

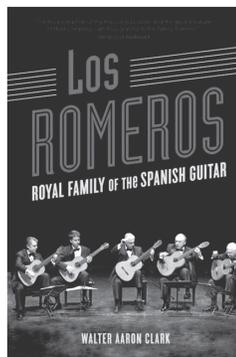
Clark, Walter Aaron.

Los Romeros: Royal Family of the Spanish Guitar. Urbana, Chicago, & Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2018.

The history of a dynasty is not an unusual subject for a book (e.g. Medici, Romanov, Bach, Strauss), but rarely are most of the protagonists alive and involved to some degree in the project. The author of *Los Romeros: Royal Family of the Guitar* is Walter Aaron Clark, Distinguished Professor of Musicology and Director of the Center for Iberian and Latin American Music at the University of California Riverside.¹ His most recent book is also atypical of most scholarly biographies in which the author's physical and chronological distance from the subject enforces a sort of remote objectivity. Clark makes no attempt to disguise his admiration and affection for his subject(s), who welcomed his research, freely shared their memories, and provided complete and unrestricted access to the family "archives."

Nevertheless, Clark is a scholar and his book bears a university imprint; he is no Boswell enthralled by a clan of brilliant Samuel Johnsons. In his Introduction, Clark states that his research was undertaken with the understanding that this was not to be an "authorized biography." "[T]he Romeros have neither supervised nor attempted to monitor the preparation of my manuscript or to exert editorial control in any way," he declares. The book is his "personal assessment of their importance in the musical and cultural history of the past several decades." He also convinced the Romero family to deposit the family archives in the UC Riverside library, so that "nearly all" of the primary documentation for the book is available to the public, and much of it is now online.² Although Clark generally avoids adulation or hyperbole (not always an easy task!), he does not dodge relevant controversy. For one example, note his respectful but neutral analysis of the existential crisis of Angel Romero leaving the Romeros quartet in 1990. It establishes Clark as the right scholar to write this fascinating book about a remarkable family.

The guitar has been a palpable presence in almost all of Clark's publications,³ including his highly-regarded monograph biographies of composers Isaac Albéniz, Enrique Granados, and Federico Moreno Torroba (the latter co-authored with William Craig Krause)—three composers who were not themselves guitarists but who have had enormous impact on the modern classical guitar repertoire. In researching their 2013 biography of Torroba, Clark and Krause were able to draw upon the personal memories of the composer's son, Federico Moreno-Torroba



Larregla, as well as many of his friends and collaborators. These latter categories included the Romero family. Not coincidentally, many of the composer's later works called for one or more guitars, or guitars with orchestra, and were written with the Romeros in mind. The Romeros were generous with their time and provided many insights and anecdotes for the Torroba biography, also contributing a touching Foreword. Clark knew several Romeros even before embarking on this project; he had studied with both Celín and Pepe while earning his master's at the University of California San Diego. Clark apparently decided that a serious study of the Romero phenomenon was needed, not only of the celebrated quartet but of the entire family and its remarkable and unique multi-generational relationship with the guitar and with music. He was uniquely suited to write such a book.

In organizing his book on the Romeros, Clark begins by telling the compelling family story chronologically: Part I is Chapters 1-4 "Spain," and Part II is Chapters 5-8 "Southern California."

The Romeros' story has been briefly and sometimes inaccurately told on thousands of program notes and album covers over many decades: a guitar virtuoso, Celedonio Romero, finding his career stalled in Franco's Spain, manages to "escape" with his family to California, where his prodigious sons inspire him to form a guitar quartet. Enormous popularity ensues. Clark retells this story but adds impressive new details and insights into the history of the classical guitar during the decades in question. Drawing on the manuscript memoirs of "Uncle Pepe," Celedonio's eldest brother, Clark traces the family back several generations to small Andalusian villages in the mountains north of Málaga, and on to Cienfuegos, Cuba, where Celedonio was born in 1913. Cuba had won its independence from Spain fifteen years earlier as a consequence of the Spanish-American War. It retained deep ties with Spain but was suddenly flush with American investment. Celedonio's father achieved success as a builder, contractor, and architect, and the family prospered but nevertheless returned to Spain in 1919, settling in Málaga. Celedonio fondly remembered Cuba as a tropical paradise, but his artistic and intellectual development from the age of six mostly took place in Málaga.

