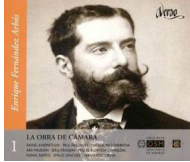


Arbos - Chamber Music (2005)

Written by bluesever

Wednesday, 06 March 2013 17:24 - Last Updated Tuesday, 06 August 2013 13:35

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Piezas en estilo español, for piano trio, Op. 1 1. *Bolero* 2. *Habanera* 3. *Seguidillas gitanas*
4. *Tango (Danse Espagnole)*, for violin & piano, Op. 2: *Seguidillas gitanas*
Rimas de Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, for voice & piano, Op. 3
5. *Asomaba a sus ojos...* 6. *Qué es poesía?* 7. *Si al mecer...* 8. *Los invisibles átomos...* 9.
Olas gigantes... 10. *Volverán las oscuras golondrinas...*
Canciones para la marquesa de Bolaños, for voice & piano, Op. 4
11. *Chanson de Fortunio (De Musset)* 12. *Ici bas!...(Prudhomme)* 13. *Les roses de Saadi*
(*Desbordes-Valmore*) 14. *Sur la plage (Picard)* 15. *Pieza de concurso, for cello & piano*
Trio Bellas Artes Ara Malikain (violin) Serouj Kradijian (piano) Emilio Sánchez (tenor)
Fernando Turina (piano) Rafael Ramos (cello) Ortega Chavaldas (piano)

I don't know how Arbós rates these days but I'd take a guess and say that as a composer of zarzuela he's probably eclipsed his reputation as a conductor. From time to time his old recordings are resurrected – he revitalised the Madrid Orchestra and conducted the band for thirty-five years – but of late attention seems to have turned more to his zarzuela. This has left his chamber works, so admired at the turn of the twentieth century, in almost total limbo.

Allow me to express my total incredulity that before the one under review the only other recording known to me of the Op.1 *Tres piezas originales en stilo espanol* was made c.1917 by Albert Sammons, W.H. Squire and William Murdoch. To be accurate their recording was slightly abridged and they omitted the *Habanera*. Try as I might I can't find evidence of another recording in the intervening ninety odd years. Arbós was popular in London of course – he was at the Royal College - which may account for the recording. It's a bold triptych of pieces for an Op.1 with the *Seguidillas gitanas* making its mark in particular in this performance – deft rhythm and evocative salon style. His Op.1 makes no other pretensions and is all the better for it.

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The Tango was written, inevitably, for Sarasate and it was popular in its day though I reckon this is a premiere recording. It's certainly not in the armoury of any fiddle players today and this performance doesn't show it at its best – smeary tone from the violinist, poor intonation and a couple of missed notes.

The songs show another side to Arbós. Seis rimas de Gustavo Adolfo Becquer is his Op.3 and therefore, once again, very early – this survey seems to be progressing chronologically – and not entirely typical of the more complete control he was later to exercise over vocal material. Emilio Sánchez takes the honours accompanied by Fernando Turina. He has a hefty and rather metallic voice with a big beat. He's admired as an Arbós singer so my dissenting view is a minority one and you may appreciate him rather more than I did. The songs are light, simple, some sounding rather French (the second is straight Fauré) but in these performances they suffer from a dose of the quasi-operatics. The strenuous histrionics that Sánchez piles on here are really no service to the music. He should be made to listen to Tito Schipa for a month and he'd be the better man for it. The companion cycle Cuatro canciones para la marquesa de Bolanos could sound very much better than it does. Turina is too reticent – the piano postlude to Sur la plage, the last of the four, is dull – and Sánchez's strangled attempt in the same song is not pretty.

Finally the Pieza de concurso is a slow test piece full of romanticism but also conservatoire dictates; it's a question more of projection than mere virtuosity, though it's of no great account otherwise.

Obviously I'm well disposed toward Arbós's uneven chamber and vocal works but stronger performances are needed to convince others of their admittedly peripheral place in the scheme of things Iberian. The booklet photographs and artwork are splendid and a real credit but the proofreading is calamitous and misspellings and misdatings abound. It's reflective of a very hit and miss recording. ---Jonathan Woolf, musicweb-international.com

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