

*Metaphoric Thinking on Audiovisual Performance of
the “Noches en los Jardines de España”*

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Abstract

This article takes Manuel de Falla's *Noches en los jardines de España* as an object of study, exploring the visual and musical metaphors embedded within the motifs and movements behind the score, and proposing a sonic design for piano performance. First, the socio-historical context of this masterpiece's creation will be examined, along with the relationship between its musical language and other artistic and literary fields. Within this contextualization, the focus will shift to a semiotic musical analysis, seeking to uncover the visual and musical metaphors hidden within the motives and movements of the composition. Based on this, a sonic design will be proposed for piano performance, including interpretive suggestions regarding touch, timbre-dynamics, melodic, harmonic and rhythmic contours, as well as expressive gestures, which will then be applied in a performative realization. Through an in-depth exploration of *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, this article aims to unveil the visual and musical metaphors imbued within the work, and to provide a novel sonic design approach for piano performance, enriching the interpretations of this masterpiece.

Keywords: Manuel de Falla, *Noches en los jardines de España*, Metaphor, Audiovisual Performance, Granada. Guia Emotional, Jardins d'Espanya

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Introduction

Noches en los Jardines de España composed by Manuel de Falla in the beginning of the 20th century, while, still regarded as very picturesque in nature due to the apparent attempt of the piece to combine music with pictures derived from the scenic beauty of Spanish gardens. Scholars like Nancy Lee Harper (2005), Francisco J. Giménez-Rodríguez (2022), and Ivan Nommick (1997) notice the composition's link to Gregorio Martínez Sierra's *Granada. Guía Emotiva*.¹ and Santiago Rusiñol's *Jardins d'Espanya*.² Very probably, these works influenced a great deal the way in which Falla portrayed these walls of the Alhambra and Generalife in sound, as if they were realms having a heavy emotional and symbolical meaning.

Falla close relations with Martínez Sierra and Rusiñol are at least well documented through the key compositional periods.

Their friendships, starting about 1913,³ continued during Falla's travels through Spain with the Sierras, affording deep artistic exchanges, particularly noted in Rusiñol's Cau Ferrat studio in Sitges, 1915.⁴ Here, in an artistic milieu at Rusiñol's Cau Ferrat studio in Sitges, he came into contact with the piano, and it strongly commanded his musical interests. The work once more transcends musical interpretation to bring to life themes from Rusiñol's paintings and Martínez Sierra's text, which evoke the Spanish gardens through sensual detail of the flora and natural decor.

The interplay of visual and aural elements in the composition creates a polychronic experience, conveying the atmosphere and mystery of the Spanish gardens rather than merely describing them. This interdisciplinary approach allows Falla and Rusiñol's gardens to be projected literally while also transmitting a deeper emotional characteristic to their respective arts. Consequently, the perception of Falla's music is transformed into a narrative that encompasses both aesthetic and emotionally vivid worlds.

As a programmatic work, *Night in the Spanish Garden* reveals its imagery and narrative content through the titles of its three movements. This article first helps explore metaphorical expressions in *Noches en los Jardines de España* based on the interpretation of imagery in Martínez Sierra's *Granada. Guía Emotiva* and Rusiñol's *Jardins d'Espanya*. Following this contextualization, the study conducted a semiotic musical analysis to reveal the visual and musical metaphors hidden within the themes and movements of the score. Based on this analysis, a sound design for piano performance is proposed, incorporating suggestions for interpretation of touch, timbral dynamics, melodic, harmonic and rhythmic contours, and expressive gestures. These elements are then applied to performative actions, demonstrating the practical implementation of the proposed sound design.

¹ *Granada. Guía Emotiva*, a travel guidebook authored by Gregorio Martínez Sierra, was first published in 1910 by París Garnier.

² *Jardins d'Espanya* is an album of paintings focusing on Spanish gardens, created by the artist Santiago Rusiñol. Comprising 40 pieces, this work was published in 1903 by Casa Thomàs in Barcelona.