Clark vividly describes this new *milieu*, which included *zarzuelas*, flamenco shows, moving pictures, phonograph recordings (especially Segovia's),⁴ and *tertulias* (informal gatherings of poets, painters, musicians, and other intellectuals). "Uncle Pepe" played guitar and was a member of an *estudiantina*, a popular

sort of musical ensemble. Celedonio's mother bought him his first guitar in Málaga, and he took lessons from a number of local teachers, absorbing aspects of both the Tárrega technique and flamenco. He also studied solfeggio and harmony at the Málaga Conservatory. He gave his first public recital in 1931 at the age of eighteen, and by 1933 was performing at the Teatro Cervantes, the city's main concert venue, in a mixed program that included a poetry reading and a student chorus. Within a few years, he was featured in weekly concerts on Spanish National Radio in Málaga.

In spite of many favorable reviews (documented by extant clippings in the Romero family archive), Celedonio faced many obstacles to making a career as a guitarist. His father died in 1932, leaving a widow and four sons in economic difficulty. Celedonio married Angelita in 1934 only to be conscripted into the army and stationed for a time in Granada, where he suffered a serious illness. In 1936, the Spanish Civil War broke out, a national tragedy in which Málaga—and Celedonio's family—remained loyal to the Republic. The city was punished with a savage aerial bombardment, the worst of it occurring while Angelita was giving birth to their first son, Celín. Celedonio chose to remain by her side. Much of Spain had descended into chaos when Franco's Nationalist forces occupied the city in 1937. Celedonio was forced to hide his Loyalist sympathies for the sake of his family. On several occasions, his skill on the guitar and the contacts he had made helped him to avoid dangerous situations and also to extricate himself from a second conscription. The family somehow survived the next two years, and Celedonio was reunited with his brothers in Málaga after the war.

Franco's dictatorship was established just as World War II was breaking out in Europe; Spain remained officially neutral. Ironically, Celedonio's concert career flourished, as did his family: sons Pepe and Angel were born in 1944 in 1946 respectively. But although he now gave concerts all over Spain, the concerts depended heavily on government favor, and the bureaucracy thwarted every effort to book performances abroad. The Civil War had left deep divisions in Spanish society in music as well as other arts. It was an embarrassment to the Franco regime that many of Spain's most celebrated artists now preferred to live abroad. Segovia had moved to Montevideo in 1936 and didn't return to Spain until 1952; Sabicas and Carlos Montoya moved to the United States and were astonishing audiences with their virtuosic exotic music called "flamenco." The Romeros determined that it was time to emigrate.

From this point in Clark's narrative, the story he tells is well known at least in outline: a train to Lisbon in 1957, a TWA flight to Santa Barbara, and a new life in California. But in Clark's telling, the quality and detail of the anecdotes

increase, probably because Celín, Pepe, and Angel were old enough to have vivid memories of these events. Clark brings to life the bureaucratic intrigue, the kindness of friends and strangers, the boldness of the *engaño* ("We left Spain with nothing ..."), and the culture shock the Romeros experienced, leaving the puritanical repression of Franco's Spain for the land of Eisenhower and Elvis. We learn, for example, that Celín was the first in the family to learn to drive, and that the first car was a 1948 Pontiac two-door that cost \$99. In 1958, the family moved to Hollywood—a better location for a career in the entertainment business—and opened a studio where Celedonio taught the young Christopher Parkening while the teenaged Pepe gave lessons to studio musicians like Tommy Tedesco and Tony Mottola. The Romeros were becoming celebrities, but in 1959, with the Cold War raging, Celín was drafted.

