

Sevilla

the music of Isaac Albéniz

Jason Vieaux

guitar



A z i c a

Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909) was a child prodigy on the piano, giving public performances at the age of four and entering the Madrid Conservatory at the age of nine. Although he might well have experienced a difficult home life, the widespread tales of his running off to America and working his way from Buenos Aires to San Francisco were apparently inventions, according to a new biography by Walter Aaron Clark (1999). While still in his teens, Albéniz did apparently manage to cross the Atlantic to play a few concerts in Puerto Rico and Cuba, but these were probably arranged by his father, a Spanish bureaucrat stationed for several years in Havana. In the 1880s, and already acclaimed as a piano virtuoso, Albéniz met the Catalan composer Felipe Pedrell (1841-1922) and became his disciple. Pedrell was a passionate advocate of the creation of a Spanish national music, based not on costumes and castanets but rather on disciplined research into national and regional traditions. Few Spanish composers of the last decades of the nineteenth century escaped his influence.

"I am a Moor," Isaac Albéniz was known to say (in fact, he had been born in the northern Spanish province of Gerona to a Basque father and Catalan mother). Although his compositions celebrated most of the regions of his country, his heart always seemed to return to the south of Spain, to Andalusia—the land of flamenco and gypsies, white-washed villages, snow-capped mountains, and strong sweet wine. On the title page of his "Córdoba," the fourth of his Chants d'Espagne (1896/7), Albéniz provided a little program which might have referred to much of his music:

In the silence of the night, interrupted by the whispers of breezes perfumed with jasmine, the guzlas play, accompanying the serenades and diffusing in the air the ardent melodies and notes as sweet as the swaying of the palms high above.

Of course, Albéniz was probably thinking of the oud, a lute-like instrument popular in Moorish Spain (the guzla was a Balkan instrument, traditionally bowed rather than plucked). Nevertheless, this passionate image of his country's past—steeped in the same romantic Orientalism which drove the Academic painters to depict exotic casbahs and pensive odalisques—won enthusiastic audiences both in Spain and abroad. And because Andalusian music was his principal inspiration, Albéniz, the piano virtuoso, took the guitar as his instrumental model. The strums (*rasgueado*) and flamboyant scales and flourishes (*falsetas*) of flamenco are evoked throughout his music, as are the traditional local dance rhythms of Seville, Málaga, and others.

Pedrell's influence was also profound upon the guitarists of late nineteenth-century Spain. In an age dominated by the piano, Francisco Tárrega (1852-1909) and his circle were determined to present the guitar as a serious classical instrument. One strategy was to transcribe for the guitar appropriate piano music from the Romantic repertoire; another was to compose new Spanish music according to Pedrell's prescriptions. Inevitably the attention of the guitarists turned to the music of Spanish piano composers such as Albéniz, Granados, and Malats—music which itself had been inspired by the sounds of the guitar. Often the

technical difficulties of such a transcription—the compression of ten octaves to three, of ten-note chords to six strings—proved insuperable, but where compromises or solutions could be found to such problems, the result could be stunning, music of an harmonic complexity rarely heard on the guitar, and music with a subtle intimacy rarely heard on the piano. Tárrega himself arranged a handful of Albéniz' pieces for guitar, and his pupils added still more. Today, a century later, Albéniz is heard at least as often on the guitar as on the piano. His charming character pieces, with their vivacious rhythms and haunting melodies, enrich the repertoire of both instruments.

Sevilla: Sevillanas from *Suite española*, Op. 47, No. 3 (1886) Sevilla, the inland seaport on the Guadalquivir river, became a world city in the sixteenth century, when its harbors served as the home port to the ocean-going galleons that travelled to the Americas and returned laden with gold from Mexico and Peru and silver from the mines of Potosí. The city of Figaro and Carmen, famous for its parks and religious festivals, Sevilla also became a center of flamenco. The sevillanas is a festive local dance and song, probably related to the Castilian *seguidillas*, that has come to be associated with Seville's spring fair, celebrated annually two weeks after Easter.

