Nicolás Ruiz ESPADERO

PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME ONE
SOUVENIR D'AUTREFOIS (NOCTURNE), OP. 11
SUR LA TOMBE DE GOTTSCHALK, OP. 68
5 GRANDS TRANSCRIPTIONS
INNOCENCE-CAPRICE, OP. 23
VALSE IDÉALE, OP. 60
PUREZA Y CALMA
OSSIAN POLKA
PRELUDIO

José Raúl López

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS
The history of ‘art music’ in Cuba begins in the latter part of the eighteenth century with the liturgical legacy of Esteban Salas (1725–1803) during his tenure at the Santiago de Cuba Cathedral, on the eastern part of the island. The existence of documented musical activity, however, dates back to the years succeeding Columbus’ discovery of the island in 1492. Chronicles describing aboriginal chants and areítos prove the existence of musical activities, but they did not leave a durable imprint on Cuba’s musical future, because of the rapid extinction of the native population. In the ensuing centuries, Spanish colonisation introduced both sacred and secular elements that co-existed alongside the oral traditions of African slaves imported to the colony from the 1600s onwards. The most notable and rapid development of a native Cuban musical culture occurred in the early nineteenth century, and correlates with the bustling economic activity generated by the Spanish monopolisation of the sugar trade in the Caribbean. On the one hand, the enormous wealth created by sugar barons forged the cultivation of cultural endeavour, as one might expect; on the other, it regimented a socio-economic system that eventually culminated in a profound and irreversible political transfiguration by the end of the century.

Politically, as a prelude to eventual independence, Cuba underwent a series of transformations, propelled to varying degrees by such events as the British

---

1 A term describing an aboriginal communal activity that featured singing and dancing.  
2 The institution of slavery differed slightly between the British-American system and the Spanish-Portuguese one, where the possibility of self-emancipation existed to a degree. Perhaps more importantly, in cultural-musical terms, was the permissive attitude many enslaved blacks encountered in the Iberian custom of allowing groups often sharing a similar culture-language to engage in tribal (religious and musical) observances under the mantle of Catholicism, in effect preserving such ancestral traditions as seen in Santería, with its mirror-image equivalence of religious deities: African ones disguised as Catholic saints. In the British/Protestant variant, ancestral traditions did not really survive to the same degree, if at all.
occupation of Havana in 1762 during the Seven Years War (1756–63) that sowed the seeds of liberalisation and expanded commerce; the aftermath of the American and French Revolutions; the independence of neighbouring Spanish colonies; and Spain’s own turbulent political crises that culminated in the Carlist Wars and the Spanish-American conflict. Amidst some of these dramatic events, Cuba produced a cadre of notable political, literary and artistic figures, including its most celebrated composer of the nineteenth century.

Nicolás Ruiz Espadero was born on 15 February 1832 in Havana. His father, Nicolás Ruiz Palomino, a Creole of direct Spanish ancestry, was a confirmed liberal and contributed to a newspaper that espoused his philosophical creed. Elected in 1821 as a representative to the 1822–23 Spanish Cortes (parliament) in an ill-fated election that ended in nullification, Ruiz Palomino soon abandoned his militant posture after the newly appointed Governor General of Cuba, Dionisio Vives, reaffirmed the political compliance of the island to the Spanish crown in 1824. Palomino quietly returned to his personal affairs and to writing pedagogical texts; he also worked as a translator, having some command of French, as did his future son. Espadero’s mother, Dolores Espadero y Orta, hailed from Cáceres in Extremadura, a region of Spain from which some of the early conquistadors had emerged. She received a serious training in piano and counterpoint and arrived in Havana in 1810. Her marriage to Nicolás Palomino

3 The frequency of the deteriorating political strife in Cuba between factions loyal to Spain, those opposing Spanish rule and others contemplating annexation to the United States culminated in a recurring progression of reactionary and oppressive measures by successive Governors General. For instance, the 1844 Conspiración de la escalera (‘Conspiracy of the Ladder’, alluding to the torment suffered by suspected insurgents, real or imagined, tied to wooden ladders) was a fabricated plot hurled at slaves and free blacks in a pre-emptive attempt to dispel any possible uprising similar to the 1791 one in Santo Domingo.

