

# Spanish music at its best

BY DAVID GWILT

Once again in the City Hall Concert Hall last night the Spanish National Orchestra under their conductor, Raphael Fruehbeck de Burgos, drew a highly enthusiastic response from the audience, in works by Turina, Falla and Stravinsky.

The programme opened with Turina's imploringly evocative Prayer of the Toreador. The strings of the orchestra sailed straight into the mood of the work, creating immediately in the hall a high intensity and depth of feeling.

The work is full of well known idiomatic Spanish musical gestures, but this time used with delicacy and subtlety to create a piece of great character, as by a Spanish Delius. There was a yearning tenderness of a peculiarly Spanish nature beautifully conveyed by the strings in some of the richest tones they have produced during their visit.

Alicia de Larrocha was the soloist in Falla's Nights in the Gardens of Spain. After her performance last Saturday in a piano recital it came as no surprise to find her a most authoritative interpreter of this work.

Mr Fruehbeck de Burgos was an attentive accompanist, leading the orchestra to support well both in timbre and volume (except in a very few places, where it hardly mattered), and also to follow the soloist's occasional finely balanced rubato.

There was always a delicacy of approach which helped much to bring out the special Spanish flavours, scents and dance rhythms of this work. A shade more incisiveness from the orchestra could at times have done much to underline the rhythms, but in spite of this the performance had all the descriptive power it needed.

Night-time Spain was brought most persuasively into the Concert Hall.

The second half consisted of that extraordinarily explosive work, The Rite of Spring by Stravinsky. This is a work of a pagan nature, deliberately



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eschewing much that was thought of as music in the early part of this century, and succeeding brilliantly in recreating in the concert hall the white heat of the middle of the fire of an impersonal sacrificial act.

Several aspects of the work are no longer so telling as they used to be, since sounds which were utterly strange at first have now been pitilessly analysed many times, so that a performance of the work nowadays needs to have a very high degree of burning intensity to succeed in fully engaging the emotions of the audience and taking them from the remote, glacial opening right up to the moment when the sacrificial victim dances herself to death.

Last night's performance had many of the necessary qualities. It was excellently balanced, leading inevitably towards the stunning final crash at the height of ritual passion, and with climaxes extremely well judged, and pagan, insistent rhythms splendidly stamped out both in pianissimo and fortissimo.

The brass could have been more incisive at times, and generally a more ruthlessly cutting edge to the tone and to individual chords would have raised the quality of implacability to yet higher levels.

Better integrated woodwind intonation would have improved many places, but why should one carp at a performance which laid bare so much of the work's stature, and which acted so powerfully upon the audience?

Two rousing Spanish encores rounded off a splendid evening.

## WHAT'S ON TODAY

City Hall Concert Hall, 7.30 pm: Concert by the Spanish National Orchestra and Hongkong Festival Chorus.

City Hall Theatre, 7.30 pm: Performance by Lucero Tena Spanish Dance Ensemble.

Hilton Hotel: Exhibition of paintings by Henry Wo Yee-kee.

Excelsior Hotel: Exhibition

of works by artist Brian Tilbrook.

Hongkong Hotel: Exhibition of sketches by Peter Chancellor.

Mandarin Hotel lobby: Exhibition of sculpture by Cheung Yee and Aries Lee.

Chinese University Department of Extramural Studies: Exhibition of Prints by Wu Hao.



Alicia de  
Larrocha

**EVEN fame is not without problems. In the case of diminutive Spanish pianist, Alicia de Larrocha, a reputation as one of the foremost interpreters of the piano repertoire, as well as of Spanish music, is no safeguard against professional and domestic complications.**

Always on the move, she has little time to work on new music. "Even for a programme three years ahead I can't include a new score, simply because I can't be sure I will be able to devote enough time to it."

In 11 years of appearances throughout the world, she has missed out on the childhood years of her two children — a son now 18 and a daughter of 16 — and the enjoyment of home life. Home — in Barcelona — is a few days' stop here and there between concert commitments.

Even special occasions, like her 25th wedding anniversary in June, have to take second place.

Alicia, on her fourth visit to Cape Town (she plays for the Concert Club on Monday and with the Cape Town symphony orchestra on Thursday) explained: "I tried to keep the date free, but couldn't avoid a recording engagement in London." Her husband, Juan Torro, a former piano teacher, now in a delicate state of health, paid her a surprise visit however.

"He is not allowed to travel, and without medical permission, came to

# Home a rare treat for pianist-on-the-move

London to be with me. After a heavy day in the recording studio, we had a quiet dinner together." Alicia wears a gold link bracelet, inscribed, "Alicia", as a reminder of that great day.

She also wears a small jade Buddha, given to her in America "for luck".

She's fuss-free as far as clothes are concerned. "When do I get time to shop? Going to a dress-maker is the biggest nightmare of my life. I just ask for something which will wash, not crease and can be thrown into a suitcase — even better fit into a pocket or handbag!"

More important are pianos. She has five at home. A grand on which she practises and one on which she plays for pleasure, two uprights are for two-piano arrangements, another for anyone else who would like to play...

It's difficult to imagine this tiny little woman with small, strong hands, as a temperamental infant who, at the age of 18 months, banged her head on the floor till it bled because her mother had locked the piano. She had her first lessons at the age of three.

"I'm not so much temperamental as variable. I can be happy, sad, irritable, depressed — every mood you can think of. And I do them all very well!"

It's when I'm depressed that I feel like giving up my life-on-the-move" (Alicia is fully booked till 1978). "But fortunately I'm a pianist first and foremost and when I get to the keyboard I forget my troubles."

She can practise for hours at a stretch without tiring. She also counts among her blessings the fact that she has learnt to relax during flights. "I just settle back and go to sleep."

"I am also lucky in that I have made many wonderful friends all over the world."

Family reunions for Alicia are a hectic rush. She has to condense into days what other wives and mothers do in months. Shopping for the children and for the house, spring-cleaning... she tackles all the chores with enthusiasm. "It's the one time my music suffers!"

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