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The First Guitar Concertos of the 20th Century: The Composer and Performer Relationship*

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Abstract

The article discusses the collaboration between composers and performers which resulted in the creation of the first guitar concertos of the 20th century and played a key role in the development of this genre. The issues discussed herein have not been extensively covered in the existing literature. The details behind the first attempts after a gap of nearly one hundred years at composing guitar concertos with orchestra are almost unknown. This article is the result of research on creative activity of both composers and guitar virtuosos of that era. The present text is largely based on primary sources such as letters, interviews, memoirs and other statements by artists as well as those in their circles. The first guitar concertos were created in diverse and distant parts of the world, hence the need for further research and elaboration on this topic.

The article also presents several lesser-known facts about the most prominent works of that time: *Concierto de Aranjuez* by Joaquín Rodrigo and *Concerto No. 1 in D major*, Op. 99 by Mario

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Castelnuovo-Tedesco. In particular, the author focuses on the selected aspects of the collaboration between the composers and guitarists with relation to the origins of these pieces, addressing issues which raised doubts, remained unclear or sparked debates among researchers.

Keywords: guitar concerto, composer and performer collaboration, Joaquín Rodrigo, *Concierto de Aranjuez*, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Andrés Segovia, Boris Asafiev.

Apart from works written by guitarists, the repertoire of 20th-century guitar music – unlike that of the earlier centuries – encompasses a large body of works by composers who never played the instrument themselves. The attempts they made involved considerable challenges, requiring them to better understand not only the capabilities, but also the limitations of the guitar. Their efforts often resulted in either oversimplification of the instrument's texture, which was detrimental to the final sound quality of the piece, or the creation of a work that far exceeded the technical capabilities of performers. Nevertheless, the latter case opened up unique prospects for these compositions. An important role for their future place and significance within guitar music repertoire was played by virtuoso guitarists, who have for centuries honed the craft of skilfully transcribing pieces originally composed for other instruments.

The importance and authority of the composer in the 20th century imposed a number of internal and external constraints on performers. It was decidedly easier to simplify the texture or adjust the pitch register of individual notes than to enrich the piece with additional sounds or contrapuntal voices. The extent of these limitations, however, depended on the authority and personality of the virtuoso artist and their relationship with the composer.

Regardless, the technical prowess of guitarists improved over time, and the pieces which had previously seemed insurmountable became artistic challenges to be incorporated into their guitar repertoires¹. Works by non-guitarist composers were usually created in collaboration with virtuosos, and frequently inspired by performers or even commissioned by them². This collaboration was often shrouded in mystery, representing artistic synergy or serving merely as a source of inspiration. However, at a certain stage in the process of creating the work, the guitarist would often adapt the piece in preparation for its premiere. Such an adaptation had to meet the practical demands of a concert performance, being adjusted to the technical skillset of the instrumentalist and their artistic interpretation of the piece.

¹ One of the most notable examples of such works includes Joaquín Rodrigo's *Toccata* for guitar from 1933, which premiered only 73 years after its composition – posthumously – on 1 June 2006 in Madrid.

² Especially great contributions to expanding the instrument's repertoire through initiating creative collaboration with composers who did not play the guitar were made by Andrés Segovia (1893–1987), Julian Bream (1933–2020), Narciso Yepes (1927–1997) and Regino Sáinz de la Maza (1896–1981).

The First Guitar Concertos with Orchestra in the 20th Century

A particularly interesting situation arose with regard to concertos for guitar or guitars with orchestra, for the genre required both the ability to compose a larger instrumental form and skilfully employ the orchestra, along with efficient handling of the solo instrument, whose part should possess an element of virtuosity. Thus, the guitar concerto became the ground for a uniquely intriguing and remarkable collaboration between composers and guitarists, which contributed to the revival of this genre in the 20th century.

After roughly a century of disinterest in the genre among composers, most likely the first attempt at writing a concerto for guitar and orchestra in the 20th century was undertaken in 1928 by the Mexican non-guitarist composer Manuel Ponce (1882–1948) at Andrés Segovia's request. By then, Ponce had already composed works such as *Concierto Romántico* for piano and orchestra (1910) and a number of compositions for solo guitar. However, he did not complete his guitar concerto, *Concierto del Sur*, until 13 years later, in 1941³. Segovia later revealed that both he and Ponce were apprehensive of whether the orchestra would overpower the sound of the guitar:

It must be admitted that this delay was also due in part to a certain skepticism in both of us. We feared that the tenuous and expressive sound of the guitar would be swallowed up by the orchestra, or that its delicate and poetic timbres would fade before the sonorous mass, like small lanterns of the night before the invasion of day⁴.

At the end of 1929, the first attempt at writing a concerto for guitar and orchestra was made by the Spanish composer Federico Moreno-Torroba (1891–1982). He presented his work to Andrés Segovia, yet the piece did not win the guitarist's approval and was likely never performed, nor is it included in catalogues of the composer's works. The archives of Fundación Andrés Segovia in Linares contain two excerpts from unidentified and undated manuscripts by Moreno-Torroba for this configuration of instruments: four pages of a piano reduction and a guitar part in the incomplete third movement of the concerto. Perhaps they are the remaining traces of the aforementioned work. More details regarding the composition are revealed in Segovia's letter to Manuel Ponce from December 1929. The guitarist wrote the following about the piece:

Torroba came to spend 15 days in Brittany with us. Under his arm, he brought a concerto for small orchestra and guitar, very melodic, and sonatine-like, but is not worth the first few chords of yours. The theme of the andante is beautiful however, and the development has strokes of genius. But all of it is too easy, and the entire first movement, too

³ The premiere of the composition took place on 4 October 1941 in Montevideo.

