

Music: De Larrocha at Carnegie Hall

Pianist Performs Rare Work by Schumann

By HAROLD C. SCHONBERG

THE last few weeks have seen a distinguished procession of pianists looking into Carnegie Hall. There was Vladimir Horowitz not long ago, and then Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli. Last night it was Alicia de Larrocha, and she was by no means the least.

By coincidence, also, each of these great pianists brought to Carnegie Hall a seldom heard Schumann work. From Horowitz we got the "Kreisleriana," from Michelangeli the "Faschingschwank aus Wien," and last night Miss de Larrocha played the "Humoreske." I haven't heard the piece in concert since the days of Paul Loyonnet and Jacqueline Blancard. The "Humoreske" is an adorable work, with some of Schumann's most beautiful ideas and also some of Schumann's most ungrateful writing for the pianist.

In recent years Miss de Larrocha has been concentrating on Spanish music, with such things as the complete "Iberia" and the complete "Goyescas." This time, except for two little sonatas by Soler, she avoided the Spanish repertory. In addition to the "Humoreske" she played Chopin's "Barcarolle," Ballade in A flat, and two mazurkas from Op. 17—the A minor (No. 4) followed by the B flat (No. 1). Then came Ravel's "Gaspard de la Nuit."

Her proficiency in this program came as no surprise. Anybody who can so deftly handle the technique and the color of the superdifficult Albeniz and Granados cycles can handle Chopin and Ravel. And handle those composers Miss de Larrocha did, with enormous sweep, accuracy and that



Vernon L. Smith—Scope

Alicia De Larrocha

The Program

ALICIA DE LARROCHA, pianist: At Carnegie Hall.

Sonatas in D minor and F major. Soler
Humoreske.....Schumann
Barcarolle; Mazurkas in A minor and B
flat (Op. 17, Nos. 4 and 1); Ballade
in A flat.....Chopin
Gaspard de la Nuit.....Ravel

peculiar kind of authority she has. "She plays the piano like a little girl playing with toys," said the woman in the seat next to me. "Like a kid bouncing a ball." And, indeed, Miss de Larrocha went through her program with the same kind of ease, comfort and relaxation.

She made clear what everybody already knows, that she is a great pianist. With that clean-cut technique of hers is a great deal of color and an orchestral sonority. One can go down the list of virtues. There is sensitivity to her playing, and intelligence, and subtle color, and an ear that sees to it that all voices of any piece of music are represented, not only the right hand.

She produces a clear, singing line, and she immediately

Deft Technique Equal to Greatest Demands

did in the simple, lyric opening of the "Humoreske." Miss de Larrocha has been trained in a school of piano playing that respects romantic music, rather than condescends to it, and her interpretation of the Schumann had details that pianists of an older generation used to bring to the music. These would include delicate application of inner voices, rubato effects, freedom in metrics and agogics without losing the basic pulse, and an ability to produce big sound without banging.

Her control is extraordinary. Because of her small hands she is forced to redistribute certain passages, dividing them between both hands, but she does not change a note nor is there ever a break in the line. Even in so difficult a piece as "Gaspard de la Nuit" she was able to resolve the writing in supremely easy manner.

It was fascinating to listen to her performance of the Ravel with Michelangeli's fresh in the memory. Michelangeli was cool, pellucid, flawless. Miss de Larrocha was passionate, much more romantic and colorful. One approach was no more or no less convincing than the other, because in both instances absolutely top pianists and pianistic minds were at work.

I had time for one encore, Scriabin's Etude for the Left Hand. This summer Miss de Larrocha suffered an injury to her right hand, and while she was convalescing she amused herself by learning the Scriabin. She played it superbly, as only a master can. And thank goodness her right hand seems to be in perfect shape. The world would be a poorer place without it.