

Searching Spain for Background Color

by Dorothy Ream Packard



Alicia de Laroccha's tiny stature is emphasized as she talks with Van Cliburn. (In the background is Friedrich Wührer of Munich, whose article on practicing is soon to appear in CLAVIER.)

Clicking heels and castanets, a whirl of flounced skirts—to many persons this seems the essence of Spanish music. But this southern, gypsy-influenced style is only a small element in a culture that is remarkably rich and complex. To play and understand Spanish music one needs to depart from the stereotype and view a more spacious landscape.

Barcelona

The search for the background of Enrique Granados led me first to Barcelona, the modern business-dominated Mediterranean seaport in the north of Spain. This is the capital of Catalonia, a province fiercely separatist and proud of its local heritage. Granados was born in the center of Catalonia in the town of Lérida, and he spent the major part of his life in Barcelona, where he founded the music academy that has trained so many of Spain's fine pianists.

Catalans speak their own language, as well as Spanish, and, usually, French. Indeed, Barcelona seems nearly as much a French as a Spanish city. Granados' location here, as well as his training years in Paris, left their influences on his style. The French or cosmopolitan flavor in his

music and its relationship to his contemporaries, the French impressionists, should be remembered when studying his compositions.

Dance rhythms predominate in Spanish music, but again these are many and varied. Knowing something of how the dances are performed improves one's grasp of the music. Once or twice a week there is dancing in a public square in Barcelona. A band of eight musicians plays for an hour or more. The instruments are one string bass and seven very reedy sounding brasses, and the music features simple two-beat folk tunes with alternating sections of melancholy and festive character. As the dancing starts men and women of all ages form circles in the square, piling coats and purses in the center of each circle, joining hands and starting the *sardana*.

As the dance progresses additional dancers break in until circles become large enough to break into two, sometimes one inside the other.

The steps are simple. Arms are kept horizontal during the melancholy section and raised during the gay part, which tightens the circle. During the gay part, each step is doubled, which makes the dance more vigorous but does not alter its basic tempo. The essential movement is merely two steps to the left and two steps to the right, but these are executed stylishly, with a preliminary tap featuring



"Tal para Cual," the Goya drawing that is used as a frontispiece in the original editions of *Goyescas*, or the *Majos Enamorado*s. The title has no exact counterpart in English but could be translated approximately as "You are what you are." Original drawing in the Prado, Madrid.

a high knee directly above the pointed toe. The angle and height of the arms are varied in unison at exact moments. The concentration on counting that is necessary to achieve the precision shown by the better dance groups results in faces completely serious and withdrawn, so that the *sardana* seems more of a ritual than an amusement.

Cultivation of the *sardana* as part of Catalonia's native heritage has stimulated the creation of private clubs where it is learned and practiced. And so in the public square on dance nights, some groups are heterogeneous, democratic circles that children or strangers may join at will. But the best dance groups will be formed by club members in their late teens or early twenties, all wearing their white canvas dance shoes with straps criss-crossed up their ankles. Watching the *sardana* is in itself worth a trip to Barcelona.

Alicia De Laroccha

But the *sardana* was only a side-light—not really basic to a search for Granados' background. This search led me first to Alicia De Laroccha, Spain's great woman pianist, who is head of the Academia Marshall in Barcelona. The English name of the school comes from an unusual situation. The father of Frank Marshall went from England to Spain as an engineer to direct a major building project. The son studied piano with Enrique Granados, the most prominent figure in Spanish music at the time. After Granados' sudden death Frank Marshall took over the direction of his piano school.

Although Granados himself taught both her mother and her aunt, Mme. De Laroccha is too young to have studied with him. She was instead a pupil of Frank Marshall, and in her turn took over the direction of the school. She is thus a direct artistic descendent of Granados and probably the one person in the world best qualified to discuss his music.

When I arrived at the academy Mme. De Laroccha interrupted a lesson with an American student to show me mementos of Granados and to answer my questions about herself and her school. Her American student became part of a giddy three-part conversation in which Mme. De Laroccha and I spoke French to each other, Mme. and her student spoke Spanish, and the student and



Alicia de Laroccha in a more reflective mood. Photo courtesy of Steinway & Sons.

I spoke English—each of us being nearly ignorant of one of the languages.

