Rodrigo composed for guitar and

orchestra, some of which feature multiple guitars. The guitar was an instrument of particular importance to Rodrigo, although he never played it himself, not least because of its associations with his homeland.

According to the composer, the Concierto de Aranjuez was inspried by the gardens at the Palacio Real de Aranjuez, a spring resort palace dating from the second half of the sixteenth century. Rodrigo said that his music was meant to convey "the fragrance of magnolias, the singing of birds, and the gushing of fountains" of these gardens. Accordingly, King Juan Carlos I awarded to Rodrigo the hereditary title of Marquis of the Gardens of Aranjuez in 1991. Many wondered what specifically had inspired the hauntingly plaintive slow movement, with some suggesting that it was mourning the bombing of Guernica in 1937. Rodrigo's wife eventually revealed in her autobiography that the concerto invoked both happy memories of the beginning of the couple's marriage and, in the slow movement, Rodrigo's heartbreak when his wife's first pregnancy had ended in miscarriage. Poignant though this is, we need not limit ourselves to any one particular interpretation of Rodrigo's music, and one should be careful not to restrict a work's potential for universality in expression.

The orchestra of the Concierto de Aranjuez is relatively small, which makes sense given that the guitar does not have great carrying power: there are pairs of woodwinds (that is flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons, with the second flute alternating on piccolo and the second oboe on English horn), a small brass section (two horns and two trumpets), and the usual contingent of strings. The first movement, Allegro con spirito, opens with the guitar, accompanied only by the contrabasses quietly sustaining a D pedal, firmly establishing D major as the work's home tonality. The first movement is in sonata form, as is traditional for a concerto's first movement, but without the initial statement of the thematic material by the orchestra alone that one hears in concertos of the Classical Era (this fell out of fashion in the nineteenth century, perhaps because everyone was eager to hear the soloists!)

Rodrigo sought to employ a Spanish character in his music, as is evident in this concerto. The first movement, marked Allegro con spirito, is in a lilting and lively 6/8 meter, frequently alternating between a two and three beat emphasis. The two thematic areas of the exposition (the first section of the sonata form) are equally lively, rather than following the tradition of a less energetic second theme, as a result of which the musical momentum never wanes. Rodrigo employs interesting interaction between the guitar and the woodwind instruments, especially the bassoon. The development section (following the exposition) begins with a solo cello, which takes up material first heard in the oboe and violins in the first theme group, but is not part of the main theme itself. The development is relatively brief but harmonically adventurous, even going to the key of A-flat major (maximally removed from the home key of D major). The recapitulation opens with the full orchestra, rather than with the solo guitar, as the exposition began. After a strong orchestral coda, the movement ends quietly with the guitar, sparsely accompanied as at the opening.

The celebrated slow movement, marked Adagio, starts in B minor, a key visited in the development section of the preceding movement and the relative of D major. As in the first movement, the Adagio opens with the guitar over a tonic pedal in the low strings (now the cellos as well as the basses). The famous melody is then stated in the English horn, a highly expressive instrument often associated with lamentation, over muted strings. This is the only movement in which the English horn is used (the same musician plays the second oboe in the outer movements). The melody is divided into two parts, each of which is stated first by the English horn and then by the guitar, which ornately decorates the melody over simple accompaniment. The second part begins in G major, a striking contrast to the mournful quality of the first section, but returns to B minor by the end. At this point, the rest of the orchestra enters and various voices take up the primary theme, beginning with the cellos (perhaps a connection to the cello solo in the first movement). The interplay between the guitar and solo instruments continues throughout this movement, primarily in the horn and the double reeds (English horn, oboe, and bassoon, recalling the bassoon-guitar

interplay of the previous movement). The music builds in intensity, including two startlingly brief outbursts from the orchestra, until the cadenza. The cadenza begins after a brief statement by the solo bassoon, and one can detect fragments of the primary theme throughout the guitar's virtuosity, which includes impressive arpeggios. After the cadenza, the strings and most of the woodwinds of the orchestra have an impassioned statement of the primary theme, notably without either of the two most prominent solo voices of the movement (the English horn is silent, as well as the guitar). The high flute ushers in the return of the guitar, and the movement ends quietly in the major mode with guitar and string harmonics, with one last interjection from the bassoon and English horn.