The following year, at an Army open house celebrating the end of basic training, Celín was joined by his father and brothers in an impromptu *malagueña*. It was the first time the four guitarists performed together, and the reception was enthusiastic. In 1960, several Romeros made their first recordings (Celedonio and Celín playing duets and Pepe playing flamenco), and the newly formed Romeros quartet played its first concerts. The following year, the quartet was featured on the *Jack Paar Show* (on national television!); professional management and a contract with Mercury Records soon followed.

There were many factors to explain the stunning success of the Romeros. They played a variety of attractive music from Renaissance to Villa-Lobos, and some flamenco—much of which was still exotic to most Americans—and they played it with breathtaking virtuosity. They were handsome and telegenic, with plenty of Old-World charm and a stage presence somewhere between a *tablaó* and classic string quartet. They had arrived in America at just the right time, when the guitar—ubiquitous in rock, folk, country, jazz, flamenco, bluegrass—was the most popular instrument in the nation and Segovia and Julian Bream had already carved out their niches as touring classical guitarists. The Romeros were also able to take advantage of postwar prosperity with its new technology such as television and vinyl LP recordings, and their tireless concert schedule made good use of Eisenhower's new interstate highway system. They were fortunate that the American friends who helped them leave Spain had brought them to southern California and not a small town in the Midwest!⁵

Part III, Chapters 9-12, presents the protagonists in individual profiles, and Part IV discusses the Romero legacy: technique, repertoire, the next generations, the evolving quartet. There are also useful appendices, including a Romero genealogy, bibliography, glossary, and a discography.

REVIEWS: (cont.)

Surveying the Romero legacy, Clark mentions first the Romero technique, which he describes as “highly systematic, clearly defined, and consistently successful,” promulgated via method books, instructional DVDs, private lessons, master classes, workshops, and festivals throughout the world, plus decades of teaching at San Diego State University and UCSD (Celín) and at the University of California Los Angeles, UCSD, and the University of Southern California (Pepe).

Having established the first professional guitar quartet of the modern era,⁶ the Romeros also created a quartet repertory that includes works written for them by the likes of Joaquín Rodrigo and Torroba—who became close family friends—as well as many transcriptions (of works by Bach, Bizet, Breton, Chapí, Falla, Giménez, Pachelbel, Turina, Vivaldi, and more). Over the years the number of guitar quartets—student and professional—has multiplied dramatically, and many of them commissioned or arranged their own repertories. The guitar quartet has become a whole new category of chamber music and also has had a significant impact on guitar pedagogy.

The individual Romeros also performed and recorded guitar solos and duets, often with chamber ensembles or orchestras. In addition to the staples of the established guitar repertory, they resurrected lost or neglected guitar music (by Giuliani, Sor, Carulli, Diabelli, Molino, Mertz, Boccherini, and the Spanish composer Ángel Barrios). In addition to concertos by Rodrigo and Torroba, they performed those of Claude Bolling, Paul Chihara, Ernesto Cordero, Morton Gould, Aita Madina, Xavier Montsalvatge, José Muñoz Molleda, Lorenzo Palomo, Lalo Schiffrin, and Michael Zearrott, many composed specifically for them. And the music of *pater familias* Celedonio Romero has always figured prominently in the Romeros’ repertory.⁷ The Los Angeles Guitar Quartet, celebrated heirs of the Romero tradition, summed it up: “It is impossible to overestimate the impact that the Romeros have had on the world of the classical guitar.”

