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Beyond the Second Viennese School: The Musical Materials of Roberto Gerhard

Abstract

The Spanish composer Roberto Gerhard (1895-1970), who was part of the Second Viennese School, was intrinsic in the development of twelve tone technique. As a student of Schoenberg, Pedrell and Granados, his use of the twelve tone row was very different to Webern and Berg. From 1939 when Franco's troops entered Barcelona, Gerhard was forced into exile in Cambridge. He went on to have a successful career at the BBC and received commissions from the London Sinfonietta, New York Philharmonic Orchestra and the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

This paper will explore the secretive nature of Gerhard's compositional style so that Spanish folk tunes are almost hidden within the serialist technique and it will unravel the origins of his musical materials. This will be within the context of Gerhard's rejection of strict serialist technique so that his rows affect every part of the music, including time point technique, which allowed him the freedom of expression which he valued. The folk tunes used by Gerhard always originate from Catalonia and are deconstructed in order to achieve intergration in the work. The paper will focus particularly on the 4th symphony, Gerhard's last completed orchestral piece.

Keywords

Gerhard, Schoenberg, Pedrell, Falla, Flamenco, Zarzuela, Symphony, Civil War, Serialist, Granados, Albéniz, BBC, London Sinfonietta, Amor brujo, Cambridge, Dent, Trend.

In this paper I am first of all going to give an overview of Gerhard's life, and then I will discuss about the development of the Dodecaphonic technique and about the categories of folk elements that Gerhard uses in his music. As I will explain later on, these categories are Folk Song, Manuel de Falla, Zarzuela and Flamenco.

Gerhard was born in Valls, Barcelona, in 1896¹. His father was German-Swiss, his mother, Alsatian. He was the eldest son of three children. His brothers were Carles and Ferran. Carles died in Mexico in 1976 in exile, after having important positions in the republican government. He became a member and subsequently secretary of the Parliament of Catalonia. Ferran, the youngest, carried on his father's business and died in Valls in 1975. He had piano lessons with one of the most important composers in Spain at that time, Enrique Granados. Between 1916 and 1929 he studied composition with Felipe Pedrell² (1841-1922).

This was one of the most exciting periods of his life, because Pedrell was an effective teacher instructing at a high level in composition, polyphony and folk music. His students were very well known composers, including Enrique Granados, Isaac Albéniz and Manuel de Falla. Nevertheless, Gerhard thought that Pedrell was not a good teacher, and he wrote to Schoenberg in his first letter "I had only to compose in a fresh

¹ This paper is principally indebted to the following biographies: *Robert Gerhard and his music*, Joaquim Homs, ed. Meirion Bowen (Cromwell Press, Trowbridge, 2000); *Robert Gerhard y su obra*, Joaquim Homs (Oviedo: Universidad de Oviedo, Servicio de publicaciones, 1987), Malcolm MacDonald, 'Roberto Gerhard', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (accessed 8 November 2008), <http://www.grovemusic.com> and *Gerhard on Music: Selected Writings*: ed. Meirion Bowen (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2000).

² Walter Aaron Clark, 'Felipe Pedrell', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (accessed 19 November 2008), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

way and without deliberation, and it was always to his great satisfaction”³. He was very critical towards his teacher, despite having a very warm relationship with him. Gerhard was looking for something deeper in the real and artistic sense of the word, something not purely musically naive or of an emotional nature, but intellectual, disciplined, structured and directly critical. After Pedrell died therefore, Gerhard tried to find a new composition teacher.

From 1923-28, Gerhard studied composition with Arnold Schoenberg, first in Vienna, and later, in 1925, in Berlin. Gerhard had a very close relationship with his teacher, and with the other two members of the second Viennese school, Anton Webern and Alban Berg. In 1928 Gerhard came back to Barcelona.

