

Goya of Music

Alicia de Larrocha talks about Granados



Caruso caricature of Enrique Granados

[On December 7, Alicia de Larrocha plays Enrique Granados' *Goyescas* and several of his other works at Carnegie Hall in tribute to the hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Catalan composer. The Barcelona-born pianist has also recorded her countryman's music for Epic and Decca.]

It is a century since the birth of Enrique Granados, and half a century since his death—an event fatefully tied up with the world premiere of his opera *Goyescas* at the Metropolitan. For me, his artistic personality is as much alive as ever. Though I never knew him, of course, I feel now as if I know him very well—through my teacher, the late Frank Marshall, who was Granados' pupil, and above all through the music itself. He seems to tell so much in his piano pieces; they are as candid, as intimate and impulsive as love letters are.

Granados was a great pianist, and most of what he wrote was for the piano. Even his opera *Goyescas* began as a series of piano pieces. In temperament as well as musical language, he was a romantic impressionist. He loved

to improvise; the music poured from him like water from a fountain. Even in pieces of his that had already been published, he couldn't always resist the temptation to improvise when he played them. For him it was agony to have to make his thoughts final, to put them down definitely on paper. Impulse was important to him, as it is to all of us in Spain: we value the extremes, we can be angels and devils at the same time. So you find in Granados that he could be both impassioned and poetic—but never sentimental.

He was influenced by everything he saw, which eventually would be translated at the keyboard. One day he arrived for a visit with Casals, and when he was greeted at the door, he rushed right past to find the piano: there was an idea he had to try out immediately, even before he said hello. He was an artist himself, and liked to make sketches. As a young man, when he first went to the Prado in Madrid, he was indelibly impressed by the etchings and paintings of Goya. These, for him, captured all the mood and color, all the fire and nuance, of the romantic

Fitziu, Martinelli, Flora Perini and De Luca in the world premiere of Goyescas, Metropolitan Opera House, January 28, 1916



era in Spain. That is the origin of the *Goyescas*, "Goya-esque" pieces.

The first book of *Goyescas*, subtitled "Los majos enamorados," was inspired by a set of etchings. These depicted the *majos* and *majas* (beaux and belles) of Goya's time, whose flirtations and rivalries, jealousies and passions were woven into the colorful tissue of Madrid life when that city was at its height. At the very first, in "Los requiebros" (Flatteries), Granados made up a story around the pictures—a *coloquio*, a lovers' tryst in front of a window decorated with iron grillework. Here we find already a rather operatic idea, a dialogue for piano. In the pieces that follow, there are more such ideas—a jealous, forsaken woman telling her troubles to the nightingale, or a dialogue between Love and Death. Granados was fond of thematic contrast, and he often accompanies one theme with reminiscences of another.

But the opera *Goyescas* was not Granados' idea. He had already written an opera, *Maria del Carmen*, which had a certain success in Madrid in 1899, and he had written several shorter operas, some of them with texts in Catalan. It was his friend Fernando Periquet who thought the *Goyescas* for piano should be adapted for the stage. Periquet, a music-lover who worked in a bank, offered to make up the libretto if Granados would continue the music. So the second set of *Goyescas* came to be written, with the stage specifically in mind. Not the famous *Intermezzo*, however; that was written in Granados' hotel in New York, after the Metropolitan Opera had started rehearsals and it seemed that some music was needed to accompany a scene change.

[Editor's note: *Goyescas* was given at the Metropolitan on January 28, 1916, in the original Spanish, as the first half of a double bill with *Pagliacci*, the latter featuring Caruso and Amato. Gaetano Bavagnoli conducted both works, with Giovanni Martinelli as the proud officer Don Fernando, who dies for the love of a court lady, Rosario (Anna Fittiu), at the hands of a matador rival, Paquiro (Giuseppe De Luca). Four more performances followed before the end of the season, after which *Goyescas* dropped from the Metropolitan repertory. Between World Wars it was produced in Paris, Buenos Aires, Milan and Barcelona, and in 1955 it introduced Pilar Lorengar to New York

in a concert revival by Thomas Scherman's Little Orchestra Society.]

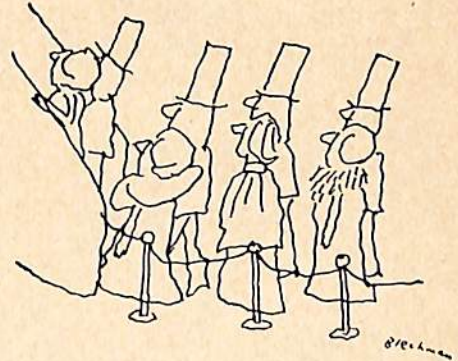
Granados felt in his bones that the trip to New York was somehow a fatal one. Before leaving home, he repeatedly spoke with dread of the ocean voyage; he would not have gone willingly unless there was a bridge across the Atlantic! Afterward, when he was ready to return to Spain, a message came from President Wilson inviting him to play at the White House. Granados' acceptance meant a change of reservations, and as a result he was on board a British steamer, the *Sussex*, when it was torpedoed in the English Channel near Dieppe on March 24. The ship split into two ends, and many from both were saved by lifeboats, but Granados and his wife were apparently caught in the middle. His death is still a mystery. Some say he was trying to save his wife, but it was she who was a champion swimmer; he could hardly swim at all. He simply disappeared, and no trace of him was ever found.

Wild rumors preceded confirmation of the news in Spain. On the day the news was made official, Artur Rubinstein played a memorial recital in Barcelona, and later there was a benefit performance at the Metropolitan Opera House to help the composer's orphaned family.

Besides his music, Granados left us the academy in Barcelona that bears his name. I am now the director of it, since the death of Frank Marshall. One of our tasks is to make a definitive edition of Granados' works and to edit the unpublished ones. This is not easy, for Granados was always changing his mind, making corrections and alternates. I haven't found much time for it so far, but eventually we'll get it done. We owe it to him: like Goya, he belongs especially to us, just as in a less personal way he belongs also to the whole world.

Did Granados have a real talent for the lyric theater? I'm not sure. He was too spontaneous, too much given to the spirit of the moment, to discipline himself to the limits of opera. But he wanted to do it, and he was headed in that direction. From New York he wrote that he couldn't wait to get back to Europe and work on some projects, which were apparently definite in his mind. "Now I'm getting started," he said. Poor man—just before he was finished!

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