
FALLA: Noches en los jardines de España. ALBÉNIZ: Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, in A minor, Op. 78.

Aldo Ciccolini, piano; Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Enrique Bátiz, cond. [Brian Culverhouse, prod.] ANGEL DS 38038 (digital recording). ~~Cassette: 4XS 38038.~~

FALLA: Noches en los jardines de España. ALBÉNIZ: Rapsodia española, Op. 70 (arr. Cristóbal Halffter). TURINA: Rapsodia sinfónica, Op. 66.

Alicia de Larrocha, piano; London Philharmonic Orchestra, Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos, cond. [Michael Haas, prod.]

LONDON 410 289-1 (digital recording). Cassette: 410 289-4. CD: 410 289-2.

I have always been puzzled by this undoubted masterpiece of 20th-century music, Manuel de Falla's *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*. Masterwork notwithstanding, is it essentially picture-postcard music (*à la* Albéniz) or impressionistic music (*à la* Granados)? This question came closer to a solution with the recent publication of an excellent monograph on the composer by Ronald Crichton (BBC Music Guides). He offers the opinion that Falla found his inspiration in the poetry of Rubén Darío, poems that are "... concerned with night-sounds heard in the distance and melancholy night-thoughts about the passing of youth and the difference between what was and what might have been."

Perhaps this interpretation appeals to me most because, back in the 1950s, Aldo Ciccolini made, with conductor Ernesto Halffter, what I considered to be the most poetically haunting version of the work recorded up to that time (Angel 35134). What a happy task it is to report that Ciccolini has maintained that same vision, with fine cooperation from Enrique Bátiz, the Royal Philharmonic, and EMI engineers. A simple record to recommend, then, if it were not for two other factors. The first is the Albéniz concerto on this LP's flip side, as worthless a piece of Spanish trivia as I have ever heard. What prompted Ciccolini to bother learning it passes one's understanding. The second factor is more serious.

Alicia de Larrocha has now recorded her third version of *Nights*, and the result is—excluding the performance by the late Gonzalo Soriano with the same conductor (Angel, deleted, but available in Britain)—the finest account I have ever heard. There is no nuance in this complex work that she and Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos do not realize fully. When one adds sound of demonstration quality into the bargain, this is a record not to be missed by anyone with the slightest affection for music or Spain, or both.

The other side of the release contributes a great deal to this verdict. The Turina *Rapsodia* again receives a performance second to none, at least in my memory. However, it is the Albéniz *Rapsodia* that may be, for some collectors, the "find" of the disc. Recorded only once before, by Soriano and Frühbeck, this concerto-ized former solo-piano work resembles nothing more or less than a Spanish *Rhapsody in Blue*, with all that that may (or may not) mean to the listener.



Christian Steiner

Superb *Nights* from de Larrocha

However, for anyone romantically inclined, put on only the first four or so minutes, and if you're not completely hooked by then, perhaps it's too late for you. Those moments are, for me, the most memorable in all Spanish music.

THOMAS L. DIXON

HANDEL: *Water Music*.

The English Concert; Trevor Pinnock, harpsichord and dir. [Andreas Holschneider and Charlotte Kriesch, prods.] ARCHIV 410 525-1 (digital recording). Cassette: 410 525-4. CD: 410 525-2. (Distributed by Deutsche Grammophon.)

As evidenced by Gerard Schwarz's recent recording with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and John Eliot Gardiner's with the English Baroque Soloists [see review, January NEW TECHNOLOGIES], lately the trend has been to present the movements of Handel's *Water Music* as three separate suites, their grouping determined as much by instrumentation as by tonality: The first set, in F major and D minor, features horns and oboes; the set in D major features horns, oboes, and trumpets; and the set in G major features oboes and recorders. Trevor Pinnock follows the more traditional ordering as laid out in the 1886 Chrysander edition, with the latter two groups shuffled into a single package. He dispenses with the familiar timpani—the argument being that kettledrums would not have fit comfortably onto the barge that hosted the music's first performance in 1717—and as "concessions for domestic listening" he reduces to solos some of the originally doubled woodwind parts.

Those details are important in this age of "authentic" performances, and,