4 The term ‘Creole’ (criollo) is used here in its original context, namely, a direct descendant of Europeans born in the New World.

5 El patriota americano (‘The American Patriot’), published in the years 1811–12.

6 Cecilio Tielles Ferrer, Espadero: lo hispánico musical en Cuba, Agil Offset, Barcelona, 1994, pp. 15–25. According to Tielles Ferrer, Nicolás Ruiz Palomino openly championed liberal causes such as civil liberties, adoption of a constitution and the abolition of slavery, which defied the political, social and economic status quo of the Creole aristocracy on the island.

7 Palomino published a guide to improving literacy in 1830 (Fácil y sencillo método para aprender a leer en muy corto tiempo – ‘Easy and simple method to learn to read in a short time’), with revised editions in 1840 and 1843 (information included in Tielles Ferrer, op. cit., p. 25).
created a cultured domestic ambience, where she and other capable pianists performed works by Haydn, Mozart, Pleyel and Beethoven in memorable soirées.

Espadero, an only son born seven years into his parents’ marriage, initially learned the rudiments of music from his mother. Several myths regarding his early general education must be disproven. The writer Alejo Carpentier (and others) claimed that his parents gave him ‘an undisciplined home education, enriched by haphazard and anxious readings’. He was indeed home – schooled by his parents – but they were singularly well equipped to provide an alternative, if not superior, early education; and his father had a keen sense of structure, to judge from his pedagogical essays, and will have tutored the young boy in a rounded curriculum. Another myth holds that Palomino was opposed to his son’s musical inclinations, which were secretly fuelled by his mother. It is true that in colonial times, some professions were favoured for males in the middle and upper strata of society, but in the years leading up to Espadero’s childhood, a musical career was gradually reconsidered as a viable and respectable profession for white Cubans, particularly one geared towards performance and ‘serious’ composition. Encouraged by the writings of José Antonio Saco and other philosophers, almost as a patriotic call to rescue the musical arts from non-whites (free blacks controlled much of music instruction and especially dance music), a number of promising instrumentalists – mostly pianists – appeared to answer the call to arms, among them Fernando Arizti (1828–88), José Comellas (1842–88), Espadero himself and Adolfo de Quesada (1830–95), born in Spain but a resident in the island for his initial musical training. In his *La Habana artística* Serafín Ramírez cites a number of factors as determinant in the acceptance of a musical profession by prominent social classes: the contributing role of the popularity of the piano; the visits of European opera companies and soloists (the

---

8 In an early public performance as a sixteen-year-old, he appears as Nicolás Ruiz, but shortly thereafter, when his music began to be published in Cuba by Edelmann, he used N. R. Espadero or the complete name, which is the usual practice in Spain and its colonies (father’s last name, followed by mother’s paternal name). When his scores were published in Europe, he used primarily ‘Espadero de la Havane’.


10 José Antonio Saco, ‘Memoria sobre la vagancia en la isla de Cuba’, *Obras*, Roe Lockwood and Son, New York, 1852, p. 32.

pianists Henri Herz and Louis Moreau Gottschalk and violinist Paul Julien, for instance); the construction of theatres; the creation of musical societies such as the Academia de Música Santa Cecilia, considered an important centre for literary and musical arts from 1834 to 1844; and the arrival of well-trained music-teachers from Europe.\(^{12}\)

