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# ART SONG IN SPAINSH: HOW CAN IT ACHIEVE ITS PLACE ON THE WORLD STAGE?

## **Nan Maro Babakhanian**

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### **Abstract:**

What follows is an assessment of information currently available about the Interpretation of Romantic, Post Romantic and Contemporary Art Song in Spanish (poems set in Castellano). The Spanish Song can only become part of the *Standard Repertoire* in conservatories, music programs and the programming of recitals in auditoriums around the world when artists and teachers know of its existence and have information on "how to interpret" it. Included is an evaluation of what pedagogical tools need to be established in order to ensure that this vast and varied body of repertoire be included in what all lyric musicians (singers, pianists and conductors) study in their "core curriculum."

**Keywords:** Intepretation of Art Song in Spanish/Spanish Vocal Pedagogy

***La Canción Española: ¿como puede llegar a formar parte de la programacción en los auditorios del Mundo?***

### **Resumen:**

El presente artículo proporciona una valoración de la información disponible en este momento sobre la interpretación de las canciones artísticas de época romántica, post-romántica y contemporánea en español (poemas en castellano). La canción artística española sólo podrá llegar a formar parte del *Repertorio estándar* en los conservatorios, en otros programas para el estudio de la música y en la programación de recitales en auditorios en todas partes del mundo, cuando los demás artistas y profesores de música sepan de su existencia y de cómo interpretarla]. Se incluye una evaluación de las herramientas didácticas que tendrían que establecerse para asegurar que este amplísimo y variado

repertorio se incluya en las asignaturas comunes de todos los músicos líricos (los cantantes, pianistas y directores).

**Palabra Clave:** Interpretation of Art Song in Spanish/Spanish Vocal Pedagogy.

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Although many musicologists have written about the vast Spanish vocal repertoire that exists in archives, in some cases published and in few cases still found in circulation in stores and libraries<sup>1</sup>, the repertoire is not included in the list of required classes in conservatories around the world, including Spain. This lack of diffusion is due to the non-existence of an established pedagogy for Art Song in Spanish -- which I define for this article as any song written for voice with instrumental accompaniment (guitar, piano or instrumental ensemble) and destined to be programmed as chamber music. This repertoire sets a written poem to music (not just a folk melody merely harmonized). The absence of any treatise of interpretation, in effect, impedes its being considered part of the *Standard Repertoire* represented in the programming in the auditoriums around the world such as the song repertoires in German, French, English and Italian. All of these, incidentally, are included as required subjects in the curriculum for singers and collaborative pianists in conservatories and music programs worldwide.

There are many books about interpretation of the song repertoires in German, French, English and Italian. These are books that are very technical (they could be called modern treatises) that show how to sing these *standard* songs.<sup>2</sup> There is certainly a need for the production, promotion and diffusion of interpretive information, so that any teacher anywhere can learn the pedagogy to be able to teach the Spanish repertoire and to promote it to become part of the core curriculum in conservatories around the world. For example, not all German song repertoire teachers are German.

*Art Song* in Spanish, both in and outside of Spain, is underrepresented in the auditoriums that present recitals and chamber music mostly due to this lack of dissemination (caused by the earlier mentioned scarcity of teaching). The few circulating scores (Falla, Rodrigo, Granados, Turina, Albéniz and more recently programmed; Mompou, Guridí and Toldrá)

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<sup>1</sup> Information about existing repertoire has improved thanks to Celsa Alonso's book about Spanish Song in the XIX Century, *La canción lírica española en el siglo XIX, Art Song Composers of Spain: An Encyclopedia* by Susan Rhodes Draayer and the *Spanish Song Companion* by J. Cockburn and R. Stokes with and introduction by Graham Johnson, not to mention Nico Castel's text book, *Spanish Lyric Diction*, along with various dissertations on the subject, such as the one mentioned by Alejandro Zabala.

<sup>2</sup> See the bibliography for some examples

don't represent the existing vast and varied vocal literature in Spanish. According to Graham Johnson (a defender of the Spanish Vocal Repertoire):

*Until now, most singers have been attracted to a new Spanish song for its music alone; as a result the dice have been heavily loaded in favor of quick, exciting and 'entertaining' songs at the expense of many of the most beautiful introverted ones, songs where an understanding of the text is essential to appreciate the full beauties of the work.*

*Johnson The Spanish Song Companion 6<sup>3</sup>*

So, according to Johnson, *Art Song* in Spanish is usually programmed as an encore or the finale of a recital, to add "regional color" or exoticism to the event.