⁴ J. Patykula, *Ponce's Concierto del Sur. The Story of the 1941 Premiere in Montevideo*, "Sound-board" 2012 (38), no. 1, pp. 6–11.

easy, understand? Too horizontal... Now he is waiting for me to take the work to Madrid, but I am preparing to turn him down based really on my need for rest⁵.

The first 20th-century guitar concerto we know of is the work of the Mexican guitarist and cellist Rafael Adame Gómez (1904–1963)⁶. *Concierto Clásico* for guitar and orchestra⁷ was composed in 1930, though the second part of the title – *Clásico* – was added by the composer twenty years later, during a concert held at Manuel M. Ponce Concert Hall in Mexico on 7 November 1950⁸. The solo instrument was the *guitarra séptima mexicana*, a seven-string guitar popular in Mexico.

While the composition was performed several times, beginning with its premiere on 19 July 1930⁹ with piano accompaniment and 5 February 1933 with orchestra in Mexico City under the baton of Julian Carrillo (with the composer himself as the soloist), and despite the composer's prominence in Mexico, the piece sunk into obscurity for many years and did not affect the further development of the genre of guitar concerto with orchestra. Even less is known about his subsequent works for guitar with orchestral accompaniment. It is most likely that Adame performed his second piece for guitar and orchestra *Concertino No. 2*, known as *Concertino on popular Mexican airs*¹⁰, during a concert on 3 May 1933. Edwin A. Fleisher Collection at Parkway Central Library – Free Library of Philadelphia houses not only the aforementioned manuscript of the concerto, listed under the title *Concierto para guitarra*, but also the scores and orchestral parts for two other pieces for guitar and orchestra by this composer: *Concertino No. 1* and *Concertino No. 3: Estilo mariache*¹¹.

⁵ “Torroba vino a pasar 15 días en Bretaña con nosotros. Se trajo un concierto para pequeña orquesta y guitarra bajo el brazo, muy melódica, y sonatinesco, pero que no vale los primeros acordes del tuyo. El tema del andante, es precioso sin embargo, y en el desarrollo hay rasgos ingeniosos. Pero es demasiado fácil todo él y todo el primer tiempo ¿comprendes? Demasiado fácil, demasiado horizontal... Ahora me espera en Madrid para proseguir el trabajo, pero le preparo una negativa fundada realmente en mi necesidad de reposo”; A letter from Andrés Segovia to Manuel Ponce, December 1929, [in:] *The Segovia–Ponce Letters*, ed. M. Alcazar, Columbus Orphée, Columbus 1989, pp. 46–48, translated by Peter Segal, pp. 48–51.

⁶ The composer was born on 11 September 1904, as indicated by his birth certificate. Many sources, however, provide an incorrect date of his birth.

⁷ The composition was only published in 2000 in the United States by Editions Orphée in the form of a piano reduction. The manuscript of the concerto is housed at Edwin A. Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music at Parkway Central Library – Free Library of Philadelphia.

⁸ See A.L. Madrid, *Rafael Adame and the First Guitar Concerto of the Twentieth Century*, “Gendai Guitar Magazine” 1998 (32), nos. 4 and 6, article published in English by Legacy of Matanya Ophee, “Digital Guitar Archive”, 18 March 2022; Source: <https://www.digitalguitararchive.com/2022/03/rafael-adame-and-the-first-guitar-concerto-of-the-twentieth-century/>, [access: 20.07.2024].

⁹ There is some doubt as to whether the piece had been performed before. However, this is the first documented performance of the composition.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ See G. Galván, *The Edwin A. Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music: Latin American Orchestral Works*, Free Library of Philadelphia, Philadelphia 2017.

Two attempts at ensuring that the guitar stands out from the orchestra have been referenced in Spanish literature. The first regarded the composition *Suite madrileña* (1936) by Conrado del Campo y Zabaleta (1878–1953). The composer incorporated four interludes performed by two guitars. The piece was premiered in Madrid on 8 December 1934 by Orquesta Filarmónica de Madrid, with guitarists Ángel Barrios and José Recuerda¹². The second attempt at including two guitars as solo instruments with an orchestra took place in 1938. The Spanish composer and amateur guitarist Quintín Esquembre (1885–1965) adapted his 1928 orchestral composition *Guitarra andaluza* ten years later into a version for two guitars and orchestra, adding the subtitle *Rapsodia española*. The issue of the instrument's quiet sound was resolved by having the two instruments play in unison or in octaves. In the 1940s, the composition drew the interest of the flamenco guitarist Matilde Cuervas and her husband, a highly regarded virtuoso of the instrument, Emilio Pujol, yet they ultimately decided not to premiere the piece¹³.

