

## PROCEEDINGS ARTICLE

# Analysis of the Spanish National Style Characteristics and Performance Skills of Falla's Piano Work "Danza Ritual del Fuego"

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## ABSTRACT

Manuel de Falla is the greatest figure in the Spanish music industry in the 20th century and the founder of the national music school since the Spanish Renaissance. His works incorporate the rich colors of Spanish folk music, fully interpreting the charm of Spanish folk music. This paper takes Falla's "Danza Ritual del Fuego" as the research object, analyzes Falla's imitation of the acoustic effects of traditional Spanish musical instruments of guitars and the use of flamenco dance elements in his works, and analyzes the creation characteristics and performance skills of the work.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Manuel de Falla (1876-1946) was one of the outstanding modern composers and pianists in Spain, under the guidance of the composer and pianist Pedrell in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. With the creation of national elements as the core, he collected and studied local folk music, and continued to innovate in the traditional music system, incorporating modern creative techniques, and made great contributions to the development of Spanish music. Falla is known as "the spiritual leader of international modern music in Spain" [1].

As one of the founders of Spanish national music school in the 19th century, Falla's works are very charming in Spanish folk music. Whether it is Falla's vocal work *Siete Canciones Populares Espanoles*, piano music *Fantasia Baetica*, the ballet *El Amor Brujo* or the orchestral *El Retablo de Maese Pedro* fully expresses the charm of Spanish folk music. *Danza Ritual del Fuego* is the most famous one of the thirteen pieces of

music in the dance drama *El Amor Brujo*. This article takes *Danza Ritual del Fuego* as the research object to explore the creation characteristics and performance techniques of its unique Spanish charm.

## 2. COMPOSED BACKGROUND OF "DANZA RITUAL DEL FUEGO"

The rise of the national music school in the 19th century was led by Philippe Pedrell, a self-taught Spanish composer and founder of the Spanish national music school, who led the revival of Spanish music and advocated collecting folk music, and fusion with musical works. His ideas influenced the development of Spanish piano music, known as the father of Spanish national music. The three outstanding Spanish folk music composers he trained are one of his great contributions to the music industry. They are Granados, Albénis, and Falla. As the most representative one of Pedrell's three students, Falla is undoubtedly a "loyalist" of Spanish folk music with

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some impressionistic features in his works. Falla's use of Spanish folk music had inherited Pedrell's creation method with Spanish folk music as the core, and continuously innovated on this basis, not only showing the charm of Spanish folk music, but also indicating the unique creation characteristics of his works. He is "the founder of Spanish national music school", "the new pioneer of folk music" and "they won the world's appreciation with the characteristics of Spanish music" [2].

*Danza Ritual del Fuego* was selected from a dance piece from *El Amor Brujo*, which was a one-act ballet created by Falla based on gypsy folklore. It told the story of a young gypsy girl Candelas, haunted by the ghost of her deceased lover, stubbornly harassing her new suitor, Calmiro, in courtship with her. After learning that the deceased's infidelity was as strong as his jealousy, Calmiro and Candelas persuaded another gypsy girl, Lucia, to use her charms to distract the ghost. When the lovers settled their love with a kiss, the power of the ghost disappeared instantly. Among the 13 pieces of music in this dance drama, *Danza Ritual del Fuego*, which appears as the eighth stanza, is particularly famous. In addition to being adapted into orchestral works, it has also been adapted into piano solo and double-piano works, especially the solo *Danza Ritual del Fuego*, which is more famous.

The ballet was composed at the end of the seven years that Falla settled in Paris. During this period, Falla inherited the creation techniques of composer Pedrell and constantly innovated them. Although deeply influenced by Impressionism and Classical music in Paris, the atmosphere of Andalusian folk music could be clearly felt from the melody and rhythm of Falla's *Danza Ritual del Fuego*. Falla incorporated acoustics of the guitar playing technique of the traditional Spanish instrument and the characteristics of flamenco dance into this work, so that the work presented a festive atmosphere of the Spanish national fanaticism.

### 3. ANALYSIS OF CREATION FEATURES OF "DANZA RITUAL DEL FUEGO"

"Our music must be based on people's music, based on folk dances and folk songs... It is once said that we don't have our own traditions. In fact, we have. There are no fully documented traditions, but we have a very deep, indelible tradition in our dance and rhythm. The player has a very ancient style and a very free nature that is born with us, and that's where our inspiration comes from" [3]. This is the concept that Falla put forward when talking about Spanish music. Although he combines the techniques of

Impressionism and Classicism while composing, his creation always takes Spanish national music as the core, and integrates the "spirit" of folk music into his works with a variety of creation techniques [4].