In Part III, Clark discusses his five principal protagonists as individuals, each of them multi-talented. Celedonio, he notes, was a gifted poet⁸ and Angelita was his muse, a lover of literature and the arts who attended to all the domestic duties, home-schooled her sons through *colegio* (elementary school), read to them on long car journeys between concerts, and expertly added castanets to their concerts. The eldest son, Celín, had reached maturity in Spain but his younger brothers were still teenagers when they arrived in America. Celín necessarily assumed many responsibilities, from “babysitter” to guitar teacher, chauffeur, bookkeeper, and financial adviser. Clark calls him the “romantic,” and cites his taste in music, his deep Spanish roots, and his skill as a raconteur. Pepe is described

as the “philosopher,” one who takes a thoughtful, often spiritual, approach to each of his many skills, which include drawing and painting⁹ as well as music. He is, of course, renowned as both a classical and flamenco guitarist. Clark describes Angel, the youngest brother, as a “Proteus”—a child prodigy who performed the west-coast premiere of the *Concierto de Aranjuez* at the Hollywood Bowl in 1964, when he was eighteen. While maintaining his career as a virtuoso guitarist, Angel is an avid painter who has also “built guitars, flown airplanes, earned a brown belt in karate, ... sung on stage with Plácido Domingo, collected Arabian horses,” and launched a second career as a conductor. He has studied acting and film scoring, has appeared on film, and has composed an award-winning film score.

Although the main focus of Clark’s book was necessarily these five protagonists, he also makes some space for the Romeros’ ladies and their children. Not surprisingly, the Romeros all chose partners who were artistic, accomplished, and supportive. Celedonio’s grandchildren likewise are loaded with talent and have begun to assume the weight of the family tradition. Celín’s son Celino replaced Angel in the quartet in 1990, and Angel’s son Lito replaced Celedonio in 1995. When the quartet plays these days, at least one of the guitars on stage was probably built by Pepe’s son, Pepe II. Pepe’s grandson, Bernardo, is also a prodigious luthier. Among the children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren there are also dancers, singers, pianists, and of course guitarists, so that at some point Clark will need to add another volume. This “beautiful journey,” in the fortunate words of David Russell, continues.

—RICHARD LONG

¹ Professor Clark earned degrees in guitar performance from the University of North Carolina School of the Performing Arts and the University of California San Diego. A grant to study early music in Germany with the eminent lutenist Jürgen Hübscher led him down a “new career path,” to UCLA and a doctoral degree in Musicology directed by Robert Murrell Stevenson (1916–2012), a versatile scholar of both Spanish and Latin American music and founding editor of the *Inter-American Music Review*. Clark has followed in Stevenson’s footsteps in several regards, notably his eclectic research topics that range from Renaissance intabulations for lute and vihuela to the many reincarnations of Lecuona’s *Malagueña*. See: “Luis de Narváez and the Intabulation Tradition of Josquin’s ‘Mille regretz,’” *Journal of the Lute Society of America* (XXVI, 1993): 17-52; “The *Malagueñas* of Brevia, Albéniz, and Lecuona: From Regional Fandango to Global Pop Tune,” in *The Global Reach of the Fandango in Music, Song and Dance: Spaniards, Indians, Africans and Gypsies* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2016), edited by K. Meira Goldberg and Antoni Pizà. This is the 700-plus-page revised and translated proceedings of a bilingual international conference of the Foundation for Iberian Music held at CUNY in 2015.

² The Romero archive includes correspondence, clippings, programs, personal and official documents, and a photocopy of the unpublished memoirs of “Uncle Pepe,” Celedonio Romero’s oldest brother. (www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8057mh2/).

³ Albéniz had not inspired a new biography for over half a century (and none in English); Torroba had been the subject of Krause’s 1993 Ph.D. dissertation at Washington University. *Isaac Albéniz: Portrait of a Romantic* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); *Enrique Granados: Poet of the Piano* (Oxford &

New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); [with William Craig Krause:] *Federico Moreno Torroba: A Musical Life in Three Acts* ("Currents in Latin American and Iberian Music," Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). Other notable publications by Clark include: *Isaac Albéniz: Research and Information Guide* ("Routledge Music Bibliographies," New York & London: Routledge (Taylor & Francis), 1998; 2nd edition, 2015); [Clark, ed.], *From Tejano to Tango: Essays on Latin American Popular Music* ("Perspectives in Global Pop," New York & Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), and [co-edited with Robin Moore:], *Musics of Latin America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2012).

