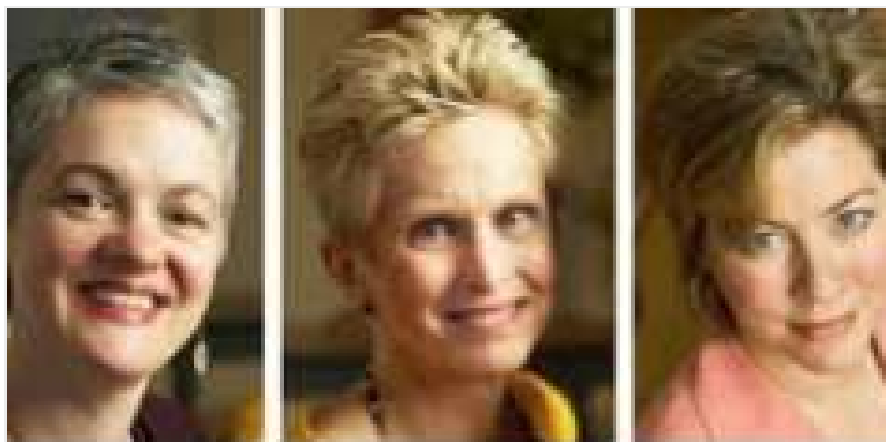


Spanish songs by Lyric Fest (1st review)

Three unpredictable women

Tom Purdom

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Ward, Marrazzo, DuPlantis: What next?

One hallmark of the Lyric Fest song series is the encyclopedic research that supports every program created by its three founders” soprano Randi Marrazzo, mezzo Suzanne DuPlantis and pianist Laura Ward. Their latest offering bore a Spanish title, but it wasn't just a simple parade of Spanish songs. The selections and the program notes sketched in a complex history that spanned five centuries and two continents.

Spanish music in Spain itself was influenced by the Moorish, Jewish and Christian musical traditions. In the New World, it interacted with the music of the native peoples as well as the enslaved Africans who were dragged across the Atlantic.

The famous composers represented on the program, like Manuel de Falla and the Argentine tango master Astor Piazzolla, shared the spotlight with unfamiliar figures from Cuba and Puerto Rico. Most of the songs were composed or arranged in the 19th and 20th Centuries, but the texts were taken from a period that stretched from the expulsion of the Jews in 1492 to the diaspora of the refugees who fled Castro's Cuba in the 1960s.

When I spoke to Marrazzo after the concert, she remarked that she and her colleagues were surprised by the recent surge of scholarly interest in Latin American music.

Feel the poetry

The concert provided a prime example of the value that music and musicianship can add to foreign texts. The English translations included in the program were precise but unpoetic, but the settings and the deliveries of the singers more than compensated for that deficiency. Even if you didn't speak Spanish, you could feel the poetry.

Pianist Laura Ward once again provided some of the best accompaniments that any vocalist will ever work with, In her hands a stream of finely nuanced commentaries interacted with the vocal lines. Nightingales sang on cue. Big symphonic surges set the stage for grand tenor and soprano outbursts.

Love and nightingales

The four vocalists were all youngish singers with good voices and enviable resumes who spoke Spanish as their native tongue. Tenor Diego Silva and baritone Luis Ledesma were both born in Mexico City; soprano Maria Aleida comes from Cuba; and mezzo Carla Dirlikov is the daughter of a Mexican mother and a Bulgarian father.

All possess strong, operatic voices capable of producing big vocal displays, but they generally adhered to the more restrained style suitable for songs. Dirlikov displayed an especially good understanding of nuanced art song style. Aleida tended to be more operatic, but she captured all the sweetness of an Enrique Granados song about love and the nightingale.

Ladies' man

Ledesma brought an opera singer's feel for character to his pieces. When he sang a lament for the loss of Cuba after the Spanish-American War, he created a portrait of a gentleman who had just put down his newspaper and launched into a commentary on the catastrophe.

Diego Silva got to wow the ladies, as tenors usually do. Five of his six songs were essentially heartfelt serenades. The texts originated in four centuries and two continents, but all conveyed a message that would be familiar to country and Western fans: The guy never gets the girl.

The sole exception was the afternoon's grand finale, the original Spanish version of what has become a fixture of the global popular music repertoire: Agustin Lara's "Granada." It's been sung by pop stars and opera stars the world over for more than half a century, but Silva proved that a big soaring tenor version can still bring down the house.

Ten-year celebration

In the ten years since their first concert in January 2003, Lyric Fest's founders have added a major series to the Philadelphia music scene. In January they'll mark the anniversary in style with a two-concert series that will introduce new song cycles by Andrea Clearfield and Daron Hagen.

They'll follow that with a March program devoted to the Civil Rights movement, featuring the opera star Denyce Graves, and a May event presenting songs by composers setting texts "in languages foreign to their own." These three enterprising and talented women are, without doubt, the most unpredictable impresarios active in our region.♦

To read another review by Steve Cohen, click [here](#).

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ARTICLE OVERVIEW

Lyric Fest transformed a concert of Spanish and Latin American songs into a complex historical trip through two continents.

WHAT, WHEN, WHERE

Lyric Fest: "A Tu Corazon, To Your Heart." Songs from Spain and Latin America by Falla, Piazzolla et al. Maria Aleida, soprano; Carla Dirlikov, mezzo-soprano; Diego Silva, tenor; Luis Ledesma, baritone; Laura Ward, piano. Suzanne DuPlantis, Randi Marrasso, Laura Ward, artistic directors. November 18, 2012 at Academy of Vocal Arts, 1920 Spruce St. [\(215\) 438-1702](tel:2154381702) or www.lyricfest.org.

ABOUT TOM PURDOM



Tom Purdom (tompurdom@verizon.net) is a science fiction writer and general freelance writer who has been writing about music since 1988.