³ París (1908-1914), <https://www.manueldefalla.com/es/paris-1908-1914> [accessed on 10th May 2024]

⁴ Madrid (1915-1919), <https://www.manueldefalla.com/es/madrid-1915-1919> [accessed on 10th May 2024]

The Pictorial Figures in Falla's "Noches en los Jardines de Espana"

In *Noches en los Jardines de España*, Falla's first two movements depict the Moorish palace of Granada from both near and distant perspectives. The first movement, *En el Generalife*, is a musical portrayal of Alhambra and the Generalife gardens in Granada. Known as part of the Alhambra complex, the Generalife served as the summer palace of the Moorish dynasty (Aben and Wit, 1999). The second movement of Falla's *Noches en los Jardines de España* is titled *Danza lejana*. According to Manuel Orozco, part of the inspiration for this movement comes from the views at San Nicolás, the highest point of Albaicín. Under the moonlight of Granada, the swirling dances of the gypsies on the sacred mountain come to life, accompanied by the murmuring waters of the Alhambra Palace, eventually converging into the rivers deep within the forests (Orozco, 1968).

The third movement of Falla's *Noches en los Jardines de España*, titled *En los jardines de la Sierra de Córdoba*, depicts the gardens of Córdoba. Regarding the precise location, Orozco (1968) provides a specific musical scene: dawn in the mountain passes of Cordoba, in the Sierra Morena. This vivid scene description immerses us in a space where passionate dance is interwoven with the tranquility of nature. When combined with Clemente's (2009) view that the music might express the gardens of the mysterious Medina Azahara, we find that *Noches en los Jardines de España* creates a musical landscape that deeply integrates real and imagined geographical spaces.

Granada. Guía Emotional and *Jardins d'Espanya* provide key insights for understanding the imagery presented by Manuel de Falla in *Noches en los Jardines de Espana*. These art works, employing symbolic techniques, sketch vivid images particularly through detailed depictions of the garden's natural ecology, such as water elements and plant imagery, alongside the portrayal of related characters. Sierra and Rusiñol encapsulate complex emotions of mysticism, melancholy, oppression, and yearning through these pictorial figures. This resonates subtly with Falla's modern representation of Spanish musical motifs in *Noches en los Jardines de España*, creating a nuanced symphony (Chase, 1960).

In the movement *En el Generalife*, the metaphoric portrayal of water elements and plant imagery is particularly prominent. Water, symbolizing mercy and the source of life, holds a central place in Islamic garden design. Ruggles, a scholar in the history of Islamic art and architecture, notes that in Islamic culture, water represents purity and the source of life (Ruggles, 2000). Sierra describes the various states of water in fountains, such as "quiet, silent, monotonous, restless, noisy, changing" (Martínez Sierra, 1911, pp. 132-133), hinting at the complex emotions carried by the water element. Rusiñol, through poetry, accentuates the multidimensionality of water as an emotional metaphor with lines like "And the water alone, throbbing, the heart of water, breaks the silent anguish with its romance" (Machado in Rusiñol, 1914, p. 13).

Regarding plant imagery, Sierra compares the osmanthus to "mortification in the bitter aroma" (Martínez Sierra, 1911, p. 126), symbolizing mystery and emotional entanglement; Ayala refers to it as a spiritual refuge akin to "hidden weaknesses" (Ayala in Rusiñol, 1914, p. 20). The irregular shape of the cypress tree is interpreted by Sierra as an "unsettling geometry" (Martínez Sierra, 1911, p. 128) that represents spiritual unease. These images have been considered by scholar Ivan Nommick as subtly echoing Falla's artistic portrayal of the soundscape of the Alhambra in his music (Nommick, 2005).

In the movement *Danza lejana*, the depiction of the Gypsy dancer Lucía by Sierra and the portrayal of a Gypsy girl⁵ by Rusiñol closely relate to the emotional core of Flamenco dance. Sierra describes Lucia with “a cinnamon-colored face, a pair of black eyes that have absorbed all the deep light of a sunny day” (Martínez Sierra, 1911, p. 168), capturing her unique charm, while Rusiñol’s painting reveals a melancholic and introspective expression. These artistic images vividly embody the spirit of Flamenco as a medium for intense emotional expression (Papenbrok, 1990; Carmer, 1994), which resonates with the somber tones in Falla's music.

The movement *En los jardines de la Sierra de Córdoba* builds a complex emotional atmosphere through images of Córdoba street scenes and courtyards. The streets are depicted as “oppressive, where each citizen is as content as a guard at the door of a barracks” (Martínez Sierra, 1911, p. 208), and the courtyards as “places where in some, the water from a fountain falls on marble and splashes the greenery of the pots; in all, there is a pleasant dreamy peace” (ibid., p.208) that evokes a longing for freedom. Sierra also portrays the Moors as “stuff of legend, mysterious people” (ibid., p.215), adding a layer of mystique; while Rusiñol uses poetic personification to praise the unique charm of the gardens of Cordoba and Granada:

