

Isaac Albéniz - Orchestral music (Jaime Martin) [2010]



1. *Catalonia* Escenes Sinfòniques Catalanes (World Premiere Recording) 2. *Au village* 3. *Idylle* 4. *Serenade* 5. *Bal champetre* 6. *Suite orquestral de l'opera Pepita Jimenez*
Orquestra Simfònica de Barcelona i Nacional de Catalunya Jaime Martín (conductor)

There are things that stir the music-lover's memory, which bring back reminiscences of that irreplaceable experience which consists of listening to live music in its natural environment, the auditorium. For many fans, the recent recording of the symphonic rhapsody *Catalonia*, by Isaac Albéniz, at the hands of Jaime Martin and the Orquestra Simfònica de Barcelona i Nacional de Catalunya (OBC) will come as a pleasant surprise: the discovery of a score that exudes freshness, simplicity and melodic charm. For others, it will imply the rediscovery of a work that would be an obligatory part of the concert repertoire in any civilized country, but here, sadly, is not.

Its audition allows listeners to refresh their impressions and memories of great conductors and composers who, throughout their careers, demonstrated their belief in the value of this piece by their acts, without getting caught up in the widespread and sterile debate about Albéniz's poor reputation as an orchestrator. Certainly, it is a marvel of refinement, but, when performed with full conviction of its merits, the listener is immediately captivated by the simplicity, the melodic inspiration and eternal freshness that permeate the Catalan composer's music.

I am speaking of legendary musicians, such as the Russian Igor Markévitch, especially in his wonderful period of artistic involvement with the Orquestra Sinfónica de la RTVE; the Romanian Georges Enescu, stalwart defender of a piece that he often programmed, and all over the world; and Eduard Toldrà, the brilliant Catalan violinist, conductor and composer who, in 1944, created the Orquestra Municipal de Barcelona (now the OBC, which has at last recorded *Catalonia*), and who was a fervent promoter of the Spanish repertoire.

The list includes musicians who are active at this time, such as Antoni Ros Marbà, a passionate performer of Albéniz and, in a very special way, of Toldrà, who was his teacher, Jesús López Cobos and José de Eusebio (thanks to his enthusiasm we now know more about the Camprodón musician's operatic legacy than ever before; the recording discussed today includes an orchestral suite from Pepita Jiménez revised by him), and on his first CD with the OBC, Jaime Martin,

Albéniz had and has eloquent supporters. Why, then, is Catalonia still rarely heard in concert halls? Difficult question. First of all, there is a need for concert programmers who really believe in Spanish music. It is pointless to include just four or five pieces in a whole symphonic season; nor is the Spanish share of the programmes sufficient; nor are there enough commissions, increasingly unambitious and scarce. A greater commitment to music is needed and less obsession with attendance figures and box office takings.

There is enough leeway to balance the offer using the more popular classics to attract the general public –it all depends on the programmers' imagination. The regularisation of works such as Catalonia – and this piece is just one example because there are hundreds of scores in the same situation – requires a strong alliance between performers, programmers and the public. --- Javier Pérez Senz, blog.trito.es

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