On the 26th of January 1939 the troops of the dictator Franco entered Barcelona and the Gerhards was forced into exile. At first Gerhard and his wife escaped to Paris. He steered clear of direct political involvement but his brother Carles, however, was a member of the Catalan parliament. The economic situation of the Gerhards in Paris was very difficult and after talking with his friends Edward J. Dent (ISCM president) and J. B. Trend, both teachers at Cambridge University, offered Gerhard a one-year fellowship at King's College, Cambridge. In June, 1939, the Gerhards arrived at Cambridge, and for almost the rest of his life, the young Gerhard had to work as free-lance composer to support himself. During the first years he wrote music of typical Spanish identity for the BBC. He also wrote some orchestral arrangements for the Overseas Service, for instance: *Granados; Albéniz; Chopin and George Sand in Mallorca*, and some arrangements of zarzuelas (light operas) from Barbieri, Chapí and Caballero. In some of these works he uses the pseudonym of Joan de Serrallonga (a 17th-century Catalan fighter against Castilian oppression).

He spent a great deal of time in this activity because the commissions from more intellectual music were not enough to survive. However he had very important commissions, and in 1966 for the first time in his life, he could refuse commercial work because the commissions from creative music were forth coming.

His more representative works are:

- 2nd Symphony (BBC Commission, 1957)
- 3rd Symphony N3 (Koussevitzky Foundation 1960)
- Concert for orchestra (Cheltenham Festival, 1965)
- 4th Symphony (New York Philharmonic Orchestra, 1966)
- *Libra* -for ensemble- (London Sinfonietta, 1967)
- 5th Symphony—Unfinished (Fromm Foundation 1969)

When considering Gerhard’s music one of the most important elements are folk songs. These are songs handed down in an oral tradition. In Spain this repertoire mostly emanates from the 18th and 19th centuries. Gerhard often incorporates folk tunes into his music, sometimes even using the same tunes as his teacher Pedrell, but in a very different way. Pedrell uses the melody without any change, like the main theme of the music, but Gerhard changes the melody in order to integrate it into the work. By this I mean he hides the original popular tune and weaves it seamlessly into his own original music. The elements of the folk tunes that Gerhard frequently changes are meter, time, and some pitches. Sometimes the pitch changes are made in order to integrate the melody into a 12 note row that he chooses. This technique makes it very difficult to highlight the original folk tune, and therefore the students have to analyze deeply all the melodies with this in mind.

³ Taken from the first letter from Gerhard to Schoenberg (Valls, 21 October, 1923). Cambridge Library.

Furthermore, he only uses the first part of the melody, developing it after a while, which means that the original “essence” of the melody is in 2 or 3 bars, because the rest of the melody is changed. The rest of the music is a development of the first bars. There is an example of this later on.

Manuel de Falla and Schoenberg did not incorporate folk tunes in their music. Arnold Schoenberg was more interested in composing “pure” music, and Manuel de Falla never used folk tunes, because he thought that the duty of a composer was to understand folk music, and create new tunes following these patterns, but Gerhard followed the example of his first teacher, Pedrell.

In the Duo for Cello and Piano Gerhard uses a republican Song called “Qué será” (fig. 1), though not in a 12-note idiom. The melody is an ancient Popular Song called Qué Será. The republicans changed part of the lyrics to celebrate the destruction of the war-ship Baleares on 6th of March, 1938 in front of the coast of Mallorca by the Republican army. This song was very popular in the Republican band because the destruction of the biggest war-ship of Franco was an important moment for the army and because the lyrics are anti-fascist. During the war and after, this song functioned as an anthem against fascism.



Fig.1 Duo for Cello and Piano — Republican Song “¿Qué será?”

Gerhard chose this melody and employs a technique, where he only uses the first part of the melody, developing it after a while. He changes some pitches some rhythms and the tempo, and it is faster than the original.

But Gerhard likes to use other borrowed materials in his compositions, and specially, folk tunes forbidden in Spain. In the 4th Symphony, he uses a Catalan Tune called Blancaflor (Fig. 2). This tune is from XIX Century, and as we can see, this tune has all the characteristics of popular Spanish music; an opening motive that is repeated, changes of meter, and very long lyrics similar to the English ballad. This song has got twenty verses and this is just the first. The structure is a-a+a'-a''. The diminished fourth is the main characteristic of this tune.

