

**THE SPANISH CELLIST GASPAR
CASSADÓ – COMPOSITIONS,
ARRANGEMENTS ... AND MUSICAL
FORGERIES**

written by David Johnstone

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CASSADÓ, Gaspar

Born: 1897, 30th September (Barcelona)

Died: 1966, 24th December (Madrid)

In this article I propose to touch many angles of the career and life of Gaspar Cassadó – his biographical details, some of his career successes, his work as a composer, his expansion of the cello repertoire through arrangements (even when this resulted in musical forgery), and his lifetime of experience alongside Casals – including both the high and low points.

Cassadó was a Spanish contemporary of Pablo Casals, living from 1897 to 1966 – whilst Casals was born twenty years earlier in 1876. In fact, he may have been Casals's youngest pupil, when he studied with him in Paris in 1910. He was born in Barcelona, the son of a church musician. His father started teaching him music when he was five, and at the age of seven he began cello lessons with a prominent Barcelona cellist, who worked at the Mercedes Chapel with his father. When Cassadó was nine years old, he played his first public performance, where he was heard by Casals, who immediately offered to give him lessons. He was given a scholarship by the city of Barcelona to go to Paris and study with Casals there.

Cassadó also began studying composition with Ravel and with Manuel de Falla. He became a friend of the composers Alfredo Casella, Joaquin Turina, and Isaac Albéniz. Paris had inspiring and intense musical activity around that time, and the young Gaspar was surrounded by some of the leading musical figures of early 20th century France, such as Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel and Erik Satie. However, during World War I he returned to Spain – Barcelona – where he took advantage of ‘free time’, without many possibilities to travel, to study composition seriously with his father.

At the end of World War I, Cassadó started touring internationally and, although it is somewhat of a cliché, started to become a famous cellist. He played under most of the leading conductors of his time, including Furtwangler, Beecham and Weingartner. His performance of the Brahms Double Concerto with Joseph Szigeti was especially appreciated; he also performed the work with Huberman. Throughout the 1920s, he appeared with Europe's important orchestras, made numerous recordings, and wrote most of his important compositions. His recital partners included Artur Schnabel, Carlo Zecchi, Harold Bauer, José Iturbi, and perhaps with the concert pianist who held most impact with him – the Italian

Giuletta von Mendelssohn-Gordigiani. She, Giulietta, was both 'high profile' and quite wealthy, and somewhat musically adopted the young Gaspar. They played many recitals together, and their renderings of the then 'new' Debussy Sonata (written in 1916) were especially note-worthy. He premiered his own trio with the pianist. It was rumoured in some quarters that Mrs. Von Mendelssohn was his sentimental partner, but in any case, she opened up a doorway for Cassadó's career to expand into Italy. Later, he was to settle in Italy – to be precise, in Florence in 1934. There were certain uncomfortable political issues from this time; Cassadó always declared himself 'apolitical', but she was closely linked to Mussolini (himself an amateur violinist!) so there was certain damage merely by 'association'. However his friendship/relationship with her was not specifically cited neither by Alexanian nor Casals (I believe) in their 'orchestrated' campaign against Cassadó's cause after the Second World War (see a little later in the article).

Apart from Italy, he was also well requested to perform in Spain – for he had established himself as one of Spain's leading instrumentalists and was in great demand all over the country. In 1921, the Barcelona Symphony Orchestra gave a special series of four concerts devoted to contemporary Spanish composers. Cassadó appeared as soloist on two of the programmes, firstly premiering a concerto by Enric Morera, and then a cello concerto which had been written for him by his father, Joaquin. Cassadó also appeared in the 'Barcelona' premiere of the Beethoven *Triple Concerto*, and a little later there are details of his having performed the solo part in Strauss' *Don Quixote*.

Cassadó first came to the United States in 1928, and during this visit he received an important premiere from the New York Philharmonic. On 8th November, William Mengelberg conducted the first performance of the Rapsodia Catalana, a work of his for orchestra based on songs and dances from Cassadó's Catalonian region. Two days later, he appeared again with the Philharmonic, this time performing his own transcription of Weber's *Clarinet Concerto*, Op. 74.