Rodrigo said that the final movement, unusually marked Allegro gentile, "recalls a courtly dance in which the combination of double and triple time maintains a taut tempo right to the closing bar." Rather than beginning in the concerto's home key of D major, this movement starts in the B major with which the previous movement ended. In addition to the alternating time signatures as noted above, the tonality is unstable throughout much of the movement, with phrases repeated in different keys. The movement opens with a folk-like melody played by the guitar alone, and while there is subsequently interaction between the soloist and orchestra, it is not as striking as in the previous two movements. The ending of the finale mirrors that of the first movement: the final statement of the main theme is given to the orchestra, after which a quiet guitar solo drolly brings the concerto to an end, some of the strings reinforcing the final plucked Ds.

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Symphony No. 7 in D Minor, Op. 70 (1885)
Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)
notes by Andrew S. Kohler

Antonín Dvořák is perhaps the best known Czech composer, most renowned for his symphonic and chamber compositions. During his lifetime, he was so well known for his role in helping to establish a tradition of Czech art music which reflected the region's musical heritage that Jeannette Thurber, an American patroness, paid him to come across the Atlantic to aid her country in establishing a nationalist tradition of its own. (In a delightful irony, Dvořák dismayed some of his patrons by encouraging American composers to turn to African-American and Native American musical traditions). It was during this period that Dvořák wrote the last and most famous of his symphonies, Symphony No. 9, Opus 95, called "From the New World." His Symphony No. 7 in D minor, Opus 70, predates his American adventure, and was completed in 1885. The symphony is scored for pairs of woodwinds (with the second flute briefly alternating on piccolo in the third movement only), four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and the normal contingent of strings.

Dvořák opens his symphony with a low rumble in the horns, timpani, and contrabasses, over which the opening melody, in 6/8 time, is heard in the violas and cellos. The first movement has a similar indication, Allegro maestoso (fast and majestic), to that of Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 (Opus 125), the scherzo of which Dvořák was later to quote in the same movement of his own ninth symphony. Both symphonies are in the key of D minor, and they have similarly stark opening measures. The first phrase of the melody in Dvořák's work is followed by a fully diminished seventh chord, a sound highly characteristic of Beethoven, after which the primary theme proper is heard. The solo horn plays a new melody, which seems a likely candidate for the secondary theme, in E-flat major (a Beethovenian key relationship of a half-step). This proves to be a false summit, however, and the secondary theme proper occurs shortly thereafter, preceded by a dramatic half cadence with unusual added dissonance. Typically for secondary thematic material, the melody is a lyrical respite. It is first heard in the woodwinds, and the flute soon after plays trills that evoke birdcalls over the thematic material. The tonality is at first ambiguous: it seems to be in the expected relative major (i.e. F major), but it eventually becomes clear that the key is B-flat major (the same key

as the secondary theme in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony). After an ominous pause and darkening of the mood, the music recovers and the exposition comes to a triumphant end.

For only the second time in his symphonic output (the first being Symphony No. 3, Opus 10), Dvořák does not repeat the exposition (the first section of a sonata form movement). Instead, although there is a sense of repose at the end of the exposition, the music's momentum continues forward and leads directly into the development section, which begins with the same diminished seventh chord that was heard earlier. Forward momentum characterizes the remainder of the movement, and in the tumult it is difficult to pin down exactly where the important structural points of the sonata form lie, although the clear return of the secondary theme in the recapitulation serves as a point of orientation. The movement concludes with a relatively brief coda that begins quietly and suppressed, as at the movement's opening. The flute restates the secondary theme, but it is disconcertingly tinged by its new dark context.

