

Antonio Ruiz-Pipó



Photo: Antonio Ruiz-Pipó (© archive)

Born in Granada in 1934, as a child Antonio Ruiz-Pipó's first musical impressions were flamenco songs. In 1936 his father was detained and executed during the same period as the poet Federico García Lorca. Soon after, he moved to Barcelona and began learning music with Antoni Pérez Moya at the Escolanía de Nuestra Señora de la Merced, where he studied Gregorian Chant, harmony and chamber music. Immediately, he enrolled at the Granados Academy, where he studied the piano with Alicia de Larrocha and worked on his composition with José Cercós and Manuel Blancafort. In 1949 the Granada City Council awarded him its Manuel de Falla Scholarship. Soon after he began composing his first works for the piano, the Suite grotesca (1950) and Tres danzas del Sur (1951), which were presented at the so-called Manuel de Falla Circle in Barcelona, which had organised contemporary-music concerts at the French Institute in Barcelona since 1947. This group of composers and performers played an important role in bringing contemporary Catalan music up to date during a period characterised by insubstantialness and atonality if not by a conservatism lacking in interest.

Ruiz-Pipó was one of the youngest members of the group, which was more of a collection of individual personalities including composers such as Joan Comellas, Josep Cercós, J. E. Cirlot, Manuel Valls, Angel Cerdá, Josep Casanoves, Jordi Giró, Josep María Mestres Quadreny, Jaume Padrós, Emilia Fadini, Manuel Blancafort. Cristófor Taltabull's teaching was decisive for the greater part of them.

The French government awarded Ruiz-Pipó a scholarship to study in Paris. Maestros such as the pianist Alfred Cortot and the composer Jean Françaix moulded him into an outstanding performer and important composer. In the French capital he gained top marks in his Bachelor of Higher Education and Performance degrees. At the École Normale de Paris he worked with Blanche Bascouret de Guéraldy and Yves Nat, as well as with Alfred Cortot. He also studied composition and orchestration with Salvador Bacarisse and later with Mauricio Ohana.

Just as Ruiz-Pipó began composing at a very young age, his career as a concert pianist began at age 15 and continued until shortly prior to his death. He has performed in recital and as a soloist in some of the most important concert halls in Europe and America, performing with great orchestras and conductors such as Charles Mackerras, Gilbert Amy, Pierre Dervaux, Antonio de Almeida, Ros Marbá and others. His career as a pianist impeded his compositional output from being more extensive, but nevertheless he was an active composer throughout his life. He didn't make recordings of his own works, but did record those of other

composers, taking a special interest in the history of Spanish music, from P. Soler to Isaac Albéniz. His works were included in discs released by numerous recording companies in Spain, France, Italy, England, the United States and Japan.

He wrote and published numerous musicological studies, including contributions to The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians. Of particular note is his research in the areas of Classicism and Romanticism. This materialised into several exceptional recordings on which he performed as either a soloist or as part of a chamber ensemble and which have now become classics (P. Soler, Basque harpsichordists, Montero, Masarnau, Adalid, Brull, Sánchez Allú, Albéniz, Granados...). He was a member of the jury for numerous international competitions and himself ran courses in interpretation in Vienna, Prague, Amsterdam, Tokyo and Paris. In the latter city he worked as a piano teacher at the École Normale de Musique. He also worked as a piano teacher and pedagogical assessor at the National Music and Dance School in Châteauroux.

In 1962 he founded the Bonaguil Festival, which he ran for many years, receiving the medal of the town of Fumel for his efforts. He was also distinguished by the Association Friends of George Bizet and awarded the title of honorary member of the Bedrich Smetana Society of Prague.

His musicological experience led him to the radio, for which he produced interesting Programmes at Radio France, Radio Nacional de España and Radio Canada. It was precisely at Radio Nacional de España where the present writer met him, presenting his music programmes with a musicological slant that aimed to bring a new focus to the history of Spanish music.

As the excellent pianist he was, he attracted anyone who had something to do with the piano, whether or not they were Spanish. He felt a special affinity for Albéniz, whom he counted among his favourite composers, but this list was led by his idol, Falla, whom he followed in the search for his roots and the elimination of all superfluous details. During his last years he recorded a compact disc of little-known works by Albéniz for the Koch-Schwann recording label.