A string of successes followed. In 1932 he gave his close hand to the formation of the Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Siena. In 1933 he played (with Jelly d'Aranyi) the Brahms double concerto at the Brahms centenary concert of the Royal Philharmonic Society, conducted by Beecham. In 1935 he made a new trio – called the 'New Trio Ensemble' – with d'Aranyi and Myra Hess. His official New York debut was in 1936, playing the Haydn D Major concerto with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. On 9th January, 1937, he gave a recital at Town Hall, which received a glowing review in the *New York Times*:

"One searches in vain to recollect another cellist possessing the fecund imagination, the tonal resourcefulness, and the infinite variety of effects made known by Mr. Cassadó. . . ."



In 1936 the Spanish Civil War began, and by January 1939 Casals had fled to southern France, following Franco's conquest of Barcelona. During this period, Cassadó was touring all over the world and, as related, had made his home in Florence for a number of years. There is no documentation of the relationship between the two Spaniards – Casals and Cassadó - at this time, but the different directions their lives took after Franco seized power must have limited their contact. While Casals abandoned performing altogether during many years to be clearly seen as a statement of protest, Cassadó was still steadily building his career, and continued to give concerts, though he did not perform in Spain until after the civil war in 1942. During World War II he actually spent most of his time in Britain.

Soon after the war finished he started to give courses of 'masterclasses' at the Siena Accademia Chigiana. We now arrive at that crucial year – 1949 ...

There have also been suggestions that Casals, who was to turn so forcibly against Cassadó in 1949, might have been growing resentment against him as early as 1939. Was this purely a consequence of the political scene, or was there an element jealousy involved? In that 'fateful' year for Cassadó – 1949 - he was accused of having collaborated with the Axis powers during the Second World War. These were not instigated by Casals himself, but by a close collaborator of Casals called Dirian Alexanian,. The nature of Cassadó's wartime activities is a very sensitive issue, and many writers in the past have tended to not touch the subject.

What we know is that in January 1949 Cassadó returned to New York to give a recital at Town Hall. He then was to begin a tour of Central America. Meanwhile, the Russian expatriate Dirian Alexanian wrote a letter to the *New York Times*, published on March 6, 1949, protesting against such a positive reception in the press for Cassadó when he was supposedly fully collaborating with the Nazi powers, building a '*glorious career*' with their help during the war years. Upon learning of Cassadó's appearance in New York, Alexanian had written a letter to Casals 'digging up the dirt' as they say, and Alexanian included Casals' reply in his letter to the newspaper. Casals statement of opposition to Cassadó was unequivocal, but did he only really know what Alexanian chose to tell him? In response, a counter letter by Cassadó himself, treating the generally unfounded allegations, was also then published in the *New York Times*. He admitted to having given one concert in Germany during the Second World War - "*I played only once in Germany in 1941, where I had been playing since 1924. I have not been back since*" and "*As for playing in Italy, that is where I have lived and even there I did not play during the war.*" There is certain evidence that he had previously attempted to distance himself from the Reich, and that the German concert was tied up with agency manoeuvring and Cassadó could not free himself from the performance, although he had voiced moderate opposition.

Despite Cassadó's attempts to defend himself, permanent damage was done. Unfortunately, his own responses were occasionally rather evasive, and not completely forthright which, in hindsight, he might have presented better. For example, he told 'white lies' about the numbers of brothers he had, and of what they were doing at this time. One should remember that the musical and humanitarian status of Casals was enormous – even unquestioned - and in the political climate of the late 1940s only simple unsubstantiated charges of collaboration were enough to do great damage to Cassadó's reputation. According to Yehudi Menuhin, Casals had to a certain extent become a 'prisoner' of

"New York colleagues who more or less ran the first few festivals at Prades, making wonderful music with Casals but also using his prestige for their own purposes, including punishment campaigns against suspect musicians."

This passage would clearly refer to people like Alexanian, and give good explanation for the tone of the letter he sent to the *New York Times*. Menuhin, apart from describing Casals as trapped by his followers, even wrote:

“In other words, he {Casals} was prepared to let me know he didn't have the courage of his convictions; so long as those convictions were approved by his admirers, they were strong convictions indeed...” indicating that he was not always free to do what he wanted because he was too concerned of what might ‘the others’ think – for an example, his back-tracking and finally cancellation of a recording of the Brahms Double concerto with Menuhin for shadows of doubts (unproven) relating to the possible pre-war activities on the chosen conductor, even though Casals personally held the man in question in very high esteem as a human being and a musical colleague.