In Gerhard's version (Fig. 3), there is another important characteristic that he doesn't use and is the altered third degree. His version as we can see is more similar to a''. The 3rd bar is an inversion of the end. We can understand that the chromatic changes are reflected in the changes of the G.

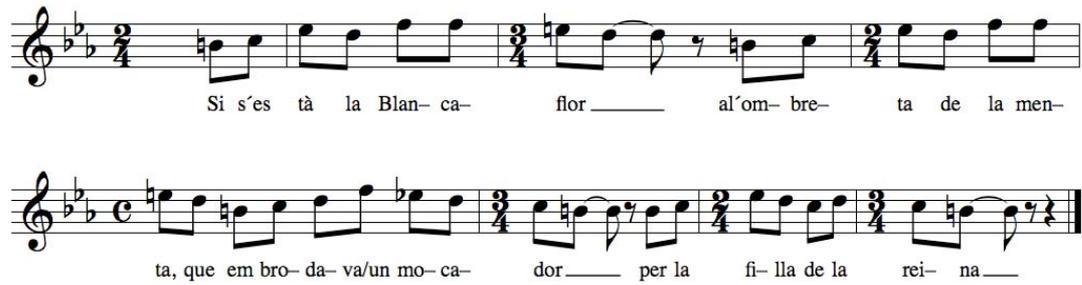


fig. 2 “Blancaflor” Catalan tune (19th century) structure A- A+A’ -A’’

Gerhard’s version has a different meter and different pitches. As we can see, Gerhard keeps the original mood.



Fig. 3 “Oboe duet” Gerhard’s 4th Symphony (1st oboe)

This is the oboe duet (Fig. 4) that occurs as the main part in the middle of the orchestration. If we listen to the final result, we can note that is very difficult to hear the original folk tune.



Fig. 4 “Oboe duet” Gerhard’s 4th Symphony.

As I said this process is very usual in Gerhard’s music, in that he likes to hide elements and in some ways play with the audience (at least a Spanish audience), in the sense that they are listening to something that they know, but only he knows where, what and why. On the other hand we must not forget that Gerhard is a composer in a foreign country and the use of this process is a link with his roots. Now, the question is how did Gerhard particularly choose Blancaflor? Is this because this melody has a particular feeling, has a particular shape or starts with the 7th grade of the scale? Or is it a combination, including that this song has Catalan lyrics

and was forbidden during Franco’s life. Before I answer this fully, I have to explain how Gerhard makes the row that he uses to compose this work. The first point is that it is a 12-note piece, although it’s not visible from the excerpt, I will show you. The row is a very clever interpretation of the chromatic scale and with just two changes (2 small movements of the scale), he achieves a symmetrical row. Gerhard uses the same 12-tone row in different transpositions as a basis for the 4th Symphony. As we can see (Fig. 5), this row is a combination of small intervals (semitones, tones and thirds minor and major). The row can be split in half to form two hexachords. Gerhard alters the order in which the pitches occur but always within their particular hexachord. In some ways these can be classed as pitch class sets, as defined by Allen Forte. If we analyse the row at a deeper level, we discover that Gerhard intricately places two intervals of semitones between intervals of a third within each hexachord. However, if we read the row another way we can split the row into 4 trichords where we have an interval of a semitone followed by a minor third in the first three trichords, and a semitone followed by a major third in the last trichord.

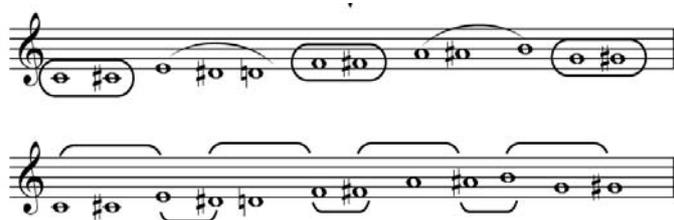


Fig. 5 4th Symphony row

Gerhard’s approach to the formation of his row, produces technical and musical possibilities developed from Schoenberg’s theories thus avoiding the rigid restrictions of Webern’s technique whilst creating a more consistent row structure than the freedoms of Berg. As you can see if we write the number of every pitch (starting at 0), the result is a row starting with 0 1 4 3 (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6 4th Symphony row with numbers.



