SPANISH FIRE

Danzas Españolas
GRANADOS

for castanets and piano

Deanna Blacher
Cameron Roberts

Spanish Fire

Danzas Españolas
Enrique Granados

arranged for castanets and piano

Deanna Blacher | *castanets*
Cameron Roberts | *piano*

1. Galante 2'15"
2. Oriental 4'32"
3. Fandango 3'54"
4. Villanesca 4'53"
5. Andaluza 3'45"
6. Rondalla Aragonesa 4'07"
7. Valenciana 3'25"
8. Sardana 3'32"
9. Romántica 4'31"
10. Danza Triste 4'33"
11. Zambra 6'10"
12. Arabesca 5'30"

Total time 52 minutes

Recorded at Move Records studio 12 and 13 July 2011
Engineers: Vaughan McAlley and Martin Wright
Illustration: Benjamin Thomas
Photograph of Deanna Blacher: Brian Astbury
Photograph of Cameron Roberts: Jacqueline Mitelman
Liner notes: Neville Cohn

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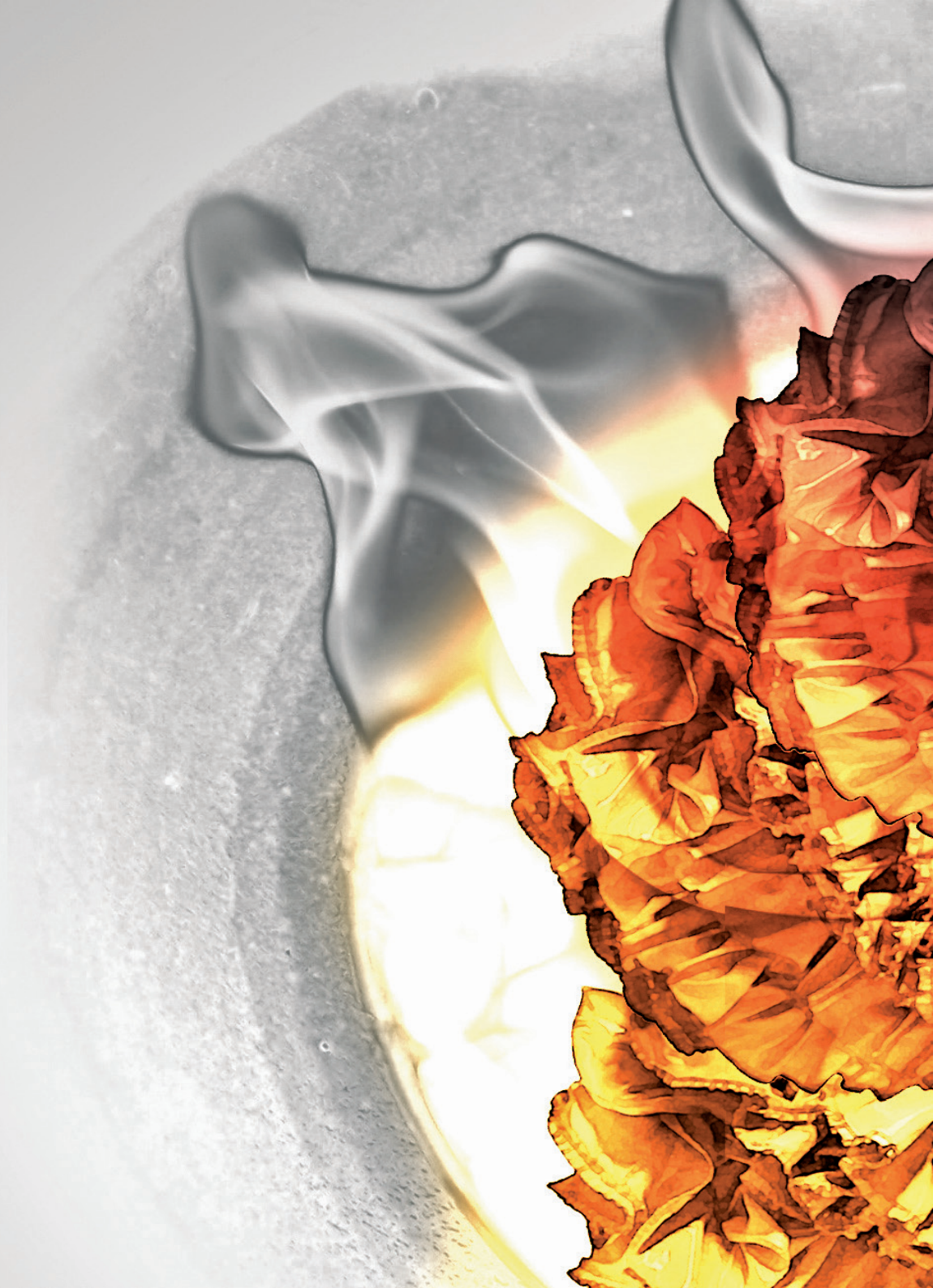

