

# *A Singing Flame*

## *The Soul of Spanish Music*

Script by James Melo based on writings by Victor Hugo, Théophile Gautier, Washington Irving and Federico García Lorca, through the voice of Miguel de Unamuno.

### *Ensemble for the Romantic Century*

**Thursday, 5 December 2002, 8:00 PM**

**The Kosciuszko Foundation  
15 East 65 Street, New York**

**Michael Goldstrom** portraying Miguel de Unamuno

**Ole Akahoshi**, cello  
**Max Barros**, piano  
**Maria Ferrante**, soprano  
**Christopher Collins Lee**, violin  
**Donald T. Sanders**, stage director  
**Benjamin Verdery**, guitar

**Max Barros**, co-artistic director; **James Melo**, musicologist in residence; **Eve Wolf**, co-artistic director

We would like to extend our special thanks to

**Thomas J. Pniewski**, Director of Cultural Affairs at the Kosciuszko Foundation, for making this series possible.

*Cover: ornamental detail from the Great Mosque in Córdoba*

## PROGRAM

ISAAC ALBÉNIZ

*Evocación (from Iberia)*  
*Asturias (from Suite Española)*

FRANCISCO TÁRREGA

*Recuerdos de la Alhambra*

MANUEL DE FALLA

*Canciones Populares Españolas*  
- Nana  
- Polo

PABLO DE SARASATE

*Romanza Andaluza, op. 22, no. 1*

ENRIQUE GRANADOS

*Danza Española no. 5 (Andaluza)*  
arr. for cello and piano by M. Calvo

FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA

*Canciones Españolas Antiguas*  
- El Café de Chinitas  
- Anda, jaleo

## INTERMISSION

FEDERICO MOMPOU

*Cantar del Alma*  
*Jo et pressentia com la mar*

JOAQUÍN TURINA

*Piano Trio no. 1, op. 35*  
- Prélude et Fugue  
- Thème et variations  
- Sonate

## PROGRAM NOTES

During much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Spanish music was predicated on forms and genres imported from other musical cultures in Europe, especially Italian opera and the instrumental music of the Austrian-German tradition. This was the result of a pronounced musical decadence after the Spanish Golden Age (the 16<sup>th</sup> century), and which caused Spain to lag behind the musical developments taking place in other European countries. Towards the middle of the century, however, the influx of nationalist ideas prepared the way for the emergence of musical traditions that had been dormant, such as those of Scandinavia and Eastern Europe. Spain was a latecomer in this scenario, insofar as the true foundations for Spanish musical nationalism were established only in the last decade of the century.

In 1898, a group of intellectuals, writers, artists, philosophers, and musicians became systematically preoccupied with what they called “the Spanish problem,” an awareness that Spanish culture was in need of revitalization. It dates from this time the first consistent efforts to research, codify, and explore the musical traditions of the country. Composers responded by incorporating folk themes in their works, or by composing in a manner that would evoke the folk traditions of the different regions of Spain. Andalusia, the region in southern Spain in which the Arab influence was most prominent, was one of the first to attract attention, and soon it became the stereotypical symbol of Spanish musical culture.

Spanish nationalism, even though it developed relatively late in comparison with that of other European countries, was guided by the same principles:

- The validation of the musical folklore as a source of inspiration;
- The exaltation of nationalist ideas as a motivation for developing a musical style that reflected the cultural heritage;
- The need to blend the local traditions with a cosmopolitan musical language, so that the musical heritage of the country could have a place in the larger European context;
- The need to eliminate any suggestion of cultural inferiority in relation to other European musical traditions.

The late development of Spanish musical nationalism also has implications for the definition of Romanticism in Spain. With very few exceptions, musical Romanticism persisted in Spain into the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a period when other European countries were engaged in fostering modernism. This is not to say that Spanish composers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were immune to avant-garde influences,

but it was clear that the long project of revitalizing the country's own musical traditions was still under way. In tonight's program, the composers featured in the first half were all directly connected with this process of nationalist revival, while the two composers in the second half represent a more universalist approach. The triumvirate of Spanish nationalism is formed by Isaac Albéniz, Enrique Granados and Manuel de Falla. Collectively, their works offer a comprehensive inventory of Spain's musical traditions, and the forms they cultivated served as models for successive generations of composers.

**Isaac Albéniz** (1860-1909) was a child prodigy who gave his first public recital on the piano at the age of four, and was admitted to the famous Conservatoire in Paris at the age of six. Two years later he undertook a series of concert tours that brought him to South America, Cuba, and the United States. His career as a composer began under the influence of Liszt, but the composer Felipe Pedrell urged him to concentrate on developing a style that was specifically Spanish. Albéniz's first attempt in this direction was the *Suite Española*, which he began in 1886. The importance of the suite (which comprises 8 pieces) resides in the characterization of each region of Spain through distinctive rhythmic and melodic features. In *Asturias*, however, the character is more typically Andalusian, expressed with great vivacity as the piano texture imitates the sonorities of the guitar. The percussive opening, driven forward through a series of repeated notes, gives way to a central section of great evocative power, with some chords resembling the strumming of the guitar. The opening section is repeated, created a balanced A-B-A form.