The young Espadero’s two piano professors proved critical to his development: the Spaniard José Miró (1815–78) and Chopin’s longtime factotum, Julian Fontana (1810–69). Through Miró,\(^{13}\) Espadero was systematically exposed to Friedrich Kalkbrenner’s technical regimen and Sigismund Thalberg’s pianistic innovations. Fontana’s pianistic, artistic and humanistic legacy was a significant influence on multiple aspects of Espadero’s musical, professional and personal evolution, although the apprenticeship itself lasted only two years.\(^{14}\) Fontana not only introduced the young pianist to the world of Chopin, but he probably also offered some guidance in composition. The initial publication of Espadero’s works in Paris by Léon Escudier in the early 1860s occurred without doubt through Fontana’s intervention and, later, that of Louis Moreau Gottschalk, who was to become another major figure in Espadero’s life. The pianistic results achieved through Miró’s and Fontana’s concurrent instruction endowed Espadero with a vast arsenal of music from the pre-Classical, Classical and Romantic canons, justifying the claims of later biographers of an impressive and erudite repertoire. A unique characteristic of Espadero’s musical trajectory is that he never travelled abroad for instruction, as did several pianists in his circle: it was

\(^{12}\) Ramírez, *op. cit.*, pp. 171–75.

\(^{13}\) José Miró y Anoria was born in Cádiz and studied in Paris with Friedrich Kalkbrenner and Sigismund Thalberg. Friendly with Parisian pianists (Henri Herz, Henri Bertini, Chopin), Miró arrived in Cuba in 1843. He was named Director of the music section of the Liceo artístico y literario de La Habana, one of the early significant musical institutions founded in Cuba, departing for Spain in 1852, where he became piano professor at the Conservatorio Real de música y declamación in Madrid. Among his pedagogical publications is a piano method.

\(^{14}\) Fontana’s life would be, inexplicably, tied to Cuba. During his stay on the island, Fontana met Camila Dalcour, at the time married to an English merchant, Stephen Cattley Tennant (1800–48). After Cattley Tennant’s accidental death, Fontana and Camila were married, raising the children from her previous marriage and a son from the new union, only to suffer the death of Camila during a later pregnancy. Fontana committed suicide in Paris after years of personal tragedies. Significantly, in his *La Havanne, fantaisie sur les motifs américains espagnoles*, Op. 10, Fontana quotes in a section a ‘chanson des nègres de l’île de Cuba’ – in effect, an early example of Cuban musical nationalism. A daughter from Camila Dalcour’s first marriage, the Cuban-born Enriqueta Augustina Rylands (1843–1908), founded the John Rylands Library in Manchester.
relatively common amongst aspiring talents – especially well-off Caucasian families. Espadero’s subsequent legacy as a much-sought-after piano teacher resulted from his early training and his encyclopaedic knowledge. Both of these attributes were present in Charles-Valentin Alkan, and these two musicians’ lives, though separated by the ocean, were to resemble each other in some striking parallels. Their personalities bear resemblance in their antipathy to socialisation, even pronounced reclusiveness at certain points of their lives; both shared an aversion to travel (though Alkan had the upper hand in managing at least two documented visits to England); both composed virtuosic music of varying difficulty and included the genre of études; both remained without or did not seek official positions, for varying reasons; both received recognition as composers while living but fell into disfavour after their demise; and for a time both were assumed to have perished in horrific accidents (a belief more recently disproven in Alkan’s case).

Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829–69) visited Cuba for the first time in 1854, after a tumultuous and triumphant tour of Spain, where he had been hailed by concert-goers, critics, fellow musicians and the nobility – including Queen Isabella II, who bestowed on him the Order of Isabella the Catholic. A chance meeting between Espadero and Gottschalk, scarcely a few days after the latter’s arrival, became the stuff of legend. Espadero used to practise in one of several instrument shops near his house,
and on that fateful day Gottschalk, accompanied by Carlos Edelmann, enchanted by the performance by this mysterious pianist, entered the store. Neither Gottschalk’s presence in Havana nor his physiognomy were known to Espadero, who nonetheless correctly identified the stranger before him. The encounter rapidly blossomed into a close professional and personal friendship and yet the two men could hardly have been more different: Gottschalk, the Louisiana native, at total ease with the public, gregarious, uninhibited, flamboyant, a thrill-seeking adventurer and hedonist, contrasted with the chaste, reclusive, reserved Cuban. It has been rightly stated that Espadero found in Gottschalk his improbable alter ego. Professionally, their relationship became mutually advantageous: each man performed the music of the other. Personally, Espadero remained Gottschalk’s confidant until the latter’s death, and the few letters that survive attest to their inseparable bond. Curiously, Espadero in turn acted as his friend’s amanuensis just as Fontana had served Chopin, taking it upon himself to complete, edit and safeguard many of Gottschalk’s improvisations or hastily written compositions, which were then published posthumously at the behest of Gottschalk’s family – a privilege that many of Espadero’s own compositions and manuscripts did not enjoy after his death.