“En Córdoba, en Granada, entre las series de columnas blancas que rodean en parejas los patios, los sembró tan hermosos y tan íntimos que aun los frisos de la Alhambra los echan de menos en sus leyendas encantadas, y los llora el llanto de los surtidores.” (Rusiñol, 1914, pp. 1-2)

Musical and Visual Metaphors in “Noches en los jardines de España”

“Nationalities, social customs and different aesthetic concepts evoke different artistic creations in which metaphors express the attributes of music through descriptions of experiences that evoke kinesthetics, aural or visual images.” (Gumm, 2003, p.80)

---Alan Gumm

Many works with metaphorical representations, when studied and analysed by the performers, make new interpretations. Therefore, “those of us who have learned to play a musical instrument might recall how effectively a simile or metaphor could strike our imaginations, thereby changing our performance of a phrase or entire piece almost instantaneously” (Shephard and Leonard, 2013, p.191).

Metaphor of the opus also provides the performer an immense imaginary space, where the design for the sound could be created with renewed insights. Paraphrasing in Brown's words, in *Noches en los jardines de España*, the elements of Night and the garden correspond to a wide range of meanings as one of the most recurring symbols in art. Like every symbol, the garden and the night have different national styles or aesthetic meanings in different regions. Therefore, in the composition of musical Works, composer or designer’s manipulations and transformations of sound and space are intentional, clearly articulated and independent of one connoisseur’s sensibilities or interpretation (Brown, 2016).

⁵ Although Santiago Rusiñol did not depict any human figures in his *Jardins d'España*, a statement from the Sitges Museum reveals that, concurrently with the creation of his first garden painting “*Xiprers vells*”, a piece titled “*Woman from Granada*” also known as “*Gitana del Albaycín*” or “*Granadina*” came into existence.

In *Noches en los Jardines de España*, the undulating melodic lines and the dynamic modulation of harmonies conjure a vivid synesthetic experience, mirroring my visual perceptions. The insights gleaned from *Granada. Guía Emotional* and *Jardins d'Espanya* illuminate that this musical movement transcends mere auditory representation; it captures garden's unique ambiance, and the character and mood evoked by the characters' dance and sing.

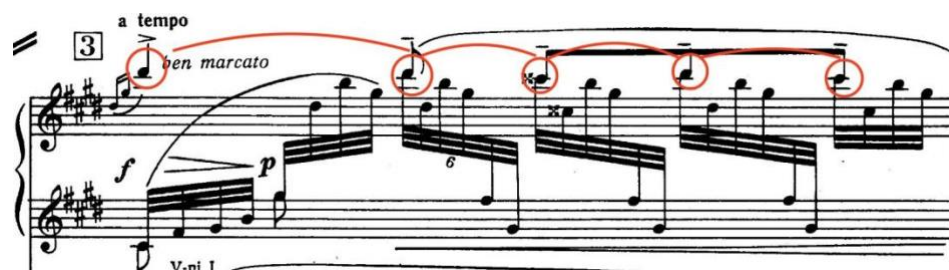
Leveraging my synesthesia I can almost perceive the distinct visual images in Falla's music from *Granada. Guía Emotional*, *Jardins d'Espanya* and the Alhambra Palace. This includes the varying forms and sounds of water in the Moorish gardens, as well as the colors, scents, and personalities of the plants. These audiovisual sensations and perceptions are powerful metaphors that underscore the deeply emotions in the music.

For instance, in describing the Generalife, Martínez Sierra's prose not only captures the visual beauty of this garden but also imparts deep emotional connotations to it by interweaving the landscape with words that evoke character traits. He compared life and spirit to a garden, particularly emphasizing the emptiness of the soul and the symbolism of water: the sound of the fountain and the restless static of the flowing water represent people's inner desires and vitality (Martínez Sierra, 1911).

In *Jardins d'Espanya*, Rusiñol personifies the various elements of the garden, endowing them with human-like qualities and emotions. This enhances the vividness of the images and emotional resonance. He mentions that ancient cypress tree symbolizes steadfast love and brings a sense of solemnity to the garden; the sound of dripping water from the windmill brings a melancholic atmosphere; the white walls and flowers covered by rain reflect rebirth and purity; the maze of willow trees and dark walls creates a mood for the mansion. Provides protection and a sense of privacy (Rusiñol, 1914).

Sierra and Rusiñol's symbolic descriptions of various garden images allow performers to perceive them through a synesthetic perspective, involving not just sound, but also colors and shapes. This content finds corresponding auditory experiences in Falla's music, as in the examples of the auditory of water and plants felt by musicians.