The suite *Iberia*, composed between 1906 and 1909, is far more ambitious. It consists of four separate books, each one containing pieces that represent "impressions" of Spain, more specifically from Andalusia. The suite is one of the most difficult works in the piano repertory, and its technical complexities even led the composer to consider destroying it because he believed it to be unplayable. Mercifully, he opened the suite with a piece of great poetic beauty, *Evocación*, whose difficulties are primarily interpretative. It is a musical reverie that unfolds through a melody which is subjected to subtle variations, moving freely in different registers of the piano. The melody is enveloped by a variety of accompaniment patterns, creating a musical texture that is rich yet transparent.

**Francisco Tárrega** (1852-1909) was one of the most famous guitarists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whose influence extended well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was hailed as "the Sarasate of the guitar", which was a direct acknowledgment of his consummate virtuosity. Tárrega wrote 78 works for guitar, in addition to 120 transcriptions, all of which occupy an important place in guitar pedagogy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Recuerdos de la Alhambra*, one of his most famous works, was described by the composer as a study in tremolo, a feature that gives the piece a certain hypnotic quality. It remains a favorite piece among guitarists.

**Manuel de Falla** (1876-1946) loved the region of Andalusia, and was captivated by the musical traditions of the gypsies, which he had many opportunities to experience in his

trips to Granada. This contact with gypsy music and dance undoubtedly influenced not only his compositions but also his perception of Spain's musical traditions, as seen in his articles and essays. Falla's knowledge of the Spanish folklore extended to several fields, and he made extensive use of it in the only work considered to be genuinely based on folk music: the *Siete Canciones Populares Españolas*, composed in Paris in 1914 to fulfill a commission from a Spanish singer. The songs are based on anonymous texts from various regions of Spain, for which Falla wrote music that preserves the popular character while at the same time being suitable for the recital hall. The composer himself expounded his views on the use of folk elements in the context of art song:

I humbly think that in popular song the spirit is more important than the letter. Rhythm, modality and melodic intervals that determine their cadences and undulations are the very essence of these songs; the rhythmic and harmonic accompaniment of a popular song is as important as the song itself. Therefore, inspiration must come directly from the people, and whoever does not understand this will only manage to create a work that is nothing more than a clever imitation of his original intentions (*On Music and Musicians*).

The two songs included in this program (*Nana* and *Polo*) are vivid testimonies of this aesthetic premise. They represent two contrasting types of folk song: a lullaby and a dramatic song that could well figure in the flamenco repertory. In both, the musical texture is appropriate to the expressive demands placed on the voice, which range from the delicate enunciation of *Nana* to the full-throated wails of *Polo*.

In an article for the *Revista Musical Hispanoamericana* (1916), Falla commented on the works of **Enrique Granados** (1867-1916):

I start writing in deep emotion after experiencing the music of Enrique Granados, music that so many times conjured up things and beings from times past, and now helps me to evoke the great artist who composed it. Those of us who have had the good fortune to hear him perform his own works never forget the strong aesthetic impression we experienced. Therefore now, while playing those of his piano works I most prefer, I unconsciously repeated the rhythmic accents, the nuances, the inflections which he used to impress on his music. And, in doing so, it seemed to me that the soul of Granados was present in the tremulous sonorities he wrote down for us, as if it were his testament.

Granados, who was terrified of the ocean, had recently died as he was sailing with his wife back to Europe after the premiere of the opera *Goyescas* in New York. While crossing the English Channel on board the *Sussex*, a German submarine torpedoed the ship and Granados died trying to save his wife, who also drowned. The 12 *Danzas Españolas*, originally written for piano, form a tapestry of Spain's musical traditions, each one having a distinctive character that can be associated with a particular region of Spain. They were performed for the first time by the composer himself, in Barcelona in 1890. In these pieces, Granados's nationalism is mostly evident, but there is no

quotation of folk material. All the themes are original, but the inspiration from Spanish traditions is obvious. The *Danza Española* no. 5, subtitled “Andaluza” by the publisher (Granados gave a specific title to only one of the dances) recalls the characteristic rhythmic and melodic features of southern Spain, the region in which the Islamic influence was stronger.

The same character informs the *Romanza Andaluza* by **Pablo de Sarasate** (1844-1908), who was one of the most famous violin virtuosos of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sarasate composed four books of Spanish dances (opuses 21, 22, 23, and 26) in which he used folk themes as the basis for compositions that are at once elegant and rich in local flavor. The *Romanza Andaluza* comes from the second book, which was published in Berlin in 1879. The writing for the violin is indicative of the composer’s skills in his instrument, as it evokes the bloom and sweetness of tone for which Sarasate was renowned.

