

Ataulfo Argenta was a leading Spanish conductor who appeared to be developing an important career that was cut short by his early death at the age of forty-four.

He was a musically talented child who attracted considerable attention as a pianist, then entered the Royal Conservatory in Madrid at the age of thirteen in 1927. He won a Premio Extraordinario in piano at the Conservatory in 1930, and the Kristina Nilsson Prize in 1931.

The latter prize enabled him to study piano and conducting in Belgium and Germany. These studies saw him safely outside of Spain when the Civil War broke out in that country. After the end of that conflict, when general war broke out in Europe in 1939, he returned to neutral Spain where he worked in a variety of musical jobs, including staff keyboard player (mostly piano and celesta) with the National Orchestra in Madrid.

He returned to Germany for more studies from 1941 to 1943, studying conducting with Carl Schuricht and teaching piano at the Kassel Conservatory, then returned to Spain and made his conducting debut on a broadcast concert with the national radio orchestra.

His first performance with Spain's National Orchestra was on October 10, 1945. It is remembered as a brilliant debut and it led to his being appointed the orchestra's music director in 1947, a post he retained until his death.

He first conducted outside of Spain when pianist José Iturbi hired him to be his conductor in a performance the pianist organized at Haringay Arena in London; the orchestra was the London Symphony. This began a demand for his services as guest conductor with various European orchestras and on South American tours. He also founded a major music festival in Grenada.

He signed a contract with England's Decca record company and specialized in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century music, especially Spanish music. Among his most notable recordings was the opera *Goyescas* by Enrique Granados and the symphonic work *Danzas fantásticas* by Turina, which remained in the LP catalogue for over twenty years. His conducting style was lean, muscular, and precise. He was considered to be on the verge of a major international career when he died.



With the *Symphonie Fantastique* Hector Berlioz pronounced that the Romantic era had arrived. With its program of romantic infatuation, a dizzying waltz, an opium-induced delirium, murder, suicide, a beheading and a witches dance, there was no going back to the sedate, refined days of the Classical.

It had its origins in a visit by an English theatre company to Paris in 1827. On offer was an exclusively Shakespearean production, and a beautiful Irish actress called Henrietta Smithson.

Smithson's role of Ophelia in *Hamlet* completely captivated the young Berlioz. He could not get her out of his mind, and despite never actually meeting her, his passion for her became first an obsession and then a torture.

He sent her letters, the fervour of which frightened her, and even rented an apartment across the road from her

own, only to have her leave a few days later for a tour of Holland. This he viewed as personal rejection and his madness grew. He wandered the streets aimlessly, dishevelled and disturbed.

By 1830, he had found his path. He wrote to a friend: "I am about to begin my symphony in which the development of my passion will be depicted".

This symphony was to be called *Episode in the Life of an Artist* but is better known today by its subtitle *Symphonie Fantastique*. It was unlike anything that had been written before. A ferment of ideas and emotions and gothic imagery, five movements, connected by a recurring but varied theme, the *idée fixe*, representing the obsessive love that permeates the piece.

Berlioz

Symphonie Fantastique

Ataúlfo Argenta - The Paris Conservatoire Orchestra

- 1 Rêveries, Passions (Largo - Allegro Agitato Ed Appassionato Assai) 12:40
 - 2 Un Bal (Valse - Allegro Non Troppo) 6:20
 - 3 Scène Aux Champs (Adagio) (Part 1) 8:25
 - 4 Scène Aux Champs (Adagio) (Concluded) 7:05
 - 5 Marche Au Supplice (Allegretto Non Troppo) 6:25
 - 6 Songe D'une Nuit Du Sabbat (Larghetto - Allegro) 9:35
- Total Time: 50:30

Producer: John Culshaw Engineer: Ken Cress

Recorded by Decca 11-13 Nov 1957 at La Maison de la Mutualité, Paris



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