Where does the lack of diffusion come from? One of the greatest causes is the limited availability of publications. Many songs exist in archives and are circulated in photocopies passed from artist to artist (such as the songs of Jesús García Leoz and Joaquín Turina) and, even if something has been published, it is usually in such a limited edition, that it is no longer available when sought. This situation exists largely because of the political and cultural autarchy in Spain in the years after the Second Republic, as well as the lack of information about the technique of *how to interpret* the repertoire. This includes;

- Diction (there is no established use of the International Phonetic Alphabet -IPA- in lyric Spanish<sup>4</sup> diction).
- Knowledge of existing repertoire and publications of songs organized by vocal category.
- Publication of accompanying information about the poems used in songs, organized by theme and author, (programming recitals by "themes" in the poetry is becoming popular to the point where some think it is acceptable to program songs extracted from song cycles that fit thematic recitals).
- Information about compositional style. Spanish music in general is surprisingly and scandalously missing from the music history books used to teach students in the US and around the world.

With the Internet and various recent publications (mentioned before), any singer looking for more repertoire in Spanish beyond the Falla and Granados songs can access impressive lists of composers and songs, but they often can't find the scores and don't have anyone to teach them HOW to sing the songs if they do, miraculously, get a score<sup>5</sup> because there are no

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<sup>3</sup> Stokes, Richard and Jacqueline Cockburn (translators) and Graham Johnson (contributor), *A Spanish Song Companion*, Scarecrow Press, NY, 2006

<sup>4</sup> Castellano

<sup>5</sup> I have received countless emails and calls from people looking for scores to songs they have read about but can't find. In one famous email, Stephen Blier, who programs the most famous recital series devoted to Art Song in NYC, wrote me looking for songs by Julio Gomez. I wrote all the publishers I

Spanish vocal repertoire teachers like there are for the required German, French, English and Italian repertoires. So anyone who discovers Draayer's great new encyclopedia<sup>6</sup> won't be able to add the listed songs to their recital programs or expect to sing them at the same high level as songs from the *Standard Repertoire*. The directors of vocal departments in conservatories<sup>7</sup> contend that there isn't enough repertoire in Spanish to include it as a required subject and, furthermore, there are not enough teachers with sufficient scientific information available to teach such a course – the biggest impediment being the lack of an established use of the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) for singing in Spanish.<sup>8</sup>

This implies that there must be sufficient scientific information about what songs exist in the *Standard Repertoire*, (how to pronounce them and how to interpret the German, French English and Italian repertoires) for them to be required subjects (for singers and collaborative pianists).

There are very few books that exist about the interpretation of Art Song in Spanish and about the repertoire that are useful for performers, and many of those that exist mention the lack of an established universal use of the IPA for lyric Spanish diction. There are three sources for lyric Spanish diction (none of them are considered definitive). The two most important are:

**1.- Castel, Nico A Singer's Manual of Spanish Lyric Diction (Foreword by Plácido Domingo) Excalibur Publishing New York, 1994**

Castel tries to establish a use of the IPA for lyric Spanish diction, but the author admits that his decision to transcribe all "e" sounds with the open symbol "E" and all "o" sounds with the open symbol "O" is from his experience working with opera singers who maintain a very open jaw position and also so that singers don't confuse the closed symbols ("e" and "o") with the very closed German sounds. So, he is not sure that he came up with the best solution.<sup>9</sup>

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know in Spain, and Aurea Ruiz, Antón García Abril's publisher and wife, gave me the composer's son's telephone number. Thanks to that call, I met one of Spain's greatest music critics and music historians, Carlos Gomez Amat who gave me 2 of the 6 or 7 copies he had left of the original publication of the songs. I have one and Stephen has the other. He did not end up programming the songs, but I eventually convinced a Fulbright student from NY to do her project in Madrid on Gomez, and now all the songs are recorded and will soon be published. I have performed some of them and they are fabulous.