It is not widely known that the great Spanish poet **Federico García Lorca** (1899-1936) intended to be a musician. In fact, in an interview in 1929 he declared that he was “above all a musician”, an statement that had even greater significance because by then he was acknowledged as the greatest Spanish poet alive. Lorca came from a musical family, and his childhood was marked by contact with different musical genres and styles. He was particularly captivated by the folk songs that the family maids sang. He received some formal musical training in his early years, and was even encouraged to go to Paris to pursue his musical vocation. In 1919 met the composer Manuel de Falla, an encounter that marked him profoundly. Falla became for him a role model, a source of musical knowledge, and a mentor. Lorca was particularly attracted to Falla’s ability to fuse popular and classical elements in his compositions, something that he attempted to achieve in his poetic works and, later, in the *Trece Canciones Españolas Antiguas*. These songs are the offshoots of Lorca’s own performances, as he entertained his friends by singing folk songs for which he provided his own accompaniments. In this collection, most of the songs come from old Spanish *cancioneros* (songbooks), with which Lorca was thoroughly familiar. He attached great importance to these *cancioneros* as the depositories of Spain’s rich musical traditions, and often emphasized the need to study and preserve this repertory:

Unfortunately, in Spain, songbooks have been plundered or spoilt and murdered... As Falla has already said: – It is not possible to copy songs onto music paper, they must be recorded on gramophones so that they do not lose the indefinable element which contributes more than anything else to their beauty– ... Songs are delicate creatures which have to be looked after so that their rhythm is in no way altered. Each song is a marvel of balance, which can easily be broken (*The Early Andalusian Songs*).

*El Café de Chinitas* and *Anda, jaleo* are both energetic, rhythmically incisive songs, and both demonstrate Lorca’s perceptiveness about the individual characterization of the poems.

Recently, the pianist Stephen Hough offered the following characterization of the music of **Federico Mompou** (1893-1987):

The music of Mompou is the music of evaporation. The printed page seems to have faded, as if the bar lines, time signatures, key signatures, and even the notes themselves have disappeared over a timeless number of years. There is no development of material, little counterpoint, no drama nor climaxes to speak of; and this simplicity of expression—elusive, evasive, and shy—is strangely disarming. There is nowhere for the sophisticate to hide with Mompou. We are in a glasshouse, and the resulting transparency is unnerving, for it creates a reflection in which our face and soul can be seen.

The song *Cantar del Alma*, based on a text by the Spanish mystic San Juan de la Cruz, is a perfect example of such simplicity and economy of means. The song consists of a short piano section which alternates with the voice, each working as a foil for the expressive declamations of the other. At no moment does the piano actually accompany the voice, so that the vocal line is left floating, free from any harmonic anchoring except the reminiscence of what the piano played before, as an echo from a vanished world. As the voice is completely exposed, so is the soul that sings in it. In *Jo et pressentia com la mar*, based on a text in Catalan, a certain medieval flavor seems to color the entire song. The imagery of the poem prompted Mompou to explore a musical texture that is far more exuberant than that of *Cantar del Alma*. The unbounded quality of the love expressed in the song is matched by the equally free and impassioned musical setting.

**Joaquín Turina** (1882-1949) occupies an intermediate position between the strongly nationalist school centered on Albéniz, Granados and Falla, and the cosmopolitan approach that characterized some avant-garde composers in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Turina's music reveals a neoclassical style that owes much to his studies with Vincent d'Indy at the Schola Cantorum in Paris. His concern with formal clarity is balanced by a musical language of great sensuality, shimmering sound effects, and fertile melodic invention.

Turina composed three piano trios, each one representing a different phase in his stylistic evolution. The *Piano Trio op. 35* was composed in 1926. The composer himself described the work as follows:

The first movement is unbelievably difficult technically. It is a prelude and fugue, the latter in reversed sequence, beginning with the *stretti*. The Variations, based on popular themes, and the finale are more benevolent.

The *Trio* is structured as a sequence of three movements, each one based on a classical musical form that is clearly stated in the titles for each of them. This neoclassical framework is enlivened by a variety of rhythmic and melodic elements that have a strongly nationalist flavor. For instance, in the central variations, Turina employs rhythmic figures derived from several popular dances of the time, so that it functions as

a tour of Spain's musical heritage: the *muniera* from Galicia; the *schotis* from Castile, the *zortziko* from the Basque Provinces, the *jota* from Aragon, and finally the *soleares* from Andalusia. The framing movements are more abstract in the use of musical material, following compositional procedures that are dictated by the strictness of their formal models. In spite of the use of Spanish traditional material, at times the musical language of this trio betrays the influence of French impressionism, especially in its colorful harmonic vocabulary. The work was premiered in London on 5 July 1927, with the composer as the pianist. It is dedicated to Her Royal Highness L'Infante Dona Isabel de Borbon.

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