

Transcript of the interview with Adeline Sire used in the *Ainadamar* CD Listening Guide  
(Deutsche Grammophon 0006429-02)

General

1. Why is the opera called *Ainadamar*?

*Ainadamar* means “fountain of tears” in Arabic. It’s a real fountain that witnessed beautiful harmony in the 12<sup>th</sup> century; it’s a fountain to which Arab poets quoted by Lorca wrote poems to the beauty, to the peace, to the inspiration, that that fountain provided to people, when these three cultures coexisted in the soul of Spain: the Moslem, the Jewish and the Christian. And it’s a fountain that – eight centuries later – witnessed the murder of this great poet, so that’s why we called it “fountain of tears”. It’s a fountain that is the witness of harmony and the witness of barbarity.

2. Musical roots

Lorca said that the greatest tragedy in the history of Spain was the expulsion of Moslems and Jews. He said that Spain, that had been a great empire and a centre for civilisation, became a little, chauvinistic, provincial country after that occurrence. So the opera tries to bring back onto the surface all those elements that created the richness of Spain, musically und culturally: Jewish, Moor, Christian, flamenco, gypsy. That’s what the opera is trying to do.

3. Myth and legacy

There are many operas that are about myths, right? And *Ainadamar* is about how a myth is actually being born, how Lorca that was a breathing, living, laughing, loving person became a symbol, a myth - and how we can bring him back to be that man. And it’s also an opera about the passing of a legacy, how Margarita Xirgu, the actress who was the muse of Lorca and the main interpreter of Lorca in his life and after his death, realizes that she cannot go on any more and she begins to teach and passes her work to her students. That legacy goes on and on. An artist’s work is never finished; it always has to continue in the next generation.

Commentary on every track in the CD

1. Preludio de Agua y Caballo

The prelude starts with the sound of deep water - the sound of the fountain *Ainadamar* - and trumpets in the distance.

Peter Sellars, the director who staged the final version of *Ainadamar*, calls that theme of the trumpets the theme of “wounded freedom”, because it is actually what Margarita sings as she dies at the end of the opera - “I am freedom, wounded and bleeding hope”- but it’s the same notes, the same theme.

After the trumpets’ disappearing echo, we hear a horse, a furious horse galloping towards us, that in turn becomes a flamenco horse. I mean: the hooves of the horse move into a flamenco rhythm and then the percussion of the orchestra takes over.

## 2. Balada

The ballad is actually a popular poem that Lorca knew. It was a song – I mean, I don't know what music the song had, but that song he used as an opener to his play *Mariana Pineda*. The words of the ballad are premonitory of the fate both of Mariana but also of Federico, and they say: “Ay, qué día tan triste en Granada, que a las piedras hacía llorar/ What a sad day it was in Granada; even the stones began to cry”.

The chorus functions there almost like a Greek chorus, predicting what is going to happen, announcing, commenting and so forth.

## 3. Mariana, tus ojos

All this number “Mariana, tus ojos/ Mariana, your eyes” is built on a rumba, because she, Margarita, left Spain to live the rest of her life in Latin America. So all this number is based on a rumba, but it's almost like a Greek rumba, because the chorus taunts Margarita, the chorus echoes lines of Mariana, and Margarita is haunted by the fates of herself and of Federico García Lorca.

Actually, this dance can create a sort of hypnotic rhythm, like Ravel's Bolero, for instance, but on the other hand it's a very popular thing, so you'll hear the clarinet really playing in a jazzy manner that is completely not symphonic.

## 4. Bar Albor de Madrid

Margarita first met Lorca at a bar in Madrid. And this is a historical scene. And Lorca offered her whiskey and she swore and she said: “This whiskey tastes like gasoline”. So I thought it would be good to use that line.