### 3.1. Use of Guitar Acoustic Effects in the Work

Spanish traditional folk instruments have had an important impact on the development of Spanish music. Many piano music creations in Spain have imitated the sound of folk instruments, of which the guitar is one of the most far-reaching instruments. According to the history of Spanish music, the guitar was divided into two kinds. One was introduced by the Latins, similar to the modern Spanish guitar; the other was introduced by the Arabs, called the Luban, which was one of the most important instruments of the Renaissance. The six-string guitar was developed and evolved from the 19th century. The six-string guitar, also known as the classical guitar, was extremely expressive. In the creation, it was an imitation of the six-string guitar sound, and Falla naturally and exquisitely set the precious gems of the Spanish folk instrumental guitar on the work. He imitated the guitar's unique playing methods through different creation techniques, and the following was an analysis of the guitar's Punteado, Rasqueado, Broken Tone, and Thumb Playing Methods and Sound Imitations in Falla's *Danza Ritual del Fuego*.

#### 3.1.1. Punteado and Rasqueado

Punteado is one of the most basic guitar playing techniques. It refers to continuous and rapid plucking of the strings by the fingers to make a clear and crisp sound. Rasqueado is a relaxed half-grip state with the right hand, and the little finger (except thumb) is used to strum the strings from the bass part to the treble part in turn, playing an arpeggio effect. Example 1 is a combination of Falla's guitar playing techniques of Punteado and Rasqueado in his composition (Fig. 1).

#### 3.1.2. Broken Tone

The explanation of broken tone in Italian is: the effect of pressing in after crushing. It is through the rapid and powerful plucking of the strings that the guitar produces sharp and shocking dissonances, which are often used in Spanish music when the guitar is used as an accompaniment to a song. In several passages of the work, Falla used dissonant lean tones to express the acoustic sound of plucked guitars (see Fig. 2).



**Figure 1.** A combination of Falla's guitar playing techniques of Punteado and Rasqueado in his composition.



**Figure 2.** Appoggiatura to represent the sound effects of a plucked guitar.

### 3.2. Application of Spanish Flamenco Dance Elements in the Work

Spanish folk dance is famous all over the world for its unique dance characteristics, which has also become the subject of many composers' music creation. Among the colorful Spanish folk dances, flamenco dance can best express the unique charm of Spain. It originated in the south of Andalusia, Spain, and is a way of expressing the fusion of gypsy culture and Spanish folk music culture. Through a series of body movements, in coordination with the guitar sound, sometimes coincident with the rhythm of the song, sometimes staggered, the dancer sings or shouts according to the needs of emotional changes, which is the most characteristic place of flamenco dance.

#### 3.2.1. Characteristics of the Diverse Rhythm of Flamenco Dance

Flamenco dance originated in Andalusia, southern Spain. The style of flamenco dance is inherently explosive, with flexible footsteps and provocative dance shapes. Male dancers sometimes use toes, soles, and heels to hit the ground. Female dancers show a

passionate and unrestrained dancer soul with the accompaniment of songs, guitars and castanets through softness of the wrists, arms, and enchanting gracefulness displayed in the dance. The syncopated rhythm, triplet, dotted rhythm and pentatonic rhythm appear in Falla's *Danza Ritual del Fuego*, and various changes in rhythm patterns also fully demonstrate the characteristics of flamenco dance (see Fig. 3).

#### 3.2.2. "Tap Dance" Rhythm Is Used to Express the Interlaced Rhythm of Flamenco Dance

In flamenco dance, male dancers mainly focus on foot movements. The dancers alternately use different parts such as the forefoot, half-foot, heel and toe to strike the ground in various intermittent rhythms, with priorities and scattered sounds. Consistent, often with a syncopated rhythm, sometimes in line with the rhythm of the music, sometimes interlaced with the rhythm of the music, sometimes without musical accompaniment, using special sound effects to drive dancers' emotions, this dance is also called tap dance [5]. In the creation of piano works, Falla used the alternate playing of left and right hands to imitate the characteristics of tap dance in flamenco (see Fig. 4).



Figure 3. Flamenco dance rhythm characteristics in Falla's piano work "Danza Ritual del Fuego".



Figure 4. The "tap dance" rhythm is used to express the interlaced rhythm of Flamenco dance.

## 4. ANALYSIS ON PERFORMANCE SKILLS OF "DANZA RITUAL DEL FUEGO"

### 4.1. Playing Techniques That Imitate Guitar Acoustics

#### 4.1.1. Fingers Jump and Touch Keys Quickly — Imitating the Sound Effect of Punteado

As the basic playing method of guitar, the main purpose of Punteado is to highlight certain tones. If you need Punteado sound effects in the piano work, you need to jump your fingers and touch the keys quickly, and it is required that each note touches the keys evenly [6]. It does not mean that the strength of each note is the same, but according to the direction of the phrase to change the strength. In bars 97-102 of *Danza Ritual del Fuego*, the left-hand passage needs to be supported by the palm, and the front of the finger

quickly presses the key to play the acoustic effect of guitar plucking (see Fig. 5).

#### 4.1.2. Quickly and Forcefully Striking Keys With Your Fingers — Imitating the Acoustics of a Broken Tone Guitar Playing Technique

In the acoustic effect of the guitar, the broken tone playing technique is a collision of rough and dissonant sounds, which brings a shocking feeling. In Spanish piano works, in order to render the jubilant and lively atmosphere, this playing technique is often used. When playing, the player needs to treat the piano as a percussion instrument, and press down the keys quickly and directly with strong force, thereby producing a sharp and rough decorative sound effect. In the *Danza Ritual del Fuego*, the tonic will have an appoggiatura, and the key will be pressed down almost at the same time as the tonic to imitate the broken tone (see Fig. 2).



