



Granados

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On the centenary of the Spanish master's birth, his leading interpreter illuminates the aesthetic conflict within the man and his music.

ENRIQUE GRANADOS was born in 1867 and died aboard the torpedoed S.S. *Sussex* in 1916. Thus I could not know him in his lifetime. Nevertheless, I feel very close to him and to his music—almost as though during my whole life he and I have been great friends.

A good deal of my career has been formed in the shadow of Granados' personal and pianistic tradition. The ardent expansiveness of his works, the inner vein and apparently endless flow of his ideas, the wit and grace and picaresque feeling of his rhythms, the intimacy and poetry, sometimes the faded perfume of his melancholy have always attracted me. I find the style elegant and devoid of the decadent sentimentality so characteristic of many

composers of his period. Because of my closeness to the Granados ambience, my having been so constantly enveloped by the source of the music, I often feel the strength of subconscious forces at work when I interpret him in concerts, as if I were a little bewitched.

The piano, the instrument and its resources, was certainly a major influence upon the composing procedures of Granados. He played Scarlatti frequently and with utmost clarity and precision, as his early recordings attest—like a born *clavecinista*. It is possible that the music of Domenico Scarlatti was absorbing to him not only because it was so highly Hispanicized (Scarlatti lived many years in La Granja and Aranjuez) but also equally because this kind of music presented him a fascinating challenge for realization at the keyboard. He prepared a scholarly, meticulous edition of twenty-six Scarlatti Sonatas composed originally for the royal family and until modern times unpublished. At one time—and I have this among his manuscripts—he wrote out a series of exercises for use by his students, to promote independence of fingers in the primary development of pianistic skills. Almost all of these are related in some fashion to baroque or classical period ornamental devices, mordents and inverted mordents and measured trills using different finger combinations. Even a cursory look at a piece like *The Maid and the Nightingale* shows how much this penchant for ornamentation permeated his romanticism. Other pianistic influences upon Granados' work as a composer are legion. I have, for instance, among his notebooks, long analyses of movements loving to play Schumann, Liszt, and, to some extent of Beethoven sonatas. He went through periods of Chopin, studying their different poetics and particularly their different instrumental sonorities.

The two sides of Granados' nature, the ordered or classical and the romantic, combine to form the profile of his music, and both must be present in performance. This age-old mixture is present in all composers, and the performer must determine the balance of the chemistry, whether in Bach or Brahms. In Granados the proportions seem clear, the ordered part of his thinking springing from his preoccupation with the piano, forming the disciplinary element within the framework and context of his personal romanticism.

I have often speculated about what his composing style would have been had he not been the pianist he was. Perhaps if he had been a violinist, the texture of his hearing would have been different. Almost certainly the details of the devices he used would not have been as they stand, for the figurative variations and embellishments he used as settings around his melodic and thematic ideas are identifiably pianistic. If he had been a conductor, there would have been a feeling for the grand orchestra; but in the Spain of his time there was no profusion of excellent symphony orchestras, nor were there

many symphonists. The only part of *Goyescas* he composed directly for full orchestra was the Intermezzo, which he wrote out overnight during the rehearsals at the Metropolitan, to fill an interlude of time needed for a scene change. He himself had little love for this addition, although it has become, in its style, a classic moment of music. Before *Goyescas* he had written other stage works of less consequence, including the opera *Maria del Carmen*—his natural gift for melodic flow and a flair for the dramatic enabled him to write well for the voice—but *Goyescas* was a curious and unique incident in the history of operatic repertory.

The opera was originally a set of pieces for piano, the libretto and vocal lines coming later, and then the orchestration. In *Goyescas* and other works of the years immediately preceding his death (at the age of forty-nine), he seemed to be reaching a new maturity, becoming more composer than pianist-composer, wishing to guide his writing more by his intellect, to pull together and unify the facets of his own nature, the Spanish elements, and the international influences into more wholly conceived forms. He spoke facetiously but at the same time seriously of wanting to do real and grand opera, something "in which all the characters die heroically and tragically." But speculations are useless, and he must be considered only in the light of what he was, an isolated personality strongly and poetically free in his romantic inclination, this temperament modified by classical modes of thought only in terms of pianistic devices and sounds.

There are several general clues to the performance of Granados, some of them a bit evasive and rather less tangible than might be expected from looking at the printed page. One intangible is the question of his expectations as to exactitude in performance, for he himself was an inveterate improviser—or perhaps it is better to say that he apparently believed deeply in the charm of fleeting impulse, in the necessity of maintaining spontaneity. In my collection I have a recording of his performance of the seventh of his *Danzas españolas*, the main theme of which is based on a *jota valenciana*, varying greatly from the printed score. Some of the deviations from the text are so interesting to me that I use them in my own interpretation of the piece. There were times when this habit took him further afield. Frank Marshall, Granados' chief disciple and my teacher told me of the time when Granados included *El Pelele* on a recital program, not long after that piece was composed. To avoid any possible lapses of memory, he played with the score before him and had asked Marshall to serve as page-turner. All went normally until about the third page, when Marshall saw with amazement that what Granados was playing had nothing to do with what was written. Knowing Granados so well, he showed no reaction, stopped turning pages, and was delighted to hear a totally new and brilliant

Pelele. With this gift of facility and a personality that was almost Bohemian (a word which to me means something more than its connotation in English). Granados remained nonacademic always.