Cádiz: Canción (originally *Célèbre Sérénade espagnole*, Op. 181) (1890) Emilio Pujol, in his biography of the great guitarist Francisco Tárrega, relates how the guitarist, having transcribed for guitar Albéniz' "famosa Serenata," performed his transcription for the composer himself. Albéniz, according to Pujol, was visibly moved and exclaimed, "This is what I intended!" But which piece did Tárrega play? There were several pieces by Albéniz entitled or subtitled "Serenata," but only one piece was known in those days as the "Célèbre Sérénade espagnole"—the title on the 1890 edition. In the posthumous, enlarged edition of the *Suite española* (1911) the "Serenata española" was included as No. 4, but under a new title, "Cádiz: Canción." Largely because the earlier edition (Op. 181) went out of print while the *Suite* (Op. 47 revised) received continuous and extensive circulation, this piece is usually known today under its later name. A gentle bolero which imitates the strumming *rasgueado* of the guitar, "Cádiz" was an obvious choice for a guitar transcription and was in fact one of the handful of Albéniz' works which Tárrega is known to have arranged for guitar. But whether it was ever intended by Albéniz to be descriptive of the picturesque Andalusian seaport is not clear.

Rumores de la Caleta: Malagueña (*Recuerdos de viaje*, Op. 71, No. 6) (1887) is frequently mistranslated as "murmurs of the cove" or "sounds of the brook," but Albéniz' obvious reference here is to the Caleta, a residential neighborhood of Málaga where villas lined the southeast slopes of the Cerro Colorado, affording spectacular views of the Mediterranean. The music evokes not the sounds of water but rather a boisterous *juerga*—a flamenco party—featuring the dance known as *malagueñas*, a local form of the *fandango*. Few of Albéniz' pieces are more evocative of the guitar than this one, with its *falsetas* (rapid scales) and *rasgueados* (strums).

Córdoba (*Cantos de España*, Op. 232, No. 4) (1896/7) The hymnlike chords which form the opening section of Albéniz' "Córdoba" almost certainly refer to that Andalusian city's most remarkable monument, the great Mezquita or mosque. Begun by Abd al-Rahman at the end of the eighth century and often referred to as the "Hall of a Thousand Columns," this spectacular structure stood at the foot of the old Roman bridge which has spanned the Guadalquivir river since the days when Córdoba was the capital of the Roman province of Spain. The Mosque came to be surrounded by the judería, or Jewish quarter, reminding us that for centuries all three monotheistic religions managed to live together here in relative peace. Nevertheless, at the end of the fifteenth century the Jews and Moors were expelled, and in the following century the Mosque was partially destroyed when a new cathedral was built in the middle of the ancient building. Today, as in Albéniz' day, the two co-exist in an obvious architectural dissonance, but together they form the historical and spiritual center of the city and serve as a metaphor for the diverse cultural heritage of the entire Andalusian region. Albéniz' solemn chorale is transformed into a gentle Spanish dance, rather like leaving the mosque for a walk in the adjacent gardens.

Granada: Serenata from *Suite española*, Op. 47, No. 1 (1886) Medieval Granada was known for its fountains, especially those high upon the Alhambra, where they were least expected. Moorish hydraulic engineers captured the Darro and Xenil streams near their sources and maintained the elevation of the water while redirecting it to create formal gardens around the royal palaces, and a lush green park on the stony slopes of the mesa. On a quiet evening, the murmuring of the watercourses is interrupted only by the song of the nightingales that inhabit the woods. Granada and the Alhambra enchanted Albéniz, as they later enchanted Falla and Lorca. Albéniz almost certainly referred to this piece when he wrote, "I [am writing] a Serenata, romantic to the point of paroxysm and sad to the point of despair, among the aroma of the flowers, the shade of the cypresses, and the snow of the Sierra. ... I seek now the tradition... [not of flamenco, but of] the guzla, the lazy dragging of fingers over the strings. And above all, a heartbreaking [modal] lament." (quoted in Clark, 65)

Cataluña: Curranda from *Suite española*, Op. 47, No. 2 (1886) Albéniz was born in the northeastern Spanish province of Cataluña, and his mother, the dedicatee of this piece, was herself a Catalan. The dances and folklore of Cataluña have entranced generations of composers, including Albéniz' mentor, Pedrell, and Albéniz occasionally departed from his beloved Andalusia to pay homage to this region. A curranda is a Catalan dance cognate with the French courante.