Mme. De Laroccha is tiny, quick, and humorous. Her black eyes sparkle, and she seems to radiate an electric charge. She showed me around her friendly school before we settled down to talk. The small recital hall—it would seat perhaps 150 persons on chairs—is dominated by the well-known and highly-colored portrait of Granados painted by Nestor. In addition to the grand piano there is the harpsichord at which De Falla wrote his concerto.

Mme. De Laroccha agreed to write an article on Granados for *Clavier* readers and then answered questions about her own life. I asked her what special difficulties face a woman who becomes a concert pianist. She herself tours widely, making frequent appearances in this country and filling engagements all over Europe. Last season she spent four months in North America arriving home just before Christmas, and then left again in January for a two-month tour that included Japan.

She agreed readily that a concert career presents problems that demand sacrifices of anyone and are additionally difficult for a woman. She says that she is unusually fortunate in the help and cooperation of her husband, Juan Torra, whom she met when they were students. He too

teaches at the Academia Marshall and not only arranges all her tours but keeps both school and family going while she is away. She still finds too little time to be with her children, Alicia, eight, and Juan Francisco, ten. And when she is in Barcelona—teaching all day long—her time is also overoccupied. Besides, she finds so little time for practice!

Asked if she teaches her own children she said, "No—is not possible." They study at the academy but not with mama or papa.

Mme. De Laroccha finds no prejudice against women performers among European audiences although she senses that there is still some in America. The biggest obstacle for a woman, however, is the reluctance of managers to schedule women artists. They fear cancellations for family reasons.

Mme. De Laroccha protests the tendency of Americans to pigeonhole her as primarily or solely an interpreter of Spanish music. In England too she is to some extent considered not so much a musician as a Spanish musician. In London, on Albeniz' centenary day, she played all the Albeniz suites, but a Spaniard in the audience, going to the other extreme, was heard to say, "Spanish music is not for us; it is just for foreigners."

Natalia Granados

Mme. De Laroccha sent me on my way with an introduction to Granados' daughter, Natalia. Natalia was sixteen when her father died, but his memory is still sharp. A handsome woman, she and her physician husband, Antonio Carreras welcomed me to their Barcelona apartment and ushered me into a small sitting room which is still furnished with her father's furniture in its original upholstery—all in remarkably fine condition. During our visit the Carreras' English-speaking grown son came in, tugged by his basset hound, to inquire hospitably if his services as interpreter were needed, but finding that we were getting along famously in French soon went on his way.

Dr. Carreras, who has made a hobby of preserving mementos of Enrique Granados, showed me many original letters—from Massenet, Saint-Saens, Kreisler, and other contemporaries to Granados—and countless photographs, including those reproduced in this issue. One of the most interesting items in the

room was the pair of leather gauntlets Granados wore to strengthen his wrists while playing. Each was about 2 1/2 inches wide and had two small straps to buckle it.

The Carreras introduced me to a club, the "Amigos de Granados," which maintains a handsomely appointed pair of rooms on the lower floor of the Hotel Manila. It too has preserved many documents and articles associated with Granados. Its main interest for us, however, is the evidence it gives of the continuing esteem and devotion of Granados' fellow-citizens. It seems to spring from a blend of pride in his world-wide status and of affection for his human warmth.

Madrid

So much for Barcelona, where Granados lived. But the flavor of Granados is not comprehended by Barcelona alone, nor even by Barcelona plus Paris. For Granados was interested in all of Spain—even in the wild Flamenco of Andalusia with which he flavored some of his dances. His principal love was Madrid, and particularly the Madrid of Goya, Spain's great painter of the Napoleonic era.

So the search for color culminated in the Prado—probably the greatest art museum in Europe—with its eight rooms full of Goya paintings and drawings. Two of the episodes in *Goyescas*, "El Pelele" and "Love and Death" are musical expressions of specific Goya works. And the other



Granados' daughter, Natalia Granados de Carreras of Barcelona.

Goya drawing reproduced herein is an illustration of the general theme of "Majos in Love."

But the influence of Goya on Granados was much greater than merely supplying a few subject-matter ideas. Granados had a particular affinity for the romantic and picturesque aspects of Goya's work and drew from it his *madrileñismo*, a feeling for the spirit of Madrid. Here is the source of what De Laroccha calls his "exalted romanticism." Seeing these pictures, with their strong contrasts, their mystery, and their extravagance, a pianist is prepared to understand the way Granados played—emotionally, waywardly, with grandeur. *Fine*



Caricature of Granados