

ERNESTO HALFFTER

(1905-1989)

COMPLETE MUSIC FOR PIANO SOLO

Adam Kent, piano

from *Sonatina* (1927) (7:55)

- 1 Danza de la pastora(3:49)
- 2 Danza de la gitana(4:05)
- 3 Sérénade à Dulcinée (1944) (5:40)

Dos piezas cubanas (1945) (7:05)

- 4 Habanera.....(3:47)
- 5 Pregón(3:15)

from *Parc d'attractions* (1938)

- 6 L'espagnolade(4:47)

Crepúsculos (1920) (9:49)

- 7 El viejo reloj del castillo(5:07)
- 8 Lullaby(1:57)
- 9 Una ermita en el bosque.....(2:44)

10 Marche joyeuse (1922) (2:56)

11 Llanto por Ricardo Viñes (1943) (5:09)

12 Gruss (1940) (2:10)

13 Nocturno otoñal: recordando
a Chopin (1987) (3:47)

Hommages (1988) (8:22)

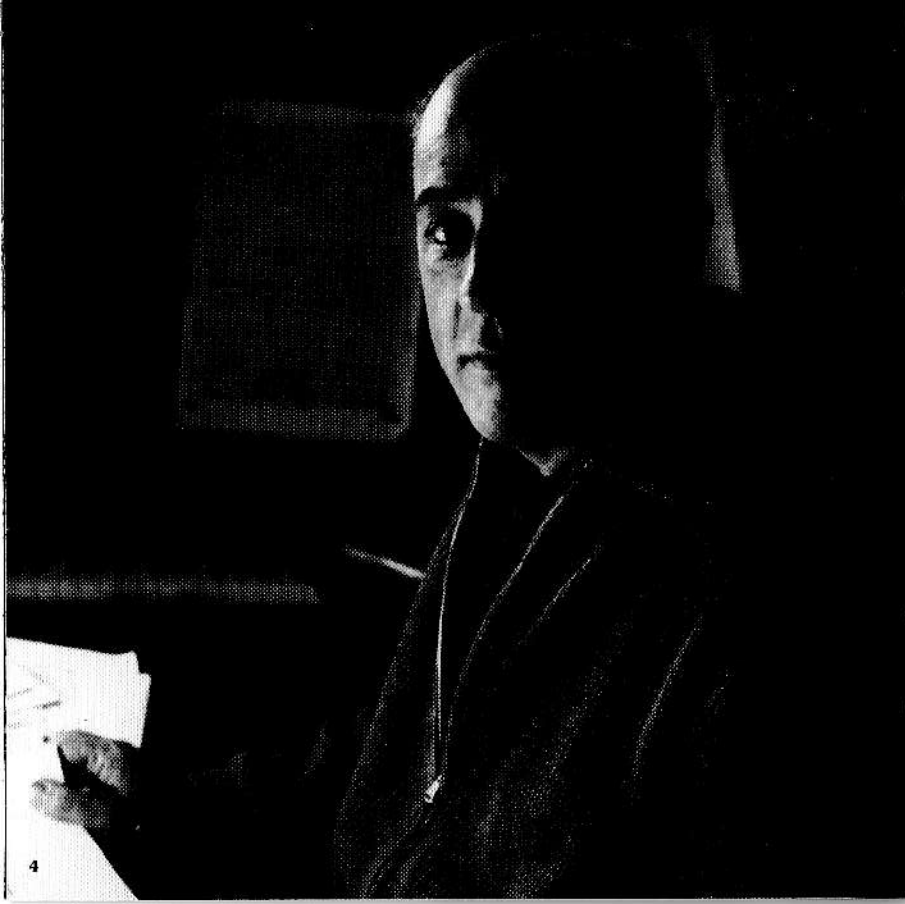
- 14 Homenaje a Joaquín Turina.....(2:11)
- 15 Homenaje a Federico Mompou(2:37)
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17 Preludio y danza (1974) (5:51)