Castelnuovo-Tedesco and his first concerto for guitar and orchestra

The year 1939 saw a major breakthrough in the history of the genre with the creation of two works of great significance for guitar music: *Concerto No. 1 in D Major*, Op. 99 by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895–1968) and *Concierto de Aranjuez* by Joaquín Rodrigo (1901–1999).

The Italian composer Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco was persuaded to write for the guitar by Andrés Segovia. They first met at a music festival in Venice in 1932 through their mutual acquaintance, Manuel de Falla (1876–1946). Although they had no opportunity to discuss the guitar during the festival, Segovia, having encountered the composer's wife Clara Castelnuovo-Tedesco by accident while travelling on a water tram from Venice to Lido, addressed her with the following words:

I've never dared to ask your husband for anything, but I would be delighted if he were willing to write a piece for me. Please tell him this on my behalf¹⁴.

¹² See M. Alonso, *Catálogo de la obras de Conrado del Campo*, Fundación Juan March, Madrid 1986.

¹³ See J. Suárez-Pajares, *Quintín Esquembre (1885–1965). Vida y obra de un maestro independiente*, "Roseta. Revista de la Sociedad Española de la Guitarra" 2009 (2), pp. 54–99.

¹⁴ C. Otero, *Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco. Su vida y su obra para guitarra*, Ediciones musicales Yolotl, México 1987, English edition: *His Life and Works for the Guitar*, Ashley Mark, Newcastle 1999, p. 41.

Castelnuovo-Tedesco expressed his concerns about writing a guitar piece in the very first letter he wrote in response to the guitarist's proposal:

It would be a great pleasure to write something for you, because I have had occasion to admire you many times, but I must confess that I don't know your instrument and haven't the remotest idea how to compose for it¹⁵.

Segovia introduced the composer to the world of guitar music and technical capabilities of the instrument by sending him a note explaining how to tune the instrument, along with two compositions: Fernando Sor's *Variations on a Theme by Mozart* and Manuel Ponce's *Variations and Fugue on La Folia*. The collaboration between the composer and the guitarist resulted in numerous pieces for solo guitar, including *Sonata (Omaggio a Boccherini)*, Op. 77 (1934), *Capriccio diabolico (Homage to Paganini)*, Op. 85 (1935) and *Tarantella*, Op. 87a (1936). However, Segovia dreamed of a concerto for guitar and orchestra. Castelnuovo-Tedesco recalled that Segovia approached him with the following words:

My ambition on my life has been to play with orchestra but there are no concertos for guitar and orchestra. Would you write one?¹⁶

The proposal was not met with the composer's enthusiasm, who responded: "One can never be sure about guitar technique, because it's a mysterious instrument¹⁷."

A few years later, however, wishing to express his gratitude for the support given to him by Segovia at a difficult time of heightening discrimination against citizens of Jewish descent in Fascist Italy and his struggle with the decision to leave his home country and move to the United States, the composer set out to work on his first guitar piece with orchestra. The concerto genre was no longer unfamiliar to him as he had already written two violin concertos: *Concerto Italiano*, Op. 31 (1924) and *I Profeti* (1931), Op. 66, two piano concertos: *G Major*, Op. 46 (1927) and *F Major*, Op. 92 (1936–7), as well as *Cello Concerto in G Minor*, Op. 72 (1932–33).

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco began working on *Concerto No. 1 in D Major*, Op. 99 for guitar and orchestra during his meeting with Segovia in Florence at Christmas in 1938. The composer recalled that the first movement of the concerto was completed within that week and immediately revised together with Segovia¹⁸. According to Corazón Otero, the remaining movements were com-

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 41.

¹⁶ Radio interview with Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco conducted by Michael Inman at the end of 1958 on Los Angeles Radio in the programme *Music and Sound*, episode entitled *Castelnuovo-Tedesco and Segovia*; available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAAqvi2BPtjg> (part one), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAFuhh10sQ0&t=61s> (part two), [access: 20.07.2024]. Own transcription.

¹⁷ C. Otero, op. cit., p. 50.

¹⁸ Radio interview with Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, op. cit.

pleted and sent to Segovia in Uruguay in January 1939¹⁹, where the guitarist was living at the time. This suggests that the piece was written in an extraordinarily short amount of time. Graham Wade (1995, 1997) and Carlos Ricardo Saeb Valenzuela (2017) date the composition's creation as occurring "in the summer of 1939"²⁰ or "by the summer of 1939"²¹, citing Corazón Otero's work. However, the author of the present article cannot find such information in either the Spanish (1987) or English (1999) editions, whether on the pages indicated by the researchers or elsewhere in the book. Instead, January 1939 is explicitly mentioned, whereas the catalogue of the composer's works compiled by Nick Rossi provides only the year of composition²². In the context of the detailed timeline of the piece's creation and the fact that the composer started working on it in December 1938, it is surprising, and likely premature, that Andrés Segovia mentioned the concerto in an interview with Amy Châtelain for the newspaper "La Suisse" on 4 January 1938, that is eleven months before the work even began: "Castelnuovo-Tedesco sent me *Concerto for guitar and small orchestra*²³."

The aforementioned radio interview with the composer (see footnote 15) suggests that Castelnuovo-Tedesco sent the remaining two movements of the concerto to Segovia only after he had moved to the United States:

Then I left for North America, he left for South America, and I sent him over two movements to Montevideo where he was living at the time and where he performed it after for the first time²⁴.

