



ÁNGEL BARRIOS. BIOGRAPHY

The figure of Ángel Barrios (1882-1964) must be appreciated from different angles. On the one hand, he was a composer, musician and guitarist; an artist of great inspiration and a wellspring of music. He was a successor of the style of Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909), and drew inspiration from folklore and flamenco in search of their essence to transform them into elegant, refined music, filled with delicacy and nuances. On the other hand, his interests were multi-faceted and included the preservation of cultural heritage, the management of public resources, the organisation of various artistic events, teaching and the active participation in different forums where the intellectuals of his time – from many different fields – gathered to contribute and share their thoughts, ideas and knowledge.

Ángel Barrios Fernández, son of Antonio Barrios Tamayo and Eloísa Fernández – the name she gave herself as she had been christened Manuela –, was the nucleus of a family that enjoyed great importance and influence within the grounds of the Alhambra during the last decades of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The father, Antonio Barrios, was a charismatic figure who cordially welcomed travellers, musicians and artists during their stay at the Alhambra.

The family home, built on the ancient bathhouse of the Great Mosque of the Alhambra, also housed a business that was something between a tavern and a shop, serving as both lodgings and a meeting place within the inhabited neighbourhood of the Alhambra; a neighbourhood that was artisanal as well as aristocratic. The place was known as the Polinario tavern and it became a sort of cultural heart of the Granada of that time. Its owner, Antonio Barrios, popularly known as 'El Polinario', was also a cobbler, painter and collector. Blessed with a gift for conversation and an exceptional talent for the guitar – he was a purist yet also went to improvise – Barrios was knowledgeable about all forms of flamenco, and his home became a bastion of classical flamenco, of *cante 'hondo'* (or 'deep' singing, as he called it) and the guitar as a solo instrument.

Ángel's first teacher was his father, Antonio Barrios, who transmitted to him a tradition inherited from the charismatic Francisco Rodríguez 'Malipieri', an artistic pioneer in the guitar world. 'El Murciano', as Malipieri's father was known, was the perfect incarnation of this romantic Granada, a destination for travellers of all kinds, such as the great Russian composer Mikhail Glinka, who lived in the city of the Alhambra for a few months between 1845 and 1846. Glinka wrote of him: 'This Murciano was an illiterate person who sold wine in his own tavern. He played divinely, with elegance and precision.' Ángel Barrios's musical education crossed the boundary of popular, self-taught music to embrace its academic side under the guidance of Antonio Segura Mesa, a composer and professor of Harmonics at the Conservatory of Granada. Segura Mesa also guided the musical inclinations of the young Federico García Lorca, who was seduced by the piano as Barrios was by the violin.



Twenty-five-year-old Ángel Barrios founded the Trío Iberia that played Spanish folk instruments. This was made up of Barrios himself (guitar), Cándido Bezunartea (lute) and Ricardo Devalque (bandurria). The Trío had a packed concert schedule with numerous concerts and many appearances in France and England; in London, the Trío Iberia not only performed at prestigious venues but also in the private homes of famous musicians, as well as in the homes of the aristocracy, and even performed for King Edward VII.

1909 marked the peak of the Trio Iberia's success. Living between Paris and London, they rubbed shoulders with other renowned artists such as the painters Ignacio Zuloaga and John Singer Sargent (one of the travellers who had spent time in the Alhambra, made friends with the Barrios family and would later give them a magnificent, dedicated watercolour), along with the sculptor Auguste Rodin and musician Pablo Casals. However, this brilliant period coincided with the death of Isaac Albéniz on 18 May 1909, in the French town of Cambo-les-Bains.

Returning to the artistic career of Ángel Barrios, it was from 1907 when he took advantage of his time in Paris to further his studies in composition. This he did with André Gédalge, also meeting other great French musicians in person, the most famous being Paul Dukas and Maurice Ravel. While in Paris, Barrios made new friendships and deepened existing ones with many of the displaced Spanish musicians who were living in Paris: Isaac Albéniz, Manuel de Falla, Enrique Granados, Joaquín Turina and Ricardo Viñes, among others.

Back in Granada, at the end of 1910, Ángel Barrios married Encarnación Pavía Ganivet, niece of the late thinker, Ángel Ganivet, author of *Granada la bella*. The couple moved into the family home on the calle Real de la Alhambra. 1910 also saw Ángel Barrios's piano work, *Guajiras*, being awarded a prize by Granada's Artistic Centre.

Ángel Barrios spent the years of World War I (1914-1918) studying under Conrado del Campo, with whom he perfected his studies in composition. Both musicians established a fruitful partnership resulting in several operas, among which these are the most noteworthy: *La romería*, *El Avapiés* and *El hombre más guapo del mundo*. Barrios's first orchestral compositions in the form of symphonic poems (*Una copla en la fuente* by Avellano and the zambra *En el Albayzín*) are from that period.

