

**Suite No. 1 from *El sombrero de tres Picos*
(“*The Three Cornered Hat*”)**

Manuel de Falla (1876–1946)

Written: 1918–19

Duration: 10 minutes

As a young man, the Spanish composer Manuel de Falla wrote *zarzuelas*, a type of Spanish operetta. In 1907, he went to Paris to broaden his horizons and study the techniques of other great European composers. While there, he rubbed shoulders with the French impressionists Debussy and Ravel who, at the same time, were experimenting with the exoticism of Spanish music. Falla’s studies in Paris enabled him to combine melodies and rhythms of his native Spain with the fantastic colors and harmonies of French impressionism.

Back in Spain, Falla wrote *The Three-Cornered Hat* as incidental music for a pantomime. Serge Diaghilev saw the production and convinced Falla to rewrite it as a ballet—and enlisted Picasso for the sets and Léonide Massine for the choreography.

The Three-Cornered Hat is about a miller and his lovely young wife. At the beginning of the ballet, they are joyfully tending their grapes. The *Corregidor* (governor), wearing the sign of his office, a three-cornered hat, approaches. He flirts with the miller’s wife, but the happy couple sends the old man on his way.

That evening, the *Corregidor*’s bodyguards come and arrest the miller. Unable to follow, the miller’s wife retreats to her bedroom. The *Corregidor* heads for the miller’s house, but in the darkness falls into some water. He goes into the miller’s house, takes off his wet clothes, and climbs into the miller’s bed.

Meanwhile, the miller escapes. He comes home, finds the *Corregidor*’s clothes, and in a fit of rage exchanges them with his own clothes. He leaves a note: “I’m off to avenge myself.

Your wife, too, is very handsome.” The *Corregidor* finds the note, puts on the miller’s clothes, and is promptly apprehended by his own bodyguards. Now the miller’s wife enters, sees who she thinks is her husband, and attacks the bodyguard. The miller enters and sees his wife defending the *Corregidor*! Not to worry – this is ballet after all. All ends well as the couple is reunited and the *Corregidor* is tossed up in a blanket.

The music extracted from the ballet for the suites from *The Three-Cornered Hat* is as fun as the story. It combines traditional Spanish dances with orchestral writing that is some of the most colorful and masterful of the Spanish school.

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