<sup>6</sup> Rhodes Draayer, Suzanne, *Art Song Composers of Spain: An Encyclopedia*, Scarecrow Press, NY, 2009

<sup>7</sup> I have been the director of Project Canción Española for 11 years and have spoken to the directors of the vocal departments of many universities and conservatories (such as Juilliard and Manhattan School of Music) and they all declare that they don't offer a class of Art Song in Spanish, or "Spanish Repertoire" because they don't believe that enough repertoire exists to warrant a class dedicated to the subject. to

<sup>8</sup> The DRAAYER encyclopedia includes a list of songs from various centuries categorized by quality of composition.

## **2.-Rhodes Draayer, Susan Canciones de España, NY, Scarecrow press, 2003**

Draayer provides a series of anthologies of Song in Spanish from the XIX Century that includes a manual of diction based on Castel's work. It also includes basic information about Spanish grammar. It does not include analysis of the poems or the music.

These above publications led to the following:

*Del Coro Delgado, Mariah Castilian Spanish for Singers: A Pronunciation Study and its Application to the Peninsular Vocal Repertoire. Doctoral Thesis, Graduate College, The University of Iowa 2006*

This doctoral thesis was inspired by the Castel and Draayer works. It contains useful information, directed towards native English speakers, and attempts to correct mistakes that Del Coro Delgado thinks her two predecessors made in their use of the IPA.

There is, as well, a book dedicated to the diffusion of the repertoire but with very little interpretive information or diction:

*Rhodes Draayer, Suzanne Art Song Composers of Spain: An Encyclopedia Scarecrow Press, NY, 2009*

This includes the basic history of Spain (political and cultural) and a very complete discussion about the history of Spanish song with a lot of information about the XIX and XX centuries including more than ninety composers. It has biographies and examples of songs of each Composer. The lists of repertoire at the end are quite complete although, for example, they don't include the names of the poets of the poems set in the songs.

The book discusses folk influence and values the composers in lists that separate them for their level of influence, while including the analysis of a few songs.

Another book that exists:

*Stokes, Richard and Jacqueline Cockburn (translators) and Graham Johnson (contributor), a Spanish Song Companion, Scarecrow Press, NY, 2006*

The publications that exist about Spanish repertoire and diction have served to expand the knowledge of the existence of more composers and to disseminate more information about their history, but it is clear that there is a great need for books that give information about the technique of interpretation so that the songs become part of the accepted *Standard Repertoire*.

There is one book, used in some conservatories and music programs at the university level, which includes Spanish art song repertoire, together with some Standard Repertoire:

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<sup>9</sup> Information from conversations with the author in New York City at his home and at his office at the Metropolitan Opera

*Kimball, Carol Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature, Hal Leonard Corporation, Milwaukee, WI, 2006*

This book includes interpretive information about songs in French, Italian, English, American, Scandinavian, Russian and Eastern European, Spanish and Latin American.

Spanish songs included in the book:

*Arne Derumsgaard (1921-2006) Arrangements of Ten Early Spanish Songs*  
*Juan de Anchieta (1462-1523) con amores la mi madre*  
*Francisco de la Torre (1485-1504) Pámpano verde*  
*Cristóbal de Morales (1500-1553) De Antequera sale el Moro*  
*Alonso Mudarra (1510-1580) Triste estaba el Rey David*  
*Gabriel Mena (1511-1516) A la caza, sus, a caza*  
*Enrique Granados (1867-1916) Tonadillas La maja dolorosa 1, 2 y 3, El tra la la y el punteado, Amor y odio, El majo discreto, El mirar de la maja*  
*Manuel de Falla (1876-1946) Siete canciones populares españolas, Trois melodies*  
*Joaquín Nin (1879-1949) Poema en forma de canciones, Tu pupila es azul*  
*Jesus Guridi (1886-1961) Seis canciones castellanas*  
*Federico Mompou (1893-1987) Combat del somni*  
*Fernando Obradors (1897-1945) Del cabello más sutil, El vito*  
*Joaquín Rodrigo (1901-1999) Cuatro madrigales amorosas*  
*Xavier Montsalvatge (1912-2002) Cinco canciones negras*