Spanish Fire

12 Danzas Españolas

ARRANGED FOR CASTANETS AND PIANO

Enrique Granados (1867-1916)

Enrique Granados y Campinya, son of an army officer, had an idyllic childhood. Born in Lerida in 1867, he spent some young years in the Canary Islands before moving to Barcelona, and later Paris, for more formal musical studies. Granados premiered his *12 Danzas* at his official debut in Barcelona in 1890. This marked both his return to Spain and his importance as a composer of Nationalistic and Romantic tendencies.Throughout his creative life, Madrid, its *majos* and *majas* – and the paintings of Goya – were a source of high inspiration. In fact, much of what he wrote, especially the often exquisite collection of *tonadillas* and his *Goyescas* suite for piano were directly inspired by Goya's work.

Nearly all photographs of Granados show a serious, unsmiling face. Yet, he had a highly developed, quirky sense of humour. Granados was a paid-up member of an extraordinary group of fellow musicians who had formed an instrumental ensemble, the only requirement for which was that each performer play an instrument about which he knew nothing. Impromptu performances would be given on the back patio of a friend's home, where disgusted neighbours would express their disapproval by pelting them with rotten fruit. For someone as intense as Granados, letting off steam along these lines was, he once confided in a friend, far more beneficial – and less expensive – than consulting his medical practitioner.

The death of Granados was tragic. It is possibly apocryphal that Granados as a young man consulted a psychic who warned him against travel over water. What is unquestioned is that Granados had a lifelong fear of water, no doubt exacerbated by a number of premonitions of death by drowning. After he'd completed his opera *Goyescas*, the composer was delighted to learn that it was to have its world premiere season at New York's Metropolitan Opera. His agreement to attend the premiere, however – and a last-minute change to his itinerary from New York – were to seal his watery fate. Shortly before his scheduled departure back to Europe, he received an invitation to the White House to give a recital for President Woodrow Wilson. To accommodate this Granados was obliged to delay his departure, booking, instead, passage for himself and his wife on the Sussex steamship via the English Channel. This ship was torpedoed by a lurking German submarine on 24 March 1916 and in the ensuing panic, Granados saw his wife floundering in the water. He jumped in to the sea to help her but both drowned.

Danzas Españolas (Spanish Dances), Opus 37

Although there is still some debate about the exact dates Granados completed his *Danzas Españolas*, it is now widely believed that they were NOT written during the composer's 16th year. This misunderstanding arises from a letter in which Granados discusses his *Danzas*. At first glance, one could be forgiven for thinking it is dated 1883 – but it is now widely considered by musicologists that the '3' in 1883 is in fact, a poorly written '8'. Each of the 12 *Danzas Españolas* could be thought of as a flawlessly facetted gem with an idiosyncratic inner fire. Of note, only the titles of dance number four and seven are from the composer himself. The other titles have been added, removed, changed and indeed mixed up by publishers ever since.