Figure 5. Fingers jump and touch keys quickly — imitating the sound effect of Punteado.



#### 4.1.3. Pressing the Finger Down to the End With the Wrist — Imitating the Acoustic Effect of Thumb Playing

In guitar playing skills, thumb playing refers to playing a single tone with the thumb to achieve a clear, powerful and strong sound effect. In Spanish piano works, the notes marked with "-" are generally played with the thumb. It is not required to use the thumb, but requires the player's wrist to drive the fingers to press down the key, and press the key to the end, so that the tone is bright and full. This technique is used in bars 22-29 of *Danza Ritual del Fuego*.

### 4.2. Playing Techniques That Express the Characteristics of Flamenco Dance

#### 4.2.1. Continuous Chords With Accent Marks

In bars 103-111 of *Danza Ritual del Fuego*, there are successive chord connections with accent marks, which have a frenetic and noisy acoustic effect. Falla added accent marks to each beat of each bar, which was characteristic of flamenco dance. When playing this chord connection, the player needs to relax his arms to let his hands naturally drop the keys, make a solid sound, and lift a chord in time to pay attention to the change in strength from P-ff (see Fig. 6).

#### 4.2.2. Playing Skills of Alternating Left and Right Hands in Toccatà Style

In Spanish works, Toccatà-style left and right hands are often played alternately, which is mainly to imitate the characteristics of tap dance in flamenco dance. When playing, the player needs to determine the theme motivation of the left and right hands. The whole arm should be in a relaxed state, and the wrist should be lowered in order to strengthen the control of the fingers. The pressing speed of the left and right hands should be very fast. At the same time, the strength should change with the direction of the theme motivation melody.

### 4.3. Use of Pedals

Appropriate pedal method is the hallmark of a pianist with artistic talent and high understanding. In *Danza Ritual del Fuego*, the player should pay attention to the use of the sustain pedal and the soft pedal, so that the changes of the timbre will be diversified.

#### 4.3.1. Sustain Pedal

In *Danza Ritual del Fuego*, two functions of the sustain pedal are mainly used:

1. Legato Function. In this work, the sustain pedal is used in many places to prolong the time value of the notes that cannot be held by fingers alone, so that two notes or two chords are naturally connected. The left hand of the 29th bar needs to use this function (see Fig. 7). To play the effect without gaps between two notes, the player needs to press the pedal when the first note is played, and then change the pedal just after the next note is played. The wonderful use of the sustain pedal in this piece can produce some overtones that create an ethereal convoluted tone.
2. Aggregate Volume Function. Refers to the sound effect of making a note or chord sound full and loud through rich common overtones. This function is required for bars 103-110 and 119-126 of *Danza Ritual del Fuego*. However, players need to note that the continuous chords here, the sustain pedal needs to be replaced by a beat to present rhythmic characteristics of Spanish dance.

#### 4.3.2. Soft Pedal

The function of the soft pedal is to reduce the sound. In *Danza Ritual del Fuego*, the intensity of the continuous vibrato changes in multiple bars, and the soft pedal is needed to complete the weak point. According to the changing requirements of the music's intensity, the player should pay attention that the soft pedal is always pressed in weak passages, and at the same time, the sustain pedal should be changed in depth according to the change of intensity (Fig. 8).



Figure 6. Accent marks to each beat of each bar and lift a chord in time to the change in strength from P-ff.



**Figure 7.** The left hand of the 29th bar needs to use the sustain pedal to play the effect without gaps between two notes.



**Figure 8.** Intensity of continuous vibrato changes in multiple bars, and the soft pedal is needed to complete the weak point.

The whole piece presents the characteristics of an intense Spanish-style dance music. The performer needs to explore the playing techniques that can best imitate the Spanish guitar sound effects and the Spanish dance style, and use the pedals of different shades to give vivid colors and tension to the work.

## 5. CONCLUSION

*Danza Ritual del Fuego* presents the audience with a picture of traditional Spanish music. Each piece of music is related to Spanish culture. The performers can deeply feel the fresh vitality of Spanish music culture. This vitality comes from the unique Spanish national music style of the work. Falla created a small number of works in his lifetime, but the quality was excellent. He has integrated his lifelong pursuit of music and his boundless love for the national music of the motherland into his works.

The creation style of Falla's *Danza Ritual del Fuego* presents the color of Andalusian folk music, conveying the composer's imagination and remodeling of the traditional Spanish culture. The composer's integration of the Spanish guitar playing techniques with Punteado, broken tone and thumb playing acoustic effects and flamenco dance elements, imitation of guitar sound and performance of flamenco dance characteristics, show the freedom and simplicity of Spanish music. As the founder of the

Spanish national music school, Falla's works constantly break through the limitations of the vision of Spanish national music and present the unique charm of Spanish national music in a refreshing way.

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