

Granados, the Composer

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Self portrait

I became acquainted with Enrique Granados in 1928 . . . My teacher, Frank Marshall, after a lesson that seemed to satisfy him, told me "Now I want you to study a work by my teacher, which I am sure you will enjoy. Listen to it." Marshall began to play, his fingers appeared to caress the keyboard . . . and it was then, under the apparent simplicity of that music, that there opened before me a new world of poetry and dreams. In that very instant I had the sensation that this music formed part of myself, and now I would never be able to free myself from its influence. It was a spring morning in 1928. Marshall played for me "La campana de la tarde" (The Afternoon Bell) from the collection *Bocetos*. I was four years old.

I shall always remember that moment, my happiness upon arriving home with the little work by Granados under my arm, and my exultant shouts to all of my family so they would learn of the great news: I was going to play a work by Granados, the great composer who had been my mother's teacher and my aunt's . . . and this work had been given me by my teacher Frank Marshall, he who had been the faithful friend, principal collaborator, and favorite disciple of Enrique Granados!

Through the years, as I filled myself with the knowledge of his music, my reverence for Granados grew. My environment was impregnated with his spirit and perpetual memory. In my home and in my Academy, The Marshall Academy, there was the continuation of that which was established by Enrique Granados. Devotion to the work of Granados, a constant during all my life, has been buttressed by the affectionate friendship which since my childhood I have maintained with people whose happiness was with the life and work of Granados, such as his daughter Natalia and his disciple Conchita Badia, and above all, by the ties that united me with Frank Marshall, my only teacher, until his death in 1959. They permitted me at the same time to know, through conversations and commentaries, the humanity and personality of the composer.

"He was an angel with the strange appearance of an Arab," "a little boy with long pants"—actually an angel as

only children are able to be: humble, understanding, always available to help a friend or neighbor. Marshall said of him: "Heart open to the most noble sentiments, frank and uncomplicated, generous and sensible, he invited expansive enthusiasm. We were all embarrassed that we felt restrained before the grandeur of his spontaneity." My mother told me of the time when she gave him the "duro"* with which she paid for the month's lessons. Granados put it together with the few others he had received for other lessons that day, shook them in the palm of his clasped hand, and exclaimed: "Oh so much money, so much money, how rich I am!" Yet this very money he would give to the first person who asked for help, without thinking that that week he would be without money to cover the necessary expenses of daily life.

Granados' appearance is familiar from his photographs, and from the portrait by Nestor, a copy of which hangs in the Academy auditorium. Marshall described him as soft spoken, with ample mustache and, above all, large eyes with a deep profound, melancholy look. But it is only through his music that we can begin to know his soul, his thoughts, all of his truth and purity.

Although Granados wrote for the Theatre (*Maria del Carmen* and other works of minor importance) and accomplished some sporadic inroads into the field of chamber music, his important and really transcendental work is the pianistic. To this perhaps should be added the *Tonadillas* and the *Canciones Amatorias*** for voice and piano, but the opera *Goyescas* clearly belongs to the piano literature since it is nothing more than an adaptation of the piano suite.

The piano was *his* instrument and through its medium he was able to express the best of his inspiration with entire mastery and fluidity. One of his acknowledged characteristics was his amazing ability to improvise at the piano. "I saw a beautiful woman," he said to Marshall, "what a figure, what eyes, what a mouth! . . . Look, it was like this,"

* A coin worth five pesetas.

** "Light tunes" and "Love Songs".

and seating himself before the piano described with hot and passionate phrases the woman that had just provoked his admiration.

Another day, when the composition "El Pelele" was still recent, he included it in the program of one of his recitals. Not wanting to expose himself to possible lapses of memory, he played with the paper in front of him and asked for Marshall's collaboration to turn the pages. All went normally until the third page, when Marshall saw with amazement that what Granados was playing was not what was written. He turned one page ahead and then behind, and noting that Granados paid not the least bit of attention to the paper, he opted for accommodating himself comfortably in his seat and listening attentively. "That day," Marshall told me, "Granados improvised a new Pelele that contained the themes and phrases of the authentic. They unfolded in a form completely distinct, but with authenticity and a feeling of the original form so that this version could well have stayed as the definitive one."

