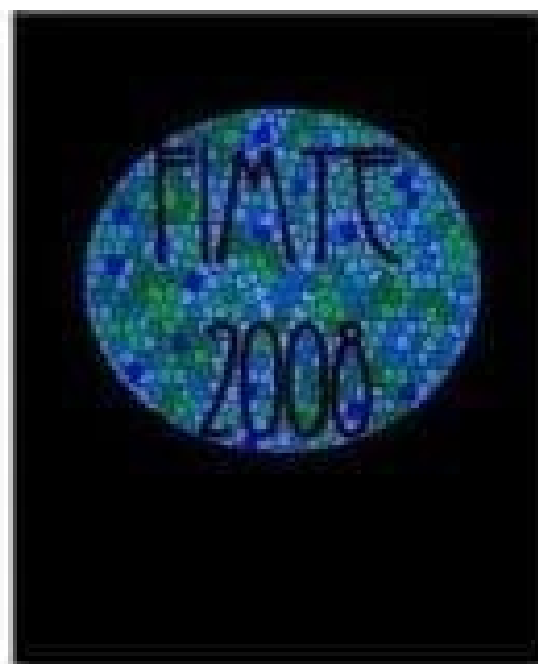


Pre-Iberia: From Masarnau to Albéniz

REDACCIÓN

The IX Festival Internacional de Música de Tecla Española “Diego Fernández” took place in Garrucha, Almería, October 9-12, 2008 . Dedicated this year to Spanish piano music of the nineteenth century, it focused on composers, works, and stylistic features antecedent to the greatest manifestation of Spanish piano composition, *Iberia*, by Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909). Hence, the title of this year’s conference: *Pre-Iberia: From Masarnau to Albéniz*. This year’s festival was organized by Luisa Morales, founder and director of FIMTE, and Walter A. Clark, professor of musicology at the University of California, Riverside, and author of the well-known biography *Isaac Albéniz: Retrato de un romántico* (Turner, 2002). The festival featured papers and concerts presented by distinguished scholars and performers from Spain, Great Britain, the United States, and Australia. The proceedings will be published in 2009.



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The festival was dedicated to the memory of Albéniz, the centenary of whose death will be celebrated in 2009 (and the sesquicentennial of his birth, in 2010). Albéniz and his friend and compatriot Enrique Granados (keep 2016 on you radar, as events in the US and Spain are now being planned for his death centenary as well) are rightly viewed as having defined Spanish nationalism in music and are credited with creating a renaissance of Spanish music around 1900, vaulting Spanish composition to international renown and laying the groundwork for all the illustrious composers who followed them, including Falla, Turina, Rodrigo, Moreno Torroba, and Rodrigo. But it is important to understand that Albéniz and Granados did not appear out of nowhere, and less celebrated names prepared the foundation for them, even as they did for those who followed them. This important festival was dedicated to exploring that foundation in the 1800s and even 1700s. The sessions explored topics ranging from Albéniz’s historic context to his the evolution of his musical style, and finally the recovery and rediscovery of his works. Several wonderful

performances and lecture-demonstrations gave audible proof of the significance of this repertoire.

Certainly piano pedagogy played a crucial role in this development, for Albéniz was, above all else, the greatest piano virtuoso Spain produced during that epoch (perhaps ever). Although he was a bona fide prodigy, he nonetheless benefited from studies at the Real Conservatorio in the 1870s. Laura de Miguel Fuertes (Complutense) delved into the history of the piano chair at the Conservatorio from 1830 through the 1870s, focusing special attention on Pedro Pérez de Albéniz (no relation to Isaac) and Manuel Mendizábal, with whom Isaac Albéniz studied. Another important pedagogue was Joan Baptista Pujol in Barcelona. Journalist and musicologist Mònica Pagès i Santacana shed welcome light on his academy and the distinguished roster of pupils it produced, including Granados, Vidiella, Malats and Viñes. Of special interest were the papers on prominent pianist-composers of the 1800s. Although José Inzenga is best remembered today for his important collections of regional folklore, Inmaculada Matía Polo (Complutense) explained the significance of his piano compositions, which reveal the strong influence of Chopin. Ramón María Montilla Romero was from Jaén and studied in Málaga and Paris. As Consuelo Pérez Colodrero (Universidad de Granada) pointed out, though Romero is far less celebrated than Albéniz, he nonetheless wrote impressive works in a wide variety of genres. Finally, Santiago de Masarnau was one of the principal progenitors of Romanticism in Spanish music, a topic elucidated by Gemma Salas Villar (Conservatorio Superior, Oviedo). Of course, the manufacture and marketing of pianos was the central economic force in all of this cultural activity, and María Belén Vargas Liñán (Universidad de Almería) provided useful insights into the piano market in Granada from the 1830s to 1870s.