In the musical scores examples, the sound of water droplets is mimicked through melodies played on the piano and the harp. The harp is particularly effective at mimicking natural sounds, especially those of water. In the notes marked for piano and harp, we can see the theme melody evoking the granular rhythm of water elements through different instruments. This approach effectively bridges the visual and auditory realms, bringing the garden's sensory experiences to life within the context of Falla's compositions.



Example 1 (1): *Noches en los Jardines de España*, En el Generalife, m.21.

Example 1 (2): *Noches en los Jardines de España*, En el Generalife, mm.1-4.

The sense of oppression and pain that is inescapable in the metaphor of plants finds release in the auditory perception of the performer, achieved through the utilization of instrumental timbre differences and the progression and resolution of harmonies. In Example 2, mm. 14-22, the orchestral ensemble ceases its tutti play from measures 14 to 20, and the columnar harmony disappears, leaving only the French horn and strings. As the piece moves from mm.17-19, a minor 3rd is repeatedly imitated, creating a tension for the listener. Entering measure 20, the composition returns to a full ensemble and subsequently transitions into a piano solo. Throughout this segment, the sound's complexity simplifies, especially as it segues into the piano theme. This shift from tension to release embodies the emotional resonance of the plant metaphor.

Example 2: *Noches en los Jardines de España*, En el Generalife, mm.14-22.

Under synesthesia, a performer's visual production must align with auditory sensations and emotional guidelines akin to the emotive metaphors found in Spanish paintings. This formulaic approach to the performer's visual creation is articulated as follows:

Auditory elements (tonality, timbre, rhythm, melody) + Pictorial Figures (color, texture, shape) = Visual representation crafted by the performer.

This framework integrates the sensory experiences and artistic expressions, enabling performers to translate auditory stimuli into corresponding visual elements that reflect the nuanced emotions and thematic depth of the music.

In the artworks of Sierra and Rusiñol, abstract concepts such as a hollow soul, the restlessness of a fountain, and the melancholic drip of water from a windmill are mentioned. Synesthetes might envision specific colors or shapes, lending tangible sensory experiences to these abstract ideas of the soul. Audibly, these themes are often conveyed through the sonorities associated with water elements.

To visually represent the forms of water elements that resonate with the music, a comprehensive application of various filming and post-production techniques is necessary. Initially, the selection of video materials should focus on Patio de los Leones and Generalife, capturing the pools at night and the water channels during the day to capture the diversity and emotional metaphors of water under different conditions and scenes.

In post-production, techniques such as masking, picture-in-picture, filters, and keyframes can be utilized to emphasize the dynamic nature and emotional expression of the water flow.

In the Figures, the focus is on the flowing water in pools and channels. Given that the visual background is set in a garden, the visuals are divided into close-up and wide-angle shots to facilitate transitions within the video. Once the appropriate footage is secured, to further enhance the depiction of flowing water, adjustments will be made using masks, picture-in-picture, and filters to refine the visual texture of the water flow in the video.

This approach not only captures the physical beauty of the water but also aligns with the emotional and metaphorical content conveyed by the music, creating a holistic sensory experience.



Figure 1: Water in the fountain



Figure 2: Water in the channel

In figures 3 and 4, after the adjustments, the visual enhancement of the water channels is achieved by overlaying white or black picture-in-picture on the video material, then applying a circular mask to emphasize the localized details of the water flow, highlighting the textural visual effects of the water. The use of multiple layers of picture-in-picture enhances the depth and dynamic beauty of the image.

During the color grading process, adjustments are made to brightness, contrast, luminance, and fade parameters to create tones suitable for different atmospheres, particularly by enhancing the blue components to resonate with the melancholic emotional tone in the music. Throughout the video, keyframes are added to smoothly transition between different shots, making the water's movement more fluid and natural. This synchronization with the music's rhythm and emotional fluctuations provides a coherent and immersive viewing experience that visually echoes the auditory elements, thereby enhancing the overall sensory impact of the piece.



