

An abstract painting of a guitar body, featuring bold black and white shapes with visible brushstrokes. The body is light-colored, while the neck and headstock area are dark. The background is a mix of dark and light tones, suggesting a studio setting.

# ASENCIO

COMPLETE  
GUITAR MUSIC

BRILLIANT  
CLASSICS

ALBERTO MESIRCA GUITAR

**Vicente Asencio 1908-1979**  
**Complete Guitar Music**

<b>Collectici Íntim (1965)</b>		<b>Suite Valenciana (1970)</b>	
1. La Serenor	4'22	10. Preludi	2'05
2. La Joia	2'41	11. Cançoneta	4'33
3. La Calma	2'56	12. Dansa	2'42
4. La Gaubança	1'54		
5. La Frisança	2'54	13. <b>Danza Valenciana (1963)</b>	4'00
6. <b>Cançó d'hivern (1935)</b>	4'31	<b>Suite Mística (1971)</b>	
<b>Suite de Homenajes (1950)</b>		14. Getsémani	3'06
7. Sonatina a <i>Domenico Scarlatti</i>	3'59	15. Dipsô	8'06
8. Elegia a <i>Manuel de Falla</i>	3'03	16. Pentecostés	2'23
9. Tango de la casada infiel a <i>Federico García Lorca</i>	2'58		

Alberto Mesirca *guitar*

Vicente Asencio is one of those 20th century composers whose works for the guitar met with widespread acclaim, although he didn't actually play the instrument himself. Indeed, he was essentially an excellent pianist who had studied at the Marshall Academy in Barcelona, where the influence of the great Enrique Granados was still tangible. As a composer, he deliberately and passionately chose to adhere to the musical tradition of his native Valencia, which might appear to be a cultural limitation, given the nature of the events that marked musical life during the first half of the 1900s. Far from being provincial, however, Asencio was an artist of considerable learning who was open-minded, unprejudiced and interested in all aspects of new music. In 1934, along with other Valencian musicians, he founded the *Grupo de los Jovenes*, declaring that «We aim to achieve a form of Valencian music that is vigorous and rich, to promote a Valencian school that is fruitful and varied, that incorporates in universal music the psychological traits and emotions of our people and our landscape; an art and a school that find expression in all genres, in symphonies, operas and ballet». In this regard it is interesting to note that he chose Valencian rather than Castilian for the titles of his works for the guitar. At all events, opting to follow exclusively in the wake of Spanish music – from Albéniz and Falla to Rodrigo – was an entirely witting decision that also embodied a touch of yearning for the era of Scarlatti. Far from eluding what was going on in the noisy world of the avant-garde, it was a declaration of identity, one that came at a price.

Asencio's relationship with the guitar began in the 1940s, when he was first approached by the young Narciso Yepes. Following his studies with the Valencian guitarist Estanislao Marco, Yepes was looking for a teacher who could instruct him in the basics of musical interpretation regardless of whether or not he was himself a guitarist. Asencio constructed models on the piano that Yepes had to imitate, and no shortcuts were allowed regarding intervals, dynamic contrasts or the various ways of articulating the notes. At one point the pupil tried to justify himself saying that a passage in double notes could not be played above a certain speed on the guitar. Asencio's reaction was to dismiss him with instructions to find a solution if he wanted



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Strings: Savarez Cantiga

Artist photos: Șerban Mestecăneanu, [www.meste.ro](http://www.meste.ro)

Cover: Juan Gris, Still Life, 1916, Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert

W. Chapman, B.S. 1924

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to continue the lessons. These sessions proved to be extremely useful, not only for the guitarist, who was forced to come up with new techniques that could respond to Asencio's models on the piano, but also for the composer, who became so fond of the guitar that he decided to write for it. The outcome was a series of three homages in which he evoked Domenico Scarlatti (*Sonatina*), Manuel de Falla (*Elegia*) and Federico García Lorca (*Tango de la casada infiel*). The triptych sums up the different ingredients of Asencio's style as a composer: the ruminative grace of the *Sonatina*, the evocative melancholy of the *Elegia*, and the fiery sensuality of the *Tango*.