Kimball's *Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature* includes historical information, along with a literal and musical analysis directed towards interpreters. It is the only book, which includes Art Song in Spanish that treats all the pertinent themes that a performer would need to make their own artistic decision about a performance (and doesn't include extraneous historical information that isn't needed for interpretation). Of the books mentioned above, *The Spanish Song Companion and Encyclopedia of Spanish Song* both have compiled useful information destined for the world of musicology, but not for performing artists. *A Singer's Manual of Spanish Lyric Diction and Canciones de España*, while not being complete, both give interpretive information. These books and other books and studies published in Spanish<sup>10</sup> won't serve to promote Spanish Art Song to the same level as its counterparts in French, German, English and Italian.

The publications that have served to create a *pedagogy* for the *Standard Repertoire* and thus making those repertoires a required subject in the curriculum of any lyric interpreter (singers, collaborative pianists and conductors included) are largely based on "lyric diction" (using the IPA) and entering the song through the literature (the poem). The way in which the information is presented in these manuals makes it very clear that it is information directed towards interpretive artists and not musicologists, although it is based on a very clear science (performance practice) of how to discover what a song really means and how to communicate that information.

<sup>10</sup> The bibliography has a list of some publication in Spanish.

Due to the importance given to lyric diction in the field, any performance practice book of Art Song in Spanish, destined for the use of artists, would have to include IPA transcriptions and a specific explanation of how it functions in Lyric Spanish Diction. The bibliography of this article includes a few books used in the teaching of lyric Song interpretation in the United States of America, but one book stands out:

*Stein, Deborah and Robert Spillman. Poetry Into Song: Performance and Analysis of Lieder New York, 1996*

This book could serve as a model for how to treat poetry and how to analyze the settings of each composer. It focuses on the music of Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Wolf and Strauss, concentrating on the poetry (including a study of the methods used to analyze German romantic poetry and the themes and imagery used in the period) as well as on various parameters of the composition that pertain to interpretation: texture, meter, articulations, and the interpretation of the notation including accents and unusual stresses. It also includes a formal musical analysis of harmony and tonality, melody and motives, rhythm and meter and of course, form and compares various settings of the same poem by different composers. It includes translations of all the poems in English but, surprisingly, doesn't include IPA transcriptions. There are many other books about songs in other languages that include information about the history of the poets and the composers that give context to the specific information given about each song.<sup>11</sup>

Thus far in Spain there has been little activity in the field of *performance practice studies* as related to the lyric genres. Most musical study at university level is done in musicology departments where there is little or no contact with performance and performers. The fact that the Spanish Vocal Repertoire is undervalued in Spain confounds the situation even more. The role of the interpreter at the University level would be an important help in the production of more performance practice studies. Meanwhile, various scholars have attempted to alert students of the existence of repertoire and, in some cases, provide relevant historical information. Unfortunately, most of the literature produced in Spain is directed from one musicologist to another.

*Es practica habitual en los estudios sobre historia de la música referirse casi exclusivamente a los compositores. Ello responde a la tradición en el mundo de la música culta occidental de separar los ámbitos de creación.....numerosos estudios musicológicos recientes sobre épocas muy diversas se centran en el papel de intérpretes y público.*

*García Gallardo Los Músicos del 27 p32*

*La Canción-como el lied- no sólo debía tener valor en sí misma, también se exija ser el "condimento nacional" de la ópera española o drama lírica nacional.*

*Alonso La Canción Lírica Española en el siglo XIX p13*

*...apelamos al concepto de "canción lírica española" en sentido amplio, en alusión a cualquier pieza para voz sola con acompañamiento instrumental (piano, guitarra, o bien una*

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<sup>11</sup> The bibliography has a list of some of most frequently used books in the academic circles.

*combinación de ambos). Otras veces, el adjetivo “española” se refiere a un contenido presuntamente “nacional” o de vocación populista. En suponiendo que muchas de han perdido, quizá podamos cifrar en miles el número de canciones que se escribieron durante el pasado siglo.*

*Alonso, La Canción Lírica Española en el siglo XIX p14*

García Gallardo applauds a recent trend to include information about interpreters who before now were almost inexistent in music history studies, and Celsa Alonso relates the social history of the Lyric Song in Spain in the nineteenth Century keeping in mind that José Carlos Mainer, in his *Historia, Literatura* already warned of how complicated this task would be.

