

THE TEARS OF ARANJUEZ

Joaquín Rodrigo's Concerto: A Masterpiece Born of Darkness

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In the small town of Sagunto, in eastern Spain near Valencia, on 22 November 1901, a child came into the world. His name was Joaquín Rodrigo. Life had dealt him a merciless blow before he had even reached the age of three: a diphtheria epidemic plunged little Joaquín's eyes into darkness forever. As his family rushed helplessly from doctor to doctor, the way the small child perceived the world was changing at its very roots. As Joaquín's eyes closed, his ears opened with extraordinary power.

Born the youngest of ten children, Rodrigo grew up in a modest yet cultured family whose livelihood came from his father Vicente Rodrigo Peirats's lands along the Valencia coast. The melodies his mother Juana Vidre Ribelles often hummed around the house, and the theatre performances his father occasionally took him to, already revealed how keenly meaningful his hearing had become. Music had settled in his heart long before he lost his sight.

According to those who knew him, by the age of five or six, the child was listening to every sound in the house, the creak of the door, the sound of his mother's footsteps in the kitchen, the wheels of horse-drawn carts in the street, as though it were an orchestra. His family was not slow to notice his extraordinary gift.

The School for the Blind and the First Compositions (1901–1927)

The Rodrigo family moved to Valencia when little Joaquín was four years old. There the child enrolled in a school for the visually impaired. At eight he began formal music lessons, learning to read notation in Braille and to play piano and violin. His principal teachers were Francisco Antich and Eduardo López Chavarri, leading figures at the Valencia Conservatory.

Having begun harmony and composition classes at sixteen, by the time he reached his twenties Rodrigo was not merely a talented musician, he was a fully accomplished pianist in his own right. Not to emphasise this would be a serious injustice to him: Rodrigo would become famous as a composer for guitar, yet he had never played the instrument. Every work he produced was created at the piano, in his mind, and in Braille notation. Even when writing for guitar, he grasped the instrument's sound, its limits, and its possibilities intuitively, yet always worked out his compositions at the piano, dictating them to a copyist to be transferred to paper.

A suite for piano, Dos Esbozos for violin and piano, and a Siciliana for cello. In 1924, his first orchestral work Juglares was performed in Valencia and Madrid. Rodrigo was already one of Spain's most notable young composers. And the time had come to go to Paris.

Paris: In the Workshop of Paul Dukas

In 1927, Rodrigo entered the École Normale de Musique in Paris. What had brought him there was the name of one of the era's most