

From Al Andalus to the Americas – An Odyssey of Spanish Song

PROGRAM NOTES

Lamma bada yatathanna, text 10th cent. Spain

Lamma bada yatathanna is a muwashshah, an Arabic-language poetic genre that appeared as a literary form in Al Andalus (medieval Iberia) beginning about the 10th century and was adopted by numerous Andalusian writers and poets. The root of the word muwashshah describes the highly ornamented scarves women wore in the period of al-Andalus, comparing them to the flowery language of the poem. The closest analogy of a muwashshah to modern writing would be lyric as opposed to epic poetry. The genre includes colloquial vocabulary and is light in theme, and treats such subjects as love and drinking of wine (or "divine intoxication" in Sufism). Although the poetic texts are from the Middle Ages, the music usually dates to 19th and 20th century Syrian, Egyptian and Ottoman composers. Lamma bada yatathanna is the most famous of these muwashshahat, and describes a man watching a woman's hips swaying as she walks and the glances she gives him, wondering if she will respond to his "complaint" of love.

Paseábase el rey moro (early 16th century)

Soon after the end of the Andalus period in 1492, when Granada fell to the catholic rulers King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, songs for vihuela called "villancicos" were written. Vihuelas were the defining musical instrument of late 15th and early 16th century Spain, and are shaped like a modern guitar, yet tuned in the manner of a lute (without frets). The anonymous poem, considered to be a translation from Arabic, and melody of this particular villancico is the song of a mudéjar (a Muslim subject living in Catholic territory of Spain) deal with the capture of Al Hama in 1482, which was a crushing defeat of the Moors by the Catholics, and foretold the fall of Granada in 1492 which marked the end of 800 years of Moorish rule in Spain.

Canciones Sefarditas (1975)

Manuel Valls (1920-1984), born in the Catalunya region of Spain, was a composer, arranger, pianist, music critic, and music educator. His compositions are described as eclectic and diverse, encompassing a wide variety of genres and forms, from many different sources. The beautiful arrangements (1975) for voice, flute and guitar is of 9 popular songs of the Sephardic Jews, whose ancestry and religious customs have historical ties to Spain where they dwelled until their expulsion in 1492, after which they dispersed to Morocco, Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria and other Mediterranean basin countries. Their language, Ladino, is a Spanish-variant language unique to them. The songs chosen by the composer for this collection are among the most well-known and beautiful, and their setting for voice, guitar, and flute maintains their authenticity and simplicity and evokes a medieval atmosphere through Valls' choice of instruments and his harmonic treatment of the songs. The texts are based on everyday occurrences in the lives of the Sephardim, including love gained (La rosa enflorece, also called Los bilbilicos), love lost (Adio querida), desire (Ven querida, Abrix, mi galanica, Paxaro d'Hermozura, Yo m'enamori d'un aire), longing (Irme quiero), humor (Ya viene el cativo) and a lullaby (Durme, durme). Only some of the Sephardic song repertoire can be traced back to the Andalus era, as a large number of the songs were changed, adapted, created or even re-created under the influence of the location of the communities spread out post-1492.

Canciones Españoles Antiguas (1933)

Federico Garcia Lorca (1898-1936) was an Andalusian poet from Granada. He was not only one of the greatest poets of Spain and the Spanish-speaking world, but also a highly skilled pianist, composer and artist. Lorca's interest in Arab-Andalusian culture, which he viewed as central to his identity as an Andalusian poet, was life-long and he regarded the Catholic re-conquest of Granada in 1492 as a tragic loss. Lorca along with his friend composer Manuel de Falla traveled together to the Spanish countryside to gather and arrange folk songs, particularly from Andalusia. Lorca and Falla believed that cante jondo ("deep song") of flamenco was what tied Spain to the orient and that its origins came from both Byzantine and Moorish music. Tragically, Lorca's life was cut short by assassination during the Spanish civil war, but not before he amassed a prolific literary and musical output in a career that spanned just 19 years. The three songs performed here all have Andalusian themes: *Las morillas de Jaen* recounts three beautiful young Moorish women (who

had become Christians) picking apples in a nearby orchard, intriguing a neighbor with their beauty; *Nana de Sevilla* is a captivating lullaby that maintains the tradition Lorca once lectured about regarding unsettling texts to lullabies, as it tells of a baby, abandoned by its Gypsy mother, whose father may or may not build it a cradle. *Sevillanas del Siglo XVIII* is an upbeat folk song set to the typical fast, triple meter Sevillana rhythm, and celebrates the men and women of Sevilla and Triana as they watch the flotilla gliding on the Guadalquivir river which separates the two opposing towns.

