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Carol A. Hess

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## Contemporary Piano

### Enrique Granados and Modern Piano Technique

Carol A. Hess

Until recently Enrique Granados's reputation rested largely on his career as a virtuoso pianist and on a handful of piano pieces, including his masterwork, *Goyescas* (later converted into an opera of the same name.)<sup>1</sup> Also active as a piano teacher, however, Granados founded a music academy in Barcelona; here, Alicia de Larrocha, Rosa Sabater, Conchita Badia, and others received the bulk of their training. While the specifics of Granados's teaching have been explored elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> the historical significance of his method has gone

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<sup>1</sup>In fact, Granados composed chamber music, vocal music (including nine operas), symphonic music, and approximately sixty piano piece. For a catalog of his complete works see Carol A. Hess, *Enrique Granados: a Bio-bibliography* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1991).

<sup>2</sup>The most complete discussion is Douglas Riva's "Enric Granados: Composer, Performer, and Teacher," *Catalan Review: International Journal of Catalan Culture* 1/2 (1986): 101-114, based on Riva's 1982 doctoral dissertation, "The *Goyescas* for Piano by Enrique Granados: a Critical Edition," New York University, 1982, (Ann Arbor: University

unremarked. Around 1900 a revolt in piano teaching was quietly taking place throughout Europe: pianists were debunking the finger-dominated approach of earlier in the century, while the expanded palette of coloristic effects (required mainly by French music) called for greater refinements in pedalling. Despite his relative isolation in Barcelona,<sup>3</sup> Granados nonetheless pursued strikingly modern ideas in piano-playing, and thus contributed to this reshaping of pianistic principles.

His teaching practice are best gleaned from two sources: his diary<sup>4</sup> and the more detailed *Enrique Granados: Recuerdos de su vida y estudio crítico de su obra por su antiguo discípulo*<sup>5</sup> by Guillermo de Boladeres Ibern, an aspiring *litterateur* who pursued piano playing as a serious avocation and studied intermittently with Granados from 1900 to 1915. The diary provides but occasional glimpses into Granados's own schooling as a pianist, and only hints at the direction his teaching would eventually take. Granados's first teacher, Francesc Jurnet (Barcelona, 1879), typified the then prevalent tastes in repertory through his fondness for *morceaux* like Gottschalk's *Last Hope*, Nollé's *The Pearls*, or *L'Harpe d'or* by Godefröid; even at an early age Granados resisted this pseudo-popular style. In 1880 Granados left Jurnet to study with Joan Baptiste Pujol (1835-1898), founder of the so-called Catalan Piano School.<sup>6</sup> After study in Paris, Pujol returned to his native Barcelona to train a generation of Catalan pianists, including Albéniz, Vidiella, Malats, Viñes, and Granados. Pujol was especially noted

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Microfilms). Standard Granados biographies by Collet, Fernández-Cid, Iglesias, and Tarazona also comment briefly on his teaching.

<sup>3</sup>Granados lived in Barcelona during most of his adult life. After a two year stay in Paris (1887-1889) he resided in Madrid during the winter of 1898 for the production of his opera, *María del Carmen*. Besides return visits to Paris in 1905, 1909, and 1914 (on this last occasion he also visited Switzerland) and his final voyage to the United States in 1915-16, his infrequent travels were confined to various regions of Spain and the Balearic Islands.

<sup>4</sup>Edited and annotated by Pablo Vila San-Juan. *Papeles íntimos de Enrique Granados*, Barcelona: Amigos de Granados, 1966.

<sup>5</sup>*Enrique Granados: Recollections of His Life and Critical Study of His Work by His Former Student*. Barcelona: Editorial Arte y Letras, n.d.

<sup>6</sup>See Mark Hansen, "The Catalan Piano School of Pedalling in the Teaching of Enrique Granados and Frank Marshall." *The Pianist's Guide to Pedalling*, ed. Joseph Banowetz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 220-29.

for his emphasis on tone production.<sup>7</sup> Granados's diary contains little else but personal impressions of this important figure, however:

[Pujol] . . . was much admired by his students. But we were not allowed our own judgments, rather, he would impose upon us his own.<sup>8</sup>

This authoritarian stance always remained distasteful to Granados, one he never cultivated in his own teaching.