Fig. 7 “Blancaflor” Catalan tune (XIX century).

So if we make a comparison between the row and Blancaflor (Fig. 7), we can see that the first 4 notes of the row are the same 4 notes of the tune. And furthermore, the 7 first notes of the row, are the notes used in all the tune.

For the second part of my paper, I will talk about the influence of Manuel de Falla in Gerhard's music. In the Dance of terror, Falla writes a typical flamenco rhythm, a "Soleá" which I am going to explain further later on. Falla writes this for the flutes (Fig. 8), and Gerhard writes a very similar rhythm in the flutes as well (Fig. 9). As we can see, the typical rhythm of the soleá is in blue, and the typical final of this dance is red. Note that the music has a very similar rhythm and a very similar orchestration.

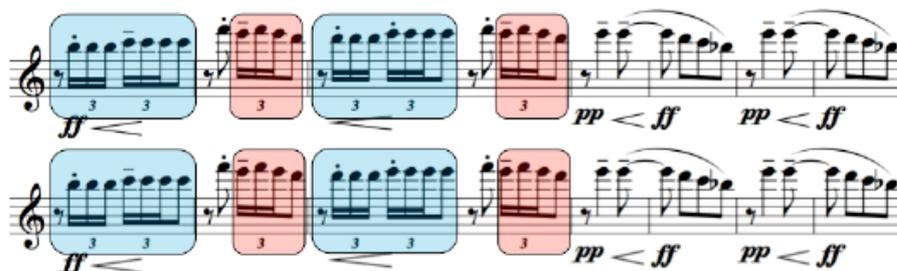


Fig. 8 Dance of terror (excerpt), from "El amor brujo" (1st flute)

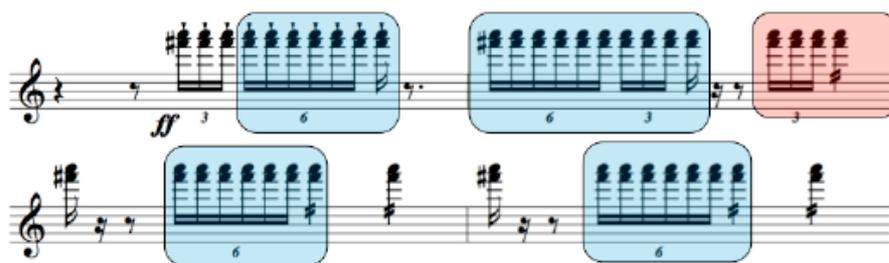


Fig. 9 Bar 47, Gerhard's 4th Symphony (1st flute)

There is another connection between Falla and Gerhard, which I call the Big E. In the beginning and in the repetition of the Dance of fire, Falla uses E as the most fundamental pitch for the length of 23 bars. In the very beginning he writes just an E, and then he introduces some other pitches, but always around E (Fig. 10).

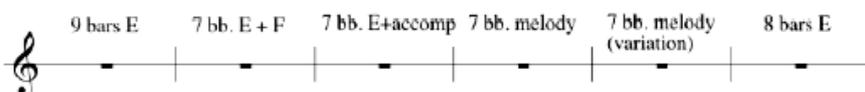


Fig. 10 Dance of fire, from "El amor brujo" (bb. 1-27)

In the same way, Gerhard uses a E from bar 294 till bar 323 Gerhard is even more strict and during 40 bars only writes E, with interjections by some instruments breaking the line (Fig. 11). The big difference is that Falla constructs the E pitch as the background for the melody (the fire melody) and Gerhard writes the E as a structural part in the middle of the Symphony. So for Falla the Big E is only the background, and for Gerhard the Big E is part of the foreground.

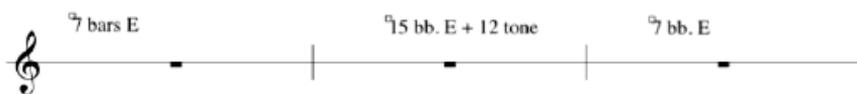


Fig.11 Gerhard's 4th Symphony (bb. 294-323)

In this example (Fig. 14) we can see a melody that Falla writes in *El aparecido* (from "El amor brujo", 1915). It is for trumpet (solo), using *Fortissimo* and *staccato*.

