

19-12-1966

Entrances and Exits

"I've been playing the piano from the beginning, since I was two years old . . . when I was just a little smaller than I am now." Petite in size, but not in talent, is Alicia de Larrocha who was about to relate the story of her international career from its first days in her native Barcelona. The background which she brings to her December 14th Philharmonic Hall recital has its roots in the "Granados tradition" which she inherited from her teacher, Frank Marshall who, in turn, had been one of the composer-pianist's leading pupils. He had established the Marshall Academy in Barcelona as a successor to the one Enrique Granados himself had created there before his death in 1916 aboard the S.S. Sussex in the English Channel at the age of 48. Today, both Miss de Larrocha and her husband, Juan Torra, are directors of this Academy, a leading private piano conservatory in Barcelona.

"Granados established his school around 1909 or 1910. Here he taught his own style of piano. In fact, he was the first one in Europe to create a school especially for the study of the pedal. He also concentrated very much on the sonority of the piano—something that was fantastically new for his era. No one before him had paid attention to sonorities with such intelligence. Granados had been greatly influenced by the technique of the harpsichord and brought this to the piano repertory of the day. He loved the music and style of Scarlatti, to which he applied the Romantic tradition and the sonorities of 19th century virtuoso playing. Also, he felt a great affinity for Schumann and was considered a leading interpreter of his music. And in the second part of Granados' life, Schumann exercised his spell over his music.

"I am, what you call, a third generation. My mother had studied with Granados, but marriage put an end to her piano playing. My mother's sister also studied with Granados, had become a teacher and is still teaching, at the age of 72, in the Academy." As a leading interpreter of Spanish music, Mme. de Larrocha stressed that Marshall had not let her study this music until she was 17 years old. "First it was Bach and Mozart and the wide range of the European piano repertoire. This is a necessary base for a pianist. You cannot play Spanish music without it.

"To the pianist, Granados, Albéniz



Alicia de Larrocha

and Falla are the cream of Spanish music. It was Felipe Pedrell, a Catalanian, who first collected all the popular Spanish songs and eventually became the teacher of Albéniz, Granados and Falla. He instilled a national-historical sense in his students and he guided them to this vast source of Spanish folk music, encouraging them to use it in their works.

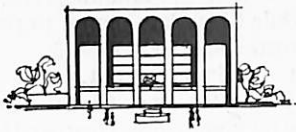
"Of course, the colorful region of Andalusia became the most influential region of Spain in the piano music during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was the music from this section of the country which had been the most popular and most commercial on the international market. This 'flamenco sound' was an export, like bullfights and mantillas—it was thought to be 'typical' of Spain. Many lesser composers took this colorful music and capitalized on it; but the few great ones—like

Falla and Albéniz—took the essential values in this music, adapted them to the classical style and created masterpieces. The popularity of Andalusia has made it difficult for the music of other regions—Castile, Galicia and others—to emerge and, to make an impression, though their music is equally beautiful and exciting. A few, like Nin and Rodrigo, have written fine works based on the folk melodies of these other regions."

The technically formidable *Iberia*, which Mme. de Larrocha will play complete in her only New York recital this season, consists of all Andalusian impressions, except the "Lavapies," which is a picture of the Bohemian section of Madrid. "Many people have felt that the Fourth Book is the best, but, like all music, it depends on the taste of the listener. Albéniz himself liked these last, less familiar, pieces best. When he had completed the tenth piece, 'Malaga,' and was about to begin the 'Navarra,' he looked at it and called it 'vulgar.' He abandoned 'Navarra' in disgust and never finished it because he did not like it. In its place he composed 'Jerez' which he loved very much. He wrote to his friend Malats (a great interpreter of Albéniz' music and the man who premièred *Iberia*) and said, 'This has the taste of the finest sherry—not bottled sherry, but the real thing from Jerez.' And this music captures the essence and spirit of the city, as well as the sherry of that region."

In comparing the three masters of Spanish music, Miss de Larrocha calls Granados "the real Romantic poet. Everything he did was spontaneous yet restrained—a reflection of his temperament; his music is very patrician and elegant—he is the Spain of the aristocracy. Albéniz, on the other hand, is more colorful, full of great spirit and power, working with a brilliant palette. And Falla—he was more under the spell of the gypsies than the others, and his music speaks of the tremendous strength of the Spanish gypsy. His works have what is called the *cante hondo*, the deep tragic sound, the ageless sorrow of Spain that is generally heard more in vocal writing than in piano music. Falla—who composed very little for the piano, concentrating more on the orchestra—is also the most cosmopolitan and universal, mirroring the influences of France and the Im-

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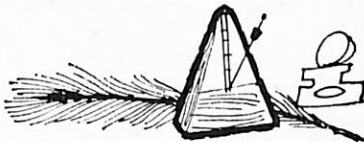
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de Larrocha . . .

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pressionism of Debussy, Dukas and Ravel. Falla once said that his music has its origins in all that is greatest in the musical heritage of our race—it must be sincere and natural, however universal in aspiration; and it was to remain profoundly Spanish in essence.

"For the pianist, the peaks of Spanish music are *Iberia* and Granados' *Goyescas*. This music is completely separate from all the other piano repertory. Technically, it is very different and difficult. It is not that you have to be Spanish-born to play this music, but it is impossible if you don't acquire the special technique that is needed. This has to do with the sound and rhythm of the music, as well as the colors. One of the clues to this style lies in the fact that both Albéniz and Falla took the guitar as their instrumental model. And this style has something to do with the same qualities that our great flamenco dancers have—it is the sense of excitement held tightly under control; there is no hysteria or flamboyance. It is crucial to keep the emotional excitement in the context of complete control. With this comes the quality of seduction, a certain arrogance, or haughtiness, or Spanish pride."



Last season, Mme. de Larrocha triumphantly returned to America, making her first New York appearance in eleven years when she played the Mozart A-major Concerto with the New York Philharmonic (December 29, 1965). In 1955 she made her U.S. debut with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and that same season she made her New York debut in a highly-regarded Town Hall recital. In the interim she had eagerly continued yearly tours of Europe. "Thanks to my husband, I can make my tours. He stays home and looks after the conservatory and the children—Alicia who is 7 and Juan who is 9. I look forward to being with them again after these three months in America. Also, I am very pleased to be a part of a special Telephone Hour program about the music of Spain, to be filmed at the end of December in the Prado of Madrid with Andres Segovia and Victoria de los Angeles." Alicia de Larrocha has indeed taken her place as one of her country's foremost artists.

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