When Yepes achieved international fame as a guitarist he returned to his teacher, asking him to write another composition for him. This turned out to be *Collectici íntim*, a somewhat misleading title for a suite consisting of five movements in the shape of a succession of songs and dances. The first piece is *La Serenità*, entirely built around the dominant pedal underpinning the placid flow of chords and bichords in the upper register that together create an essentially serene melody. *La Gioia*, the second piece, is like a fireworks show, with a heady rhythm in 6/8 and 3/4 time broken up by bold virtuosic figurations. The explosive energy of the music evokes a burst of collective joy or celebration rather than individual emotional experience. The third piece is *La Calma*, a somewhat dreamy song suspended between a *rêverie* and a *barcarola*. As for the fourth (*Il Giubilo*), it is a sort of *jota* in which distinctly rhythmic passages alternate with audacious bursts of virtuoso display, including an extraordinarily fast passage in fourths that Asencio may have intended as an echo of his onetime fury towards his recalcitrant pupil. *La Fretta* is the fifth and last piece, a perpetuum mobile in arpeggios that calls for Paganini-like skill on the part of the player, along with particular sensitivity for fluctuating moods ranging from quiet delicacy to belligerence.

Composed in 1973 and dedicated to Angelo Gilardino, *Suite Valenciana* perfectly embodies the ideals announced in the *Grupo de los Jovenes* manifesto. Indeed, its three movements are infused with the freshness typical of Valencian music,

even though there are no direct references to folk melodies. Asencio's approach to composing was naturally that of a pianist, yet the guitar nevertheless evokes a brilliant palette of colour and light.

In 1971 Spanish national radio commissioned Asencio to write a piece for guitar on the subject of Holy Week. The outcome was *Dipsò*, a regional word that refers to the agony of Jesus Christ in the form of a recitative in which the composer avoids dramatic stance and instead gives voice to a doleful lament that is full of pathos and sweetness. The piece so appealed to Andrés Segovia that a few years later, in 1977, he invited Asencio to add a further two items, also relating to the Passion. With the addition of *Getsemaní* and *Pentecostés*, the composer called the triptych *Evangeliques*, though when he recorded it Segovia decided to change the title to *Suite mística*. The sadness of the two previous pieces changes in *Pentecostés*, where the flow of arpeggios conveys the idea of the Holy Spirit descending to invest the grieving apostles with courage and the charismatic gifts required for their future mission.

Vicente Asencio thus enriched the guitar repertoire with four compositions in various movements. The other two short works may not have originally been written for the guitar, and effectively contribute little to its advancement.

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**Vicente Asencio** was born in Calle de le Estrella in Valencia on 29 October 1908. He had a twin sister, Concepción, and four older siblings: Cándida, Pascual, Francesc and Enrique. His mother, Cándida Ruano Gomis, was from Cullera (Valencia), and his father, Pascual Asencio Hernández, from Villareal (Valencia). At the time his family lived in Castellón, where his father was conductor of the Regimental Band and later the Town Band.

Asencio spent his early years in Castellón, attending primary school there and beginning his musical education under his father and with the violinist Emilio Bou. From an early age he showed great aptitude for music, and by the time he was nine was able to conduct the school choir.

Once he had completed his basic education, he moved to Barcelona, where he graduated in 1927, then obtaining a degree in 1930 in Castellón. He continued his studies at the Escuela Municipal de Música and at the Marshall Academy, with classes in harmony led by Enric Morera, who had been a pupil of Albéniz and Pedrell, and in piano under Frank Marshall, a disciple of Enrique Granados. Later Asencio also turned to Joaquín Turina and Ernesto Halffter for advice, thereby further broadening his musical education.

When he returned to Castellón in 1929 he took an active role in the city's cultural circles. Indeed, along with the violinist Abelardo Mus and other remarkable musicians, in 1932 he helped found the Music Conservatoire there, teaching history of music, harmony and composition as well as conducting the choir and orchestra. Between 1936 and 1937 he not only taught at the Conservatoire, but also at the Colegio de Huérfanos of San Vicente Ferrer.

At the Conservatoire his courses in History of Music brought him into contact with Matilde Salvador, whom he married in 1943. By then he had written various youthful works, a number of songs and his Sonata (*En estilo clásico*) of 1928, as well as other piano compositions and the String Quartet in F (*Homenaje a los cinco*) of 1931-32, which was premiered in 1935. Next came the *Cançó d'hivern* for guitar of 1935, the

*Sonata* for violin and piano of 1939, the *Tres obras para orquesta de arco* of 1932-34, and the ballet *Foc de festa* of 1936. The composer later removed most of these compositions from his established oeuvre.