Albéniz's dramatic stylistic evolution was made apparent by Pola Baytelman (Skidmore College) in her lecture-recital presenting works beginning with the Pavana-capricho of 1882 and concluding with El Albaicín of 1906. Despite all its Frenchified sophistication, the latter exhibits the same lyric gift as the former. Desirée García (Complutense) made useful comparisons of Iberia with the piano works of Albéniz's fellow Catalan Frederic Mompou. True, Albéniz's Andalusian orientation has nothing in common with Mompou's style, but Iberia is consistent with the Catalan fascination with Andalusia, and portrays it from a distinctly Catalan perspective. Walter Clark (University of California, Riverside), established the probable influence of Sebastián Iradier on Albéniz, particularly in the use of the habanera, often referred to by Albéniz in his works as a "tango," a generic name for different styles of Latin American popular song and dance. Michael Cristoforidis (University of Melbourne) placed Albéniz's late works in the context of Alhambrism in fin-de-siècle Paris, viewing it as a manifestation of the French fascination with Granada as the juncture of East and West. In the performance history of Iberia, Blanche Selva is a dominant figure, as she gave the official premieres of it. Her collaboration with Albéniz was the subject of a presentation by Montserrat Font Batallé (Universidades de Barcelona y Granada). Barry Ife (Giuldhall School, London) concluded this session with further contextualization, pointing out the relevance of the Generation of '98 to Albéniz's Iberia.

Despite the considerable scholarship done on Albéniz's works over the last two decades, new discoveries continue to be made. Mac Maclure (Barcelona), recording artist and editor

of the most recent edition of Albéniz's songs, talked on and demonstrated Albéniz's pianism from the standpoint of his songs, the late examples of which demonstrate the same pianistic style as Iberia. Of course, Iberia is Albéniz's most celebrated and recorded work, and Alfonso Pérez Sánchez (Complutense), presented groundbreaking research on the discographic history of this colossal masterpiece. Milton Laufer is not only an outstanding pianist but also runs a business that digitizes and restores historic recordings. He has added to the list of Albéniz's works by transcribing and publishing the three "impromptus" that Albéniz recorded on wax cylinders in 1903. His performance of these works was one of the highpoints of the festival.

Eminent Albéniz authority Jacinto Torres (Real Conservatorio) was the featured presenter at the festival. Renowned for his catalog of Albéniz's works and other pioneering research, he presented valuable insights into the eclectic nature of the stylistic influences in Albéniz's music, particularly Scarlatti. He cautioned against facile assignments of this or that style of folklore to a particular piece, however, pointing out the stylized character of so many of Albéniz's nationalist references. Walter Clark, author not only of a biography of Albéniz but more recently of Granados, discussed the close personal relationship between the two men, exemplified in the works by Albéniz that Granados completed or arranged. The conference concluded with a forum on the considerable impact of Spanish piano music on European music in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Several concerts added luster to the festival this year, including a memorable appearance by Luisa Morales playing eighteenth-century harpsichord music, especially Soler and Scarlatti, to accompany the enchanting dancing and castanet playing of Cristóbal Salvador, thus demonstrating the eighteenth-century origins of Spanish nationalism in music. Valvanera Briz's recital of works by Mateo and Pedro Albéniz, Masarnau, Pujol, Marcial del Adalid, Eduardo Ocón y Rivas, as well as Isaac Albéniz and Joaquín Malats was a revelation and absolutely central to the theme of this year's festival. Shuann Chai brilliantly placed Albéniz's music in a Parisian context, presenting several of his celebrated works alongside Spanish evocations by Debussy and Ravel. The festival concluded with an unforgettable recital of songs by Albéniz, Mompou, Granados, and Falla, marvelously rendered by mezzosoprano Marisa Martins and pianist Mac Maclure.

This festival provided further evidence that FIMTE is among the most important annual celebrations of Spanish music. What does the tenth festival hold in store? That remains a secret known only to Luisa. One thing is certain: it will be worth attending.