In considering his pianistic work we should not forget Granados' custom of polishing, and sometimes substantially modifying passages of his compositions after these had been published. It appears that, forced by economic indolence, he brought his compositions to the editors with a certain hurry. Later, in periods of greater tranquility, he dedi-



El Pelele. The Goya cartoon (in color) created to be copied in tapestry. The word means a dummy or straw-doll, and the implication is that a man in love is tossed around like a pelele.

cated himself to retouching and correcting the published and accomplishing the authentic version. This discrepancy between the true intent of the composer and the product of the printer is found in almost all of his work and it affects to a greater or lesser degree simple questions of detail. Sometimes the change is really important, as, for example, in the Spanish Dance No. 7, (Valenciana) where not only the details of phrase and musical punctuation in the theme are at variance, but where the two versions have completely different finales.

We should also view with reservations the Opus numbers that figure in some of his works since these do not follow a chronological order. The fact is that he was only able to behave with inexplicable confusion. Besides, many of these pieces with the indication "Opus" are little works without importance, written at the request of the disciples and friends to whom they are dedicated.

In the pianistic production of Granados, we can delineate three epochs or periods of completely distinct characteristics: the nationalistic, the romantic, and the "goyesca."

The "Nationalistic" Epoch

In the first group we include those small master works called Spanish Dances, without any doubt the first work that gave fame and popularity to Granados. It consists of a series of twelve pieces of acknowledged racial character. But the admirable thing is that Granados did not allow himself to transcribe or adapt motives or themes of Spanish folklore, so rich and varied, but used themes that were completely original, though saturated with the heart and soul of Spain.

In the same climate as the *Danzas* are the *Pieces about popular songs of Spain*. They are six pages headed by a very brief Prelude and feature some of the themes that he would later utilize in his opera *Maria del Carmen*. The "popular" aspect lives in the rhythms rather than in the themes or motives.

Included also in this group is the "Danza Lenta," in my judgment one of the best brief pieces of Granados. It is based on the "Jota Valencia," a regional folk dance. It is not primarily a rhythmic dance, but is full of poetic surgen- cies, from the initial chords until the finale. One should remark the dramatic crescendos of the stanza; in the fortissimo this dance reaches enormous emotional strength. In spite of the number of this Opus (37), I am convinced that the "Danza Lenta" is one of his later compositions, perhaps contemporary with the "Goyescas."

Romantic Epoch

In reality Granados was a dreamer and a poet and all his work was infused with a frank romanticism, perhaps influenced by Chopin, Schumann, and Liszt whom he admired. But there was one period in which everything else in his work was subordinated to the most exalted romanticism. The best example of this phase is his work *Escena Romanticas* in which the language is not Spanish but in which passion enfolds you. The phrases are alternately tender or stormy, desperate or hopeful.

The *Valses Poeticos*, much before the *Escenas Roman- ticas*, belong to this group; also included are some minor works which are undeniably influenced by Schumann, such as *Bocetos* (Sketches) . . . *Cuentos para la juventud* (Tales for Youth) and *Seis estudios expresivos en forma de piezas faciles*. (Six Studies expressed in the Form Of Easy Pieces). Moreover there are some "Impromptus" and the

"Allegro de Concierto," the work virtuosically written for the Piano Course at the Conservatory of Madrid, with grand brilliance and passionate inspiration.

