Spanish composer Joaquín Turina was born in Seville. He is often associated with three other luminaries of the early 20th-century Spanish national style: Isaac Albéniz, Manuel de Falla, and Enrique Granados, all his seniors by some years. Turina’s path to success and fame in his native land was circuitous, and on the way he absorbed the lush, moody impressionism of France. This mixed musical heritage reflects the competing influences of the time and place. The sensuous, shimmering world of Debussy and Ravel exerted its seductive pull, while some Spanish artists advocated grounding a unique national music in the sharper rhythms and distinctive modalities of folk music. Layered on top of this was the question of whether to conform to the traditional Romantic models of the European, largely Germanic, tradition.

When Turina moved to Madrid early in his career, new music trends leaned heavily on the zarzuela—a form of Baroque-era musical theater resurrected in the mid-19th century as a response to Italian opera. Turina’s own zarzuelas met with a lukewarm reception, and in 1905 he moved to Paris. There, Albéniz and Falla heard the premiere of Turina’s opus 1, a piano quintet heavily influenced by the sound world of César Franck and Vincent D’Indy. Taking a sudden concern in the path of their young countryman, the two Spaniards encouraged him to explore Andalusian folk music.

By the time Turina wrote the Piano Trio No. 1, he had returned to Spain and learned to grapple with and synthesize these competing influences. The work was warmly received and won the National Music Prize. The first movement begins with a prelude, in which jagged, high-register counterpoint between the strings alternates with a sultry piano figure. The subsequent fugue starts sweetly, but quickly develops an energetic, extroverted character. The second movement segues from a languorous theme to a series of five variations based on Spanish dances: the Galician muñeira; the schotis, an import from northern Europe; the Basque zortziko; the jota, from Aragon, and the Andalusian soleares. The third movement, in a sort of inversion of traditional structure, is in sonata form, incorporating themes now familiar from the previous movements.

© NOTES: Zoe Kemmerling