

ALMA ESPAÑOLA

ISABEL
LEONARD

SHARON
ISBIN



BRIDGE 9491

Alma Española

Federico García Lorca (1898-1936) | arr. Isbin*
from Canciones españolas antiguas (before 1936) (7:08)

- 1) El café de Chinitas (2:59)
- 2) Las morillas de Jaén (2:08)
- 3) Anda, jaleo (2:01)

Isabel Leonard & Sharon Isbin

Enrique Granados (1867-1916) | trans. Llobet
4) Danza española No. 5 (Andaluza) (c. 1888–90) (5:36)

Sharon Isbin

Federico García Lorca (1898-1936) | arr. Isbin*
from Canciones españolas antiguas (before 1936) (20:35)

- 5) Romance de Don Boyso (5:02)
- 6) Zorongo (1:11)
- 7) Nana de Sevilla (4:22)
- 8) La Tarara (:57)

(arr. Emilio de Torre/Isbin)

- 9) Los mozos de Monleón (6:18)
- 10) Sevillanas del siglo XVIII (2:45)

Isabel Leonard & Sharon Isbin

Joaquín Rodrigo (1901-1999)
11) Aranjuez ma pensée (1988) (6:29)

Isabel Leonard & Sharon Isbin

Agustín Lara (1897-1970) | arr. Isbin*

12) **Granada (1932)** (3:08)

Isabel Leonard & Sharon Isbin

Francisco Tárrega (1852-1909)

13) **Capricho árabe (1892)** (5:55)

Sharon Isbin

Manuel de Falla (1876-1946) | trans. Llobet/rev. Pujol/rev. Isbin

Siete canciones populares españolas (1914) (13:20)

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|-------------------------|--------|-------------|--------|
| 14) El paño moruno | (1:22) | 18) Nana | (1:57) |
| 15) Seguidilla murciana | (1:22) | 19) Canción | (1:04) |
| 16) Asturiana | (2:38) | 20) Polo | (1:38) |
| 17) Jota | (3:19) | | |

Isabel Leonard & Sharon Isbin

Xavier Montsalvatge (1912-2002) | arr. Isbin*

from Cinco canciones negras (1945) (3:59)

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|---|--------|
| 21) Canto negro | (1:17) |
| 22) Canción de cuna para dormir
a un negrito | (2:42) |

Isabel Leonard & Sharon Isbin

Isabel Leonard, voice • Sharon Isbin, guitar

** world premiere recordings*

Sharon Isbin & Isabel Leonard: Alma Española

By Allan Kozinn

From Medieval times through the 19th century, Western art music maintained strong, if often disguised, links with folk and dance forms. The *ländler* of Austria-Hungary, the *contredanses* of France and England, and the *mazurkas* and *polonaises* of Poland all found their way into the classical music repertory, usually with considerable refinement along the way, but as Romanticism gave way to various stripes of Modernism, the ties between folk and art music became frayed.

One country where composers resisted that development was Spain, where a nationalistic style blossomed near the end of the 19th century, and proved both tenacious and popular. That style was inextricably tied to flamenco, a distinctive musical language with roots in the *cante jondo*, or “deep song” – the implication of “deep” being intensely soulful – that developed uniquely in Spain as a result of its position as a crossroads between Europe and North Africa. Within the *cante jondo* you find influences that include gypsy rhythms and modal Arabic and Moorish melodies.

Sharon Isbin and Isabel Leonard have long been fond of this repertory. For Isbin, as a guitarist, Spanish music has long been a crucial part of her expansive repertory. However far afield the guitar may wander – whether it’s into the realm of Dowland and Bach lute transcriptions, or recent works by Britten or Carter – the instrument’s history and essential DNA are Spanish. And for Leonard, as an opera singer and recitalist with an extensive international career, the Spanish repertory puts her in

touch with her roots. Born in New York City, the daughter of an Argentinian mother, she grew up speaking both Spanish and English at home.

The collaboration, which began in 2014, was Leonard's idea. She had performed Spanish songs at her recitals, in editions for piano and voice, but she knew, as any fan of this music does, that even when works were written for the piano, Spanish composers had the sounds and techniques of the guitar in their inner ears.

Isbin, for her part, has performed much of this repertory with Spanish singers throughout her career, and notes that the last major recording of Spanish art song featuring a guitarist and native Spanish speaker was made more than four decades ago, by Teresa Berganza and Narciso Yepes. So, although Leonard and Isbin perform other repertory as well, including a work composed for them in 2014 by Richard Danielpour, Spanish song was clearly the ideal meeting ground.

