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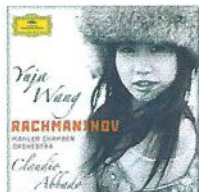
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French Mélodies



Piano Concerto 2



<http://www.sebastianstanley.com/>

El Amor y la Muerte

Enrique GRANADOS *Goyescas* (1911-1912): *El amor y la muerte* (segundo cuaderno no.5) [14:00]; *El pelele* (apéndice, no.7) (1913) [4:53]

Isaac ALBENIZ *Iberia* (primer cuaderno) *Evocacion* [6:16]; *El Puerto* [4:34]; *Fête dieu à Séville* [9:06]

Federico MOMPOU *Variations sur un thème de Chopin* (1938-57), ed. Salabert [21:26]

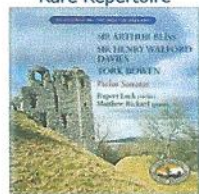
◆ Sebastian Stanley (piano)
rec. 7-8 December, 2010, The Peregrine Piano Studio, London, UK.

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I imagine most music lovers do what I do when I hear a piece of music I don't immediately recognise. I try to identify the country of origin then the era it comes from then try to home in on style in order to identify the composer. The music on this disc would not prove any problem with either the country of origin or the era in respect of two of the composers – their music is so obviously Spanish and from the first half of the twentieth century. Then, if you really didn't know the works it might be more of a poser to identify which Spanish composer was responsible for five of the tracks. Suffice to say that all three would be among the principal contenders. I just adore this music and, having just returned from my escape from our awful winter - well most of it - after five weeks in Andalucía, it is incredibly evocative of so many aspects of Spain today just as much as it was yesterday. It made me want to rush out and buy each composer's complete works for piano.

It is so sad to know how short some composers' lives were and to think of what might have been written had they lived longer. Granados was a case in point as he was drowned aboard the Sussex in the English Channel in 1916. He travelled around Europe with Thibaud and Casals - just imagine what a dream team they must have made in the days before Cortot replaced him. His music is full of melody and feeling and as C. Jean Aubry put it "He created themes with the long-lasting character of folk-tunes – without borrowing them from folk music". Pedro G. Morales summarised this skill by saying that "Seldom has the soul of Spain revealed itself so vividly in music ...". His set of piano pieces inspired by Goya's paintings, resulting in the title *Goyescas* is probably best known among his piano works and deservedly so. How wonderful it would be to look at the paintings while listening to the music!



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Albeniz was another composer whose life was cut short far too early by Bright's disease, a chronic liver disease suffered also by people such as Alexander III of Russia, Isambard Kingdom Brunel and Bram Stoker. He was a child prodigy and had completed several tours of Europe by the time he was 15. His music is again extremely evocative of Spain. The first piece of the three taken from Albeniz's suite *Iberia* is aptly entitled *Evocacion* and echoes the Fandango and Jota which perfectly reflects the colours and spirit of his native land. The second piece describes the dance steps of the Zapateado and was inspired by the port of Cadiz – hence its title of *El Puerto*. I visited the port in January and can see how one could draw inspiration from it, busy and delightfully set in an impressive bay. The last of the three and the final piece in the set is a representation of the Corpus Christi procession in Seville in which a statue of the Virgin Mary is carried through the streets accompanied by marching bands and songs and stiring. It gently eventually builds to an exciting climax. Both Debussy and Messiaen were huge admirers of Albeniz's work – what better approval could one wish for!

Federico Mompou was, unlike Granados and Albeniz, extremely long-lived, dying at 94. The pianist on this disc, Sebastian Stanley, has written the extremely informative liner-notes and explains that Mompou was an early minimalist in that his melodies are delightfully simple in construction. They fuse various influences from Debussy for colour with Ravel for a fascination with childhood, Satie who showed the young Mompou that simplicity was acceptable and finally drawing inspiration from Poulenc in respect of harmonics. All those influences are evident in the work represented here, the 12 *Variations sur un thème de Chopin*. My feeling is that while his music may be difficult to categorise this work sits very well along with several composers' variations on themes by others. In any event it is a perfect treatment of Chopin's A Major Prelude which ably dissects it into its constituent parts and shows how wonderful a piece Chopin wrote - not that we didn't know that already! What higher praise can one give Mompou than that!

Sebastian Stanley was born in La Linea which shows his Spanish roots and, I think, results in a close love and affinity for Spanish music if this disc is anything to go by. It is always sobering to learn that so prodigious a talent stems from a desire to learn the piano following a concert he attended only 14 years ago! When I say prodigious talent I mean it for this young pianist is a perfect exponent of this beautiful music, knowing when to be quiet in relevant passages but able to roar when necessary. I have really enjoyed reviewing this disc and will eagerly look out for more of them from this wonderfully sensitive young pianist.

Steve Arloff