

ART'S NIGHT JUNE 27, 2008

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER BEFORE PROGRAM

1. Why am I doing what I do?

Before I answer the why I thought I should say that what I do is play the piano. I began playing the piano when I was four years old simply because there was a piano where I was living. I have continued to play the piano for 73 years because it was and still is, inherent for my self preservation. The empowerment that my art has brought to me has helped me to overcome many adverse situations which included a near death experience.

2. Do I practice my art because I am able to or because I am compelled to?

I practice my art because there is a powerful compulsion deep within that drives me to spend time with it as often as it is possible to do so.

3. When did I start to become interested in what I do which is Spanish Classical Music for the Piano and what got me started?

After a very challenging period in my life that took my sight for two years, I was given the opportunity to attend a Summer School of Music at Shawnigan Lake on Vancouver Island. The professor for the piano discipline was from Madrid. Needless to say there were several misunderstandings between the professor and the students. This was, of course, because the professor could speak no English and we could speak no Spanish.

A fiery outburst from the professor during one master class at which I had, with considerable courage, decided to play one of the Spanish works I had tucked in with the proposed repertoire led to my hasty retreat from the salon. At the time, I believed that the professor's outburst was the result of my poor playing. Back in my room, to my surprise, there was a knock at the door. A note was given to me from the professor, requesting me to meet with him. Since I was now, more than positive that the professor was going to tell me to leave the course, I almost made the decision not to go and see him.

However, in spite of how I was feeling, I made my way to the deserted salon where the professor and his lovely wife were waiting. To my amazement, I was greeted with warmth and enthusiasm and the sound of English. The professor's lovely wife

was most proficient in three languages and acted as translator for the occasion.

The professor's first question to me was where I had learned to play Spanish music. When I told him I had learned from no one this astonished him. The main point of the meeting was that Profesor del Pueyo thought I should go to Madrid and study Spanish music at the Conservatory since I seemed to have such a natural inclination towards its interpretation.

Later in the evening, still feeling somewhat hostile I decided to attend the professor's concert. The last piece on the program was one of the repertoire's greatest pieces. During its performance the penny dropped as they say and I knew clearly where my new direction was to be. The rest, as they also say, is history.

4. What has made me continue with Spanish music and brought me to its current state?

From the first moment I stepped off the plane on to Spanish soil, I was beguiled by the sights and sounds that greeted me. I actually felt as if I had finally come home. During the subsequent years that I studied music at the Royal Conservatory of Madrid, Spain continued to entice me with her mystery, exoticism and beauty. Very simply I became her captive. This was the singular thing that drove me to continue to seek the mysteries that lay hidden behind her fan.

The current state of the art is the result of 28 years of research. The many levels that have been investigated are each rich with the cultures that have passed through Spain as are the valuable contributions that were left behind. The interpretation of the music and the dance presented during the past 11 years in public performance has been drawn from this research as well as the experiences of the artist during the time spent in Spain and the Higher Sources of Creativity. As the art evolved, authenticity began to make its appearance and has, over the years, continued to be the main focus for each performance.

5. What do I derive from my art?

When I sit down with my instrument, I virtually enter another world. Almost immediately, that world enfolds me in a cloak of deep peace and tranquility. I am able to shut out all the chaos and turmoil that is sometimes such a part of the outside world and this allows me to communicate on another level.

During this contemplative time with my instrument, I am shown how to master a difficult technical passage or given the solution to a problem that has arisen in the physical world. On occasion when absolutely everything falls together perfectly at the keyboard, an ecstatic moment will present itself. These moments are rare and cannot be contrived. They only ever occur at least for me when that special Andalusian phenomenon known as the duende is

present and they are never duplicated no matter how hard I might try to repeat the passage in which this has occurred.

The deep satisfaction that is derived from such a moment, whether in practice or performance, is really beyond description. Suffice it to say that such a moment makes one feel that the hours of practice have been worth it. One is given the courage to go on, not only with the art but with life itself, because life is so representative of the art that also demands its sacrifices. The Golden Moment when it does happen is definitely worth the effort.