18 Sonate: Homenaje
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19 Sonata per pianoforte (1926-32) (6:51)

20 El Cuco (1911) (1:13)



NOTES BY ADAM KENT

Federico García Lorca, Luis Buñuel, Salvador Dalí were daring iconoclasts whose names have become synonymous with Spain's so-called *Generación del '27*. Less well known to the general public are the musicians who participated in this modernist explosion on the usually reactionary, tradition-bound peninsula. Ernesto Halffter (1905-1989) was perhaps the most precocious member of the *Grupo de los Ocho* (Group of Eight), the generation's Madrid-based contingent, which included such other composers as Rodolfo Halffter, Gustavo Pittaluga, Rosita García Ascot, Julián Bautista, Salvador Bacarisse, Fernando Remacha, and Juan José Mantecón. Manuel de Falla loomed large as a role model for most of these musicians, although his connection to Ernesto Halffter was unique in its intensity and constancy. Like his colleagues in poetry, painting, and film directing, Halffter was drawn at an early age to surrealism and was keenly influenced by avant-gardist trends beyond his country's borders. At the same time, the composer never lost sight of his Spanish identity, ever adhering to Falla's call to create Spanish music "with vistas towards Europe."

Prior to the generation that produced Ernesto, the Halffter family had not been particularly associated with the musical profes-

Left: Ernesto Halffter in Belgirate, Italy, circa 1958

sion. However, the twentieth century saw the emergence of a virtual dynasty through the prodigious compositional activities of Ernesto, his older brother Rodolfo (1900-1987), and their nephew Cristóbal Halffter (b. 1930), as well as the conducting of Pedro Halffter (b. 1971), Cristóbal's son.

Ernesto revealed his gifts at an early age, composing *El Cuco* for solo piano at six. Largely self-taught, the precocious composer soon came to the attention of Spanish critic, composer, and musicologist Adolfo Salazar, who introduced his talented charge to Manuel de Falla in 1923. Falla would become a seminal influence on Halffter not only compositionally, but also through his indefatigable support and promotion of the younger composer's career. In 1924, Halffter was named musical director of the newly created Orquesta Bética de Camara de Sevilla at Falla's insistence, beginning a long and esteemed career as an orchestral conductor. Other important influences were a series of lessons with Maurice Ravel and frequent visits to the Residencia de Estudiantes of Madrid, a gathering place for many gifted artists of the *Generación del '27*.

The 1920s saw many of Halffter's most enduring compositional successes, including *Sinfonietta*, recipient of the Premio Nacional de Música in 1925, and the ballet *Sonatina*, premiered in Paris in 1928 by "La Argentina" and her company. In the same year, Halffter married the Portuguese pianist Alicia Camara Santos and relocated to Lisbon in 1935 on a grant from the Fundación Conde de

Cartagena. Among the fruits of this nineteen-year sojourn were a series of Portuguese-language songs (1940-1941) and the brilliant *Rapsodia portuguesa* for piano and orchestra (1937-1940). During these years, Halffter enjoyed considerable success as a composer of film scores, including music for José Luis Sáenz de Heredia's *Bambú* and musical arrangements for Antonio Román's adaptation of *El Amor Brujo*. In addition, the success of such works as *El cojo enamorado* (1955) and the *Fantasia galaica* (1956) speak to the composer's continued mastery in the balletic domain.

Halffter's abiding love and admiration for Falla found its ultimate expression in his heroic efforts to complete *Atlántida*, the epic cantata left unfinished at Falla's death. Halffter would work intermittently on this project for nearly twenty years, presenting a preliminary version in 1961 and the final edition in 1976. No doubt that his immersion in this idiom influenced his own *Canticum in P.P. Johannem XXIII* (1964), the *Canticum elegiacum in memoriam Pierre de Polignac Praeclarissimi Principis* (1966), and *Psalmi* (1967).

In 1983 Halffter was awarded his second Premio Nacional de Música—this time for his life-long contribution to Spanish music—and continued to compose virtually until his death in 1989. In 1997, commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the premiere of *Sinfonietta*, the Residencia de Estudiantes of Madrid and the Fundación Archivo Manuel de Falla mounted a comprehensive retrospective of Ernesto Halffter memorabilia entitled *Ernesto Halffter*

(1905-1989): *Músico en dos tiempos*, that later traveled to Granada. The following year, the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center presented *Ernesto Halffter: Life and Work of a Spanish Musician*, an exhibition culled from the library's own collection as well as the holdings of Manuel Halffter. Most recently, the tenth anniversary of Halffter's death was marked internationally by concerts in New York, Paris, and Buenos Aires.