Considering that the composer and his family left for America on 13 July 1939, it might be surmised that the piece was completed after this date. At the same time, a letter from Andrés Segovia to Manuel Ponce, dated 26 August 1939, reveals that the guitarist was already in possession of the concerto's score at that time²⁵.

¹⁹ The month is provided by Corazón Otero, eadem, op. cit., p. 55.

²⁰ See G. Wade, G. Garño, *A new Look at Segovia*, vol. 1, Mel Bay Publications, Pacific 1997, p. 104.

²¹ See G. Wade, *The Relevance of Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895–1968)*, European Guitar Teachers Association 1995; Source: <https://web.archive.org/web/20130530064634/http://www.egta.co.uk/content/ct/#11>, [access: 10.07.2024]; C.R. Saeb Valenzuela, *The cadenzas of the first modern guitar concertos*, doctoral dissertation, University of Kentucky 2017, p. 11; Source: https://uknowledge.uky.edu/music_etds/77/, [access: 10.07.2024].

²² See *Catalogue of Works by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco*, ed. N. Rossi, International Castelnuovo-Tedesco Society, New York 1977.

²³ "Castelnuovo-Tedesco m'a envoyé un *Concerto pour guitare et petit orchestre*"; Press interview with Andrés Segovia conducted by Amy Châtelain for the newspaper "La Suisse", 4 January 1938, published in full as an appendix to the article: J. Gimeno, *Un viaje sin destino: Andrés Segovia hacia el Concierto de Aranjuez*, [in:] *Nombres propios de la guitarra: Joaquín Rodrigo*, ed. J. Suárez-Pajares, Ayuntamiento de Córdoba, Córdoba 2010, pp. 185–187. Own translation.

²⁴ Radio interview with Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, op. cit. Own transcription.

²⁵ A letter from Andrés Segovia to Manuel Ponce, 26 August 1939, [in:] *The Segovia–Ponce Letters*, pp. 185–188.

This information would be important because the claim that it was the first guitar concerto in the history of the genre (often without specifying ‘in the 20th century’), which was strongly emphasised for years by Castelnuovo-Tedesco and Segovia, not only proved to be untrue in view of the known works of Rafael Adame, but the piece might have been completed at a similar time-frame to *Concierto de Aranjuez* by Joaquín Rodrigo. In the case of the Spanish composer, we also do not know the exact day when his first guitar concerto was completed. We do know, however, that on 1 September 1939, when Rodrigo and his wife decided to return to Spain, they took with them a fully completed version of the piece.²⁶ It had probably been finished even earlier, which is discussed later in the article.

However, in his autobiography published in 2005, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco recalls that he finished working on the composition in January 1939:

[...] in January 1939, I composed the remaining two movements [of the concerto] and sent them to him [Andrés Segovia] before leaving Italy²⁷.

The premiere of *Concerto No. 1 in D Major*, Op. 99 for guitar and orchestra by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco took place in Montevideo on 28 October 1939²⁸. Andrés Segovia was the soloist, and the SODRE orchestra was conducted by Lamberto Baldi. The composer could not attend the event and did not hear his work performed live until 12 years later, in 1951.

Segovia’s impressions of Castelnuovo-Tedesco’s concerto, described in his letter to Ponce, are particularly interesting. He did not believe that the orchestra was capable of overpowering the solo instrument and was critical of the guitar part itself:

Castelnuovo Tedesco has written a delightful Concerto for Guitar and Orchestra for me. He has been very much on target with the choice of themes and in its proper development. The orchestra is composed of: 1 flute, 1 oboe, two clarinets in A, 1 bassoon, 1 Horn in F, Tympani, 2 violins I, 2 Violins II, 2 Violas, 2 Cellos and 1 Contrabass. I do not believe this whole ensemble covers up the guitar, because his use, with respect to it [the ensemble, Tr.] is prudent and clever. On the other hand the treatment of the guitar could have been more brilliant. In any event it is a very clever and successful work²⁹.

²⁶ See V. Kamhi de Rodrigo, *De la mano de Joaquín Rodrigo: Historia de nuestra vida*, Fundación Banco Exterior, Madrid 1986; English edition: *Hand in Hand with Joaquín Rodrigo: My Life at the Maestro’s Side*, Latin American Literary Review Press, Pittsburgh 1992.

²⁷ “[...] nel gennaio del 1939, composi gli altri due tempi, e, prima di lasciare l’Italia, glieli spedii”; M. Castelnuovo-Tedesco, J. Westby, *Una vita di musica. Un libro di ricordi*, Cadmo, Fiesole 2005, p. 265. Own translation.

²⁸ Some publications incorrectly date the composition’s premiere to 28 November 1939. G. Wade, *The Relevance of Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895–1968)*; C.R. Saeb Valenzuela, op. cit. The first performance of the composition took place on 28 October 1939, as evidenced by several sources, including a preserved poster from the event.