Beginning in the 1860s, Espadero’s fame grew exponentially, thanks to the numerous publications in Paris under the sobriquet ‘Espadero de la Havane’, similar to Gottschalk’s ‘de la Louisiane’. He was included in an entry in Fétis’ dictionary, with a quotation from a letter by Gottschalk, which reads in part: ‘Il écrivit des compositions

---

18 The Cuban-born son of the Alsatian pianist Jean Frédéric Edelmann (1794–1848), who emigrated to Cuba and founded a music store and publishing company. Many of Espadero’s early compositions were published by the Edelmanns.

19 Carpentier, op. cit., p. 196.

20 Espadero was a confirmed bachelor, and yet it is not possible at this time to suspect, much less prove, that he was homosexual, based on Ramírez’s description, though he does question his friend’s extreme reclusiveness. To give a glimpse of Espadero’s reclusiveness, Gottschalk, during his visits to Cuba, would habitually travel not only to major cities to concertise but also to remote villages in the interior of the island, simply for adventure’s sake, and yet Espadero never accompanied him. Surviving correspondence between them, when Gottschalk had left Cuba for the United States and became entangled in the daily juggernaut of appearances in the midst of the savagery of the American Civil War (1861–65), tells of Espadero’s naivety: he seemed incapable of understanding or imagining the geographic vastness of North America.

21 At the time of Espadero’s death, in the absence of heirs, his musical estate was disseminated amongst admirers and through a public auction.

 originales, reflétants toutes une fraîcheur de mélodie, une élégance d’harmonie, une sonorité et une connaissance de l’instrument qui assurent à Espadero un rang à part dans la multitude des compositeurs contemporaines.’

In Spain, articles, reviews and performances of his works assured him a leading status amongst Spanish composers, a position undimmed until his death and the rise of the next generation of composers, including Albéniz and Granados.

After Gottschalk’s final departure from Cuba in 1862 and his death in Brazil in 1869, a series of personal and social reversals gradually provoked in Espadero a withdrawal from society, which became more pronounced in the 1880s. War became inevitable between the Spanish authorities and rebels intent on procuring independence, resulting in the Ten Years’ War (1868–78). Cuban cultural life ebbed and flowed around the disruption of wartime, and although several of Espadero’s students left the country or professed allegiance to the rebel cause, he himself made no pronouncement, seemingly remaining a faithful Spanish subject.

In 1847 Espadero’s father’s had died unexpectedly in his presence before taking a stroll – an event from which his son never fully recovered – and in 1871 his mother became incapacitated. The deterioration of her health took a toll on her son, forcing him to decline social invitations, and her death in 1885 was another traumatic blow. Another personal tragedy came in the form of the early death of his pupil Natalia Broch de Calvo, a talented pianist, born in 1830, who had triumphed in the Parisian salons and was warmly praised by the pianist and piano-manufacturer Auguste Wolff (1821–87) and by Alkan: she died from unspecified causes on 19 December 1876 during her return voyage to Cuba aboard the German passenger-ship Frankfurt.

Espadero practised curious habits of hygiene, consisting of a daily alcohol bath followed by a cleansing of the bowels. On 22 August 1890, after his ritual bath, his scarcely dried body grazed a portable floor kerosene stove/lamp, causing it to be

---

23 ‘He wrote original compositions, all reflecting a freshness of melody, an elegance of harmony, a sound and a knowledge of the instrument that give Espadero a special place in the multitude of contemporary composers.’