THE PIANO WORKS

Tracks 1 and 2: from *Sonatina*

Danza de la pastora (1927)

Danza de la gitana (1927)

Dedicated to Halffter's future wife, Alicia Camara Santos, the *Danza de la pastora* and the *Danza de la gitana* are undoubtedly the composer's most popular piano solos. While both dances were originally conceived for the keyboard, within a year they would find their way into the orchestral score of *Sonatina*. The choreographic work relates the tale of an unhappy princess entertained by an entourage of "doncellas" (maidens). When their own dances fail to cheer the melancholy damsel, the maidens solicit the aid of a shepherdess (*Danza de la pastora*). In the end, however, the unexpected intervention of a gypsy (*Danza de la gitana*) is



Above: Ernesto, Rodolfo, and Cristóbal Halffter, Madrid 1963

required to lift the princess's gloom. In what seems to be a deliberate reversal of the premise of Falla's *El Amor Brujo*, the desired prince is summoned through the gypsy's spell. Indeed, the structure and even some of the rhetorical gestures of Falla's celebrated *Danza ritual del fuego* are closely followed in the *Danza de la gitana*. The *Danza de la pastora* unfolds in a neatly structured binary form,

adhering not only to the tonal and thematic layouts of early sonata forms expounded by Soler and his contemporaries, but also to the sort of keyboard figurations they favored. In quoting such popular tunes as "Me casó mi madre" in the *Danza de la pastora* and "Marabú" in its companion dance, Halffter also pays homage to his folkloric heritage.

Track 3: Sérénade à Dulcinée (1944)

The *Sérénade à Dulcinée*, a reference to Don Quijote's idealized peasant woman, derives from incidental music composed for the drama *Dulcinea* by the Portuguese author Carlos Selvagem. According to Manuel Halffter, along with the serenade, only a *Prólogo y Alborada* and a *Nocturno* survive from the complete score. The work is in ABA form, prefaced by an extensive introduction that lays out the harmonic and textural substrate of the "A" section. Evocations of a plucked guitar accompaniment abound, supporting the plaintively expressive vocal line.

Tracks 4 and 5: Dos piezas cubanas: (1945)

Pregón

Habanera

Caribbean musical idioms enjoyed something of a vogue among certain Spanish composers in the 1940s and 50s. This style is known as "Antilleanism," and perhaps the most celebrated example is the *Cinco canciones negras* of Xavier Montsalvatge. With its

use of piquant dissonances to impart a tartness to otherwise treacly melodic and harmonic materials, *Pregón* belongs to this tradition. Pianist Guillermo González likens its 5/8 rhythm to a habanera shorn of its sixth beat, and the frequently accentuated fifth beats and phrase endings introduce further rhythmic mayhem. The piece is taken from the film score composed by Halffter for José Luis Sáenz de Heredia's *Bambú*, a sentimental love story set in Cuba at the time of the Spanish-American War. In the movie, *Pregón* (Proclamation) furnishes the music for winsome *Bambú*'s fruit-vending song.

The *Habanera* was written as a sketch for the same film, although only vague intimations of it are heard in the finished score. Halffter casts Havana's eponymous dance in a simple ternary form, adhering to the traditional rhythm and harmonic scheme. The miniature's enduring appeal lies in the naturalness of its melodic contour and its subtly sultry ambiance.

Track 6: from Parc d'attractions, (1938)

L'espagnolade

L'espagnolade was written for French pianist and pedagogue Marguerite Long, in celebration of "EXPO 37." The Paris-based publisher Max Eschig commissioned a number of non-French composers to contribute to an album of short piano works in Long's honor, and the resulting *Parc d'Attractions Expo 37* functions as a worthy sequel to *A l'exposition*, Salabert's similarly con-

ceived collection of pieces by native composers. *L'espagnolade* is essentially a spoof of the clichés foreigners typically associate with Spanish music. The guitar imitations, hemiola, decorative triplets, and Phrygian cadences are all part of the popular tendency to reduce Spanish music to the most superficial aspects of Andalusian flamenco. The work is essentially in rondo form, the primary theme of which bears a passing resemblance to the *First Spanish Dance* from Falla's opera *La vida breve*.

