

musical america



ALICIA DE LARROCHA: Musician of the month

highlights of october

musician of the month

ALICIA DE LARROCHA began piano study in her native Barcelona at the age of four. Her teacher—the only one she ever had—was Frank Marshall, a pupil and friend of Granados; when he played a Granados composition to the prodigy she felt, as she later put it, that "a new world of poetry and dreams opened before me. And I had the sensation that this music would form a part of my soul forever." Miss de Larrocha gave her first public recital at five. Eventually came a debut in Madrid, and in 1947 she made her first tour outside Spain. For an account of her career in the United States, see page MA-6.

Cover photo: Sheila Schultz

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| SATURDAY | 4 | Prague Symphony Orchestra makes U.S. debut at Constitution Hall, Washington, D.C. |
| MONDAY | 6 | Opening concert of American Symphony Orchestra's season includes New York premiere of Louis Gottschalk's Symphony No. 2, <i>Montevideo</i> .

Janos Starker and Radio Symphony Orchestra, Berlin, give premiere of Miklos Rózsa's Cello Concerto during Berlin Festival. |
| TUESDAY | 7 | Santa Cecilia Orchestra of Rome opens the International Festival of Visiting Orchestras at Carnegie Hall. |
| THURSDAY | 9 | Beverly Sills stars in New York City Opera's new production of <i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i> . |
| SATURDAY | 11 | Amy Shuard sings Brünnhilde in San Francisco Opera's new mounting of <i>Götterdämmerung</i> . |
| TUESDAY | 14 | Little Orchestra Society gives U.S. premiere of Carl Orff's <i>Prometheus</i> at Lincoln Center. |
| FRIDAY | 17 | Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center launches first season at Alice Tully Hall. |
| SATURDAY | 18 | At Donaueschingen Festival of Contemporary Music the Swingle Singers take part in premiere of Sinfonia for Eight Voices and Orchestra by Luciano Berio. |
| SUNDAY | 19 | U.S. premiere of Roger Sessions' <i>Montezuma</i> by the Opera Company of Boston. |
| TUESDAY | 21 | Premiere of a commissioned work for narrator, chorus, and orchestra by Ulysses Kay at Worcester Festival, Mass. |
| SATURDAY | 25 | Cincinnati Symphony's 75th anniversary season opens in newly redecorated Music Hall. |

HIGH FIDELITY
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musician of the month

ALICIA DE LARROCHA

ALICIA DE LARROCHA seems like a most unlikely pianist to be in the midst of a musical marathon. Standing 4' 9" and weighing less than a hundred pounds, she probably is today's tiniest concert artist of major stature—if you'll pardon the contradiction in terms. Besides, she is known as a specialist in the rather limited Spanish piano repertory, and as such presumably should have problems in assembling enough of a variety of programs for ten concert appearances in New York alone.

Nevertheless, the marathon is on, and proceeding brilliantly. Miss de Larrocha compensates for her small size with a plenitude of personal vivacity and pianistic virtuosity. Her fingers, she says proudly, after years of stretching and abetted by an oversized pinky, can now span ten notes, which is adequate to meet all technical challenges. And she firmly refuses to be categorized as strictly a performer of Spanish music. "I am a pianist who is Spanish," she says sweetly, "not a Spanish pianist."

Her New York programs, and those she will play elsewhere during her current coast-to-coast visit, substantiate her claim. Her opening salvo, in late September, featured four performances of the Schumann Piano Concerto with the New York Philharmonic. At the Metropolitan Museum of Art she will play Beethoven's Concerto No. 2 in B flat on November 1 and 2, and at Carnegie Hall on December 9 she'll play an unusual solo program that brackets sonatas by Grieg and Ginastera and French Suites by Bach and Poulenc. Only in a special Hunter College series of three concerts, October 3, November 28, and next May 1, will Spanish music take over.

Even here, Miss de Larrocha promises something different, for she is going to leave out some of the more famous Spanish warhorses—the *caballos de batalla* as she calls them—in favor of pieces by more obscure composers that are less frequently heard in this country.

Speaking in a pleasant and perfectly understandable mixture of English, French, and Spanish, she says there's plenty of variety in her country's music, as between, for example, the Andalusian and Castilian styles, although she concedes that it helps to be Spanish to tell them apart. One of Miss de Larrocha's regrets is that the young Spanish composers of today are losing much of their regional, and even national, individuality. "We, too, have an avant-garde," she says, "and they compose in the international style, like everybody else. I am a little sorry that folklore is finished for now. But maybe it will come back."

Asked whether she plays, or intends to play, Spanish avant-garde music, she rolls her expressive dark eyes in

mock terror and exclaims: "Ah no, it is too difficult for me!"

Miss de Larrocha is one of those artists who made her first significant impact in the United States through recordings. Curiously, her first visit to the United States came as long ago as 1954. Alfred Wallenstein had heard her play in Spain and, impressed, invited her to appear with him and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, of which he was then conductor. She played a Mozart concerto and de Falla's *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* and was excellently received. On the way home she stopped off in New York for a Town Hall recital, and again the reviews were appreciative. But in terms of an American reengagement, nothing happened.

Miss de Larrocha says that the ensuing eleven-year interregnum, puzzling though it now seems, never bothered her. She had plenty of concerts to give in Europe, she was raising two children (now aged twelve and ten), and with her husband, pianist Juan Torra, she was directing the Marshall Piano Academy of Barcelona, founded by her teacher Frank Marshall, himself a pupil of Granados.

Besides, there were the records devoted mostly to Albéniz and Granados and garnering all sorts of European awards including a Grand Prix du Disque. Columbia contracted with the Spanish company Hispavox for release here of a two-record Epic album devoted to Albéniz's *Iberia*, hitherto known to most Americans in the Arbós orchestration.

Forthwith there was created in this country a kind of de Larrocha underground, made up of listeners who thought they never before had heard Spanish piano music presented with such subtle coloration, rhythmic vivacity, and dazzling technical mastery. Among the aficionados was musical agent Herbert Breslin, who wrote in 1965 to Miss de Larrocha asking (a) if she would like to come to the United States, and (b) if she was managed by anyone here. The respective answers being (a) yes and (b) no, Breslin set wheels in motion, with the result that Miss de Larrocha has been returning yearly ever since, under the management of Columbia Artists and with himself as personal representative.

Whatever her own feelings, Miss de Larrocha accepts philosophically the insistence of virtually all her audiences that she play Albéniz, Granados, and de Falla. "All over the world, they like Spanish music," she says. "Sometimes when it is asked for, I think 'Oh no, please, not again.' But always the moment I begin to play, I enjoy it. Besides, today I think it is good for every pianist to have a part of the repertoire he can call his own. But to me, an ideal program is one that is half standard and half Spanish. I love music, you know—every period, every century, every country."

HERBERT KUPFERBERG