This is a scene full of fun – they are both relatively young and they cannot even begin to imagine what a horrible fate awaits them. Margarita and Lorca are having this raucous dialogue and then she stops him cold and says: “Wait, wait, wait: I do want to play Mariana Pineda in your play, because this great woman, murdered 100 years ago, has come back to life in your folk drama, bringing with her the pure air of freedom that our people today must breathe.”

## 5. Desde mi ventana

This aria “Desde mi ventana/ From my window” – when I wrote the opera, I didn't know if it would work as an opera, but I wanted at least to have one great aria. And I was listening both to a lot of Handel great arias and Italian - you know, Donizetti, Bellini, all these people that knew how to write a great tune with a beautiful climax and tear your heart - so it's a very old-fashioned concept.

The aria is sung by Lorca and he simply says that when he was nine years old, in sleepless nights he would go to his window and watch the statue of Mariana Pineda. And Mariana Pineda was called (and it's written on her statue) the symbol of the purity of the Revolution. But for Lorca, he says she was not so pure, not so grey and not so cold like a statue. Actually she would come back to life and her spirit would flow towards the window and give him a kiss and he would fall asleep. So the aria is basically about the world of childhood in which

you animate inanimate objects and a world that inspires you, especially in a sensitive kid like Lorca was.

Towards the end of the aria, Margarita and Nuria enter. That means they enter forty years later, so to speak, but they start commenting and saying: Did Lorca know then, when he was talking about Mariana, that his fate will mirror her fate? And Lorca keeps singing about Mariana, and basically the aria becomes a trio.

#### 6. Muerte a Caballo

The first time that we hear Ruiz Alonso, we are inside Margarita's head. We hear a memory, the memory of her voice saying: "Give him up, give Lorca up!" So he comes riding that horse of death, so I call that scene "Muerte a Caballo/ Death on Horseback".

Ramón Ruiz Alonso was another historical character. He was the man that arrested and murdered Lorca. He is sung in the opera by a fantastic flamenco singer called Jesús Montoya. Lorca loved flamenco, but flamenco was also associated with very reactionary times in Spain. So that's the voice of Ruiz Alonso, a voice that is as fated as Lorca himself.

#### 7. Balada

The *balada* recurs four times in the piece and signals that actually time has not passed - I mean that we are still in that first minute of the opera - but the second *balada* is a crazed, frenetic reprise of the first *balada*, because now Margarita is haunted, losing her mind in a way, so everything starts to spin furiously inside her head.

Towards the end of the second *balada*, we hear for the first time the radio messages from the Falange. I'll read you one: "We'll exterminate the seeds of the Revolution, even in the wombs of their mothers". This is the kind of hatred that fuelled these people.

This idea of Radio Falange: I mean, I don't know if there was such a thing as Radio Falange. But all these messages were printed actually in a number of Spanish newspapers in 1936 and were quotations from Falangist officers.

#### 8. Quiero arrancarme los ojos

"Quiero arrancarme los ojos/ I want to tear out my eyes." This is what Margarita feels when she remembers these messages of the Radio Falange, when she remembers how she tried to convince Lorca to flee Spain, to go with her to Cuba. She was going to go on tour with a number of Lorca's plays, to crown him in glory, but he said no.

This number is a recitative, but it's also in a pseudo-Greek style, you know, like a tragic Greek heroine consumed by what we could call survivor's guilt. I wanted musically to simply represent the kind of melodic curve that a woman weeping would have and echoes in the horns in the orchestra, I mean like really something desolate.

#### 9. A la Habana

"A la Habana" functions as a little oasis in the piece. Actually, I didn't write this number: I asked my friend and the great flamenco cajón player Gonzalo Grau to write it and I gave him a theme and the words and ideas. But he actually composed it, and we needed this relief

before tragedy strikes in full form. So this is really a duet of the possibility: what will happen if we went together to Havana? And this beautiful number is written in the Cuban style of the 30s.

Margarita tries to entice Lorca to come with her to Havana and she says: “Come, there will be the possibility of freedom, of peace, of joy”, and Lorca dreams with her and then says: “No, I won’t go!” And this is how he seals his fate.