I believe that this trait of Granados explains many markings in the printed scores. There are some successions of measures during which the variations of tempo are so profusely indicated that it would be folly to try to follow them. It is as though, at the moment of publication, he were overcompensating for his love for freedom and variability of expression—or as though he wanted to fix on the printed page his views about all the *rallentandos*, *affretandos*, and *accelerandos* as he felt them that day, very carefully and unmistakably. Sometimes the principal tempo marks are supplemented with fanciful or descriptive phrases, such as "*con sentimento amoroso*." Even though a slavish adherence to the tempo marks would not be advisable, taken in totality they add up to a fair synthesis of his type of rubato.

The subject of rubato is always a tricky one in the vocabulary of pianists, since it is one of the subtlest facets of expression. In general I believe that the music of Granados calls for a type that is broader than demanded by romantics such as Chopin—broader and often more sudden in its stopping over a point in the melodic line, almost a temporary disfiguration, a very strongly presented instant followed by a long breath of relaxation. Since Granados is so rich in his personal versions of mordentlike and ornamental figures, it is frequently at points in a phrase where these are most pronounced that more activity and stress are appropriate. His harmonic style is a rich one, though not experimental even in terms of his own day, but the tension reached in harmonic progression can dictate freedom in tempo. Of course, a constantly free treatment of every phrase group leads to sentimentalism, and this is a danger with Granados in the hands of performers lacking in musical sensitivity. In his works, as in Schumann and Chopin, part of the fascination for a pianist is to walk this fine line of tasteful re-creation.

How much of Spanish nationalism is there in Granados? Does it take "Spanish blood" to play his music? To me this is like asking whether it is necessary to be Viennese to play Mozart or a New Yorker to understand Gershwin. What is supremely necessary is for a performer to become imbued with the idiom and style in question, to add artistry and life to the printed page of notes. But perhaps this is begging the question. Undeniably, Granados wrote "Spanish" music, but this statement needs qualifying. It is hard to identify in a man who died at a comparatively young age three distinct periods. Yet in what I like to call his "middle period," represented by his "Romantic Scenes" and "Poetic Waltzes" among other works, the influences are not national, but rather those of Continental fashions. Here there is not much evidence of the themes and colorful

sounds he knew from his native land. In his younger days he had studied with Felipe Pedrell, and the fervent nationalism of his teacher influenced him markedly for a while. The fifth, eleventh, and twelfth of the first set of *Danzas españolas*, for instance, are Andalusian in spirit. But Granados was never absorbed completely by a single folk source, and chose ideas (and themes) from all the regions of Spain—Valencia, Murcia, New Castille, Andalusia. In his third period, he felt impelled to return to Spanish folk sources, his *madrilenismo* coming to the fore, and threw himself with much enthusiasm into the creation of *Goyescas*, based on Goya's scenes of late eighteenth-century Madrid and New Castille.

Granados, in the history of Spanish music, indeed does belong with the nationalists. Most frequently linked with his name as forming the "nationalist group" are Isaac Albéniz and Manuel de Falla, and in a way this is indicative, for in all of them existed deep folk feelings. They differed greatly in temperament, however, and are distinguishable too as to periods and places, Falla being of a later generation and Andalusian by birth. Falla was of the earth born, and the Impressionism that critics like to identify in his music I consider to be of the surface, a stylish façade. Albéniz, a Catalan like Granados and almost exactly of the same generation, found himself in the flamboyant culture of Andalusia. If Granados was impossible in his notation of tempos and rubato, Albéniz's dynamic markings frequently test aural credibility, *ffff* for a climax or, for example, a spot in *Iberia* where an accompaniment is marked *pppp* against a line that is *ppp*. Granados' brilliance and intimacy are achieved within more sensitive volume limits, and his markings in this respect are useful. He was not prone to think as a builder of musical forms. Among his works are no sonatas, no fugues, no involved polyphony except the play of transient inner lines moving through colorful harmonies. The composing is "sectional"; unity is achieved by the more evanescent means of personality in style, contrast by the changing textures.

This year is the centenary of Granados' birth, and 1966 was the fiftieth anniversary of his death; but it is not only during these two years that I have performed and recorded his music. He remains a perpetual fascination for me. He was mixture of child and man, enormously sensitive, full of *prontos*, ready to laugh with tears in eyes. Perhaps it was not for nothing that he inherited the blood of the Antilles from his Cuban father. He was easily influenced by the sounds of music or the glance of a lovely *maja*, quick to respond to the brightness or shadows of life, or to forget its realities. One Granados had a distant look, a mind of dreams and imagination. The other Granados was passionate and involved, capable of profound enthusiasm and strong moods and communicative wit. The warmth of humanity, the subtlety of poetry was in him and his music.