24 Ignacio Cervantes (1847–1905) was exiled to Mexico in 1875 after the authorities discovered that the proceeds of many of his concerts in Cuba were destined for rebel causes. Another pupil, the opera composer Gaspar Villate (1851–91), temporarily emigrated to the USA, as did the pianist Pablo Desvernine (1823–1910), who taught the young American pianist Edward MacDowell in New York.

25 It may also help explain the importance of father-figures in his development.
engulfed in flames. Some of his contemporaries believed the accident to be suicide, but common sense suggests that, if that were the case, he would have chosen a more efficient and less painful means of self-destruction. After eight days of agony, Espadero expired on 30 August, and the next day, when the funeral cortege arrived at the Colón Cemetery, the casket was opened one last time as a means of identification, prompting the cemetery staff to describe in the burial log the body of an 81-year-old man, possible visual evidence of the condition of the corpse.²⁶

Alejo Carpentier’s celebrated narrative *Music in Cuba* is to this day an essential reference work that encompasses Cuba’s musical development from the sixteenth century to the first publication of the book in 1946. As eloquent and persuasive as Carpentier’s prose is, his historical conception of Cuban music is marred by the personal premise to which he rigorously adheres throughout the text, and which requires truly Cuban music to manifest a prescribed degree of ethnicity, racial-cultural homogeneity and, later, political slant. For Carpentier, a composer’s ‘Cuban identity’ was invariably linked to the degree to which he used elements of Cuba’s African musical legacy (specialised percussion instruments, rhythmic formulas, pentatonic and modal melodic strains, etc.).²⁷ Gottschalk, a frequent visitor to the island, personified some of these inclusive qualities even while writing within the framework of European Romanticism, and

²⁶ Tielos Ferrer, op. cit., p. 67.

²⁷ Carpentier’s musical aesthetic preferences should be seen as a product of his upbringing, specifically his immersion in the Parisian literary and musical circles during his self-exile to France from 1928 to 1939, escaping political repression during the second term in office (1929–33) of the Cuban President Gerardo Machado Morales. During Carpentier’s residency in Paris he experienced first-hand the blossoming of Neo-Classicism and the craze over the incorporation of African musical characteristics derived from American, Brazilian and Cuban music. At the time of publication of *La música en Cuba*, Carpentier openly praised composers such as Stravinsky, Milhaud and Poulenc as musical models for emerging Cuban composers. In the first Spanish edition of his book in 1946, Carpentier traces an imaginary aesthetic demarcation line with regards to Cuban and Spanish composers, exhorting them not to ‘live with their minds focused north of the Pyrenees’ (p. 338). By way of illustration, Aurelio de la Vega (a young composer at the time, and an alert nonagenarian as these notes are written) was potently attracted to German Expressionism and studied for a short time with Schoenberg in Los Angeles in the 1940s, and so he was excluded from the section of the book dealing with contemporary Cuban composers. De la Vega was, eventually, doubly condemned, not only because of his political opposition to the 1959 Revolution but precisely for his adoption of the dodecaphonic technique in the 1950s, described (by Néstor Díaz de Villegas, ‘Nadie es universalista en su tierra’, *Revista Encuentro*, Nos. 28/29, pp. 10–11) with the epithets ‘anti-Cuban’, ‘traitor’, etc., which prompted his name to be erased from official musical reference works, a practice borrowed from the Soviet system.
thus was accepted into Carpentier’s pantheon of composers who rightfully proclaim a transcultural Antillean inheritance.