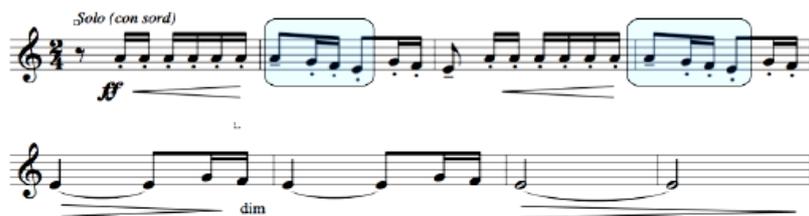


Fig. 12 *El aparecido*, from "El amor brujo" Falla, 1915 (solo trumpet).

Gerhard writes a fanfare in his Symphony with a very similar material, for 4 trumpets, again using *fortissimo* and *staccato*, and as we can see, he writes exactly the same end for the melody (as we can see in blue, Fig 13). The only difference is that Gerhard uses 4 trumpets instead of 1, and that the pitch that is played in repetition in Falla is an A and in Gerhard it is a G. The musical result is very similar.



Fig. 13 Bar 493, Gerhard's 4th Symphony (1st trumpet).

In addition Gerhard, writes a version of a Zarzuela, with an easy and rhythmical melody and some details in the orchestration. Zarzuela is a Spanish genre of musical theatre characterized by a mixture of sung and spoken dialogue, usually with humorous storylines about ordinary people from Madrid, who gossip about the things that happen.

Gerhard arranged two Zarzuelas for the BBC. One in 1943, called *Cadiz*, by Federico Chueca, and the other in 1954, the very well known *El barberillo de Lavapiés*, by Fernando Barbieri. Furthermore, Gerhard wrote 4 commissions for BBC radio, in a typical Zarzuela style. That means that Gerhard was very comfortable with the style and technique of the Zarzuela, and he applied this in his music, integrating it, into the 12 note system.

One of the most famous Zarzuelas is "La revoltosa" Ruperto Chapí (Fig. 14) and Gerhard writes this part of the Symphony (bb. 544 till 591, Fig. 15) with a melody that is reminiscent of the Chapi original. As we can see in the slide, the original of Chapí has similar intervallic structure to the original of Gerhard.



Fig. 14 Zarzuela. "la revoltosa" Ruperto Chapí



Fig. 15 Gerhard's 4th Symphony (bb. 544-553)

Both, Falla and Gerhard studied with Pedrell, and both studied the technique of flamenco in depth. This explains why there are elements of flamenco in the works of both composers. Flamenco is applied to a particular body of cante (song), baile (dance) and toque (solo guitar music), mostly emanating from Andalusia in southern Spain. As I said before, in the flute part of the 4th symphony b. 47 (Fig. 17), we find the flamenco rhythm the Soleá (Fig. 16).

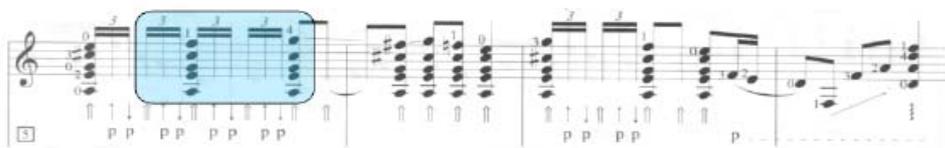


Fig. 16 Flamenco example. Soleá



Fig. 17 Bar 47, Gerhard's 4th Symphony (1st flute)

Conclusion

To conclude, I have discussed how Gerhard rebuilt his musical style while in exile. He had to leave his native country because of the spread of fascism and this reflected in the techniques he uses in his works. As a Spanish citizen with a German background, he never forgot his roots, and used this influence in a very personal way. From my point of view, the use of certain Catalan tunes that were associated with the anti-fascist movement, can be seen as a political statement by Gerhard, as well as a way of constructing a sense of personal nationality in the exile.

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