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A Musical Tour of Modern Spain

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Spanish classical music often has a French accent: Bizet's "Carmen," Chabrier's "España," Ravel's "L'Heure Espagnole" -- with a little Russian thrown in (Rimsky-Korsakov's "Capriccio Espagnol"). But true Spanish music is richer and more exotic -- a legacy of eight centuries of Muslim rule. On Sunday night at the Kennedy Center Terrace Theater, Angel Gil-Ordóñez and the Post-Classical Ensemble put musical aspects of modern Spain on beautiful display.

Washington's own Harolyn Blackwell, a soprano of sensitive expression and great vocal beauty, was equally at home in the impressionism of Manuel de Falla's "Psyché" and in Joaquín Turina's "Poema en Forma de Canciones," which displayed her considerable range -- from coloratura to something approaching nightclub singing.

Blackwell's ability to emote with her voice came through especially clearly in the two bright, slightly sarcastic songs within Joaquín Rodrigo's "Cuatro Madrigales Amatorios," the last of which features accompaniment reminiscent of Respighi's "Ancient Airs and Dances." And in Roberto Gerhard's 1941 "Cancionero de Pedrell," whose strong rhythms resemble those of Orff's 1936 "Carmina Burana," Blackwell and the Post-Classical players swirled effortlessly from wistful emotion to an insistent, percussion-dominated sound.

The all-instrumental "Sinfonietta 'Folia Daliniana'" by Xavier Montsalvatge, in its U.S. premiere, was revelatory in its own way, with the flute producing sounds as well as notes and a stirring exploration of the matching timbres of cello and clarinet and the contrasting ones of cello and bassoon. And Heitor Villa-Lobos's Choro No. 7, lyrical and jazzy by turns, distinctively blended Brazilian rhythms with classical form -- a musical treat, albeit a distraction from what was otherwise a focus on Spain.

■ **Mark J. Estren**