**Tracks 7-9: Crepúsculos: Tres trozos líricos
para piano (1920, rev. 1936)**

I. El viejo reloj del castillo

II. Lullaby

III. Una ermita en el bosque

Halffter provided the following program for his first published piano work, *Crepúsculos* (Twilights), in an unsigned preface to the Max Eschig edition: *Escorial, autumn 1920. Through the stained glass, decorated with prophetic figures, filters the evening light; it's an ancient light, bathed in gold. In the solitude of the space, I meditate and dream of musical spaces. Almost imperceptibly, the multi-colored stained-glass figures start to move in a solemn, choreographic crescendo. Freed from the glass, they fill the room with the half-tints of their sacred evolutions. I watch in wonder, with tremulous astonishment, this sacred spectral round that encircles me in steps of some arcane sanctity. All is*

*transfigured: the old wall clock hurries and strengthens its beats, matching them to the hallucinogenic rhythm of the dance, while the febrile atmosphere is invaded by the sound of bells, sonorous and splendid. But all of a sudden, shattering the exalted spell, come the sound of other bells, slow, whole, and round: it's the bells sounding 5 P.M. on earth. Silence returns. The fading light hovers, polychrome, through the stained-glass figures, once again imprisoned in their leaden profiles. And in the sad fullness of recovered reality, at the end of this vanishing hour, I feel the mysterious prelude of my future arise with a pure joy of hope. The imagined scene is clearly traced in the first work (*The Old Castle Clock*) with its endless bell effects, gongs, and drones, although the hallucinatory state is preserved throughout the entire cycle. Lullaby, cast in the traditional 6/8 of a "berceuse," occupies a sweeter harmonic world, although subtle dissonances in the middle section add expressive depth to its simple melody. Introspection is again the order of the day in the concluding work, *A Little Chapel in the Woods*, an allusion to a woodland hermitage the young composer frequented in El Escorial. Halffter's score suggests a vivid program, with solemn four-part chorales interrupted by the distant call of birds.*

In spite of Halffter's references to El Escorial, the music itself speaks more to an assimilation of French sonorities and atmosphere than any quintessentially Spanish traditions. The first of Halffter's compositions to be performed publicly,

Crepúsculos was to play an important role in the composer's professional development. The premiere attracted the attention of the critic and musicologist Adolfo Salazar, whose support of Halffter's budding career was detailed in the above biographical sketch. Indeed, the technical accomplishment and creative maturity of the writing certainly justify Halffter's "joy of hope" in this, the "mysterious prelude" of his own future.

Track 10: Marche joyeuse (1922)

Dedicated to Adolfo Salazar, *Marche joyeuse* provides impressive evidence of Halffter's cutting-edge modernity. The work was premiered at the Residencia de Estudiantes of Madrid and soon entered the repertory of Arthur Rubinstein. Salazar cites Debussy's *L'isle joyeuse* as the primary inspiration, although Halffter's lean textures and transparent scoring bespeak a far less opulent aesthetic. The seventeen-year-old Spaniard demonstrates an adventurous spirit in this experiment with bi-tonality and polyrhythms, often splicing from idea to idea with cinematographic aplomb and Satie-esque wit. In its hypnotic use of pedal points and slowly

evolving variation, *Marche joyeuse* prefigures the work of later twentieth-century minimalists.



Track 11: Llanto por Ricardo Viñes (1943)

The *Lament for Ricardo Viñes* was conceived as the opening movement of an unfinished *Suite Lírica*, which was to include a *Toccata* and *Introducción a un Libro de Poesía*. Viñes, a Catalan native, devoted much of his pianistic career to promoting new music from Spain and France. Ernesto Halffter, Debussy, Ravel, Milhaud, Poulenc, Mompou, Albéniz, Granados, and Falla were a few of the luminaries who owed the dissemination of their piano music to the intrepid crusader. Halffter's tribute is severe in its modal language and solemn pace. Grandly arpeggiated chords suggest harpsichord sonorities and contribute to the music's archaism. To the analytically minded, the use of recurrent themes will imply rondo form, but the more poetically oriented will no doubt discern Fate's weighty inevitability in these same motives.

Above: l. to r. Adolfo Salazar, Juan José Mantecón, Ernesto Halffter, ca. 1920

Track 12: Gruss (1940)

The German title and interpretive directions of *Gruss* (Greeting) may strike some readers as incongruous, but this diminutive work was originally written as a sort of Christmas greeting to the composer's German-born father. In its simple, tender lyricism, it recalls the world of Mendelssohn's *Songs without Words* and Schumann's *Album for the Young* and *Scenes of Childhood*. The manuscript has been lost, and the version reconstructed by Max Eschig requires considerable amendment.