As previously indicated, Cassadó's career were severely damaged. His immediate U-S tour was cut short, but, more importantly his large-scale recording contract in the U.S.A. was cancelled. These events probably also were an artistic burden on his shoulders too. The recordings that he did later make in the 50's and 60's generally lack the stamp of personality of the younger pre-war artist – so to some extent he was not thought of as the ‘same force’ in world cello playing.



Yehudi Menuhin, though, remained close with Cassadó, and formed a trio with him and pianist Louis Kentner in the early 1950s.



The Cassadó-Kentner-Menuhin Trio

Knowing that Cassadó despaired at having been cut off from Casals' inner circle, Menuhin approached Casals and asked him to 'forgive' him. Casals agreed, sending a letter to Cassadó in Florence, inviting him to serve as a judge at the 1955 competition in Paris which bore Casals' name. Cassadó was overjoyed, and immediately flew to Prades, where the two men embraced in an emotional reunion. Casals also asked Cassadó to be on the jury for the 1956 competition and Cassadó took part in the concert given at the competition celebrating Casals' 80th birthday.

In addition to teaching in Siena, Cassadó joined the faculty at the Musik Hochschule in Cologne in 1958. In that same year, he also founded, along with Andrés Segovia and Alicia de Larrocha, a summer festival in Santiago de Compostela.

In 1964 Cassado premiered six unpublished cello sonatas of Boccherini, and performed them (firstly in London) on the Strad cello that was once owned by the very composer. Eve Barsham, his accompanist, had discovered the manuscripts in the archives of the Duke of Hamilton in Scotland. He was also at this point playing recitals with the Japanese pianist Chieko Hara, now his wife.



They made a tour together of the Soviet Union. Cassado died in 1966 of a heart attack, after a strenuous tour of a flood stricken area of Florence where he was raising funds for those who had been devastated by the natural catastrophe.

As a performer, his style might be described as noble and austere, rather than flamboyant. Playing a Stradivarius cello, his tone production was enormous. The great accompanist Gerald Moore spoke very highly of him:

"Perhaps Cassadó's playing intrigued me more than anyone's. He was full of ideas, full of originality."

He also liked to experiment with the instrument itself. For example, Cassadó's bow had a piece of cork attached to the side of the frog where the fingers fall, so that his hand was more open. Also, a set of four springs took the place of the cello's tailpiece. Cassadó was thus able to control better the tension of each individual string, and the resulting sound was larger than usual (especially useful in projecting over an orchestra), but the tone was rather more brittle and metallic. Cassado was one of the first cellists to use totally metal strings. He installed a screw in the foot of the instrument's neck, with which he could raise and lower the fingerboard as necessary, which eliminated the need for switching bridges on the cello because of changes in humidity.

Gaspar Cassado, unlike many cellist-composers throughout history, was actually quite a good composer! His pieces are still played widely today, in particular his Requiebros for Cello and Piano.

Though Cassadó did write a great deal of music for cello (with and without piano), one should be aware that he was not a 'simple' cellist-composer; he also composed three string quartets, a piano trio, a violin sonata and several solo piano pieces. He also wrote a piano concerto and several works for orchestra, including the previously mentioned *Rapsodia Catalana*, which enjoyed a good deal of success. His Concerto in D Minor for cello is unfortunately barely programmed any more.

It is Cassadó's music for cello and piano, however, that is remembered and played most today. Amongst these are the 'Sonata in Old Style' (though neo-classical would be a more accurate description), a further sonata for cello and piano, and shorter pieces such as the 'Dance of the Green Devil' or the Lamento de Boabdil (which uses surprisingly adventurous writing, reflecting his study with Ravel). There is also a 'Suite for Solo Cello', which again might have been better called 'Spanish Suite' for its well-achieved charismatic Spanish flavours.



Cassadó was a famed arranger too. So much so, that when the conductor Jonathan Sternberg once bumped into Maurice Gendron in Paris and mentioned that he had just seen Cassadó, Gendron replied tongue-in-cheek "*What has he changed lately?*"! I have mentioned his version of the Weber Clarinet concerto. There were others of note – in 1928 he had arranged Schubert's "*Arpeggione*" Sonata for cello and orchestra, adding several transition passages of his own to the original work, and shortly afterwards he had the honour of giving the first performance of this 'work' with orchestral accompaniment – and with no less than the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Wilhelm Furtwängler.