#### 10. Quiero cantar entre las explosiones

Lorca seals his fate, saying “I want to stay here in Spain. I will sing amidst the explosions, I will sing the song of the dead. Spain is a bull burning alive, Spain is a people draped in a black veil.”

Lorca is singing all that in a flamenco rhythm. Actually it’s influenced by flamenco, and under Lorca and then the pleading Margarita, the orchestra builds and builds until it becomes this huge volcano. It’s almost Egyptian in a way, but ends up in the form of what we call the “flamenco taconeo”, you know, the dance of the heels.

And then on top of it, the radio messages of death, of hatred, of these Falange generals. Talking about the Republicans, they say: “If they hide under the ground, we will dig them up. And if we find them dead, we will kill them again.” And then this thing: “Don’t be afraid: I give you permission to kill them like dogs, and your hands will be clean.” These messages allowed people like Ruiz Alonso to make justice with his own hands.

#### 11. Arresto

The arrest scene is also taken from real witnesses’ accounts: I mean, Lorca went into hiding, actually to a Falangist family that were friends of his family. And the women of this family – the Rosales family – tried to protect him from Ruiz Alonso who came to seize him. So the scene is a little bit like a ritual, you know, with Ruiz Alonso throwing a litany of accusations to Lorca, the Rosales women repeating in a ritualistic way “What crime did he commit?”, and Margarita, thirty years later, remembering all those accusations and responding to them. So it’s a dialogue across time between Margarita and Ruiz Alonso.

Ruiz Alonso says a list of accusations, such as: “He is an enemy of Spain; he is a faggot; he has done more harm with his pen than many others with their weapons; he is a lover of Russia.” To each of these false accusations, Margarita responds from her vantage-point of 1969, Montevideo.

#### 12. La Fuente de las Lágrimas

After Lorca’s arrest, he was taken to the fountain of tears, to Ainadamar. And he spent the night there, and the following morning he was executed. So what we hear after the arrest is the song of the fountain. We hear the water drops, the voices of the fountain, and we hear Margarita describing Lorca’s entrance into the area of the fountain, flanked by a bullfighter and by a teacher who were also imprisoned.

In her vision, Margarita describes Lorca almost as Jesus being led to Golgotha. Also the fact that he was murdered with two other people, one to his right and one to his left, not to mention that he was unjustly accused, associates him to Jesus. Margarita says: “So up that

hillside you carried your cross; on your left is a schoolteacher, on your right a bullfighter, and the fountain itself began to cry.”

### 13. Confesión

Lorca and the bullfighter and the teacher spent a long night before they were murdered in the early morning of August 19, 1936. And there was a guard, Javier José Tripaldi – this is also a historical fact – who actually offered him a cigarette, and he thought he was being a good person by saying: “Look, I’m a good Catholic and I must tell you, you’ll be executed. Why don’t you make a final confession – you know, not of your crimes, but to God?”

Surrounding them, there are voices praying to the Virgin Mary. And these are actually voices from the Mexican area of Chiapas. They are praying to the Virgin of Guadalupe.

I thought that the haunting, hypnotising character of these voices would bring to mind that Lorca was not the only one that died during that civil war. He is the most famous murdered person in the Spanish civil war, but thousands upon thousands of people died. So those voices are the voices of the dead and the soon-to-be-dead in that war.

During this scene Lorca tries to remember this prayer. He starts the prayer, fumbles the words, starts crying in fear; at the same time, the guard tries to guide him through the prayer, whereas the bullfighter says: “There is no God, only the bull, only my cape, only my sword, only my mother drowning in my blood.” And the teacher reflects on how much good work the government had done in the two years that they were in power: “Thirteen thousand schools were built in two years”, he says. “And so many children now know how to read, and they will know how to ask the questions!”