Undoubtedly, the success at the Teatro Real in Madrid of *El Avapiés*, an opera in three acts, first performed on 18 March 1919, placed Ángel Barrios among the best known Spanish composers. That same year saw Barrios's friendship with Manuel de Falla deepen. Falla wished to settle in Granada after having triumphed in London with *El sombrero de tres picos*, the same creation that would be performed by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes with sets and costumes designed by Pablo Picasso. The Barrios family helped Falla look for a suitable house for him and his sister María del Carmen to live in. At the end of 1921 they eventually found a little Carmen [a walled house and garden, typical of



Granada] also on the Alhambra hill but on the side of the Palace Hotel. Falla and his sister lived in this 'Carmen de la Antequeruela Alta' until September 1939.

The Cante Jondo Competition, held in the Plaza de los Aljibes of the Alhambra in June 1922, made Granada the meeting place of the day. Old friends of Ángel Barrios attended the competition: Santiago Rusiñol, Ignacio Zuloaga, Manuel de Falla, and younger friends such as Federico García Lorca, Manuel Ángeles Ortiz, Hermenegildo Lanz and Andrés Segovia. But the surprising thing was that Ángel Barrios himself did not take part, as in theory he was one of the promoters of the competition. He eventually distanced himself from it because of a misunderstanding and the fact that a dance project organised by Barrios was to be performed at the same time. But the confusion soon blew over.

In the autumn of 1923, Ángel Barrios was appointed deputy mayor and chairman of the committee for festivities at the Town Hall of Granada. While there, he carried out important work addressing issues of various kinds, from the conservation of artistic heritage to the organisation of traditional fiestas such as Corpus Christi, and proposing new initiatives such as the 'Right to Landscape'. On 20 February 1924, the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of Granada appointed Ángel Barrios and Manuel de Falla as Full Members of the Academy. The friendship of these two men was reflected in outstanding collaborations such as that of 27 June 1927, with the performance of the mystery play *El gran teatro del mundo* by Pedro Calderón de la Barca, at the Plaza de los Aljibes in the Alhambra. Ángel Barrios conducted the orchestra that played the background music written by Falla for the occasion.

In 1928, Barrios was appointed director of Granada's Conservatory of Music. A year later, on 8 November 1929 to be precise, the comedy *La Lola se va a los puertos* by the brothers Antonio and Manuel Machado, premièred in Madrid at the Teatro Fontalba. The adaptation of this work, aimed to enrich the wealth of Spanish opera, saw Ángel Barrios as the composer of its score. However, two decades would pass until its inauguration as a zarzuela.

Ángel Barrios remained in Granada during the years of the Civil War (1936-1939), where he played a hugely significant role in the musical life of the city. He was responsible for creating several music groups and on 25 July 1938, he conducted at the inaugural concert of the Symphony Orchestra of the Falange of Granada. During these years and those immediately following the war, Barrios corresponded with a number of friends such as the painter from Granada, Gabriel Morcillo, the writer Manuel Machado from Seville, and the playwright and librettist from Madrid, Tomás Borrás. Sadly, his great friend Manuel de Falla decided to leave Spain and set sail for Argentina at the end of 1939. Not long after, the Barrios family left the Alhambra and moved to Madrid. It was there that they received the news that Manuel de Falla had died on 14 November 1946, in the Argentine region of Alta Gracia.



Barrios's life continued and, on a compositional level, a new and very fruitful phase -- now far from the city of his birth -- lay ahead of him, for the enjoyment of future generations, and included works for piano, guitar, song and piano, and ballet. As with the case of his great friend Isaac Albéniz, the inspiration for all of his work was Granada. These were also years of recognition. On 3 May 1949, a nostalgia-filled celebration of Granada was held in Madrid. On that day, the Town Hall of Granada, represented by its mayor Antonio Gallego Burín, an old friend of Barrios, received the Medal of Honour from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of Granada. On the following day, a concert and literary recital presented as 'musical and poetic reminiscences of Granada' were performed at the Teatro Español in Madrid. Ángel Barrios, participating as both composer and guitarist, was among the musicians.

One of Barrios's last professional achievements came in 1950 when *La Lola se va a los puertos* was awarded the National Prize for Musical Theatre. The zarzuela's official première was on 19 October 1951 at the Teatro Albéniz in Madrid. In his later years, Barrios, hindered by his waning vision, dictated music for guitar to his friend and disciple José Corrales. On 26 November 1964, Ángel Barrios passed away at his home in Madrid. The world lost one of the last witnesses and participants of an era filled with inspiration and creation, as well as a huge part of the spirit of an Alhambra that was lived to the full.