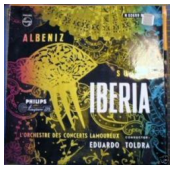
Albeniz – Iberia Suite (Orchestrated by Arbos)[1953]



1. *Iberia* Lamoureux Orchestra of Paris Eduard Toldrà – conductor

Albeniz's masterpiece Iberia—a set of twelve colourful piano pieces—was written in the period 1906-9 (very much the same time as Ravel's Spanish Rhapsody, also issued this month) : it was not, however, until some time later that some of the set were transcribed—brilliantly--for orchestra by Fernandez Arbbs, a Spanish violinist and conductor who had been a pupil of Joachim and who taught for many years at our Royal College of Music. The six pieces in this issue are five of the Iberia and one originally separate work, Navarra, which Albeniz left unfinished and which was completed by Deodat de Severac : this last is the only intruder into the otherwise exclusively Andalusian scene. All these movements have the vividness of brightly-coloured picture postcards, and each is based on Spanish folk harmonies and rhythms —El Puerto (The Harbour) is a polo, Triana (a suburb of Seville) is a slightly sublimated pasodoble, El Albaicin (the gipsy quarter of Granada) begins with a bukria, Navarra is a jota El Corpus en Sevilla (Corpus Christi in Seville) is to all intents and purposes a marcia, and EvocaciOn is a fandanguillo.

The immediate things which strike the ear about these records are the animation and controlled exuberance of the playing, and the high level at which it is registered—too loud alto gether for me, who find too prolonged a manifestation of high spirits wearying : I begin after a bit, to sigh for one real piano. (There are several in the score of El Puerto, for example, but we are not allowed to have them.) The playing of the Lamoureux Orchestra is spirited and brilliant; with the minimum of lapses in these most . difficult scores (the piccolo and saxophone in unison two octaves apart in El Albaicin and the final F sharps in El Corpus could have been improved as to intonation and in the latter piece the unanimity of attack by celesta and harp is poor) ; but as a whole one is left with the impression that the melodies do not sufficiently sing through the mass of accompanying orchestral detail. Whether this lack of internal balance is the fault of Freitas Branco, or whether it is inherent in the perhaps overloaded orchestration, I would not like to say for certain ; but I suspect the former. --- L.S., gramophone.net

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