



Lise de la Salle

April 21 & 23, 2023

PROGRAM NOTES

Support for the program notes is generously provided by Roberta Viviano.

ISAAC ALBÉNIZ

(CAMPRODÓN, GERONA, SPAIN, 1860–CAMBO-LES-BAINS, FRANCE, 1909)

Cantos de España (1891-1894)

Spanish pianist Isaac Albéniz was a child prodigy who traveled the world with his father performing throughout Spain and the Spanish colonies. This transient upbringing led to interruptions in Albéniz's formal musical training, but he eventually attended the Brussels Conservatory to study piano with Louis Brassin. Albéniz returned to Madrid in 1880 where he presented piano concerts, conducted a touring zarzuela company, and studied composition. Although other Romantic composers were fascinated with Spanish music, most famously heard in Georges Bizet's *Carmen* (1875), Albéniz became the first composer to transfer the unique rhythmic and articulative properties of Spanish flamenco music to the piano. Not surprisingly, Albéniz eventually found that his stylizations of Spanish guitar music appealed more to the French than Spaniards. His dramatic works and operas were well received in Paris and he briefly taught piano at the Schola Cantorum. Albéniz enjoyed the support of French colleagues, but suffered from Bright's disease, which made it difficult for him to tolerate the capital's erratic, and often cloudy, weather for lengthy periods of time.

Albéniz's *Cantos de España* is typical of his mature style prior to his incorporation of French Impressionistic compositional techniques into his works, which are heard in his large-scale piano work *Iberia* (1905-1908). *Cantos* begins with a prelude (also well-known as *Asturias* in a solo guitar transcription) that features a feisty rhythmic pattern, clearly derived from the syncopated accents and repeated notes that characterize flamenco guitar performance. *Oriental* shifts to a melancholic mood, quickly clearing as Albéniz depicts swaying palm trees in *Bajo la palmera* (Under the Palm

Tree). Next, Albéniz uses the piano's lower register to evoke the tolling of church bells, which welcome us into his musical portrayal of the city of Córdoba, steeped in both Christian and Islamic religious history. A slow hymn in Dorian mode contrasts with delicately decorated Spanish folk music. The piece concludes with a collection of *Seguidillas*, the catchy popular song and dance style that garnered so much foreign appreciation for Spanish music.

ALBERTO GINASTERA

(BUENOS AIRES, 1916–GENEVA, 1983)

Three Argentinian Dances (1937)

Alberto Ginastera began composing in the early 1930s while progressing through studies at the Conservatorio Williams and the National Conservatory. He was a very careful and self-critical composer, but gained confidence when his *Panambí* ballet suite was performed at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires in 1937 while he was still a student. That work, like *Three Argentinian Dances*, is representative of Ginastera's early nationalistic style, which defined his compositional approach until around 1947. His compositional palette broadened after he received a Guggenheim grant and spent 1945-1947 in the United States, where he became close friends with Aaron Copland and had the opportunity to visit a number of music schools on the East Coast.

The set begins with “Dance of the Old Herdsman,” which ironically sounds like a frenzy of youthful vitality, generated by Ginastera's bold use of cluster chords and bitonality (the right hand plays in the key of C major while the left hand plays in Db Major). The hauntingly beautiful melody of “Dance of the Graceful Maiden” creeps in over an ostinato in the bass line. This melody continues to evolve as Ginastera varies its colors with a plethora of added chromatic tones and dense textures before circling back to the original version for the conclusion, now in a duet voicing with parallel thirds. Ginastera's portrayal of the mischievous gaucho makes for a rousing final movement with a rapidly-moving bass line, wild glissandi, and off-beat accents.

FRANZ LISZT

(DOBORJÁN (RAIDING), HUNGARY, 1811–BAYREUTH, GERMANY, 1886)

Mephisto Waltz No. 1 (1859-1862)

Sonata in B minor (1853)

In 1848, Franz Liszt voluntarily walked away from his brilliant decade-long stint as a concertizing piano virtuoso and settled in Weimar, Germany where

he assumed the post of Kapellmeister-in-Extraordinary to the Grand Duke of Weimar. This position enabled him to focus on composition and recruit excellent musicians for his orchestra. He was also in the throes of a love affair with Princess Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein, a very wealthy, but married, aristocrat who followed Liszt to Weimar and financially underwrote their “Altenburg” home, which became a welcoming abode for visiting artists. Liszt completed the groundbreaking Sonata in B minor in 1853, but it did not receive its public premiere until 1857 when Liszt’s student Hans von Bülow performed the work to mixed reviews in Berlin.

Many nineteenth-century piano composers sought to differentiate their works from Beethoven’s output of thirty-two piano sonatas by creating programmatic instrumental music that portrays great literary works, or is inspired by poetry or visual art. Franz Liszt was a pioneering figure in this sector as he invented the symphonic poem genre and composed twelve works in this genre between 1848 and 1857. In the Sonata in B minor, the only piece that Liszt titled as a standard sonata, Liszt also builds on structural innovations to sonata form established by Franz Schubert and Robert Schumann, which are now termed “double function form.” In works like Schubert’s *Wanderer Fantasy* (1822) and Schumann’s Fourth Symphony (1841, rev. 1851) a single continuous sonata form unfolds over the course of a multimovement work performed without breaks between the movements, thus linking the thematic material in the “fourth movement” (which contains the recapitulation of the sonata form) to the “first movement” (the exposition of the sonata form). In Liszt’s sonata, a slow section (“second” movement) and fugal scherzo (“third” movement) comprise the development section.

Ironically, Liszt’s sonata is one of his few pieces that appears unconnected to extramusical sources, but many critics are convinced of its programmatic content. Kenneth Hamilton, a pianist and Liszt scholar, reports that although neither Liszt nor his students ever mentioned a program tied to the piece, it has often been described “as another commentary on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Faust*—a pianistic double, therefore, of the *Faust* symphony. Other suggested interpretations include the autobiographical (a ‘character sketch’ of the composer himself) and the eschatological (a musical version of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*).”

Later, Liszt overtly displays his fascination with the *Faust* legend in his four Mephisto Waltzes, completed between 1862 and 1885. The first waltz depicts a scene from Nikolaus Lenau’s 1836 dramatic adaptation of Goethe’s *Faust* as denoted in the published score:

There is a wedding feast in progress in the village inn, with music, dancing, carousing. Mephistopheles and Faust pass by, and Mephistopheles induces Faust to enter and take part in the festivities. Mephistopheles snatches the fiddle from the hands of a lethargic fiddler and draws from it indescribably seductive and intoxicating strains. The amorous Faust whirls about with a full-blooded village beauty in a wild dance; they waltz in mad abandon out of the room, into the open, away into the woods. The sounds of the fiddle grow softer and softer, and the nightingale warbles his love-laden song.

Program Notes © Dr. Jessica Payette, Associate Professor of Music, Oakland University.

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