In 1943 Asencio moved to Valencia, where he began working for the administrative department of the delegación of the Ministerio de la Hacienda. He nevertheless stayed in contact with Valencian music circles, cofounding with Vicente Garcés, Emilio Valdés, Luis Sánchez and Ricardo Olmos the Grupo de los Jóvenes. The group's aesthetic intent was clearly expressed in its first manifesto: "[...] We aim to achieve a form of Valencian music that is vigorous and rich, to promote a Valencian school that is fruitful and varied, that incorporates in universal music the psychological traits and emotions of our people and our landscape [...]".

Vicente Asencio was a great admirer of the music of Manuel de Falla, and when the older musician died in 1946 he composed his *Elegía a Manuel de Falla* for piano, which became extremely popular, to the extent that he later arranged it for guitar and orchestra as well. During those same years he also worked as a conductor and pianist, to great acclaim in both fields. In particular as a pianist he enjoyed playing in chamber ensembles with exceptional musicians such as Josefina Salvador and Rafael Sorní. Likewise he was also busy as a teacher and scholar, holding posts at the Conservatoires of Castellón and Valencia, giving conferences and pursuing his studies of 17th and 18th century composers, especially Marin Marais, Francisco Manalt and José Herrando.

Outstanding among his compositions are certainly the orchestral works, the ballets and songs, as well as the piano compositions and chamber music. Yet his most popular and widespread works are unquestionably the pieces he wrote for the guitar, which were widely published, recorded and performed by eminent guitarists.

In an article published in the magazine Levante in Valencia on 25 January 1962, Asencio explained exactly what he intended as a composer: "*I am a modern musician, although I am not interested in all the current trends. I am a tonal musician; I believe*

*that the atonal movement of today, which is relatively new in Spain and already old in Europe, is interesting as a movement intent on renewal; yet I also believe that its aesthetics do not really suit us Mediterraneans, with our temperament, because dodecaphony is a particularly cerebral movement, whereas we are essentially intuitive”.*

In another article for Levante of 23 May 1967 he also declared: *“I am an intimist composer. I don’t like overflowing; I prefer the total, succulent introspection of intimacy”.*

Further insights are to be gleaned from words written by the guitarist Narciso Yepes: *“I recall Vicente’s great urge. If I have created a new technique for the guitar it is thanks to him, who was not a guitarist... For Vicente perfection did not exist, he always sought to achieve something that went further, and I learned this from him and continue to strive in this direction”* (from José Luis Ruiz del Puerto: *Vicente Asencio y la guitarra. Integral de la obra para guitarra de Vicente Asencio*. Palau de la Música. Valencia, May-June 1990).

During his entire lifetime Vicente Asencio worked tirelessly and fruitfully, dividing his time between teaching, composing, performing and research. As an artist he was always active and open-minded, though in his latter years what he could achieve was undermined by ill health. He died in his home in Valencia on 3 April 1979, just before his seventieth birthday. He was buried in Castellón Cemetery, not far from the resting place of other great artists, such as the sculptor Juan Adsuara, the painter Juan Bautista Porcar, the guitarist Francisco Tárrega and the writer Manuel Segarra Ribes.

Vicente Asencio was a musician of great importance for his times. As Jaime Nos Ruiz wrote in his article *En el dolor por la muerte de Vicente Asencio* (Mediterráneo, Castellón, 5 April 1979), he embodied *“[...] a most noble combination of the highest human qualities, tempered by a degree of goodness that was mirrored in another of his virtues: exceptional modesty [...]”*.

Many homages were duly paid to Asencio following his death, especially on the

part of private and public musical institutions, including the Permanent Municipal Commission of the city of Castellón, which on 26 December 1979 dedicated a street to him. Shortly afterwards Benicasim (Castellón) followed suit. His life and works made such an indelible impact on the city of his childhood, the focus of so much of his creative energy and affections.

*Translation by Kate Singleton*

Sources:

Salvador Seguí Pérez, "Vicente Asencio", 1996, Madrid.  
VV.AA., Diccionario de la Música Valenciana, 2006.



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*This recording is dedicated to the memory  
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