### 14. Interludio de Balazos y Lamento por la Muerte de Federico

I thought: for the murder of Lorca, what to do, what to do? And I felt: let’s start with just one gunshot! So I traced in a library of sounds a gunshot from the 1930s, and we hear that gunshot, and we hear the shell falling to the ground. And then I thought: let’s do a whole, entire piece based on this sound, where one gunshot becomes thousands and thousands of gunshots that killed thousands of people.

It starts almost with random isolated rhythms like all wars start, but then it becomes this semi-flamenco dance of bullets. And on top of it we hear a lament for the death of Lorca. Jesús Montoya is singing this heart-breaking lament that he improvised on top of the gunshots, but he is not Ruiz Alonso any more: he is the flamenco voice of pain.

### 15. Balada

The third time that the ballad appears, it is now heard as a dirge, as a funeral dirge. And Margarita has already collapsed under the weight of her memories. Nuria, Margarita’s student, is tremendously concerned. She realizes that Margarita is going to die. And Margarita in her semi-delirium asks Nuria: “What did I teach you?” And Nuria says – and this is something I know from the books on Margarita Xirgu - “Actors are not like paintings or statues. When we die, when the people that heard our voices die, we are gone.” And Margarita says: “Help me to go on stage!” Margarita realizes that she will not be able to finish her work, that she has actually passed the torch to a next generation.

#### 16. De mi fuente tú emerges

As Margarita begins to die, she has the vision of Lorca coming to talk to her. You know, in the same way that the statue of Mariana spoke to Lorca, now the dead Lorca is speaking to Margarita and comforting her and saying: "Margarita, thank you for passing my legacy, for keeping my works alive in Latin America, while I was forbidden in Spain." So she finds communion with the spirit of Lorca, she finds that her life, those thirty years that she survived Lorca, were not in vain: that she actually kept him alive.

Lorca tells Margarita: "Your spirit lives in each one of your students. You and Mariana Pineda are already one and the same."

#### 17. Tome su mano

For the first time, Nuria the student is able to see what Margarita sees, so she actually talks to the spirit of Lorca, and she tells the spirit of Lorca: "Come, take her hand, take her with you, take me with you!" So she has the same vision as her teacher.

#### 18. Crepúsculo delirante

At the end of the play *Mariana Pineda*, before the final scene, Lorca has instructions for the lighting to echo the delirious orange of the Granada sunset. So before the death of Margarita, I decided to have an orchestral interlude featuring the two guitars playing in an Arabic way, in which we reproduce that light, that orange light.

#### 19. Doy mi sangre

"Here is my blood shed for thee, drink it and tell my story." Those are the last words of Mariana Pineda, but now they are sung by the three main characters of the opera: Nuria, the student who will carry on the legacy of Margarita and Lorca, Margarita who is dying and Lorca who has died, but who has written those words in his play *Mariana Pineda*. These three generations, Lorca dead in 1936, Margarita about to die in 1969, and Nuria, a young student, become one and the same.

The music starts almost in a Straussian manner to me, *Rosenkavalier*-like, but then it goes on to Purcell. To me it resembles the death of Dido: that majesty, that love, that grace. It's a number about finding grace right before death, finding the serenity to die. And that's what Margarita finds when she says "Adiós, adiós." She is at peace; she finally has shed all her fears, all her misgivings, and enters the realm of death with great dignity, in the same way that Mariana died.

#### 20. Yo soy la libertad

The orchestra mourns the death of Margarita, then becomes furious. Then the voice of Margarita, the spirit, sings: "Yo soy la libertad/ I am freedom!" Then we establish an orchestral fountain of tears. The chorus sings a mournful lullaby, the trumpet brings again the opening theme from the prelude: the theme of wounded freedom. The voices of the fountain sing again the ballad of Mariana Pineda. They sing: "Ay, qué día tan triste en Granada, que a las piedras hacía llorar/ What a sad day it was in Granada, even the stones began to cry!"

And everything dissolves into the water of the fountain.