²⁹ “Castelnuovo Tedesco me ha escrito un delicioso Concerto para Guitarra y Orquesta. Ha estado felicísimo en la elección de bs temas y en su justo desarrollo. La orquesta se compone de:

The concerto sparked Castelnuovo-Tedesco's interest in composing for the guitar or guitars and orchestra. His next composition of this kind was *Serenade* for guitar and chamber orchestra from 1943. Interestingly, in line with Segovia's suggestion, the composer increased the number of performers in the orchestra compared to his first concerto, adding another horn, triangle and tambourine, as well as cymbals and a drum in the final movement³⁰. Two years later, in 1945, Castelnuovo-Tedesco created a guitar and orchestra arrangement of *Capriccio diabolico (Omaggio a Paganini)*, Op. 85a, which he had written ten years before. In 1953, he composed his second *Concerto for guitar and orchestra in C Major*, Op. 160 (*Concerto Sereno*), and in 1962 *Concerto for Two Guitars and Orchestra*, Op. 201.

Concierto de Aranjuez by Joaquín Rodrigo

Regardless of Segovia's efforts to acquire a concerto for guitar and orchestra for his repertoire, an important meeting took place between the Spanish composer Joaquín Rodrigo and his compatriot Regino Sáinz de la Maza on 29 September 1938³¹ in San Sebastian in the north of Spain. Also present at the lunch was Luis de Urquijo, the future Marquis of Bolarque. It was at this meeting that the composer made the final decision to write his first concerto for guitar and orchestra. He recalls the words spoken to him by the Spanish guitarist:

Man, you must make a return with a concerto for guitar and orchestra... It is my life's dream [...] You are destined for this, a sort of "chosen one"³².

To which – having drunk two glasses of wine – the composer responded with confidence: "Man, it's done"³³.

The composer and the guitarist had known each other for many years, and Rodrigo had previously written two other guitar compositions for him: *Toccata* (1933) and *En los trigales* (1938). Rodrigo made his first attempts at composing

1 flauta, 1 oboe, dos clarinetes en La, 1 fagote, 1 Como en Fa, Timbal, 2 violines I, 2 Violines U, 2 Violas, 2 Cellos y 1 Contrabajo. Todo este conjunto no creo que cubra a la guitarra, porque, en relación con ésta, su empleo es prudente e ingenioso. En cambio el tratamiento de la guitarra hubiera podido ser más brillante. De todos modos es una obra muy ingeniosa y afortunada"; A letter from Andrés Segovia to Manuel Ponce, 26 August 1939, in: *The Segovia-Ponce Letters*, pp. 185–188, translated by Peter Segal, pp. 189–192.

³⁰ See C. Otero, op. cit.

³¹ Some publications also date the composition to 26 September 1938.

³² "Hombre, has de volver con un concierto para guitarra y orquesta... Es la ilusión de mi vida... Eres el llamado a hacerlo, algo así como el «elegido»"; J. Rodrigo, *El porqué y cómo se hizo el Concierto de Aranjuez. Recuerdos y vagas apostillas a la obra*, [in:] C. Rodrigo, A. León Ara, C. Laredo, *Joaquín Rodrigo a través de sus escritos*, Ediciones Joaquín Rodrigo, Madrid 2019, p. 110. Own translation.

³³ "Hombre, eso está hecho"; Ibidem, p. 110. Own translation.

for this instrument in 1926 with *Preludio al atardecer*³⁴ and *Zarabanda lejana*. According to Regino Sáinz de la Maza, they had discussed a concerto for guitar and orchestra before, although Rodrigo was not enthusiastic about writing such a piece. However, he supposedly promised that the concerto would be ready when the guitarist returned from America:

I worked with Joaquín Rodrigo for some time, years even; he did not seem overly excited and did not believe in including the guitar in the orchestra. Once, on the way to America, when the ship was passing through Valencia, I spoke to him, and he solemnly promised me that when I returned from America, he would have the concerto written³⁵.

Recalling the moment of their farewell, Rodrigo mentioned that it happened in the spring of 1934³⁶.

There are many conflicting reports as to the circumstances surrounding the creation of *Concierto de Aranjuez* for guitar and orchestra by Joaquín Rodrigo. They result – in my opinion – from a misinterpretation of the diaries of Victoria Kamhi, the composer's wife. She recalls the memories of Amalia Carrasco, who played host to them in Paris starting from late summer 1938. During this difficult time for the composer, due to the death of his unborn child and the severe illness of his wife, she heard the haunting sounds of *Adagio*, the second movement of the concerto, played late at night on the piano.

Later she would tell me how he would spend the long hours of the night at the old piano, unable to sleep and that she heard from her room a melody as full of sadness and longing that it truly gave her chills – writes Victoria Kamhi³⁷.

The composer's wife comments on this memory, adding that this melody would become the *Adagio* from *Concierto de Aranjuez*, and that the composer played it for the first time. However, this information is not entirely accurate since the author of the diaries, having already recalled the events from the Christmas period of 1938, later mentions that one morning Rodrigo informed her that he had finished working on the second and third movements of the concerto:

One morning Joaquín, to my great surprise, announced that he had already composed two movements of his concerto for the guitar: the second – which would attain such

³⁴ Dedicated to Josefina Robledo and forgotten for over 90 years, *Preludio al atardecer* was discovered in the composer's archive in 2018 by the Spanish musicologist Javier Suárez-Pajares.