Figure 3: Water in the fountain (Adjust)

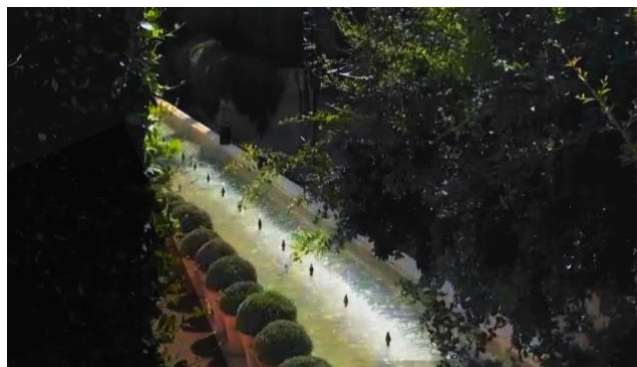


Figure 4: Water in the channel (Adjust)

The visual production of water droplets differs from flowing water and must align with the crystalline and detailed textures found in the music. In imagery, the water droplets must appear transparent and granular. By utilizing light-shaping techniques, both natural and artificial light sources are cleverly used to highlight the transparency and three-dimensionality of the droplets.

When filming under sunlight, the light refracts and reflects through the droplets, casting vibrant colors and enchanting halos on the screen, creating a visually stunning effect of crystal-clear and dazzling water droplets. In backlighting conditions, the outlines of the droplets are more sharply defined, presenting a translucent and graceful texture. Furthermore, by blurring the background, the water droplets become the absolute focus of the frame, their crystalline clarity maximally enhanced. This perfectly resonates with the clear and bright timbres in the music, together creating the effect of light dancing on water surfaces. Additionally, to maintain a consistent emotional tone in the metaphor, the color tonality is kept consistent with earlier segments. This integrated approach ensures that the visual elements complement the musical elements, enhancing the overall sensory experience.

Gesture and Audio-Visual Permeation in Performance

For artists, musicians, and their critics, metaphors not only establish extensive similarities across different disciplines but more importantly, they catalyze transformations in style and technique, propelling the mutual influence and fusion among various media. In the realm of music research, human motion is often intimately connected with the concept of gesture. Many musical activities, such as playing, conducting, and dancing, involve bodily movements that evoke specific meanings, hence these movements are termed ‘gestures’ (Jenselius, Wanderley, Godøy & Leman, 2010).

Gesture plays a pivotal role in musical performance. Firstly, the variability in performers' physical movements leads to a complex array of sonic effects. It is essential for performers to be acutely aware of the desired sound effects and to achieve these through the selection of appropriate physical actions (Xue, 2020). Secondly, when musicians communicate through music-related auxiliary body movements, particularly gestures, it constitutes a vital component of the interaction between live performers and the audience (Aroso, 2020). Lastly, the majority of gesture utilized by musicians in performance often embody metaphors and exert specific psychological and emotional impacts on the audience (Nusseck & Wanderley, 2009; Psaila, 2007).

In his article, scholar P.J. Psaila proposes two directions for the study of gestures in musical performances. He notes that musicians convey conceptual and emotional information to the audience through the use of gestures during performances (Psaila, 2007). Nusseck and Wanderley further elaborate that “expressive performer movements in musical performances represent implied levels of communication and can contain certain characteristics and meanings of embodied human expressivity” (Nusseck & Wanderley, 2009, p. 335). Thus, musical gestures should be regarded as carriers of emotional information, capable of influencing the audience’s perception and impression of the performance. As scholars Alan Cienki and Cornelia Müller articulate, the dual representation of musical gestures signifies that “In a way, gesture attests to the metaphor passing from (a) something concrete to (b) the physical representation of something abstract”(Cienki & Müller, 2008, p. 485).

In addition to gestures, the narrative elements within a musical composition also merit attention. In the study of *Noches en los Jardines de España* presented in this article, the description in the initial section confirms that it is a narrative piece rich with metaphors. Scholar M. Fludernik suggests that employing semiotic and narratological approaches can aid our understanding of narrative concepts within a musical context (Fludernik, 2012). Both language and music rely on their own systems of signs, which serve as the starting point for content creation. Musical performance is realized through physical actions, and these actions also facilitate our production of music. Therefore, the narrative presented in a musical work during a performance often depends on the performer's understanding of the piece, or the message the performer wishes to convey. Performers make corresponding gestural actions based on their perception of factors such as tone, rhythm, harmony, and cultural background.

Thus, under the support of the above theories, performers can perceive or shape the gestural movements in performance through interactive listening content. For instance, in the first movement of Manuel de Falla's *Noches en los Jardines de España*, the piano texture is flowing, akin to the imagery of flowing water. However, as noted in the score, this texture is not monolithic but layered. Beyond the notes of the melody line, the remaining notes in the piano part serve to fill the flow of the melody and provide some background. This arrangement allows for clarity in the melodic points and a moderate blurring of the background notes. The sound effect aims to match the visual content: a Spanish garden at night, the sound of flowing water, and the hues of water droplets under moonlight.

