

## EMEC, E-105/6, GRANADOS PIANO MUSIC

The only complaint I have is the awkward packaging, measuring 10" x 5-1/2. That does not make for a comfortable shelf fit for most collectors. Beyond that, I have nothing but praise for the set. I suppose the cover illustration of Goya's White Duchess of Alba would not have fit comfortably on a standard jewel case. Bowing to royalty, and not wishing to cut her off at the waist, it was only proper to honor her diminutive figure and lovely gown by lengthening the package. Besides, we are able to see her dog at the bottom as well, if not his feet. Goya captured this Duchess on canvas many times and may have entered into a liaison with her as well—that's never been proven.

Leaving aside the attractive container, pianist Sebastian Stanley was born in Andalucia and moved to Britain at the age of 4. He graduated from the Royal College of Music and has given concerts in the United States, Germany, and Britain. This is his recorded debut as a soloist. He is young and photogenic.

While most of Goyescas is of considerable technical difficulty, Stanley turns his back on outward display and concentrates on the music, its subtleties, colors, and, above all, its unique inflections. Both Goyescas and the Danzas are intensely nationalistic, with turns and phrases superbly executed by Stanley. As a colorist he has an instinctive feel for embellishments and their ties to the folk music of the Iberian peninsula. He also makes superb use of the pedal, knowing the precise moment to press and release for maximum effect.

For all his considerable qualities, fortunately none of this playing comes across as too studied. What we do hear is an uncanny feeling for performing as if the music were part of a grand improvisation. The flow is always very natural. Of course, he left Spain at age 4, and I doubt if he absorbed much of this before departing.

Of great fascination is comparing the Goyescas piano suite with the opera of the same name. It is an indulgence that every music lover should allow himself, and it's made even simpler since You Tube has an excellent concert performance from Barcelona that readers can view. As with most other recordings Stanley includes 'El Pelele', not strictly part of the suite, but related to it.

The Danzas Espanolas are 12 in four books of three. While they need not be performed together in recital, they usually are on recordings. They are less elaborate than the Goyescas and do not quote any folk melodies. They have also been transcribed for guitar, and there are several orchestrations of varying success. Stanley caresses each dance as if it were a lovely maiden responding only to the most gentle touch. Thomas Rajna's performance is more direct, slightly faster, and perhaps a little more exciting, though never as poignant and devastatingly sad as Stanley. Alicia De Larrocha is in a class of her own, and her two recordings combine power, movement, and a beauty that will probably remain the choice of a lifetime. Still, I would not choose to be without this newcomer. The interpretation is beguiling to the ear and reaches the heart as few others have done. © 2014 American Record guide.