The heart of this set is a pair of collections by Federico García Lorca and Manuel de Falla, both of whom were devoted flamenco enthusiasts. García Lorca, of course, is best known as one of the greatest poets and playwrights Spain produced; he was murdered at the height of his powers (at age 37) by Francisco Franco's Nationalist forces in 1936, during the Spanish Civil War. (It is said that Falla offered to hide him in the cellar of his home, an offer that García Lorca, sadly, declined.) But García Lorca was also a pianist and guitarist, and in 1922, when Falla, whom he revered, organized El Concurso del Cante Jondo in Granada, a competition meant to encourage and celebrate flamenco, García Lorca quickly became involved, speaking on the contest's behalf, and publishing an essay on the art of flamenco performance.

Nine years later, García Lorca became the director of Teatro Universitario La Barraca, a student theater group that toured throughout Spain, with García Lorca directing, acting, and providing incidental music, including scores built of flamenco songs, which he performed himself. Sadly, he never committed these scores to paper – he felt that their nuances and inflections could not be adequately captured on paper, and that by nature, these folk melodies and lyrics were meant to be passed down orally. He did, however, make more than a dozen recordings, around 1931, with Encarnación López Júlvez, an Argentinian-born flamenco singer and dancer who performed under the name La Argentinita. Transcriptions of the set were published as “Canciones españolas antiguas,” in the early 1960s, in guitar and piano arrangements.

When Leonard and Isbin began working together, exploring the García Lorca songs was high on their agenda. But neither was fond of the existing guitar arrangements, so using the recordings and piano editions as guides, Isbin created new arrangements of twelve songs. She took some liberties along the way, eliminating doublings of the vocal line, adding *rasgueado* flamenco strums and other purely guitaristic techniques that a sense of the flamenco tradition suggested might be appropriate. Clearly, given García Lorca’s refusal to commit his arrangements to paper, and his passion for the true *cante jondo*, such liberties are fully in the spirit of the music.

But they are also part of the in-the-moment collaboration between the singer and guitarist. During their rehearsals, Isbin demonstrated guitar techniques to Leonard, and both musicians proposed additions or deletions of filigree and strumming, and other ideas suggested by the musical context and the lyrics. (Listen, for example, to Isbin’s shift into a higher register in the final verse of “Romance de Don Boyso,” a suggestion of Leonard’s, an evocative touch inspired by the verse’s surprising revelation.) Further revisions were made once the songs were stage-tested.

Midway through the García Lorca set, Isbin interpolates a solo guitar piece – an arrangement of Granados’s “Danza española No. 5 (Andaluza).” Like the songs, it is a work originally scored for the piano, yet is so fully guitaristic in spirit that it is heard these days in guitar arrangements more frequently than in its original keyboard form. And far from interrupting the flow of the García Lorca songs, its kinship to the vocal works is so close that it seems a natural interlude here.

Falla’s “Siete canciones populares españolas,” a set Falla composed in 1914, when he was clearly nostalgic for his homeland as he neared the end of a seven-year sojourn in Paris, was the clear model for García Lorca’s folksong arrangements. It is an extraordinary set, and an enduringly popular one, not only for voice and piano, but in orchestrations and in instrumental editions in which the violin takes over the singer’s role. Musically and temperamentally, the songs cover a broad range of human experience – a lullaby (“Nana”) at one extreme, songs of jealousy and rage (“Canción” and “Polo”) at the other, and proclamations of passion (“Seguidilla murciana” and “Jota”) in between.

The guitar arrangement of the Falla set is one of several of this collection’s glimpses at the dawn of the instrument’s modern history. It was created by Miguel Llobet and Emilio Pujol, two composer-guitarists who came to prominence in the early decades of the 20th century. Both were students of Francisco Tárrega, the most celebrated guitarist of the late 19th century, and a prolific composer of colorful (and usually virtuosic) miniatures, which remain beloved parts of the guitar repertory.

Isbin plays one of Tárrega’s works here – the “Capricho árabe,” a 1892 fantasy, composed in Valencia, and evoking the powerful Moorish influence on Spanish culture.

And she shines a spotlight on Llobet by way of his arrangement of the Granados “Danza española No. 5 (Andaluza),” although in both the Falla and Granados works, Isbin made some alterations of her own.

Rodrigo’s “Aranjuez, ma pensée” touches on a later chapter in the guitar’s history. A recasting of the exquisite Adagio of the 1939 “Concierto de Aranjuez,” this short piece dates to 1988 when Rodrigo’s wife, the pianist and poet Victoria Kamhi, composed a poem, to strains of the concerto’s slow movement, in which she looked back at the afternoons she and the blind composer walked, hand in hand, through the gardens at the Royal Palace at Aranjuez.

Lara’s “Granada” was composed by a Mexican rather than a Spaniard, and is typically heard in performances by opera singers with either piano or orchestral accompaniment. The subject matter, and musical impulses, are quintessentially Spanish, and Isbin’s guitar arrangement captures the music’s essential spirit vividly.