Track 13: Nocturno otoñal: recordando a Chopin (1987)

In honor of the Arthur Rubinstein centenary in 1987, the Paloma O'Shea International Piano Competition commissioned many leading Spanish composers to create homages to the Polish pianist who had faithfully championed their country's music. Halffter's *Autumnal Nocturne* is dedicated "with lively admiration and gratitude" to Rubinstein, although its lyrical texture suggests Rubinstein's other great musical love, Frederic Chopin. The main theme of this ABA form is true to its nineteenth-century model in its ternary meter, winding melodic contour, and accompanimental pattern. The introduction hints at a theme only fully articulated in the coda, however. Does it quote some fragment of authentic Chopin or merely give the illusion of disclosing a hidden connection?

Tracks 14-16: Hommages: (1988)

Homenaje a Turina

Homenaje a Mompou

Homenaje a Rodolfo Halffter

The three Hommages are Halffter's final compositional essays, completed less than a year before his death in 1989. In the *Homenaje a Turina*, the composer quotes "De los álamos vengo, madre," a popular sixteenth-century villancico by Juan Vázquez, also treated by such twentieth-century Spaniards as Falla and Rodrigo. The references to Seville in the original text are surely intended by Halffter as an allusion to Turina's native city. Alternating with these quotations are several brief episodes that suggest both the pianistic "éclat" and the searing Andalusian lyricism so beloved of the work's honoree.

Federico Mompou (1893-1987) was a close friend of Halffter, who captures with timeless simplicity the intimate compositional style of his senior colleague. The evocation of bell-sounds was one of Mompou's stylistic hallmarks, and Halffter effectively approximates these so-called "metallic chords" in the central section of this lyrical miniature.

Most poignant is the *Homenaje a Rodolfo Halffter*, a tribute to the composer's older brother. Among Rodolfo's earliest successes were the *Dos Sonatas de El Escorial*, single-movement works reminiscent of Scarlatti and Soler. The younger Halffter's homage quotes the first of these and suggests the deeply expressive religiosity associated with Philip II's austere monastery. Queried by pianist Guillermo González

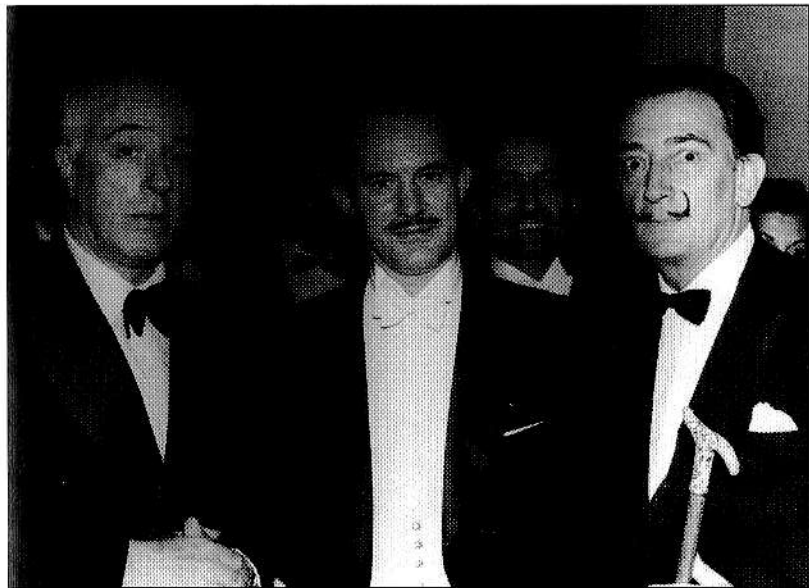
as to the meaning of the concluding enigmatic harmonies, the composer responded, "I was thinking of Rodolfo's soul that, good as he was, can only be in Heaven."

Track 17: Preludio y danza (1974)

An archaic musical form: the Prelude's dotted rhythms and sweeping arpeggios recall Baroque precedents, although the underlying tonality is heavily encrusted with severe dissonance. A roiling middle section functions as a cadenza-like improvisation, not unlike that of the first movement of Bach's *Fifth Brandenburg Concerto* in effect. Coming on the heels of such drama and intensity, the *danza's* wit and lightness may seem incongruous, but a short introductory section serves as a crucial transition between two highly contrasted moods. The *danza's* form seems modeled after the familiar rounded binary structures of so many Baroque dances. The work was written in honor of Alonso Ortiz, a member of the Bilbao Bank Group's Board of Directors and a notable artistic patron, and received its premiere at the opening of the Ortiz's new residence.