To achieve soft melodic points, the performer should not strike the keys from a height, as this would produce a sharp sound. Instead, the fingers should stay very close to the keys, touching the keyboard with the fingertips to avoid the loud hammer strikes inside the piano. Then, by moving the elbow downward while keeping the entire arm relaxed, one leverages gravity to extend the arm downwards. This approach allows the sound of the melodic points to be soft yet sparkling. The background notes, besides producing a low touch sensation on the fingers, should be integrated with the use of the pedal. Harmonically, the first and second velocities share the same harmony. Considering the melodic points and the dynamics moving from forte to piano, the pedal at the rhythmic points can be engaged more, approximately two-thirds of the total pedal use. As the notes progress, the foot should slowly lift, enhancing the clarity of the overall harmony. This method distinguishes both the melody and background notes and also prepares for the next sequence of melody and background.

In contrast to the theme of the first movement, the primary visual imagery in the second and third movements of *Noches en los Jardines de España* revolves around figures and dance, with the nocturnal garden serving merely as a backdrop. From the introductory passage by the orchestra alone, one can sense the mood of the Gypsies gathering around a campfire, preparing to dance. Taking the piano part as an example, both hands perform the rhythm of a zapateado, yet there are three levels of intensity, and we must use the dynamic marking 'p' to differentiate between the parts. The keystrokes must be swift and low because a dance rhythm is desired. The remaining sounds depict the nocturnal atmosphere, yet clarity in keystroke is essential as we are sonically sketching a clear, dark night in the valley. Finally, in conjunction with the orchestra, we see a group of people dancing under the stars, around a campfire set against the backdrop of the Alhambra.

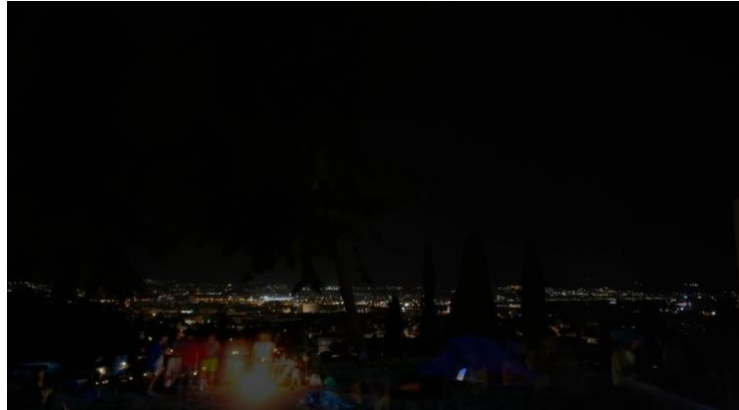


Figure 5: Panoramic view of a crowd dancing at the Alhambra

Conclusion

This article explores the rich metaphors contained within *Noches en los Jardines de España* from an interdisciplinary perspective. By examining the socio-historical context of the work's creation, alongside literary and artistic works such as Gregorio Martínez Sierra's *Granada. Guía Emocional* and Santiago Rusiñol's *Jardins d'Espanya*, the uniqueness of Manuel de Falla's musical language is revealed.

Music semiotics analysis demonstrates that the musical themes and structural design of *Noches en los Jardines de España* are intricately linked with the imagery of Spanish natural landscapes and folk culture. The rhythmic patterns of flowing water elements echo the variations in piano timbre, while the dance of the Gypsies vividly comes to life in the melodies and rhythms of the second and third movements. These musical metaphors, carrying emotions of mystery, melancholy, oppression, and longing, intertwine with the imagery depicted by Sierra and Rusiñol, together creating the unique atmosphere of Spanish garden nightscapes as envisioned by Falla.

Therefore, the paper proposes a sound design for piano performance, integrating considerations of touch, timbre, melody, harmony, rhythm, and expressive gestures, aiming to provide performers with a more comprehensive and dimensional interpretative perspective. In musical performance, gestures are not merely physical movements but are crucial carriers of musical metaphors. The gestures of performers often embody specific emotional connotations, significantly influencing the aesthetic experience of the listener.

In summary, the metaphorical content of *Noches en los Jardines de España* opens new avenues for music performance practice. The dialogue between music, painting, and literature from an interdisciplinary perspective, and the enhancement and extension of musical moods through body language and gestures in performance, all underscore a profound understanding of the work's intrinsic meanings. This research perspective also offers new possibilities for future studies in music performance.

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