

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.



Hector Berlioz, who wrote his own version of Faust and became the eventual dedicatee of Liszt's Faust Symphony, introduced Liszt to Goethe's Faust in the 1830s through the French translation of Gérard de Nerval. Although sketches exist from the 1840s, he was hesitant about composing this work. He commented wryly to one correspondent, "The worst Jesuit is dearer to me than the whole of your Goethe." In an 1869 letter, Liszt makes a revealing comparison between Faust and Manfred:

In my youth I passionately admired Manfred and valued him much more than Faust, who, between you and me, in spite of his marvellous prestige in poetry, seemed to me a decidedly bourgeois character. For that reason he becomes more varied, more complete, richer, more communicative ... (than Manfred) ... Faust's personality scatters and dissipates itself; he takes no action, lets himself be driven, hesitates, experiments, loses his way, considers, bargains, and is interested in his own little happiness. Manfred could certainly not have thought of putting up with the bad company of Mephistopheles, and if he had loved Marguerite he would have been able to kill her, but never abandon her in a cowardly manner like Faust.

Despite Liszt's apparent antipathy toward the character of Faust, his residency in Weimar surrounded him with Goethe and the Faust legend at practically every turn. He had barely served out his first year as Kapellmeister when Grand Duke Carl Alexander decreed that the city would celebrate the centennial of Goethe's birth on

August 28, 1849. During this celebration Liszt conducted, among other things, excerpts from Robert Schumann's Scenes from Goethe's Faust for orchestra and choir. After the centennial remembrance, he helped in the creation of a Goethe Foundation; this culminated in the publication of Liszt's brochure *De la Fondation-Goethe à Weimar*. In the summer of 1850 Gérard de Nerval himself stayed as Liszt's guest. There was much talk about Faust and the topic would spill over into their subsequent correspondence.

The performance of Berlioz's *La Damnation de Faust* in 1852, conducted by the composer, encouraged Liszt further, though he still hesitated, writing Princess Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein, "Anything having to do with Goethe is dangerous for me to handle." However, the final catalyst for the symphony came in a two-month period between August and October 1854. This period coincided with a visit to Weimar by English novelist Mary Ann (Marian) Evans, better known by her pen name George Eliot. Her consort George Henry Lewes was gathering information for his biography of Goethe. During visits to Liszt's residence, the Altenburg, Lewes and Eliot had several discussions with both him and Princess Carolyne about Goethe and his place in German literature. Once Liszt began writing, it was all-consuming; the work was produced in a white heat of inspiration.

Liszt A Faust Symphony

Ataúlfo Argenta conducts the

Orchestre De La Société Des Concerts Du Conservatoire

- 1 Faust 22:10
- 2 Faust (Part II) 5:15
- 3 Gretchen 17:35
- 4 Mephistopheles 17:00
- Total Time: 62 min

Transferred from a 2-track tape 15ips tape

All tracks recorded by Decca Records

Recorded in Stereo June 1955 at La Maison de la Mutualité, Paris

Producer: James Walker Engineer: Roy Wallace



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