Track 18: Sonate: Homenaje a Scarlatti, for piano or harpsichord (1985)

Most Spanish composers consider Domenico Scarlatti the father of Iberian keyboard music: not only did several generations of composers on the peninsula emulate his style, but a number of twentieth-century figures attempted to evoke the crystalline textures, structural conci-



Above: l. to r. Ernesto Halffter, Gratiniano Nieto, Salvador Dalí

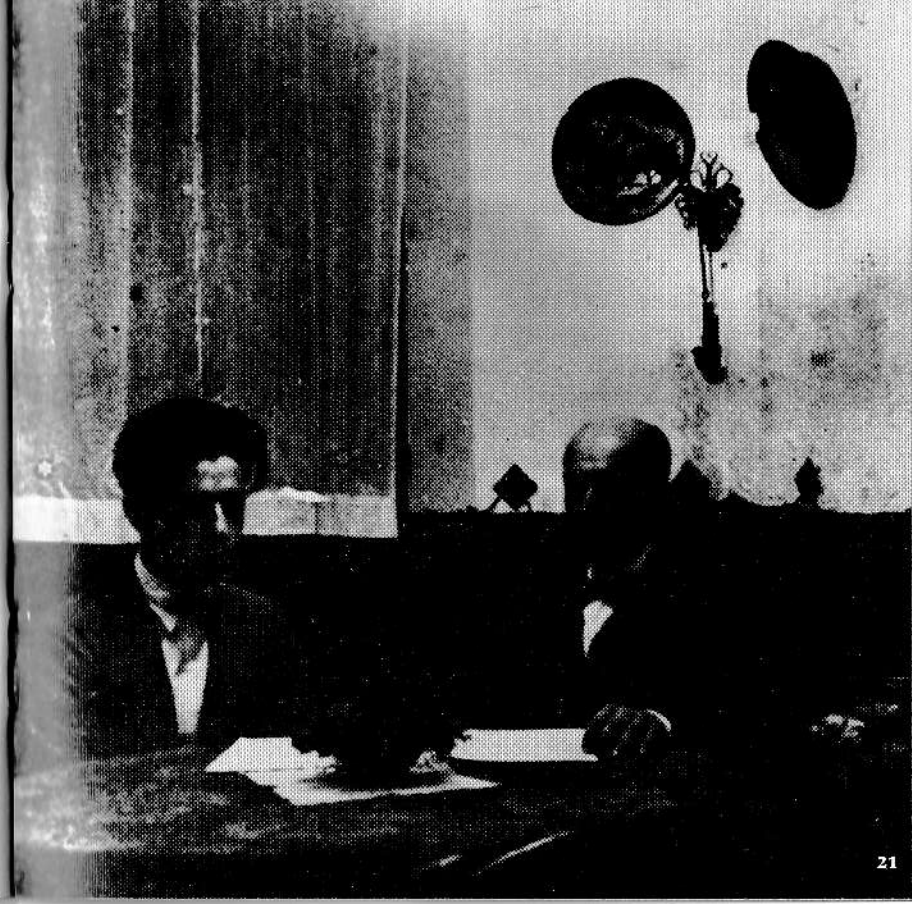
sion, and occasional harmonic asperity of the Neapolitan master. As Ernesto Halffter himself has stated, "Since I was a child, when I began playing the piano, I was captivated by Scarlatti. His influence can be perceived in my works, for instance in the *Danza de la pastora* and in other passages from *Sonatina* and, of course, the *Sinfonietta*." The

Sonata: Homenaje a Scarlatti, composed in time for the Scarlatti tricentennial, is cast in the nearly ubiquitous binary form of the Baroque composer's harpsichord sonatas and follows a similar tonal layout. The dramatic juxtaposition of contrasting themes and the apparent allusion to popular idioms are also quintessentially Scarlattian, although Halffter's polyphony results in a more consistently dissonant musical language. Toward the work's conclusion, the composer actually quotes the subject of Scarlatti's so-called "Cat's Fugue" (Sonata in G Minor, K. 30) in a cadenza-like interpolation. The bizarrely futuristic harmonic ambiguity of Scarlatti's theme, said to suggest the tread of a cat over a harpsichord's keys, seems to claim its rightful place in the midst of this twentieth-century creation.