In accordance with traditional symphonic form, the second movement is slow (although the tempo indication Poco adagio suggests a relatively moderate tempo) and lyrical in character. It is in F major, the relative major of the symphony's home key, although the first chord is B-flat major, suggesting the key to which the exposition modulated in the previous movement. In the middle of this movement, listeners familiar with Dvořák's Symphony No. 9 should keep an ear out for music similar to that later work.

The Poco adagio begins with a woodwind chorale, accompanied by plucked strings with only a brief instance in which the strings, now bowed, have the melody. Throughout the movement, most of the thematic material is entrusted to the woodwinds and horns, and much of the motivic material derives from a descending arpeggio with dotted rhythm. This movement is highly characteristic of the Romantic Era, both in its affect and in its musical language (especially the minor third key relationships). After the serene opening of the Poco adagio, it soon become clear that there are storm clouds on the horizon. Material from the first movement returns ominously, but is followed by a romantic horn solo, recalling the horn solos of the preceding movement. The key of D minor at one point also returns. Despite the various intrusions into the music's calm atmosphere, the movement draws to a gentle close.

The third movement, again following the traditional symphonic form, is a scherzo, marked Vivace ("lively"). The key returns to D minor and the time signature is 6/4, rather than the expected 3/4 (the effect is thus two 3/4 measures in one). The graceful character of the opening is closer to a waltz than to a scherzo (which literally means "joke"). In this movement motives from earlier in the symphony, such as the descending arpeggio, recur, albeit transformed. One may hear more Beethoven quotations in this movement: the chains of rising and falling octaves on the pitch in the upper voices recall yet again the Ninth Symphony, and a prominent turn figure is similar to the scherzo from Beethoven's Piano Sonata Opus 2 No. 3 (although there, it is in the major mode). As the scherzo progresses music builds in tension, using more chromaticism (motion by half-step) than the earlier movements of the symphony. From this the trio section (i.e. the contrasting middle section) provides a respite, replete with birdcall trills in the high woodwinds. Despite its lighter character, however, the trio is still quite busy (especially in the frequent use of two-note slur figures). The trio does not draw to a distinct close before the scherzo is reprised: rather, the scherzo's material intrudes into the trio and eventually overtakes it. The movement ends with an intense coda, closing with aggressively repeated chords. Dvořák undermines the sense of closure by putting the fifth, rather than the first, scale degree in the top voice.

The finale is in sonata form, as in the first movement without a repeat of the exposition (this is more common in finales than in first movements). It opens with a lengthy introductory section, the material of which is incorporated throughout the rest of the movement (notably in the development section). The opening motive (reminiscent of Franz Schubert's Piano Sonatas in A minor, D. 784/Opus 143) creates tonal ambiguity by raising the fourth scale degree and initially avoiding the

home pitch of D. This ambiguity is continued throughout the movement as Dvořák frequently employs chromaticism and the dissonant interval of the augmented second (associated with non-Western musical traditions, which may include Dvořák's own Czech tradition). The serious primary theme gives way to a highly contrasting folklike melody (the secondary theme): it sounds as though the secondary theme, representing the redemptive heroine from the overture to Carl Maria von Weber's opera Der Freischütz ("The Free-shooter") has been crossed with traditional eastern European melodies. The secondary thematic area is tonally unstable: it is A major, but the exposition ends in A minor (as in the first movement, Dvořák has avoided the standard modulation to the relative F major). In the midst of the A minor, however, the music also ventures into the relative C major.

The development section opens with the introductory theme (a characteristic of Romantic rather than Classical sonata form). The development features an exciting build-up through contrapuntal writing, and it is even more difficult to determine the moment at which the recapitulation begins than it was in the first movement, not least because the expected prolonged dominant preparation and resolution are absent. As in the first movement, however, the secondary theme (now in the home key) is immediately recognizable. The recapitulation ends with the same tug-of-war between the major and minor modes as did the exposition. The coda, while not particularly long, is highly dramatic. The tempo increases following a cadence not in the home key of D minor but in A minor, and at a moment of particular tension the diminished seventh chord from the symphony's opening returns. The symphony concludes with a sudden, exalted shift to the major mode, emphatically marked Molto maestoso—very majestically.

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