Conspicuously absent from Granados's diaries are any impressions of the next landmark in his career, his two-year stay in Paris under the tutelage of Charles de Bériot (1880-1914).<sup>9</sup> Thus, the effect of the Paris period on Granados's later teaching is ambiguous, although it has been claimed that de Bériot's emphasis on pedalling sparked Granados's subsequent interest in this area.<sup>10</sup> A second area de Bériot emphasized was improvisation. Although a moribund practice by the late 1880s, such notable pianists as Emil von Sauer (dedictee of "Los Requeiebros," the first movement of *Goyescas*) were known to improvise short modulatory passages between different works on their recital programs.<sup>11</sup> By all accounts Granados was a brilliant improviser: the significance of the often-quoted story of his informal performance of *El pelele*, in which the composer's unexpected improvisations resulted in a stymied page-turner (Frank Marshall) is perhaps better illustrated by a review of one of Granados's many public Chopin

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<sup>7</sup>Pujol also founded a publishing house in 1888, which brought out many works of Granados and Albéniz as well as Pedrell's *Els Pirineus*.

<sup>8</sup>Vila San-Juan, *Papeles íntimos*, 57.

<sup>9</sup>The unpublished diaries of Ricardo Viñes, fellow de Bériot student and Granados's roommate in Paris however, indirectly provide information on this period of Granados's life. For excerpts see Elaine Brody, "Viñes in Paris: New Light on Twentieth-Century Performance Practice," in *A Musical Offering: Essays in Honor of Martin Bernstein*, ed. Edward H. Clinkscale and Claire Brook (New York: Pendragon Press, 1977), 44-62. See also Brody's "The Spaniards in Paris," in *Paris: The Musical Kaleidoscope, 1870-1925* (New York: George Braziller, 1987), 168-89.

<sup>10</sup>Mercedes Roldós, former Director, Marshall Academy (formerly Granados Academy), interview with the author, December 23, 1987.

<sup>11</sup>Dennis Libby. "Improvisation, Western, after 1800." *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Stanley Sadie, ed. (London: Macmillan, 1980).

recitals, during which the composer wove together entire sections of a nocturne, the *Waltz* (op. 64 no. 2), the *Berceuse*, and the *Polonaise-Fantasy* with a "grand, Romantic gesture."<sup>12</sup> According to Boladeres, Granados often resorted to improvisation during lessons, presumably to elucidate a desired interpretive quality.<sup>13</sup>

From the standpoint of modern piano technique, however, Granados's physical approach to playing is of greater interest. From the first lesson, Boladeres observed Granados's completely original outlook on technical problems; like so many pianists of the early twentieth century Boladeres seems to have been trained in a tradition akin to that of the Lebert-Stark school of Stuttgart, the proponents of which preached high finger action, an excessively curved hand, and isolation of individual fingers, despite the unsuitability of this approach for the demands of the Romantic repertory. The results of this system included often crippling muscular tension, injuries to the fourth and fifth fingers, and a brittle, percussive sound. By contrast, Granados disparaged the physically impractical notion of lifting each finger to its greatest possible height, and advocated instead his own concept of the *mecanismo*, i.e. the arm, forearm, wrist, and fingers working together as a coordinated unit. Granados also favored the idea that physical flexibility was critical in piano-playing, a relatively new concept in 1900, when many teachers still balanced coins on the backs of students' hands and indulged in other such stiffness-producing contrivances. (Here it is worth noting that the curriculum of the Granados Academy included classes in Dalcroze's eurhythmics, the then novel method of cultivating musical sensitivity through body movement.) Neither was Granados overly conservative in his choices of repertory for students of the Granados Academy: aside from Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, and Schubert, recent works by Grieg, Paderewski, Fauré, Debussy, and Albéniz formed the basis of the curriculum. It is tempting to suggest that Granados's spirit of innovation in musical education is linked with Barcelona's brief

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<sup>12</sup>See "Sala Granados," *Revista Musical Catalana* 12 (1915): 184 (n.a.). For an account of another public improvisation see in the same publication "Academia Granados," 1 (1904): 151 (n.a.). For a recorded version of one of Granados's *pelele* improvisations see *The Catalan Piano Tradition*, sound recording no. 109, International Piano Archives (New York: Desmar, 1970).

