

ALICIA DE LARROCHA

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Mozart Is Played to Perfection by Spanish Pianist

By WILMA SALISBURY

Two extremely gifted international musicians performed brilliantly before a crowd of 5,179 last night at Blossom Music Center.

Alicia de Larrocha made a stunning Cleveland Orchestra debut in Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 23, and Pierre Boulez completed his three-week guest-conducting engagement with an evocative, exciting interpretation of Stravinsky's "Firebird" suite.

Miss de Larrocha is too good to be true. Her Mozart performance was perfection personified.

Every detail of the solo part was perfectly measured and perfectly played. Phrasing and articulation were meticulously shaped, ornaments and inner voices clearly projected, dynamic and rhythmic nuances exquisitely balanced.

Yet, for all her attention to detail, the Spanish pianist never lost the music's singling line or rhythmic flow. Her interpretation had thrust and intensity as well as intelligence and poetry.

IN FACT, SO ELOQUENTLY was her playing that the orchestra part, by comparison, sounded mundane.

La muy fantastica Alicia de Larrocha

By R. A. PERRY
Contributing Editor

CULTURALLY, Spain has always strangely seemed a second-class country. Edmund Burke called it "a whale stranded upon the coast of Europe," and Emerson summed up the anxieties of all American tourists, clutching their Eurail Passes in one hand and Kaopectate in the other, when he said, "It requires a strong constitution to travel to Spain." Many think of Hemingway's Pamplona with appreciation, but in regard to the Arts, Spain never quite made it into marble halls of high respect. Certainly, you can name more German or French authors than Spanish: Spanish sculpture and architecture seem farther from the Western European tradition than they really are. In the realm of music, the greatest composers of Spain have never been elevated to the esteem granted lesser men in Europe.

This latter unfortunate state of affairs results primarily, I would think, from the apparent lack of seriousness of Spanish music, especially when compared to the philosophic struggling of a Beethoven or Mahler. Spanish music is so easy to listen to, with its profusion of color and excitement of rhythms, that one tends to overlook, somewhat lazily perhaps, the depth of emotion which turns beneath those colors and rhythms.

FURTHERMORE, in comparison to Spanish music, with its Moorish and Semitic shadings, Western music is simple and elemental in its tonal prerogatives. Manuel de Falla, a leader in the regeneration of Spanish music, stressed the similarities between the music of Spain and of India,

for each depends upon far more gradation of pitch than in the West, and each is intricately tied to vocal music. In listening to both Indian and Spanish music there are expressive modulations too quick and too subtle for us to catch their meaning, though aurally the music seems so brilliant.

All this is a too lengthy preface to Alicia de Larrocha, who stunned the Rackham Aud. audience last night in the opening concert of the University Musical Society's Summer Concert Series. Miss de Larrocha is one of the most phenomenal pianists alive, but since she has devoted her recording to music of Granados, Albeniz, Turina, and Soler, she is far less known than many lesser artists who assault the standard piano repertoires. To listen to Miss de Larrocha's playing is to be a fan for life; to buy one of her records is like eating the first fatal peanut: you have to have them all.

ALICIA DE LARROCHA was a student of Frank Marshall, the disciple of Enrique Granados, and today this petite woman heads the Granados Academy in Barcelona and truly represents the spirit, fire, and sensitivity of Spanish musical tradition. It would be fatuous to merely mouth the usual praise, to say that she has all the technical facility and poetic sensibility — she goes beyond such levels of competence. Her "soft" has about fifteen levels; her runs are as smooth as rose petals; her guitar-like grace notes spring out with blinding pace. More than this—a complete mastery of touch—is the way in which de Larrocha conveys the emotion, the poignancy and the passion of Spanish

music. One of Tolkien's Hobbits once said he was so happy that he felt as if inside a song; Miss de Larrocha penetrates to and lives within the core of her music. She quite literally makes all other pianists who attempt Spanish music sound as if they learned their lessons at Berlitz.

Miss de Larrocha's Rackham concert was doubly fascinating. First it offered her forte: Three Spanish Songs and Dances by Carlos Surinach. Four Spanish Pieces by Manuel de Falla (with a "Cubana" that reveals the composer's debt to Ravel and Debussy), and the Fantasia Betica also by de Falla. Less openly lyrical than Granados and more trenchant than Albeniz, de Falla's music depends a great deal on contrast in rhythms and especially dynamics. Having studied with Debussy, Ravel, and Dukas in Paris for seven years, he returned to Madrid at the outbreak of war in 1914 as an afrancesado, or "Frenchified" musician. Yet de Falla dug deeply into the folk music of his country, into its special mixture of indigenous, Moorish, and Oriental influences. His piano music especially shows de Falla's respect for the guitar, and this was evident in the "Andaluza" which Miss de Larrocha performed.

The second fascination of last night's concert was the anticipation of hearing the master of Spanish music play Bach and Beethoven.

BACH'S Italian Concerto was programmed and the results were unusual, beautiful, and moving. Probably written in 1734, the work

served as a source for the later classical and romantic concertos; it contains three movements, an allegro, an andante, and a rondo-like presto. The andante is especially beautiful for it expands and spins out the melody in a mood of placid transparency that anticipates some of the evanescent adagios of Mozart, Beethoven and Ravel. Here de Larrocha's perfect touch—never the least bit heavy nor precocious—made every note an experience.

Playing the Italian Concerto on the piano instead of the harpsichord immediately demands a choice between two alternatives: to simulate the fleeting sparkle of the harpsichord or to allow the piano's potential for expression through pedal effects. Basically, de Larrocha opted for the latter effect, but her ultra-clean fingering and clarity of line still maintained a decent toccato sound. In many ways hers was a strangely Spanish Bach, for there was a certain tendency for the stop-start rhythms of Spanish music to slightly break up the momentum. Also, there just simply seems to be paint on de Larrocha's fingers, for she cannot hit many a note without imparting color to it. Her touch, then, does not yield the "white music" of Glenn Gould.

By the time of the Op. 110 Sonata (No. 31), Beethoven was little interested in sheer beauty for its own sake; there are none of the melodies of his earlier sonatas here. The opening moderato cantabile states a six-note theme of limited charm but of great structural importance: the first movement consists of the dynamic working-out of this theme and the poetry is the process.

THE SECOND MOVEMENT offers a pert statement, a brusque reply, and a light-hearted evolution of this material. The movement is one of Beethoven's most emotionally chaste adagios, only slightly more self-important than the slow introduction of the Waldstein rondo. Here the adagio gives way to a three-part fugue and then — almost unbelievably — the fugue is interrupted by the return of the slow ariosos. It is a perfect example of the late Beethoven exercising his complete dominance over all formal laws, his proclamation of independence. The fugue returns to a rousing climax.

Usually there are two approaches to late Beethoven: an exegesis of structure or an exploration into philosophy. Miss de Larrocha is no philosopher, but she revealed the structure of the music admirably. Yet if pressed to find one word for her approach, I would pick sensual. Quite simply, I have never heard Beethoven played so beautifully—not that she reveals meaning as does Schnabel or Brendel—but the pure sound of her phrasing is eminently lush and almost sexual.

If you heard Alicia de Larrocha last night and want to purchase her albums, I would make the following recommendations. First, try "Piano Music of Granados" on Epic BC 3910. It has all of the pianist's charms displayed in fantastically lyrical and colorful works which include the Valses Poeticos and Six Pieces on Spanish Popular Songs. Next try Granados' complete Goyescas on Epic B 2C 6065. By that time you will have to have Albeniz's Iberia BSC 158 (Epic) and will be enticed to try the Scarlatti-esque music of Antonio Soler on Epic BC 1389.