Mozart, Schumann, Bizet, Debussy and Spanish classical composers such as Montero, Nebra and Antonio Soler, were other composers he also enjoyed performing at the piano. He was a great pianist and had a peculiar style that was very clean and elegant. He himself emanated distinction and courtesy. I remember asking him to be the soloist in Schumann's Introduction and Allegro appassionato with the Orquesta Sinfónica de Madrid in 1994, during a cycle of Romantic music. The work, rarely performed in spite of its beauty, is not very suited to Ruiz-Pipó's style of playing, characterised by its gaiety and spontaneity, nevertheless, as well as being a great professional, he was a more passionate man than he looked and for this reason gave a mastery performance. I think that was one of the last times he performed with an orchestra, together with the première of the original version of Isaac Albéniz's Rapsodia española on 26 August 1994 in A Coruña. The OSM paid homage to him on 21 May 1998 under the baton of Martínez Izquierdo, performing his Libro de Lejanía, a work with a very deep and melancholic poetic vein, full of ideas and intimate feelings whose meaning is unknown to us.

I have kept various letters from him, one of which is very touching, written in response to a review I published of his above-mentioned Albéniz recording. And perhaps the key to his Libro de Lejanía could be in his unequivocal love of his native land and the deception caused by a lack of interest in not only his own output, but that of Iberian music in general in Spain.

At Radio Nacional we often used to see each other in Enrique Franco's study and chat about a whole array of musical matters. He especially liked chamber music and we spoke about some of the rarities of this genre. At the time he was collaborating with the French violinist Serge Blanc, with whom he formed a duo. Together they recorded several discs and gave numerous concerts, going on to form the Trio de Paris. The Trio performed at the Manzanares el Real Chamber Music Festival, which has been held every July for more than 12 years at the Castillo de los Mendoza in this locality of Madrid.

When he visited Madrid we used to have lunch at El Luarqués, in Ventura de la Vega Street. We spoke passionately about music. I informed him about what was new in the music world, about the likes and dislikes of this person and that, critics and performers. We laughed a lot, because he always had a great sense of humour.

In some of his last letters, after having gone through some difficult moments with his illness, he seemed optimistic. He fondly recalled the Spanish saying "bicho mab, nunca muere" ("Only the good die young") and never thought he would die so soon, increasingly heeding the call to Music during his last years.

He unceasingly composed chamber music and even a third Concierto para guitarra y orquesta, written in memory of the great Spanish guitarist Narciso Yepes (1927–1997), whose death at the beginning of May had a deep impact on him.

Due to his dedication to music education, the radio and arts management, Antonio Ruiz-Pipó's output is not as extensive as its excellent quality would indicate.

He always possessed a clear mastery of instrumental writing, especially in his guitar and piano works, as well as a clear sense of form. The works written during the last ten years of his life were of an exceptional quality, such as his extraordinary Concierto para piano e instrumentos de viento, a very expressive score whose approach is extremely restrained and concise. Falla would not have hesitated in putting his name to a work of such considerable scope, in which not only the piano but the woodwind parts demand virtuosic playing without making any concessions to softness or simplicity. A unique kind of neoclassicism, stripped of glib resources, related to the late style of Manuel de Falla, whom he put up as an example of what the music of our time should be like. It is fair to say that Ruiz-Pipó also admired a certain kind of French music that was modelled on Poulenc.

Among the works he composed prior to 1987 there are also some beautiful creations such as the Canciones y danzas and the Homenaje a Cabezón for guitar and the magnificent Variaciones sobre un tema gallego (1984). The latter

displays his knowledge of the piano and a profound sense of Andalusia, emerging out of the Galician origin of the work. In one of his last letters, now gravely ill, I was surprised by his emphatic anti-Wagnerism. I had written to him about something to do with the Bayreuth Festival, which I had attended in 1997 with my wife. Listening to Ruiz-Pipó's music, this can be understood, since it is radically opposed to Wagner's. His aversion to the German composer's works reflected the coherence of his aesthetic convictions.

Although it has been said it is difficult to perceive avant-garde features in Ruiz-Pipó's output, to really enjoy it one must listen to it more attentively than one would many so-called "avant-garde" works. Gratitude must be paid to his wife Ruth Wetzel for her work in disseminating his first-rate output, which will undoubtedly be favoured by the passage of time.

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