<sup>13</sup>Boladeres makes numerous references to Granados's tendency to improvise during lessons. See, for example, *Recuerdos*, 147-48: "One of Granados's qualities . . . was the absolute insouciance of the troubadour who follows his fancy come what may. When his hands don't arrive at the expected destination, he turns around with the same grace of movement with which he arrived."

status around the turn of the century as a center for experimentation in general education in Spain, with the secular and co-educational *Escoles modernes* a particularly noteworthy enterprise. These were established, like the Granados Academy, in 1901.<sup>14</sup>

One of Boladeres's more provocative remarks is his comparison of Granados's teaching with that of Ludwig Deppe (1828-1890), the Berlin-based conductor and pianist, who taught, among many others, Sauer and the important American pianist William Sherwood. Citing Deppe student Amy Fay, author of the well-known memoir *Music-Study in Germany*,<sup>15</sup> Boladeres insists that Deppe's avoidance of finger-lifting, his careful attention to muscular coordination, controlled relaxation of weight, and preoccupation with the gradations of tone ("las veinte o treinta maneras distintas de pulsar las teclas") all find an identical correspondence in Granados's teaching.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, both Deppe and Granados subscribed to the idea that intelligent training of the muscles was far more important than mere unrelenting practice; thus with proper training *all* students might aspire to a high level of artistry (see *Recuerdos*, 57-61). "Was [Granados] the representative of a scientific school of piano-playing?" Boladeres queries, in his comparison of Granados and Deppe. Surely the above considerations answer this question.

The previously unexplored parallel between Granados and Deppe is especially thought-provoking when Spain's habitual isolation from Western European trends is taken into account. According to at least one chronicler of modern piano technique, Deppe's method "counteracted the existing system of the last half century of keyboard methodology."<sup>17</sup> Since any idea that threatens methodological complacency is only slowly put into practice, pianists in other countries did not take up and expand upon Deppe's teachings immediately; among the more celebrated of these were Tobias

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<sup>14</sup>For a brief summary of the active role played by the Granados Academy in Barcelona's musical and educational life see Hess, "Enric Granados i la vida musical barcelonina entre 1891-1916," in *Actes del Sisè Col·loqui d'Estudis Catalans a Nord-Amèrica* (Vancouver, 1990), ed. Arseni Pacheco and Karl Kobbervig. (Montserrat: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1992), 469-81.

<sup>15</sup>First published in Chicago (A.C. McClurg, 1880).

<sup>16</sup>According to Boladeres (*Recuerdos*, 60) Granados was unfamiliar with Fay's book, which compares the teaching methods of Tausig, Kullak, Liszt, and Deppe.

<sup>17</sup>Frances Dillon, "Introduction to the Dover Edition," *Music-Study in Germany* (New York: Dover Publications), xii.

Matthay (1895-1945) in England and Theodore Leschetizsky (1830-1915) in Austria. It now seems only reasonable to include Granados among these purveyors of modern piano technique.

A final parallel between Deppe and Granados is their emphasis on pedalling. Granados's pedalling was often praised for its extreme subtlety, and his interest in pedagogy led him to write two booklets on the subject, an area then just beginning to be treated in detail.<sup>18</sup> Although the main points of Granados's approach are cogently summarized by Hansen,<sup>19</sup> a significant point should now be emphasized in light of the above discussion. Of his pedalling system Granados claimed, "My method has the merit of being the first." The debatable accuracy of this comment (given Matthay's work in the same area at approximately the same time)<sup>20</sup> seems only to confirm Boladeres's description of Granados working in a vacuum, unaware of Deppe and of Matthay. It therefore seems certain that Granados arrived at his own approach—one that corresponds in so many respects to the thinking of the great innovators in piano technique—completely independently of outside influences. It is regrettably characteristic of Granados scholarship in general that his contribution to 20th-century piano technique should be thus overlooked until now.

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<sup>18</sup>*El pedal* (unpublished) and *Método teórico práctico para el uso de los pedales del piano* (Madrid: Unión Musical Española, 1966). Technological developments in the pedal continued to be made into the first decade of the 20th century.

<sup>19</sup>See note 6 above. In addition to specifying different types of pedal attacks (*pedal de salto*, *pedal incidental*, *pedal de accentuación rítmica*) Granados considered the various depths of pedal, applied for a variety of coloristic effects. He also emphasized the timed release of the pedal through assigning it rhythmic values within the context of the piece. This sort of detail represents a major departure from the idea that the pedal is "either up or down," regrettably still a prevalent oversimplification in piano pedagogy.

<sup>20</sup>See, for example, Section V of Matthay's *Musical Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Boston Music Company, 1913), "As to Pedaling and the Element of Duration." Unlike Matthay, Granados designed a systematic series of exercises for specific pedalling problems.