The last of Isbin’s new arrangements (all heard here in their premiere recordings) are a pair of songs from “Cinco canciones negras,” a gracefully chromatic 1945 cycle by the Catalan composer Xavier Montsalvatge. These songs, in their original form, have long been part of Leonard’s repertory, and both she and Isbin felt that guitar arrangements of the brisk “Canto negro” and the gentle “Canción de cuna para dormir a un negrito” would show the music in a fresh light, with the “Canción,” a lullaby, bringing the album to a dream-like close.



Highly acclaimed for her “passionate intensity and remarkable vocal beauty,” the multiple Grammy Award-winning **Isabel Leonard** continues to thrill audiences both in the opera house and on the concert stage. In repertoire that spans from Vivaldi to Mozart to Thomas Ades, she has graced the stages of the Metropolitan Opera, Vienna State Opera, Paris Opera, Salzburg Festival, Bavarian State Opera, Carnegie Hall, Glyndebourne Festival, Teatro Comunale di Bologna, Lyric Opera of Chicago, San Francisco Opera as Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Angelina in *La Cenerentola*, Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Dorabella in *Così fan tutte*, Charlotte in *Werther*, Blanche de la

Force in *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Costanza in *Griselda*, the title roles in *La Périchole* and *Der Rosenkavalier*, as well as Sesto in both Mozart’s *La clemenza di Tito* and Handel’s *Giulio Cesare*. She has appeared with some of the foremost conductors of her time: James Levine, Valery Gergiev, Charles Dutoit, Gustavo Dudamel, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Franz Welser-Möst, Plácido Domingo, Edward Gardner, Edo de Waart, James Conlon, Michele Mariotti, Harry Bicket, and Andris Nelsons with the Cleveland Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Orchestra, and Vienna Philharmonic, among others. Ms. Leonard is in constant demand as a recitalist and is on the Board of Trustees at Carnegie Hall. She is a multiple Grammy Award winner, most recently for Ravel’s *L’enfant et les sortilèges* with Seiji Ozawa on Decca and *The Tempest* from the Metropolitan Opera on Deutsche Grammophon, both Best Opera Recording. Ms. Leonard is the recipient of the Richard Tucker Award and joined the supporters of the Prostate Cancer Foundation to lend her voice in honor of her father who died from the disease when she was in college. www.isabelleleonard.com





Acclaimed as “the pre-eminent guitarist of our time,” multiple GRAMMY Award winner **Sharon Isbin** has been soloist with over 170 orchestras and has given sold-out performances in the world’s finest halls. Winner of the Toronto, Madrid and Munich Competitions, Germany’s Echo Klassik and *Guitar Player’s* Best Classical Guitarist awards, she created festivals for Carnegie Hall and NPR, and has appeared on *All Things Considered*, *A Prairie Home Companion*, *CBS Sunday* and the cover of over 45 magazines. She performed in Scorsese’s Oscar-winning *The Departed*, the first internationally televised 9/11 memorial,

the White House by invitation of President Obama, and as the only classical artist in the 2010 GRAMMY Awards. PBS performances include *Tavis Smiley*, the *Billy Joel Gershwin Prize* with Josh Groban, and the acclaimed documentary *Sharon Isbin: Troubadour* seen by millions on over 200 PBS stations across the U.S., and abroad including Europe, Japan and Mexico. Winner of the 2015 ASCAP Television Broadcast Award, the film is available on DVD/Blu-ray.

Isbin’s over 25 recordings include her GRAMMY-winning *Journey to the New World* with guests Joan Baez and Mark O’Connor which spent 63 consecutive weeks on top *Billboard* charts, and her Latin GRAMMY nominated concerto disc with the New York Philharmonic, their only recording with guitar. Performance highlights include a commission for her and Isabel Leonard by Carnegie Hall for its 125th anniversary and by Chicago’s Harris Theater, a 21-city Guitar Passions tour with jazz greats Stanley Jordan and Romero Lubambo, collaborations with Sting, Steve Vai, and premieres of works written for her by many of the world’s finest composers including Corigliano, Tan Dun, Rouse, Foss, Kernis, Tower, Shore, Schwantner, Brouwer, Rorem and Brubeck.

She began guitar at nine in Italy, later studying with Andrés Segovia, Oscar Ghiglia and Rosalyn Tureck with whom she collaborated on landmark editions/recordings of the Bach lute suites. She authored the *Classical Guitar Answer Book*, and directs guitar departments at the Aspen Music Festival and The Juilliard School, which she created. Visit: www.sharonisbin.com

“Feasts of beautifully sculpted phrases ... glimpses of heaven”

Philadelphia Inquirer

“Soulful depth ... dramatic flair and contrast”

New York Times

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