³⁵ "Yo venía trabajando lea a Joaquín Rodrigo durante algún tiempo durante años incluso, él parecía que no estaba muy animado y no creía en la posibilidad de incorporar la guitarra a la orquesta. Ya en una ocasión en que viva [unintelligible] América al pasar el barco por Valencia estuve con él hablando y me prometió solemnemente que cuando yo regrese de América tendría el concierto escrito"; Television interview with Regino Sáinz de la Maza, 16 January 1976. J. Soler, *Regino Sáinz de la Maza. A Fondo*, RTVE, 1976. Own transcription and translation.

³⁶ See J. Rodrigo, *Mi vieja y fraternal amistad con Regino Sáinz de la Maza*, "Ritmo, Revista musical ilustrada" 1982 (52), no. 518, p. 20.

³⁷ V. Kamhi de Rodrigo, op. cit., p. 109.

fame – and the third. Furthermore, he hoped to have the first ready very soon. This news filled me with pleasure and optimism³⁸.

This account is confirmed by the composer's own words. He recalls that the second and third movement of the concerto were written two months after the memorable meeting in San Sebastian. Rodrigo described the process of composing these movements in the following way:

[...] two months later, standing in my small studio in Saint Jacques street, in the very heart of the Latin Quarter, and thinking vaguely about the concerto as the idea appealed to me by virtue of its difficulty, I heard the entire theme of *Adagio* being sung within me, all at once, without hesitation and almost exactly as you will hear it. And then, with hardly any transition, the third movement, which is absolutely the same as in the piece. I quickly realised that the work was finished; our intuition does not deceive us in this. I outlined the form, shaped by the respective themes, and wrote the guitar part with a very rudimentary and uncertain first draft of the orchestral part³⁹.

According to the composer, the work on the first movement proceeded differently and did not result from inspiration, but rather from “reflection, calculation and willpower”. Rodrigo's statement also reveals when he completed the concerto: it was the spring of 1938, which he described as a “joyful spring”⁴⁰.

The situation here is also not wholly unambiguous, as there are statements by the composer indicating that he had already completed the piece in Spain. Thanks to a letter from Regino Sáinz de la Maza we know that he had not yet received the complete work in August 1939:

I suppose that you are still busy with the music for “Colón” [the score for a film about the life of Christopher Columbus] and finishing my concerto. Please send it to me soon because I want to perform it in Madrid at the beginning of the new season and then immediately tour the world to play it with the best orchestras. You'll see⁴¹.

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 107.

³⁹ “[...] dos meses después, hallándome de pie en mi pequeño estudio de la rué Saint Jacques, en el corazón del barrio latino y pensando vagamente en el concierto, pues yo me había encariñado con la idea a fuerza de juzgarla difícil, oí cantar dentro de mí el tema completo del adagio, de un tirón, sin vacilaciones, y casi idéntico al que vais a escuchar. Y en seguida, sin apenas transición, el del tercer tiempo, este absolutamente igual que figura en la obra. Rápidamente me di cuenta de que la obra estaba hecha, nuestra intuición no nos engaña en esto. Esbocé la forma gobernada por los temas respectivos y escribí la guitarra con un primer esbozo de orquesta muy rudimentario e incierto”; J. Rodrigo, *El porqué y cómo se hizo el Concierto de Aranjuez*, p. 110. Own translation.

⁴⁰ See ibidem, p. 111.

⁴¹ “Te supongo metido en harina con la música del «Colón» y terminando mi concierto. Envíale pronto porque quiero darle en Madrid a principios de temporada y salir por el mundo enseñando a tocarle con las mejores orquestas. Va verás”; A letter from Regino Sáinz de la Maza to Joaquín Rodrigo, 10 August 1939. A reproduction of the letter was published in: J. Suárez-Pajares, *Joaquín Rodrigo. Imágenes de una vida plena, 1901–1999. Iconografía*, SGAE – Fundación Autor, Madrid 2001, p. 76. Own translation.

It is important to consider Rodrigo's unique process of recording his pieces, for it was unusually complicated. Blind since the age of three, the composer would write down his compositions using a special Braille typewriter, then dictate them to a copyist, after which together with his wife, a pianist, they made revisions. The process was arduous, time-consuming and, as the composer recalled, very exhausting.

Both Rodrigo and Regino Sáinz de la Maza were aware of the challenges involved in performing the piece. The composition required the guitarist to make a tremendous amount of effort and struggle with its technical difficulties. The guitarist's health deteriorated significantly as he was preparing to premiere it. Leopoldo Neri, a scholar of Sáinz de la Maza's artistic achievements, quotes the concerned words of his wife, Josefina: "He has become obsessed with the Concerto and studies it more than necessary despite my prohibitions⁴²."

Conversely, the composer, fully conscious of the challenges facing Sáinz de la Maza, emphasised the need to further develop guitar technique and its virtuosic elements. He perceived this development as a natural consequence of introducing the guitar into the concerto genre as a solo instrument:

It was not enough for great virtuosos to shine as soloists; they also had to stand out among and above the instrumental ensemble, displaying the highest level of technique. The "concerto" was born from this ambition – a sumptuous and decorative form which has greatly increased the solo instrument's capabilities by pitting it against the orchestra. The same process of development has been demanded of the guitar, and its suddenness has raised a series of unusual technical problems, which Sáinz de la Maza has had, not to solve, but to tame⁴³.