Two Cuban-born composers who enjoyed Carpentier’s approval were Manuel Saumell Robredo (1817–70) and Ignacio Cervantes Kawanagh (1847–1905): although they were not as adventurous or flamboyant as Gottschalk in using African-derived elements in their works,\(^{28}\) they contributed precious miniatures in that typically Cuban dance genre known as the *contradanza*. The *contradanza* can be considered a unique fusion – ‘transculturation’ was the term used by the ethnomusicologist Fernando Ortiz\(^{29}\) in the early twentieth century – of European (mainly Spanish and French) melodic contour with recurring, yet varied, African-derived rhythmic formulas, producing the characteristic genre Rossini referred to as ‘a delightful blunder’.\(^{30}\)

By contrast, Carpentier chooses two other Cuban-born figures for especial censure: Eduardo Sánchez de Fuentes (1874–1944), for his miscalculated denial of the important African legacy\(^{31}\) – a common response by whites in the early days of the Cuban Republic – and for his equally baseless premise of attempting to re-create an imagined aboriginal musical legacy;\(^{32}\) and Espadero, for his unabashed cultivation and imitation of European Romanticism. The chapter ‘Espadero, the romantic’ in *Music in Cuba* begins uncompromisingly:

Nicolás Ruiz Espadero was a man whose life and death were equally strange. Living in Havana, a city of open doors, he had the minimum contact with the outside world. Only

---

\(^{28}\) Gottschalk’s Symphony No. 1, *La nuit des tropiques*, a ‘romantic symphony’ conceived during his Antillean sojourn and premiered in Havana in 1860, during his third and last visit to Cuba, uses an array of African percussion instruments (brought from the easternmost part of the island), anticipating the use of such percussion in Cuban music by some 60 years before its employment by Amadeo Roldán (1900–39) in his *Rítmicas V* and *VI*.

\(^{29}\) Fernando Ortiz (1881–1969) was a leading pioneer in the 1920s *Afrocubanismo* movement, which proclaimed the inseparable contribution of black culture to Cuba’s national conscience.


\(^{32}\) Aboriginal peoples such as the Siboney, a sub-group of the Taíno, and the Guanahatabey basically became extinct after the Spanish colonisation, principally because of contagious disease, warfare and physical exploitation, although some of their DNA may still be found in highly diluted form in certain areas of the island.
familiar with a tropical ambience – so little given to inhibitions – Espadero lived in a long romantic dream, filled with distant images, without any rapport with the sonorous reality bubbling at the foot of his window, always barred shut. However, he was the most famous Cuban composer of his time – the only one who, without having traveled, was applauded and published abroad; the only one of his Havana contemporaries who could be compared to the great maestros of the time. Little, very little, of his work has been saved throughout the years. No one has claimed his legacy. However, the historical interest of his personality is undeniable. A musical tradition does not only feed on its achievements; it is also nourished by its errors. What must be avoided is just as instructive as the model that engenders new ideas. Seen from a current perspective, Espadero’s universal worth is null, but locally his case merits examination.\(^3\)\(^3\)

One valid criticism of Carpentier’s book is that, consciously or not, he failed to consult archives in different parts of the island, and thus arrived at inaccurate conclusions to satisfy his musical-cultural-racial hypothesis. In Espadero’s case, Carpentier ignored a brief but significant excursion of the former into what would be termed, in due course, Cuban ‘nationalism’ after independence from Spain, but during Spanish rule was simply viewed as another example of regionalism within the Spanish Empire.\(^3\)\(^4\) Espadero composed seven *contradanzas* and a substantial *Fantaisie-Ballade*, published for the first time in 2006 and recorded a year later;\(^3\)\(^5\) as well as the *Canto del guajiro* (‘Song of the [White] Farmer’) and an *Étude dans le style Créole* as the last of his 8 *Transcendental Studies*.\(^3\)\(^6\) True, these forays into a ‘nationally inspired’ idiom are the exception, and so he should not be considered a fully fledged nationalist.

\(^3\)\(^3\) Carpentier, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

\(^3\)\(^4\) Examples of such ‘regionalism’ include the Catalan Isaac Albéniz (1860–1909), writing in an Andalusian and at times Cuban style, the Canary Islander Teobaldo Power (1848–1884), who composed a series of *Cantos canarios* for piano and for orchestra, and the Cuban-born Anselmo González del Valle (1852–1911), many of whose numerous piano works were dedicated to the folklore of his ancestral region, Asturias.