⁴ Segovia's first recording was a wax cylinder engraved in a studio in Havana in 1923, with music by Tárrega and Turina; his first phonograph recordings date to 1927, when Celedonio was fourteen. Alberto López Poveda, *Andrés Segovia: Vida y obra* (Jaén: Universidad de Jaén, 2009), II, 1098.

⁵ Los Angeles was probably the most lively classical guitar community in the U.S., with the possible exception of New York. In the 1950s and '60s, L.A. was the seat of Vahdah Olcott Bickford's American Guitar Society and home to classical guitar aficionados such as Ronald Purcell, Frederick Noad, Howard Heitmeyer, Theodore Norman, and the luthier José Oribe. Residents or frequent visitors included studio musicians Jack Marshall and the aforementioned Tedesco and Mottola, while the Hollywood film industry was known to employ Sabicas, Laurindo Almeida, and Vicente Gómez (who also gave guitar lessons to Ricky Nelson), not to mention Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, who was at this time living in Beverly Hills, scoring major motion pictures and composing some of his best guitar music.

⁶ Allen Morris has pointed out that the Romeros were the first professional guitar quartet; obviously, they were not the first example of four guitarists playing together. Guitar trios were not unusual in the early nineteenth century, but there is almost no extant repertory for four guitars from that period. Early ensembles usually included one or more *terz*-guitars, and sometimes quart-, quint-, or prim-guitars, and often a bass guitar as well. The Romeros' guitar quartet always consisted of four normalized instruments in standard tuning—a compromise that limited the collective tessitura but probably encouraged imitation. Heinrich Albert's guitar quartet in Munich in the early twentieth century was at least semi-professional, depending on how one defines the word, but it consisted almost entirely of harp guitars. Allan Morris, "Heinrich Albert and the First Guitar Quartet [in Munich Around 1909]," *Guitar and Lute Issues* website (orphee.com, 2003 [no longer online]); republished on *Mando Island* website www.mandoisland.com/?p=886, 2010. Also see Gregg Miner, "Heinrich Albert and the World's First Harp Guitar Quartet," at website www.harpguitars.net/players/month-player-7-04.htm, 2004.

A more likely source of the Romeros' inspiration was the *rondalla*, a band of street musicians popular in Spain and throughout the Spanish empire from South America to the Philippines. By the late nineteenth century, a typical *rondalla* consisted of *bandurria*(s), Spanish lute(s), and guitars, as well as tambourines, castanets, and other percussion. A *bandurria* is a cittern with a very short neck with metal frets and six double courses of metal strings tuned in fourths (from G#). The traditional *laúd* is organologically similar but has a larger body and a longer neck (facilitating access to higher positions); it is tuned an octave lower than a *bandurria*. Celedonio's brother "Uncle Pepe" played guitar in such an ensemble. Similar string bands were popular in many countries, including mandolin orchestras in Italy, German *Zupforchestern*, and American folk ensembles of mandolin, banjo and guitar. Some of the *estudiantinas* (bands of Spanish "students") traveled abroad and became internationally famous. Both Torroba and Rodrigo composed or arranged music for *rondalla*; see, for example: Federico Moreno Torroba, "Luisa Fernanda": *Mazurka y habanera del soldadito*, for 2 *bandurrias*, 2 lutes, & guitar (Madrid: Union musical española, 1932, p.n. 17206; Joaquín Rodrigo, *Estudiantina: Pasacalle y Coplilla*, for 2 *bandurrias*, 2 lutes, and 2 guitars (Madrid: Union musical española, 1962, p.n. 1989).