6. If I were not skilled or successful in my art, would I continue?

Although I found all the questions perceptive and probing, this one was the most difficult. At first reading of it, I said no I would not continue simply because of the great discipline it takes to practice one's art, especially when things are not going well or conditions are far from ideal. Perfection is a harsh taskmaster. To climb one's Tower of Perfection involves more than skill or success and is more than just the art.

As I struggled to find an answer to this question, I took a look back down the long road that has represented my life. I saw perhaps for the first time how music had influenced every aspect of that life and had not really anything to do with skill or success.

It has really been about making a journey with a trusted friend. The journey has included life altering decision and challenges that arose from those decisions. Along the Road of Life, my friend has always been there to help me find answers to questions when I had none. My friend has been there to share the valuable lessons that that needed to be absorbed in order to teach me the more Divine aspect of who I am and why I am here.

My trusted friend has given me the courage to continue with this journey when I thought I could not go on. Most importantly, my trusted friend has allowed me to speak my truth through my instrument, the piano.

ARTS NIGHT JUNE 27
PROGRAM NOTES

Although there are many elements that make up Spanish music, one of its greatest sources, has been the guitar.

In past centuries the guitar or the sound of the guitar was considered to be a distinguishing feature of ancient Andalucian music.

Its role was not only to accompany. It was used to add special colour to the music and evoke atmosphere.

In tonight's brief program we are going to see how the guitar influenced composers in the above ways and enabled them to express the true essence of Spain in their music.

SPANISH DANCE #5
ENRIQUE GRANADOS

I thought it might be appropriate if I began this evening's program with the first piece of Spanish music I ever learned to play.

The Spanish Dance #5 comes from a set of 12 written by the great Catalan composer, Enrique Granados.

Known as a *Playera*, it was thought to have had its origins with an ancient Andalusian gypsy lament that was sung and danced on the way to the gravesite. The lament was accompanied by a tambourine which was for the gypsies, also a symbol of death.

The guitar motif is unmistakable and in this piece, takes the role of accompanying. It provides a poignant background for the deeply sad melody.

PRELUDIO ISAAC ALBENIZ

One of the Spanish composers who was greatly influenced by the guitar was Isaac Albeniz.

Not only was Albeniz a brilliant pianist, he was also a prolific composer and they say he could play a mean guitar.

He often entertained his friends on the instrument late into the evening at his local, favorite bar.

Albeniz was so intrigued by the guitar that he wrote much of his keyboard music as if it were for the guitar, thus making some of it exceedingly difficult to play.

In the Preludio that comes from the Cantos de Espana, Albeniz guitar motif returns us to a primal world of magic and mystery. Through the obsessive repetition of one note and an ancient Andalucian guitar technique whereby the appoggiatura viciously attacks the chord, he sets up an atmosphere of ritualism and passion in the outer sections.

In the central section, haunting fragments of melody evoke the sadness and sorrow of an exotic realm that once dominated Spain for almost 9 centuries.

SPANISH DANCE #1
ANTON BILOTTI

In the Spanish Dance #1 by Anton Bilotti, the second piece of Spanish music I ever learned thus making my great repertoire of two, the guitar motif is initiated through a deep plucking in the base.

The plucking is outlined with a melody that is mirrored in the right hand and together they evoke an atmosphere of Andalusian melancholy.

The melancholy is very sad and echoes perfectly the words of the great Andalusian poet Federico Garcia Lorca as he writes:

The earth laments because it will never be the sky.

The sea complains because it has no limits.

And a goodbye is forever.

THE MILLER'S DANCE MANUEL DE FALLA

One of Andalusia's great composers, Manuel de Falla, was also influenced by the guitar.

He often said that the orchestra for him, was like one great big guitar and wrote his music accordingly.

In the Miller's Dance Falla introduces us to another ancient Andalusian guitar technique known as the rasguado.

On the instrument, the right hand of the player viciously strums the strings.

The resulting dissonance evokes a fiery passion that makes one feel as if they are standing on the edge of a volcano that is ready to erupt.