I propose that in order for the “Canción” to be appreciated as a genre and not an “exotic” addition to a program, it must be proclaimed for its literary and musical cultural value. The difference between the genre of “Zarzuela” (Opera) and that of “Canción” (Song) is that a song sets a poem. The way in which the composer sets that poem to music can add to, and even change, the meaning of that poem, and it is the interpreter’s job to communicate that meaning to the audience.

The recovery of the genre (la canción) and the documenting of an established pedagogy for singers and teacher is a much needed and important step in bringing the great body of work (la Canción Española), and thus a great treasure of Spanish literature and culture to the level of international awareness it deserves, in conservatories and on concert stages, not to mention recordings.

As the genre of “Canción” is intrinsically tied to the genre of “Poesía” (poetry) and furthermore, in certain periods in Spain the poetry was actually written with a melody in mind (such as “tonadillas”) the interdisciplinary study of both genres is inevitable. Thus far the field has produced various studies, with none of them directed at performers<sup>12</sup>:

There are also several dissertations and papers<sup>13</sup> about the subject but none of them are written in a way that can serve the performer directly in their interpretive choices. In order to create more information about Art Song in Spanish (both known and unknown) which would be useful for performers and so that they choose to perform the under represented body of work, there is a need for;

<sup>12</sup> Diego, Gerard; Gallego, Antonio, *Poemas musicales* Catedra Madrid 2012: Benavides, Ana *Gerardo Diego y la música*, Universidad de Cantabria, 2011: Tinnel, Roger D., *Federico García Lorca y la música: catálogo y discografía anotados*, Fundación Juan March, 1998: Sánchez Pedrote, E. *Bécquer y la música*, Sevilla, 1971: Lolo, Begoña (ed), *Cervantes y el Quijote en la Música*, Centro de Estudios Cervantinos, Madrid 2007: García Giberar, Javier, *Antonio Machado y la Música olvidada*, Analecta malacitana: Revista de la Sección de Filología de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, ISSN 0211-934X, Vol. 27, N° 1, 2004 , págs. 191-220: García Gallardo, Cristobal; Martínez González, Francisco; Ruiz Hillilo, María *Los Músicos del 27* Universidad de Granada/CDMA 2010

<sup>13</sup> Como: *Poesía Española en la Canión de Camara Argentina* Marcela González, Revista de Musicología Vol. 28, No. 2, Actas del VI Congreso de la Sociedad Española de Musicología (Diciembre 2005), pp. 1335-1344, [Sociedad Española de Musicología \(SEDEM\)](#)

- The establishment of a methodology that explains and concretizes certain aspects of the interpretation of Art Song in Spanish (music with texts by Spanish poets with compositions by Spanish composers)
- The collection of information that serves to establish pedagogy in the field of “Interpretation of Art Song in Spanish”.
- The reinforcement of the use of the IPA for Spanish lyric Diction by establishing a standard use of the alphabet in transcriptions.

All of these factors would help in the effort to bring Art Song in Spanish to all higher-level music programs (conservatories and universities) and thus to more recital stages of the world.

A study dedicated to this kind of information, and that focuses on the interpretive and musical aspects of this repertoire, would raise the value of all the printed music that already exists and promote the production of more. It could, as well, infiltrate electronic markets and forums directed towards performers. In studying and analyzing the different compositional styles of various poets and composers, the objective is to encounter a technique of interpretation that would facilitate communicating the interpreter’s understanding of the relation between the text and the music. It is another aid for artists, enabling them to apply their “vocabulary of expression” (vocal technique) to the interpretive choices made from applying the performance practice analysis<sup>14</sup> to the Song.

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García Gallardo, Cristobal; Martínez González; Francisco; Ruiz Hillilo, María. *Los Músicos del 27*, Universidad de Granada/CDMA 2010. ISBN 9788433851574.

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<sup>14</sup> By doing a transcription of the IPA for lyric Spanish diction, facilitating a literal and poetic translation of the poem, providing a musical analysis based on the composers interpretation of the poem and giving any historical information necessary about both the poet and the composer that could contribute to the understanding of the song.

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