Cassadó also made almost 70 transcriptions for cello and piano; most of these are of well-known works by composers like Bach, Chopin and Debussy, and there is therefore no question of their authenticity. Perhaps the most popular transcription Cassadó ever made was of the *Intermezzo* from the opera *Goyescas*, by Enrique Granados, which is still very much a popular encore amongst cellists. Some of the transcriptions involved a great deal of work, such as a Suite for cello and piano based on themes from Richard Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier*, or a 'Concerto' with orchestral accompaniment based on arrangements of the piano music of Tchaikovsky (lasting over half an hour long). Another concerto version was made of the Bach G minor sonata for viola da gamba and harpsichord. His fine academic control also asserted itself in projects like the arrangement for guitar and orchestra of a Boccherini cello concerto, or a setting of the famous Bach-Gounod *Ave Maria* for solo violin, four cellos, organ and harp.

Cassadó's curiosity and inventiveness were therefore to allow him to make many significant contributions to the cello and its literature. But when does a good arrangement become a nuisance, and not at all desired? Well, in the summer of 1949, Joaquin Rodrigo was close to completing his *Concierto Galante*, which was a commission direct from Cassadó. Composer and cellist worked hand-in-hand for several days at the composer's home, helping to copy out the main score. The premiere of the piece was given by Cassadó in Madrid that autumn. However, in January of 1951, Cassadó returned to perform the piece again (in Naples, Italy) with Rodrigo and his wife sitting in the public.

The composer's wife wrote about the experience:

"a very disagreeable surprise awaited Joaquin. His concerto, which at first had aroused such enthusiasm in Cassadó, began to seem too long to him once he began to perform it. Neither reluctant nor lazy, Cassadó took scissors to the score, especially in the parts where the soloist didn't play. Joaquin complained bitterly about seeing his work mutilated . . . This "little caprice" of Cassadó's seemed a veritable heresy to us! "

This story would clearly illustrate Cassadó's enormous confidence in his own abilities and judgment!

However, what I will now touch on is even one step farther than that. Cassadó was to write several works which he claimed were transcriptions but are in all certainly not; of these pieces the *Toccata*, supposedly of Frescobaldi, is the only one that appears regularly on concert programmes today. Surely Cassadó was fully convinced nobody would ever find out, but he could not then imagine later musical research, nor the posterior interest in his whole career! Strangely enough, the *Toccata* was itself 're-arranged' for orchestra by the conductor Hans Kindler. Kindler completed 'his' version in 1942, and it was actually performed quite frequently in the 40's and 50's. When questioned about the manuscript, Kindler admitted that he had never seen it, and that he had used Cassadó's version as the source of his material. Kindler later became quite embarrassed when a music librarian called Cudworth questioned very seriously the authenticity of the *Toccata*, asserting that it was "*almost certainly composed by Cassadó*". In December of that same year, the Boston Symphony programmed Kindler's arrangement of the *Toccata*, and the programme note writer John Burk, perhaps following Cudworth's intuitive lead, also wrote to Cassadó, asking exactly where and how he had found the original Frescobaldi manuscript. Burk included the following in his notes to the concert:

“Mr. Cassadó explains that the Toccata which he has arranged for cello was discovered by him in the archives of La Merced, the Conservatory of Music at Barcelona where his father was for a long time organist and Maestro di Cappella. The score bore the title Toccata and the name of Frescobaldi, and was presumably a copy originally written for organ solo. Mr. Cassadó adds: “I cannot be absolutely sure whether it was Frescobaldi or another author who did the rest, though in some passages one can easily find some characteristic “frescobaldiane.”

Burk felt compelled at that point to accept Cassadó’s little creditable explanation, which never-the-less he saw highly evasive.

