

Liner notes to From the Soul of Spain

The Gift of Spanish Music, by Jason Espada

Each culture offers, as its unique gift, arts that could have only come from that place and people. Such is the case with Spanish music. The history, language and collective memory of a people all flow into their arts. Without these, in fact, no art would be possible.

A number of years ago, I heard an interview with the famous violinist Itzhak Perlman, who was on his way back to Israel to play Klezmer music with the folk musicians there. In it, he said that ‘Music is the soul of a culture’. In the most generous, most poetic sense, music is the melody and rhythm of a peoples’ language; it is expressed in their gestures, food, dance and social graces; it is the fragrance and flavor that lingers, the pulse and light that is shared.

The Arts, at their best everywhere, as is seen with Spanish music, take our whole lives, including all that is difficult and tragic, and hopeful and innocent, and create something beautiful, something redemptive out all of it. The Arts leave nothing out, and make living worthwhile. In fact, you can dance to it.

This is what I hear so clearly in Spanish music: a whole culture’s drama, passion, and tenderness; its mysterious, and profound nature.

All Art that deserves the name *needs* to be personal – no ‘cookie-cutter’ imitations take us to any deep level at all – and when it *is* truly taken personally, by the composer and performers, then the paradox is that we can touch something universal; beauty can lift us from what is bound up in time to the time-less.

With so much so easily available today, my friends, it's vital that we remember what Art can be, and not lose sight of this.

The Living Arts are our heritage. They belong to us all equally. As players of lesser and greater stature, as composers, and as listeners, music gives us all a place in the world; it gives us all a place in our greater human family. *How wonderful is it to be here, in this time, and in this place.* Engaging the Arts in this way, as we can see, does comfort, heal, and nourish us.

For a guitarist, the music of Spain is an extraordinary gift. The guitar is its National Instrument, with its influence infusing all varieties of Spain's music. In fact, the two are so connected, it's hard to tell where one leaves off and the other begins. As an instrument, the guitar can be warm, intimate, lyrical, bold, mercurial, forthright and proud. Just like the Spanish people.

Choosing what to play from all that is available was not easy – as there is so much to draw from. My thought was to select an hour of music to play that is representative, in that it speaks to me most deeply and most clearly of Spain. It is my hope that the spirit of the music will then be heard by others too, and felt, and enjoyed.

Classical Music and the Nationalist Movement

From the middle of what is called the Romantic Period in Classical music – the mid to late 1800's, a movement started where composers, trained in classical forms, began celebrating their heritage by drawing on the melody, rhythm and harmonies of their native culture. Some of the best known examples of this were the composers Chopin in Poland, Tchaikovsky in Russia, and Dvorak in Czechoslovakia.

In Spain, the Nationalist Composers included Isaac Albeniz, Enrique Granados, and Manuel De Falla. The music of Albeniz in particular is seen by classical guitarists as a great treasure. Although he wrote for the piano and for orchestra, Albeniz himself, on hearing some of his music performed on guitar, was heard saying that he thought his music sounded better on guitar. (this story has always been a point of pride for us guitarists).

A word here about los flamencos, and classical guitar: although I am not a flamenco player, I thought it would be fitting to include one short Solea, a traditional flamenco piece, in this hour of music. I do this as a gesture of respect and appreciation for this essential stream that has entered into the river of what we know as Spanish Classical Music. Many composers, such as Albeniz, have also used flamenco forms for their music, thereby honoring this lineage with their compositions. I want to join them also, as best I can, in saying: respect and gratitude!

I will end here by – not ending – but with one more quote that I heard that says, ‘*Art begins where ordinary language leaves off...*’

And so, to all my friends and family everywhere, I say, enjoy!

Much happiness to you all!

Jason Espada,
San Francisco, California,
Mother’s Day, May 13th, 2012

This album can be heard at jespada.bandcamp.com

From the Soul of Spain - Jason Espada, guitar

1. Granada, Isaac Albeniz
2. Spanish Dance Number 5, Enrique Granados
3. Dedicatoria, Enrique Granados
4. Cadiz, Isaac Albeniz
5. Solea, a traditional flamenco piece
6. El Carcelero, an anonymous flamenco song
7. Alegrias, Celedoino Romero
8. Lagrima, Francisco Tarrega
9. Serenata Espanola, Joaquin Malats
10. Study in b minor, Fernando Sor
11. Miller's Dance, Manuel De Falla
12. El Noi de la Mare, a Catalan folk song
13. Canco del Lladre, a Catalan folk song
14. Leyenda, Isaac Albeniz
15. Torija, Federico Moreno Torroba
16. Sevilla, Isaac Albeniz