La maja dolorosa (1910)

Born in Barcelona, Enrique Granados (1867-1916) is considered one of the greatest of Spanish composers. Granados had a fulfilling yet short-lived career due to his untimely drowning on the Lusitania on his return from the New York premiere of his opera *Goyescas*. Granados' compositional style was heavily influenced by the painting style of his countryman Francisco De Goya, and he employed Goya's technique of mixing old and new styles into his own compositions. His work *La maja dolorosa* recounts in "¡Oh muerte cruel!" the immense shock and grief of a young "maja" at the death of her "majo" (majos and majas are tough, street-wise Madrid natives), in "¡Ay majo de mi vida!" her lamenting his absence, and in "De aquel majo amante" her coming-to-terms with the loss through fond memories. The song texts by Periquet capture the feel of 18th century Madrid, and Granados uses the influence of Spanish dances to enhance the "nationalism" throughout the dramatic pieces.

Violeta (Colores) (1922)

A native of Madrid, Julián Bautista was a member of Generation of '27 and the Group of Eight, the latter of which also included composers Jesús Bal y Gay, Ernesto Halffter and his brother Rodolfo, Juan José Mantecón, Fernando Remacha, Rosa García Ascot, Salvador Bacarisse and Gustavo Pittaluga. He composed the soundtracks to 37 movies in addition to more than 30 other classical works. 'Violeta' is part of a larger collection called "Colores", written in 1921-22 at a time when the composer was submerged in the impressionistic style. In these pieces the composer subjectively represents each color, with a clear influence by Debussy. However, there are many distinctive elements of the composer's personality and Spanish background, including imitation of guitar strumming and dissonances that result in surprising chord progressions. Julián Bautista emigrated to Argentina at the start of the Civil War, where he ended up spending the rest of his life and where he befriended Manuel de Falla, Juan José Castro and other relevant composers of his generation.

Canciones del Jardín Secreto (2001)

Antón García Abril (1933-1921) was one of Spain's foremost 20th-21st century composers, and is especially noted for his large canon of works written for the voice. His five *Canciones del Jardín Secreto* are set to Spanish translations of Arabic poetry (except for one which is kept in the original) written during the nearly 800-year Moorish era of Al Andalus that began in 711 and ended with the fall of Granada in 1492, as well as the "Golden Age of Islam" of the 9th and 10th centuries, centered in Baghdad. The five poems set in this song cycle were penned by Baba al-Din Zuhayr from Mecca, Arabia, lauded as the best prose and verse writer of his time, and whose poem, "Ausente de mis ojos," laments the solitariness the writer feels at the "absence from his eyes" of his beloved; Rabia Al-Adawiyya, a well-known and celebrated female poet from Basra, whose poem "Los dos amores" speaks of the two types of love for the object of her desire: a love of passion, and another one that "you truly deserve"; Abu Abdullah, also known as Boabdil, the last Moorish king before Granada's fall to the Spanish "reyes católicos" Ferdinand and Isabella, whose famous lament describes his devastation at the loss of his beloved Alhambra hanina ("longed-for"); Al Farazdaq, also from Basra, recognized as one of the finest classical Arab poets, whose poem "Te seguiré llorando" depicts the poet following beloved weeping, until his eyes leave him without water; and finally, Ben Jafacha, one of the greatest of Andalusian poets, famous for his descriptions of gardens, whose poem "El Jardín de Al Andalus" exults in the beauty of the lush fields, gardens, woods and rivers of Andalusia.

Danza ritual del fuego (Ritual Fire Dance - *El amor brujo*)

Manuel de Falla, considered one of Spain's greatest composers, was born in Cádiz in Andalusia where he spent his formative years studying piano, theory, and counterpoint. By the age of 20 he was living in Madrid, studying at the Real Conservatorio de Música y Declamación, garnering attention and prizes for many of his student works. It was in Madrid

he first became interested in the music of his native Andalusia, particularly flamenco. After living in Paris for seven years, he returned to Madrid, where in 1915 he composed the pantomime-ballet “El Amor Brujo” (‘Love, the Magician’), originally published as an orchestral piece and considered part of the composer’s ‘Andalusian period’. The Ritual Fire Dance is one of the most well-known pieces of the ballet and of the piano repertoire thanks to Anton Rubinstein, who played it often as an encore. In this piece, the main character Candelas, dances around a fire casting a spell, to expel the ghost of her dead lover.