The myth of it supposedly being a Frescobaldi arrangement by Cassadó was finally laid to rest in 1978 by Walter Schenkman, professor at the University of Northern Colorado. In an article for *American String Teacher*, Schenkman examined the piece alongside all of Frescobaldi's other organ *Toccatas* and found that the structure and tonality of this piece are nothing similar to those used by Frescobaldi. Frescobaldi generally wrote modal works in many sections which have little or no connection between them, and did not even need to be played in their entirety (and this according to the indications of the composer himself). However, Cassadó's *Toccata* is far too tonally compact – basically languishing in only D Major and B Minor - and is built consistently on one principal theme (two 16th notes, followed by a series of 8th notes), and consequently it is a composition which grows organically. Apparently it is set in ‘older’ style, but is typical of other artistic efforts seen in the first half of the twentieth century to re-create old-style modern pieces by popular figures such as Kreisler.

Furthermore, Schenkman also points out the overall structure of its slow introduction-Allegro form is not so much belonging to the proper style of Frescobaldi, but as being much closer to another composer: G.F. Handel. Thus we can be fairly certain from all these many indicators that this ‘piece’ had absolutely nothing to do with Frescobaldi, but that Cassadó himself wrote the *Toccata* and assumed he would never be asked to discuss its authenticity, rather as Kreisler had at first done with violin pieces of the same age. However, Kreisler later freely admitted his forgery, whereas Cassadó did not. Perhaps Cassadó, having had such experiences with bad publicity in 1949, did not wish to suffer again by an admission of ‘guilt’. Of course, the popularity of Kreisler was enormous, and could easily ride through his ‘admission’, whereas Cassadó could not be entirely sure of the same forgiveness.

Without bearing any malice whatsoever, truthfully this piece should be programmed simply *Cassadó – Toccata*, without any mention at all of Frescobaldi. Even at the time of the composition Cassadó could have easily originally titled it '*Toccata in the style of Frescobaldi*', therefore putting to rest any musical investigation, and gained substantial performing rights money into the bargain! Perhaps he was himself surprised by the extent of the work's later popularity. However, now in the twenty-first century, it really surprises me how many cellists are naively dragging their feet on this issue or, if the truth were known, are blissfully ignorant and simply play the musical notes in their own-bought copy, and paste the 'old' title of the work that still appears in the officially published version for the concert programme!

It should not be surprising, therefore, that the *Toccata* was almost surely not the only piece Cassadó forged in this manner. In 1925, Universal Edition published a set of pieces entitled *Collection de Six Morceaux Classiques*. Besides this very *Toccata*, the set contained works attributed to Schubert, Boccherini, Couperin, Gottlieb Muffat, and Martin Berteau. Of these pieces, the Schubert *Allegretto grazioso* and the Boccherini *Minuetto* are also most likely to be forgeries. These pieces do not appear anywhere in the official catalogue list of the composers in question. The Schubert *Allegretto* is, to give Cassadó due credit, an excellent imitation. Perhaps the Couperin *Pastoral* is again by Cassadó, as it too neither appears in the composer's known works and, what is more, seems to be almost 'too' cellist-like! If anyone might be offended by these proposals, their individual investigation and production of the 'original' work (from which Cassadó supposedly made his transcription) would be welcomed by many a musicologist!

Gaspar Cassadó was one of the great composer-performers of a long historical line that are famed on the cello, and these multi-talents were clearly shown by the content of his concert performances. Such programmes as Cassadó offered – both with piano, and in concerto performances with orchestra - were much more varied and exciting than is the norm today. In Cassadó's age, topics like manuscripts, musicology and textual fidelity, were less 'rigid'; but that is not to say that events like his "editing" of the Rodrigo concerto clearly overstepped the line and are not, and were not even then, acceptable. However, having said that, musical forgeries like the Frescobaldi *Toccata* were much more commonplace in Cassadó's time and in virtually all of the generations before him.

This type of artist, even when involved in such activity, has given the string repertoire some wonderful pieces of music, and surely he should not be punished in posterity for that?! Rather in the manner of the famous opera 'prima donnas' or the present day 'pop star' concerts, the Cassadó cello recital was a highly-charged and popular event which did not simply involve including x number of masterworks, but which was a real testimony to the interpretative powers of Cassadó the cellist, Cassadó the arranger, and Cassadó the composer. In many ways, his idea of such varied programming may be a sensible way forward for artists of the twenty-first century, in order that the classical concert - and especially the recital with piano - does not simply become a 'museum piece' attended by the older generation.

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