Such an approach by the composer, stressing the importance of displaying one's skill and making significant demands of the performer, was a distinctive feature of Rodrigo's later works, evident not only in his guitar concertos, but also in those written for other instruments, for instance cello or flute.

The problem of the guitar sound against the orchestral background posed a great challenge for the composer, who chose to write the concerto with a large orchestra consisting of strings and double winds. Even in the final days leading up to the premiere, both the composer and the guitarist were concerned whether the guitar would be audible enough:

⁴² "Está loco con el Concierto y a pesar de mis prohibiciones estudia en él más de la cuenta"; L. Neri, *El Concierto de Aranjuez a través de los escritos de Regino Sáinz de la Maza*, [in:] *Nombres propios de la guitarra: Joaquín Rodrigo*, pp. 71–72. Own translation.

⁴³ "No les bastaba á los grandes virtuosos brillar como solistas, necesitaban también destacar entre y por encima de un conjunto instrumental, en un supremo alarde de técnica. De este afán nace el «concierto», forma suntuaria y decorativa que, al querer enfrentar un instrumento con la orquesta, ha agrandado en proporciones considerables la capacidad de los instrumentos solistas. El mismo estirón ha sido pedido a la guitarra, y este súbito proceso decrecimiento, ha planteado una serie de inusitados problemas técnicos, que Sáinz de la Maza ha tenido, no que resolver, sino que domeñar"; A. Iglesias, *Escritos de Joaquín Rodrigo*, Editorial Alpuerto, Madrid 1999, p. 179. Own translation.

In the early hours before dawn, Regino, who was travelling with Joaquín in the same compartment of the sleeping car, woke him with these words: "I'm obsessed with an idea that won't let me sleep. What if tomorrow, in the rehearsal, the guitar can't be heard over the orchestra?" As a result of this question, neither of the two slept for the rest of the night⁴⁴.

Their fears, however, were unfounded, and the premiere of *Concierto de Aranjuez* turned out to be a great success. The first performance of the piece took place in Barcelona on 9 November 1940. Regino Sáinz de la Maza was accompanied by Orquesta Filarmónica de Barcelona under the baton of César Mendoza Lasalle.

Although Rodrigo had vowed not to compose another guitar concerto, in 1954 he yielded to Andrés Segovia's persuasion and wrote his second work for guitar and orchestra entitled *Fantasia para un gentilhomme* (which the composer referred to as a concerto). He would later return to the genre three more times: in 1966, he composed *Concierto madrigal* for two guitars and orchestra, a year later *Concierto Andaluz* for four guitars and orchestra, and in 1982 his last work for guitar and orchestra *Concierto para una fiesta*.

Boris Asafiev and his Concerto for Guitar and Chamber Orchestra

The year 1939 saw yet another guitar concerto, this time created in the Soviet Union by Boris Vladimirovich Asafiev (1884–1949), who also used the pseudonym Igor Glebov. *Concerto for Guitar and Chamber Orchestra*⁴⁵ is a work with a classical three-movement structure: *Allegro moderato*, *Andante* and *Allegro non troppo*. The orchestra, consisting of strings, a clarinet and timpani, accompanies the solo instrument only during the first and third movements of the composition.

Asafiev was one of the leading Russian and Soviet musicologists, who was most active as a composer in the 1930s. His three concertos – for guitar, piano and clarinet – are dated to the same year, 1939. The composer's interest in the six-string guitar was not natural, as it was considered to be a "hostile" Western instrument in his home country⁴⁶.

⁴⁴ V. Kamhi de Rodrigo, op. cit., p. 113.

⁴⁵ The composition was published in 2001 by Editions Orphee.

⁴⁶ See Ю.А. Финкельштейн, *Гитара в композиторском творчестве Б.В. Асафьева: жанры, стиль*, "Вестник Академии Русского балета им. А.Я. Вагановой" 2015 (38), no. 3, pp. 251–262; [Y. A. Finkelshteyn, *Gitara v kompozitorskom tvorchestve B.V. Asaf'yeva: zhanry, stil*, "Vestnik Akademii Russkogo baleta im. A.Ya. Vaganovoy" 2015 (38), no. 3, pp. 251–262]; Source: <https://vaganov.elpub.ru/jour/article/view/112> [access: 11.07.2024], p. 252.

Asafiev's guitar concerto was one of the first pieces written for this instrument by the composer. Before it, he had only written a few guitar miniatures. His fascination with the instrument was predominantly inspired by two guitarists. The first was Andrés Segovia, who travelled to Russia in 1926, 1927, 1930 and 1936, and whose playing aroused great enthusiasm in the composer. The second was the Russian guitarist Vasily Yashnev (1879–1962); he maintained a close relationship with the guitarist and composed the concerto with him in mind. He also learned more about the instrument from Yashnev's students. The composer was likely not very proficient at playing the guitar. As he recalls:

I knew the guitar, but I almost forgot about it. I immediately became fascinated, and relearned to play the instrument; soon after, I began composing *24 Preludes* for guitar..., *Concerto for guitar*... and the cycle *Romances and Songs* for solo guitar⁴⁷.

