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SPANISH IMPRESSIONS
Hermitage Piano Trio

Reference Recordings RR151 (reviewed as 24/176.4 FLAC download). 2023. Victor and Marina A. Ledin, prods.; Sean Royce Martin, Keith O. Johnson, engs.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

SONICS ★★★★★

Here's a real treat: piano trios by four outstanding Spanish composers—Enrique Fernández Arbós, Joaquín Turina, Gaspar Cassadó, and Mariano Perelló. All except Cassadó, a famed cellist born in 1897 who studied with Pablo Casals in Paris, composed during the same golden period as Granados, Falla, and Albéniz—the composers whose orchestral music graces Fritz Reiner's famed Living Stereo recording, *Spain*. Expertly recorded at Skywalker Sound by the family team of Sean Martin and Keith O. Johnson, the hi-rez recording stands out for its excellent dynamics, natural colors, and big, realistically spaced images that fill a natural-sounding acoustic. It also impresses with its many pages of informative liner notes.

Unless you're a connoisseur, the four compositions may be a bit too alike to take in in one sitting, yet they are ideal for auditioning in smaller chunks. Composed in Berlin and premiered in Brussels, Arbós's *Trois Pièces originales dans le genre Espagnol* are delicious accountings of three Spanish dances: Bolero, Habanera, and Seguidillas Gitanas. The Hermitage Piano Trio sounds right at home with the color and verve of this music.

Paris-schooled Turina's Piano Trio No.2 in B minor blends Western European cosmopolitan sophistication with Spanish passion. In the middle movement, which alternates between intrigue, longing, and seduction, you can virtually hear castanets. The final *lento* is passionate and intimate with gorgeous delicate passages that lead to an all-out ending.

All-out is also the byword for Cassadó's intense Piano Trio in C Major, which requires serious musicianship. Violinist Perelló's gypsy-inspired *Tres Impresiones*, which begins with a tribute to Albéniz, his teacher, makes for a delightful conclusion.

—Jason Victor Serinus