

EMEC, E-100/101, LUYIS THE NARVAEZ COMPLETE WORKS

Luyis de Narvaez is one of a small number of composers who wrote for the vihuela da mano, the Spanish Renaissance lute. His works for that instrument were published in 1538 with the title *Los Seis Libros del Delphin de Musica de Cifra para Taner Vihuela* (The Six Books of the Dolphin, Music in Tablature for Playing on the Vihuela). The index lists only a few recordings of this music, including a complete set on vihuela by Hopkinson Smith (N/D 1989), now long deleted but still available used.

The first two books contain 14 Fantasias; then we have arrangements of vocal works, mainly by Josquin, but also Gombert and Richefort. Then there are several sets of variations, some on sacred, some on popular songs. Finally, there is a set of nine songs, romances, and villancicos, where mezzo Marta Infante sings. Her voice is lovely and clear, if not especially memorable. Maruri favors a muscular approach with a nice range of color and dynamics and an expressive rubato. He holds the interest—no mean feat with this much music by a single composer, if an inventive one.

This set is different because it is played on guitar, not vihuela, but that need not disqualify it. Frankly, just as I prefer Bach on piano, I prefer vihuela works on the guitar, as long as the performance is committed and expressive. Maruri is both. I'm not sure why he made this choice—it is unusual to see a complete works recording on a modern instrument (perhaps he just doesn't play vihuela). But he is concerned with historical re-creation. In May/June 2010 I reviewed three of his discs, and another in July/August 2010, where he used historical instruments (though modern strings). Many of his more than two dozen recordings explore roads less traveled, with obscure composers, especially from the 19th Century. In the 40-page booklet of wonderfully enlightening notes about Renaissance Spain and her music, there is not a word about the performers.

I found the whole thing delightful. My only complaint is the packaging. We have two discs (Smith fit everything on one), just six minutes over the normal capacity of one, selling at full (or slightly discounted) price. I can live with that, but who approved packaging it in a sleeve that's twice the height of a regular jewel box? That makes it impossible to store in most collections. © 2014 American Record Guide

EMEC, E-097, JIANG WENYE BAGATELLES, Cello and guitar

Welcome to the Far East! Jiang Wenye (or should it be the other way around?) (1910-83) was born in Taiwan, grew up in Japan, and moved to China along with Alexander Tcherepnin in 1936, who encouraged him to write these Bagatelles for piano. What we are hearing now is a transcription by the guitarist, who is also responsible for the anonymous Chinese material included here. So this is a program of miniatures; only two pieces are longer than three minutes. The cellist is not as accurate in intonation as one might hope, but one only notices this occasionally, and the guitarist is excellent in variety of sound as well as technique.

The music is quite lovely. The folk settings are more interesting than they are absorbing musically, but Jiang's Bagatelles are full of imagination and variety. The general mood of all of this material is not as harmonically

active as we are accustomed to. One does get a little tired of the prevailing pentatonic atmosphere. Still, it is an unusual concept and by no means unpleasant. © 2014 American Record Guide

EMEC, E-105/6, GRANADOS PIANO MUSIC

The only complaint I have is the awkward packaging, measuring 10" x 5-1/2. That does not make for a comfortable shelf fit for most collectors. Beyond that, I have nothing but praise for the set. I suppose the cover illustration of Goya's White Duchess of Alba would not have fit comfortably on a standard jewel case. Bowing to royalty, and not wishing to cut her off at the waist, it was only proper to honor her diminutive figure and lovely gown by lengthening the package. Besides, we are able to see her dog at the bottom as well, if not his feet. Goya captured this Duchess on canvas many times and may have entered into a liaison with her as well—that's never been proven.

Leaving aside the attractive container, pianist Sebastian Stanley was born in Andalucia and moved to Britain at the age of 4. He graduated from the Royal College of Music and has given concerts in the United States, Germany, and Britain. This is his recorded debut as a soloist. He is young and photogenic.

While most of Goyescas is of considerable technical difficulty, Stanley turns his back on outward display and concentrates on the music, its subtleties, colors, and, above all, its unique inflections. Both Goyescas and the Danzas are intensely nationalistic, with turns and phrases superbly executed by Stanley. As a colorist he has an instinctive feel for embellishments and their ties to the folk music of the Iberian peninsula. He also makes superb use of the pedal, knowing the precise moment to press and release for maximum effect.

For all his considerable qualities, fortunately none of this playing comes across as too studied. What we do hear is an uncanny feeling for performing as if the music were part of a grand improvisation. The flow is always very natural. Of course, he left Spain at age 4, and I doubt if he absorbed much of this before departing.

Of great fascination is comparing the Goyescas piano suite with the opera of the same name. It is an indulgence that every music lover should allow himself, and it's made even simpler since You Tube has an excellent concert performance from Barcelona that readers can view. As with most other recordings Stanley includes 'El Pelele', not strictly part of the suite, but related to it.

The Danzas Espanolas are 12 in four books of three. While they need not be performed together in recital, they usually are on recordings. They are less elaborate than the Goyescas and do not quote any folk melodies. They have also been transcribed for guitar, and there are several orchestrations of varying success. Stanley caresses each dance as if it were a lovely maiden responding only to the most gentle touch. Thomas Rajna's performance is more direct, slightly faster, and perhaps a little more exciting, though never as poignant and devastatingly sad as Stanley. Alicia De Larrocha is in a class of her own, and her two recordings combine power, movement, and a beauty that will probably remain the choice of a lifetime. Still, I would not choose to be without this newcomer. The interpretation is beguiling to the ear and reaches the heart as few others have done. © 2014 American Record guide.