Track 19: Sonata per pianoforte (1926-1932)

Halffter's *Sonata per pianoforte* in D major was originally conceived as the first of a projected series of three piano sonatas. Once again the composer recalls the work of late-Baroque predecessors in the sonata's traditional tonal scheme and ongoing rhythmic propulsion. A fugato in the development section further underlines the work's anachronistic underpinnings, although the thick-textured keyboard writing owes more to the style of Isaac Albéniz and Enrique Granados than to the Baroque aesthetic. Listeners may well find much that is derivative in this eclectic

Right: Ernesto Halffter and Manuel de Falla, 1923, Granada



composition: echoes of Ravel's Sonata for Violin and Piano and Falla's Harpsichord Concerto are readily discernible, as are more general references to the spiky dissonances and additive rhythms of Igor Stravinsky. For all of the diverse elements it synthesizes, the sonata nevertheless bears the unmistakable stamp of Ernesto Halffter in its joyous effusiveness, pugnacious energy, and aura of Spanish pageantry.

Track 20: El Cuco (1911)

How to capture for posterity a musical prodigy's pre-literate creativity? Ernesto Halffter's *El Cuco*, composed at age six but never notated, might well have perished with the composer, were it not for twentieth-century technology and the foresight of pianist Guillermo González. At a 1985 master class in Segovia, González pressed the reluctant composer to share with the assembled students his first attempts at composition. Unaware of any microphones, Halffter played *El Cuco*, and the present recording derives from my transcription of that tape.

*I am indebted to Ernesto Halffter's son, Manuel, for his assistance in the preparation of these notes and for sharing much valuable information with me. I also urge readers to investigate Ernesto Halffter: *Músico en dos tiempos* by Guillermo González, Yolanda Acker, Arturo Reverter, and Andrés Ruiz Tarazona (Madrid: Residencia de Estudiantes, 1997).*

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Adam Kent has performed in recital, as soloist with orchestra, and in chamber music throughout the United States, Spain, Switzerland, and South America. Spanish music is a specialty of Mr. Kent's, and he has performed numerous all-Spanish recitals regularly during the past few seasons. In addition, Mr. Kent has lectured on the piano works of Federico Mompou and was invited to present a recital in conjunction with the New York Library for the Performing Art's exhibition on Ernesto Halffter. *Excelsior* of

Mexico City enthused about Mr. Kent's recent all-Halffter recital, "Adam Kent has brought not only magnificent technical ability to the music, but has managed to go beyond the printed page, delving into the essence of what the composer sought to express."

Mr. Kent made his New York recital debut at Weill Hall in 1989. Among his recent appearances have been performances with the Juilliard Symphony at Alice Tully Hall, the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, and solo recitals at The Library of Congress in Washington D.C. and MOMA in New York. Winner of the American Pianists Association Fellowship and Simone Belsky Music Awards, Mr. Kent also received top prizes in the Thomas Richner, the Juilliard Concerto, and the Kosciuszko Foundation Chopin Competitions. He is a recipient of the Arthur Rubinstein Prize and the Harold Bauer Award. Mr. Kent received a D.M.A. from The Juilliard School, where he studied with Jerome Lowenthal and served as an adjunct professor. His dissertation, "The Use of Catalan Folk Materials in the Works of Federico Mompou and Joaquín Nin-Culmell" was awarded the school's Richard F. French Prize. He holds B.M. and M.M. degrees from the Manhattan School of Music, where he studied with Solomon Mikowsky. In addition, he is on the faculty of the Manhattan School of Music Preparatory Division and has taught a course of the history of Western Art Music at Iona College.

"I am very pleased to write a few words for this recording of the complete piano works by my father, Ernesto Halffter. Throughout my father's music for piano, one can sense his strong personality, joyful and vibrant, but always showing a powerful creativity whether in colorful or melancholic compositions. Adam Kent's sensitivity captures the different shadings and pianistic diversity of this art, the result being an attractive and generous encounter with good music."

—Manuel Halffter Camara Santos

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Núm. 11



ERNESTO HALFFTER

50 céntimos

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