Tango (*España: 6 Hojas de album*, Op. 165, No. 2) (1890) is perhaps the composer's best-known melody. It has little in common with the Spanish flamenco dances known as tangos or tanguillos. Instead, this music evokes the New World—the Argentine tango and milonga, and also their cousin, the habanera.

Mallorca: Barcarola, Op. 202 (1891) The barcarolle was a dance in imitation of the songs of Venetian gondoliers. In the nineteenth century, pianists including Mendelssohn and Chopin had embraced the barcarolle, constructing memorable melodies over its rolling 6/8 rhythm. Offenbach's barcarolle in *The Tales of Hoffmann* became an international "hit." Albéniz's barcarolle, no less lilting and memorable, was dedicated to Spain's lovely Mediterranean island, to which most visitors today arrive by airplane.

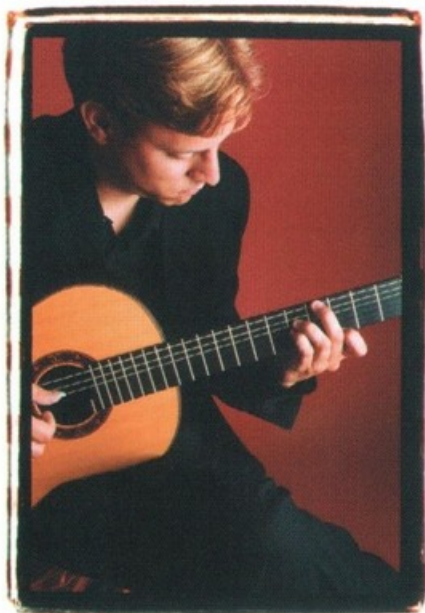
Cuba: Capricho/Nocturno from *Suite española*, Op. 47, No. 4 (1886) Albéniz' father worked for a while as a customs officer in Havana, and probably arranged for his son's visit and brief concert tour in the Antilles in 1875. Cuba was still an important part of the Spanish empire, although an increasingly restless colony; the infectious habanera rhythm, closely akin to the Argentine tango, came to be known throughout Europe, where its influence can be heard from Neapolitan songs like *O Sole mio* to the famous habanera from Bizet's *Carmen*, (which was actually composed by a Spaniard named Yradier!)

Zortzico (*España: 6 hojas de album*, Op. 165) (1890) Albéniz' father was a Basque from Vitoria who met his wife while he was employed as a tax collector in Cataluña. A zortzico, a Basque dance in the unusual time signature of 5/8, is far removed in spirit from the Andalusian music; this piece was one of Albéniz' few excursions into the music of his paternal heritage.

Asturias: Leyenda ("Preludio," from *Cantos de España*, Op. 232, No. 1) (1896) is another piece which has probably been misnamed as a result of its inclusion in the posthumous, enlarged edition of the *Suite española*. Originally the first movement of the *Cantos d'España* (with the simple title "Preludio"), it was included in the 1911 *Suite española* under a new name, "Asturias: Leyenda." As Clark has pointed out, the music seems purely Andalusian, so it is likely that this reference to Asturias was an invention of the publishers, perhaps to avoid offending an important Spanish region that had somehow failed to inspire Albéniz.

Torre Bermeja: Serenata (*Douze Pièces caractéristiques*, Op. 92, No. 12) (1888-9) The "vermilion towers" at the foot of the Alhambra are the remains of the outer fortifications of the medieval fortress; as early as the ninth century, a Moorish poet referred to the Kal'at al-Hamra, or "red castle," a reference to the iron-infused clay from which local bricks and concrete were formed. A turn-of-the-century Baedeker guidebook describes the towers as Albéniz would have seen them—as a military prison which admitted tourists!—advising that they should be visited after the Alhambra and Generalife "for the sake of the picturesque view they command. ... The extensive buildings, including large cisterns, underground stables, and casemates for 200 men, give an excellent insight into the Moorish art of fortification. A steep staircase ascends to the platform (azotéa) of the chief tower, whence the best view is enjoyed."