The concerto was written by Asafiev in a very short span of time, between 10 and 13 September 1939, in a version with piano. After some time, it was arranged for orchestra⁴⁸. Its premiere took place in the spring of 1941. Veniamin Kuznetsov, Yashnev's student, performed as the soloist, and the conductor was Nikolai Rabinovich. Soon after, Kuznetsov joined the Red Army to fight in the Great Patriotic War and would never return to playing the guitar.

The composer spoke about his work with great enthusiasm:

[...] the solid three-movement concerto for guitar and orchestra (strings with a clarinet and timpani) in the style of Russian European classical music. It was a great artistic success⁴⁹.

The issue of guitar concertos has not been extensively discussed in literature, and it requires ongoing research and coverage. The works of Polish composers creating in this genre have been examined in Wojciech Gurgul's articles published in "Edukacja Muzyczna"⁵⁰.

⁴⁷ "Гитару я знал, но полузабыл. Тут же я увлекся, вновь изучил инструмент, и вскоре стали возникать: 24 прелюда для гитары [...], Концерт для гитары [...], цикл: Романсы и песни для гитары соло"; Ibidem, p. 253. Own translation.

⁴⁸ See Б.Л. Вольман, *Гитара в России*, Государственное музыкальное издательство, Ленинград 1961; [B.L. Vol'man, *Gitara v Rossii*, Gosudarstvennoye muzykal'noye izdatel'stvo, Leningrad 1961], p. 159.

⁴⁹ "[...] солидный трёхчастный концерт для гитары с оркестром (струнные с инкрустацией кларнета и литавр) в стиле русской европейской классики. Это была большая художественная удача", Б.В. Асафьев, *Мысли и думы*, ч. I: *О себе*, manuscript, 24 December 1941 – 19 January 1942, later published in: "Искусство музыки: теория и история" 2023, no. 29, pp. 206–245; [B. V. Asaf'yev, *Mysli i dumy*, č. I: *O sebe*, later published in: "Iskusstvo muzyki: teoriya i istoriya"]; Source: https://imti.sias.ru/upload/imti/imti_2023_29.pdf [stan z 11.07.2024], p. 232. Own translation.

⁵⁰ W. Gurgul, *A Panorama of Polish Guitar Concertos*, "Edukacja Muzyczna" 2020 (15), pp. 85–103; Source: <https://czasopisma.ujd.edu.pl/index.php/EM/article/view/1129/1074/2583> [access: 11.07.2024], [DOI: 10.16926/em.2020.15.11].

One of the key aspects in the development of the guitar concerto in the 20th century was the collaboration between the composer and the performer. As can be seen from the examples of the early works of this century, it was not easy and faced many obstacles.

Both the composers and guitarists were forced to make many compromises. Their initial notions had to undergo significant changes. However, some of the early works written for this constellation of instruments turned out to be true masterpieces. Their popularity has not faded to this day, and *Concierto de Aranjuez* by Joaquín Rodrigo has become the most performed piece for guitar and orchestra.

Over the years, numerous doubts have arisen as to the dates and circumstances surrounding the creation of the first guitar concertos in the 20th century, which required careful investigation and discussion.

Without a doubt, guitar concertos have significantly influenced the development of the instrument and contributed to elevating its status. At the same time, the composers creating in this genre began to gain widespread recognition, as well as new platforms and opportunities for artistic expression. The successes of the first guitar concertos in the 20th century generated great interest in this combination of instruments. According to my research, at least 540 pieces for guitar or guitars with orchestra have been composed since 1939, and more are written with each passing year.

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Pierwsze koncerty gitarowe w XX wieku – kompozytor a wykonawca

Streszczenie

Artykuł porusza problematykę współpracy kompozytorów i wykonawców, która zaowocowała powstaniem pierwszych w XX wieku koncertów gitarowych i odegrała kluczową rolę w kształtowaniu się tego gatunku. Analizowane zagadnienia nie są szeroko opisane w literaturze. Historia pierwszych prób kompozytorskich w obszarze gatunku koncertu na gitarę z orkiestrą po około stu-letniej przerwie jest prawie nieznaną. Artykuł jest efektem badań twórczej aktywności zarówno kompozytorów, jak i wirtuozów gitary tamtych czasów. Niniejszy tekst oparty jest w dużym stopniu na materiałach źródłowych, które stanowią listy, wywiady, pamiętniki oraz inne wypowiedzi artystów, a także osób z ich otoczenia. Pierwsze koncerty gitarowe powstawały w bardzo różnych i odległych miejscach na świecie, stąd też temat ten będzie wymagał dalszych badań i uzupełnień.

Artykuł przedstawia również szereg nieznanych powszechnie faktów związanych z najwybitniejszymi dziełami tego okresu: *Concierto de Aranjuez* Joaquína Rodriga oraz *Koncertem nr 1 D-dur* op. 99 Maria Castelnuovo-Tedesco. W szczególności autor koncentruje się na wybranych wątkach współpracy kompozytorów i gitarzystów związanych z genezą tych utworów, odnosząc się do problemów, które budziły wątpliwości, pozostawały niejasne bądź wywoływały dyskurs badaczy.

Słowa kluczowe: koncert gitarowy, współpraca kompozytora z wykonawcą, Joaquín Rodrigo, *Concierto de Aranjuez*, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Andrés Segovia, Boris Asafjew.