1. Galante. *(Minueto)* Opening as an *allegro* in the form of a *bolero*, it is cast in alternating major and minor modes. Bold fanfares give way to melody in the style of an elegant minuet a la Mozart before a return of the energetic opening statement.

2. Oriental. An enchanting melody in C minor has the characteristics of a slow and distant *malagueña*. There are also murmurs of guitars and music of a strongly nostalgic flavour in a nocturne-like central section of which Chopin himself might have been proud.

3. Fandango. Sometimes titled *Zarabanda*, it calls for virtuosic, energetic interpreters. It is a superb foil to the introspection of Oriental.

4. Villanesca. Redolent of an ancient Castilian dance, the repeated Ds (and the visual effect of the pianist's crossing hands) and the seductive chatter of castanets create an almost mesmeric effect. Midway, we hear *Canción y Estribillo* (Song and Refrain) before a reprise of the almost hypnotic measures that

usher in this beguiling and haunting sound image of Spain.

5. Andaluza is far and away the best known of the twelve dances. Sometimes titled *Playera*, its guitar-like inflections of southern Spain have as firm a grip on a vast listening public today as it rapidly acquired after its first publication. It has been transcribed for a miscellany of different instrumental combinations as well as being converted into a song with added text. Granados recorded this for Welte Mignon and Duo Art reproducing pianos which sparked a worldwide love affair with this most engaging of Granados' shorter pieces.

6. Rondalla Aragonesa is a study in contrasts. The ever-increasing speed of an energetic *jota* with great crescendos that quicken the pulse and excite the imagination. Tension eases with a suave and gently lyrical episode before, yet again, intense animation and bracing sonic climaxes which seize the attention in a vice-like grip.

7. Valenciana. Dedicated to Russian composer Cesar Cui, Granados has here composed an *allegro arioso* which has the accentuated pace of the *jota valenciana*. Staccato arpeggionated chords, sinister rumblings in the bass register and delightfully jaunty melodic interpolations by the left hand make this one of Granados' most charming offerings. He played it frequently in public including at the White House in Washington on 7 March 1916 which, tragically, turned out to be the last public recital he gave before a pointless, too-early death.

8. Sardana. Sometimes titled *Asturiana,* this is written to the rhythm of the Sardana, a dance of the composer's native Catalonia. Much of it is a superb example of musical hauteur. Certainly, it is one of the composer's most majestic utterances, the more effective for a contrasting, engagingly folksy episode. It enshrines one of Granados' most impassioned and loudest keyboard climaxes culminating on a chord marked *ffff*.

9. Romántica. Flamboyant, virtuosic music that calls to mind fleeting impressions of the *jota* of the basque countryside. Nimble fingers and an iron nerve are required to successfully negotiate its often villainously demanding, rhythmically intricate measures.

10. Danza Triste. Dedicated to the Infanta Isabel, this delightful dance vividly simulates the strumming of a guitar with a brief inner episode that calls to mind the staccato plucking of strings with abrupt accelerations and sudden lessenings of speed.

11. Zambra is a Moorish dance, of which too different types are known: a wedding dance and a belly dance. The dance infiltrated gypsy culture and, as is the case in this movement, is intensely expressive in both its rhythmic zest and religious spirit.

12. Arabesca. This hypnotically undulating melody in the form of a *bolero* begins as hauntingly and mysteriously as it ends. Its central section is evocative of Moorish vistas.

Castanets

In the minds of most people, the castanets, until comparatively recently, have been associated almost exclusively with the Spanish dance. However, since the 1920s, the castanets have gradually emerged as solo instruments in their own right. In recent years, numbers of composers have written works featuring the castanets in solo roles. They are chestnut-shaped – the Spanish word for chestnuts is castañas – and nowadays are made from either wood or fibreglass. The expressive potential of these tiny instruments is extraordinary and they are capable of a wide dynamic range and of great rhythmic versatility.

In Dance No 3, for instance, Deanna Blacher uses a man's-size pair made for her in Madrid by Victor Galiano in 1988. For *Andaluza*, Blacher plays castanets carved for her in 1972 by Manuel Vela, widely considered as one of the greatest of all castanet makers. Lucia, the grand-daughter of Vela, made the instruments used in Dances 8 and 9. All the instruments are made of fibre glass.