Poema en forma de canciones (1917)

Joaquín Turina (1882-1949) was born in Seville into a middle class yet artistic household. A child prodigy, he began composing at the age of 14. At age 23 he moved to Paris where he met fellow Spanish composers Isaac Albéniz and Manuel de Falla. Albéniz, noting his Seville roots, encouraged him to find inspiration for his composing in the popular music of Spain and Andalucía. The successful outcome of Turina’s meeting Albéniz and Falla was a plethora of compositions that established Turina as one of the outstanding Spanish composers of the early 1900s. Nearly all of his works evoked the sounds of Spain, and more specifically Andalusia. He once said, “My music is the expression of the feeling of a true Sevillian who did not know Seville until he left it... yet, it is necessary for the artist to move away to get to know his country, just as it is for the painter who takes some steps backwards to be able to take in the complete picture.” His style is most exemplified in his lyrical and romantic Poema en forma de canciones, a song cycle that looks into the mind of a man wildly obsessed with a certain woman. The first song, Nunca olvida, deals with unrequited love and the resulting bitterness: “I shall never be able to forgive you, whom I have loved so much.” This is followed by Cantares, the most popular song in the cycle, composed in the “cante jondo” flamenco mold. In this song the singer stresses the more he flees from his lover, the closer he feels to her. Los dos miedos is a bitter-sweet reflection on the whimsy of love -- last night he feared being too close to his lover, yet this morning he is frightened to be far from him. Finally the upbeat, “Las locas por amor” poses the question to the goddess Venus – do you prefer a long-lasting, sensible love?; her answer is, “like most women, I prefer to love fleetingly and with passion.”

Un dia de Noviembre (1968)

Leo Brouwer is a Cuban composer, guitarist and conductor. He descends from a long line of musicians – he is the grandson of the Cuban composer and pianist Ernestina Lecuona de Brouwer, grandnephew of the great musician, composer and conductor Ernesto Lecuona and cousin of Margarita Lecuona, author of the famous songs, “Babalú” and “Tabú”, made famous by Desi Arnaz. Brouwer’s early works represent his Cuban context and show the influence of Afro-Cuban music and its rhythmic style. Un Día de Noviembre, written as part of the soundtrack of a Cuban film by the same name, is an intimate work that he composed with a clear influence of the romantic music that characterized the style of Spanish composer Francisco Tárrega.

Cinco Canciones Populares Argentinas (1943)

Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983) was born in Buenos Aires to a Catalan father and an Italian mother. He is one of Argentina’s two foremost composers, the other being Carlos Guastavino, and considered one of the most important classical composers in all Latin America through his works for most vocal and instrumental combinations, including opera and ballet. His Cinco Canciones Populares are settings of folk melodies, in which Ginastera’s contributions are the sophisticated piano parts. They reflect his consistent interest in Argentine folklore (country music, combining equal parts of the colonial Spanish tradition with indigenous elements) as opposed to urban music, such as tango. The set is reminiscent, in scope and mastery, of Manuel De Falla’s Siete canciones populares españolas, with which Ginastera is likely to have been acquainted. (De Falla, in fact, spent the last years of his life (1939-1946) in exile in Argentina.) “Chacarera” (literally, from the farm) is the generic name of a lively, syncopated dance, in this case, with humorous commentaries about a snub-nosed bride. “Triste” (Sad) features a minimalist accompaniment which emulates the sound of Andean flutes, as well as an arpeggio consisting of the notes of the open strings of a guitar. “Zamba” (another generic dance name, not to be confused with the Brazilian Samba) features a moderate tempo and wistful words of love. “Arroró” (Lullaby) is perhaps the most international of the set, a melody that is recognizable, with variations, in most Spanish speaking countries. Finally, “Gato” (literally “Cat”, but also the name of a folk dance) features short sung verses

on various unrelated subjects, with an accompaniment which reminds us of some of the best piano pieces of Bartok and Milhaud. (Program note © Pablo Zinger).