Capricho Catalán (*España: 6 Hojas de album*, Op. 165, No. 5) (1890) is a gentle piece in the simple style of a Catalan folk song, but with the insistent rhythm of a march.



Guitarist **Jason Vieaux** is widely recognized as one of the most exciting performers of his generation. His dynamic concert programs are highlighted by his effortless virtuosity, natural musicianship and an engaging manner with audiences worldwide. These attributes have earned him a constant schedule of solo, chamber and concerto engagements, performing a wide range of repertoire spanning the Renaissance to the music of our time.

Concert tours have taken Mr. Vieaux to Spain, France, Canada, Mexico, Southeast Asia, Japan, Taiwan, and New Zealand, and he regularly performs in most of the major American cities. Mr. Vieaux has performed as concerto soloist with The Cleveland Orchestra, Cleveland Pops, The Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia, Auckland Philharmonia, Santa Fe Symphony, The Astral Chamber Orchestra and Orchestra 2001, and has worked with conductors Miguel Harth-Bedoya, Luis Biava, Gareth Morrell, Steven Smith and Jahja Ling.

Jason Vieaux's two recordings for Naxos Records have collectively sold over 40,000 copies internationally. Laureate Series *Guitar Recital* (8.553449), featuring Latin

American guitar music, won the coveted Rosette from The Penguin Guide, and is in Gramophone's *Classical Good CD Guide* and *The NPR Guide To Building A Classical CD Collection*. Jason Vieaux's last solo CD on Azica Records, *Manuel Ponce: The Guitar Sonatas*, was recently described by American Record Guide as "...a stunning reading ...beautifully restrained ...a marvelous release".

Jason Vieaux recently gave a week of solo and chamber music performances as a 2002 Young Artist-in-Residence on National Public Radio's "Performance Today", with musical guests flutist Gary Schocker, violinist Soovin Kim and the Shanghai Quartet. These performances were broadcast on NPR stations around the US and internationally via the internet.

Jason Vieaux began his guitar studies at age eight in Buffalo, New York. He won the prestigious Guitar Foundation of America International Competition in 1992 and was honored as a top prizewinner in the Naumburg International Guitar Competition. He resides in Cleveland, enjoys golf and an occasional game of pool, and is the Head of The Cleveland Institute of Music Guitar Department. Mr. Vieaux is also affiliated with Astral Artistic Services in Philadelphia.

www.jasonvieaux.com

"Taut" guitar by Paul Fischer, 1998

Mr. Vieaux thanks: Alan, Bruce, Jim, Richard and Kate; Martha, Kenneth and Jonathan Wentworth Associates staff; Vera Wilson and Astral Artistic Services; my family, friends and students.

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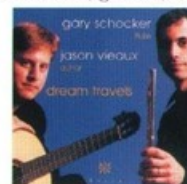
Recorded at St. Stanislaus Church, Cleveland, Ohio, September 30 - October 2, 2002.

This Azica release was recorded "live to two-track" at the recording sessions. No mixing was done subsequent to the recording sessions. The intent of this technique is to capture the artist's performance without alteration by the recording process. There have been no analog stages since the original analog to digital conversion at the sessions. All editing and transfers have been done in the digital domain to preserve the sound quality produced during the artist's performance.

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Jason Vieaux

guitar

1. Sevilla 4:57
2. Cadiz 4:42
3. Rumores de la Caleta 4:10
4. Córdoba 7:24
5. Granada 5:05
6. Cataluña 2:20
7. Tango 3:13
8. Mallorca 7:45
9. Cuba 5:44
10. Zortzico 3:25
11. Asturias (Leyenda) 7:01
12. Torre Bermeja 4:19
13. Capricho Catalán 3:23



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TOTAL RUNNING TIME: 64:33

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