Deanna Blacher

Deanna Blacher, trained in the exacting discipline of the Spanish dance, has worked internationally as dancer and choreographer. She has also carved a remarkable niche as castanets virtuosa.

Numbers of composers have written and dedicated castanet concertos to her. An invitation by Zubin Mehta to perform as castanets soloist with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra opened many career doors including a six-performance engagement with the Israel Chamber Orchestra and many concerts with the Israel Sinfonietta. She has performed with all the major orchestras in southern Africa, most frequently with conductor Enrique Garcia Asensio. In recital, piano partners have included Lamar Crowson, Thomas Rajna, Michael Isador, Michael Cole and, most recently, Cameron Roberts. Deanna Blacher has also performed as concerto soloist at London's Royal Festival Hall as well as with the Hague Philharmonic, the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, and the West Australian Symphony Orchestra.

Deanna Blacher has been guest teacher for Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet (at the University of Manitoba). Lectures on various aspects of the Spanish dance given at the universities of Cape Town and Witwatersrand (Johannesburg) have been published. She also gave lecture demonstration on Spanish dance at the University of Western Australia and in Canberra.

Since settling in Western Australia, Deanna Blacher has founded the Danza Viva Spanish Dance Academy and Company. She has also devised a graded Spanish dance examinations system which is administered by the Spanish Dance Institute, Inc. Candidates are examined in Australia, south-east Asia and Israel. For almost three decades, Deanna Blacher has taught Spanish dance at the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts (Edith Cowan University)

Recently, His Majesty King Juan Carlos of Spain granted Deanna Blacher the Cross of the Order of Civil Merit for services to Spanish dance. She is also the recipient of the Medal of the Order of Australia – and a Lifetime Achievement award by Ausdance.

Cameron Roberts

Australian-born pianist Cameron Roberts is recognised as an artist of great distinction and originality. He performs in Australia, England and Spain as soloist and chamber musician whilst gaining growing success as a composer and arranger. Performances have taken him throughout the UK, Spain, Belgium, the USA, Colombia, Thailand, Singapore and Australia. He has performed in ensembles in the Royal Albert Hall, the *Konzertgebauw*, and the Sydney Opera House, and as concert soloist, with such conductors as Lawrence Foster, John Hopkins and Dobbs Franks.

His early years of study were with Mack Jost (piano) and Christopher Martin (violin). He later graduated in both Medicine and Music at The University of Melbourne, before furthering his piano studies at the Australian National Academy (Ronald Farren-Price and Michael Kieran Harvey), the Tanglewood Institute, USA, and privately at the Moscow Conservatory, Manhattan School of Music, and London's Royal Academy.

His debut CD of Bach's *Goldberg Variations and Original Transcriptions* (2006) is praised as 'thought-provoking' and 'a disc of rare and valuable insight'. *Original Piano Transcriptions* (2009) was acclaimed: 'his taste is impeccable… it's virtuosic playing that is frankly thrilling.' His performing repertoire also includes major works such as *Iberia* by Albéniz, and The *24 Preludes* by Rachmaninoff. As chamber player he has collaborated with Jacques Zoon (flute), David Walter (oboe), Beate Altenburg (cello), and Plural Ensemble, amongst others.

Roberts maintains a strong interest in contemporary music, jazz and composition, and with the recent support of the Ian Potter Trust and the Michael Kieran Harvey Piano Scholarship, is writing works for solo piano, and various chamber ensembles. He is also completing a book on 'The application of science to advanced piano technique'.

Recent performances have been in London's Purcell Room, St.Martin-in-the-Fields, Madrid's Auditorio Nacional, Teatro Real, and also in Germany, Colombia and Australia. Later this year he records rare cello transcriptions with cellist Beate Altenberg (Deutcheradio Kultur, Berlin) and next year with celebrated flautist, Jacques Zoon.