Goyescas Epoch

We have arrived at the culminating moment of the art of Granados: his *Goyescas* for the piano, which with the *Tonadillas* are the most personal and definite of all his work. For a long time Granados had planned to write music about a theme pertaining to Goya. It was in 1909 that his project began to take form. "I fell in love with the psychology of Goya, with his palette. With him, and with the Duchess of Alba; with his maja Senora, with his models, with his disputes, loves and flirtations. The white rose of the cheeks, contrasted with the flaxen hair against the black velvet with buttons and loops; those bending bodies of the dancing creatures, hands of mother-of-pearl and of jasmine resting on jet trinkets, they have disturbed me . . ." wrote Granados to his friend, the pianist Malats. In effect *Goyescas* is all this and much more. It is the high point of his life and, together with the *Iberia* by Albeniz, the major example of the Spanish piano literature, indeed one of the more important works of the universal literature. It is also the culmination of all his experience and of all of his art. Granados had found, at last, his road and his personality. Like Albeniz in *Iberia*, Granados invents a completely new and transcendental pianistic vocabulary. Inspired motivation, wide, rolling phrases embroidered with arabesques and ornaments, the evident consequence of dedication as reviewer and interpreter of the work of Scarlatti, enrich these pages in which he describes the underworld of *majas and chisperos* of Madrid* in the beginning of the 19th century—the scenes that Goya immortalized with his brushes. Loves, flirtations, talks in the lattice work (the classic mark of southern love), complaints to the light of the moon, the poetry of the sad gardens, stabbings, death—all these are elements of these sketches. And later the serenade, the poetry of the guitar, and the lament of the vagabonds were added, tracing macabre phantoms rising from so-called "black Spanish" superstition.

This suite, which Granados subtitled *The Majos in Love*, consists of two parts. The first is composed of "Flirtations," "Conversation in the lattice-work," "The Fandango of Candil," and "Complaints" or "the Maja and the nightingale." The second part contains "Balada (Love and Death)," and "Epilogo (Serenade of a phantom)." Later he would add "El Pelele." The most tender page and at the same time the most intensely passionate that Granados ever wrote is "The Maja and the nightingale," whose principal theme is based on a popular song. It is dedicated to his wife Amparo. The other numbers in the collection he dedicated to the great pianists of the time; Sauer, Risler, Vines, and Bauer.

The suite *Goyescas* was composed in 1910. In 1914, Fernando Periquet, at the request of Granados, joined the diverse numbers and devised a libretto that would turn the suite into an opera. Only the "Intermedio" that Granados wrote in 24 hours to accommodate a scene change just before the New York opening (Jan. 28, 1916) was originated and composed expressly for the opera. Through the good offices of Granados' intimate friend, the noted pianist Ernest Schelling, the premiere of the opera *Goyescas* took place at the New York Metropolitan. Granados, full of hopeful illusion, overcame his inexplicable terror at the

* Belles and dandies of the lower classes



Granados, own sketch to suggest costuming for the opera, *Goyescas*.

immensity of the sea and, with his wife Amparo, made the voyage to attend the opening. The premiere was an outstanding success, in spite of the libretto being very inferior to the music and in spite of the loss of spontaneity in adapting to the orchestra what was essentially pianistic music. Nevertheless, the triumph of Granados was evident.

As a testimonial to him, the public succeeded, as it should, in persuading him to give some concerts. One of them stands out markedly—the invitation from President Wilson to play at the White House. To play this recital he was obliged to change the date of his return passage and accordingly left on the S.S. Rotterdam on March 11, arriving at Falmouth eight days later. On March 24, 1916, Enrique Granados and his wife took the Sussex to cross the channel to Dieppe. A little after breakfast the ship was struck by a German torpedo. Eye witnesses affirm having seen Granados and his wife struggling in the water with their arms around each other.

"I am beginning. I have a world of ideas. I am full of confidence and enthusiasm to work more and more," he had written shortly before the sea buried his plans, illusions, and desires. But the immense treasure of the music he did accomplish, so fresh, so vital, so new, all of it impregnated with the heart and soul of Spain, remains a faithful portrait of one of the most poetic and sensitive Spanish composers that ever lived.

Enrique Granados was 49 years old at the moment of his tragic death. If he had lived, his art and inspiration might have reached unsuspected heights. He said it . . . "I am beginning . . ." *Fine*