The most famous such ensemble was probably the Cuarteto de laúdes Aguilar—much like a string quartet except that the strings were plucked rather than bowed. It consisted of Ezequiel and José Aguilar on *laudines* (soprano lutes), Elisa Aguilar on a (viola-sized) *laúd*, and Francisco ("Paco") Aguilar on a *grand laúd* (a custom *laudón* with double courses and the tessitura of a cello). Note that the Aguilars, like the Romeros, were all members of the same family. Included in their repertory were a number of Joaquín Turina arrangements and compositions such as "Fiesta mora en Tanger" (*Album de viaje*, Op. 15, No. 5), published for piano in 1916 and arranged for lute quartet in 1924, and "Desfile de soldados de plomo," from *Niñerías*, Op. 21 (serie 1), arranged by Turina in 1925. Turina's *Dos danzas sobre temas populares españoles*, Op. 41, were composed or arranged for the Aguilars in 1926, then published for piano the following year. Turina's masterpiece, *La Oración del torero*, Op. 34, was originally conceived for the Aguilars in 1925 and then reworked by the composer into his lush String Quartet No. 2, Op. 34 (1926). Turina's *Recuerdos de la antigua España*, Op. 48, was his last work for lute

quartet; the manuscript is dated 1930. Celedonio Romero was a friend of Turina and was well aware of this music; in 1995, the Romeros recorded the *Oración* in an arrangement by Pepe based on the Aguilar version.

⁷ Clark includes several useful appendices but regrettably omits a list of Celedonio's compositions and transcriptions. The catalog of the UME Archive in Spain lists seventeen entries; of course it does not include editions from other Spanish publishers, publishers outside of Spain, unpublished works, or arrangements and orchestrations of previously published works. Yolanda Acker, María de los Ángeles Alfonso, Judith Ortega, and Belén Pérez Castillo, eds., *Archivo histórico de la Union Musical Española: Partituras, métodos, libretos y libros* ([Madrid]: Catálogos de los fondos musicales de la Sociedad General de Autores Editores – Instituto Complutense de Ciencias Musicales / III, n.d. [1993?]), 195–196.

⁸ An anthology of Celedonio Romero's selected poetry was privately published: *Poemas, prosas, pensamientos y cantares* (Del Mar, California: n.p., 1995).

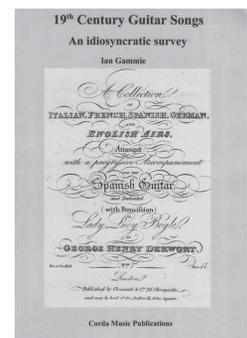
⁹ In the prestigious Robert Lehman Collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, there is a landscape painted by Pepe Romero when he was a teenager in Santa Barbara. Richard R. Brettell, Paul Hayes Tucker, & Natalie H. Lee, eds., *The Robert Lehman Collection, Vol. III: Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Paintings* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art & Princeton University Press, 2008), Catalog No. 128.

Ian Gammie.

Nineteenth-Century Guitar Songs: An Idiosyncratic Survey.

St Albans Herts: Corda Music Publications, 2017.

www.cordamusic.co.uk



Who were the most popular, prolific, best-selling guitarists of the period 1790–1840? Most modern guitarists might think of Carulli, Giuliani, or Sor; those who consider chamber music would probably suggest Leonhard von Call, Joseph Küffner, and Carulli. But the correct answer may well be Alberti, Ducray, Gatayes, Lemoine, Meissonnier, or Vimeux. One of the least studied aspects of the history of the guitar is the enormous production of vocal music with guitar accompaniment dating from the last decades of the *Ancien Régime* to the mid-nineteenth century. Thousands of guitar songs and airs were published in Europe and America. Those that have survived are now scattered throughout the private and public libraries of the world. The music ranges from broadsides and ballads, comic tunes from vaudevilles, arias from popular operas, and political parodies based on well-known melodies, to arrangements or original compositions by the most celebrated composers of the age. Obviously, the quality of the music varies greatly. Many of the composers supplied their own accompaniments for guitar, while others (or their publishers) employed arrangers. Some of the best-known guitarists of the time, such as Carulli, Carcassi, and Lhoyer, augmented their incomes in this fashion. Often the accompaniments are rudimentary but some require accomplished performers; the guitar methods of the period are filled with arpeggio patterns ideally suited to