\(^3\)\(^5\) By the pianist Cecilio Tieles Ferrer on the EGREM label (0787) in 2006. EGREM (an acronym for *Empresa de Grabaciones y Ediciones Musicales*, ‘Enterprise of Recordings and Musical Editions’) is the national record label of Cuba.

\(^3\)\(^6\) Espadero’s hitherto unpublished 8 *Études d’exécution transcendante* are scheduled for publication in the Patrimonio Musical Cubano series.
Thanks to the unrelenting commitment of the Cuban pianist and musicologist Cecilio Tieles Ferrer in his Espadero: lo hispánico musical en Cuba and other writings, the distorted myth of a helpless neurotic, totally reclusive Espadero created by early biographers (mainly Serafín Ramírez and José Vidaurreta) and perpetuated to the point of caricature by Carpentier is finally disproven. But even as Tieles Ferrer rescues Espadero’s character, he rather falls prey to a forced view of his subject in quasi-nationalistic terms, perhaps explainable through the ultra-nationalism cultivated in Cuba since the onset of the 1959 revolution.

This recording and its projected sequel present Espadero’s musical persona in its more universal (that is, ‘European’) vein, and aims to rescue an important Spanish-Cuban composer active in the Americas, a product of the Romantic era, faithful to and convinced of his European-derived training and models.

The 5 Grands Transcriptions
The history of opera in Cuba begins properly in 1833, after the Governor General approved a petition by the Havana municipal government to engage an Italian opera troupe, which arrived in November of that year. The opening was temporarily delayed following the death of King Fernando VII and a mandatory period of mourning. The long-awaited debut finally materialised on 16 January 1834, with Elisa e Claudio by Saverio Mercadante. Other operas presented during the inaugural season included Bellini’s La straniera and Rossini’s Il barbiere di Siviglia, La gazza ladra and La cenerentola, but the initial enthusiasm of the public waned after a year, forcing the inclusion of acrobatic acts and lighter fare between acts of operas when the season resumed in 1835. Serafín Ramírez narrates all the vicissitudes of the recurring enterprise until 1891: the unmanageable schedule of operas forced on the public to fill the coffers of some unscrupulous impresarios; under-rehearsed presentations; the

38 Espadero’s repulsion towards marriage and preference for feline companionship is a recurring theme in early biographies. One article mentioned his ownership of 28 cats at the time of his death.
39 Saverio Mercadante (1795–1870) was a contemporary of both Donizetti and Bellini. Mercadante’s strengths as an orchestrator may have influenced the young Verdi.
excisions to which operas were subjected; the calamitous state of the accompanying orchestras and choruses; and the ostentatious and deceitful publicity campaigns, down to doubts about the merit of some of the stars engaged.\textsuperscript{40} Not all presentations suffered these shortcomings, and there are many productions that Ramírez praises, singling out singers and members of the orchestra or conductors – the renowned double-bassist Giovanni Bottesini (1821–89) and the conductor Luigi Arditi (1822–1903), for instance.

During particularly successful stagings, the operatic addiction of the public reached fever pitch, and the furore that ensued bordered on incivility when followers of a specific soprano argued with a rival singer’s devotees. Composers of \textit{contradanzas} would dedicate their creations not only to singers but also to visiting instrumentalists. Amongst Manuel Saumell’s fifty or more \textit{contradanzas}, one singularly sad one (\textit{Ayes del alma}, ‘Laments of the Soul’) was intended for Fontana, describing his hopeless love for Camila Dalcour; one entitled \textit{Luisiana [sic]}, with a rhythmic superposition of $\frac{2}{4}$ in the right hand over a $\frac{3}{4}$ waltz-rhythm accompaniment in the left, is dedicated to Gottschalk; and \textit{La Tedezco} is dedicated to the Italian soprano Fortunata Tedesco (1826–66), who gave the New World premiere of Verdi’s \textit{Ernani} in Havana in 1846. The second part of the \textit{contradanza} (sixteen bars) actually quotes the main melodic line in the Act I cavatina ‘Ernani, involame’. Even Espadero, normally dismissive of popular Cuban dance-forms, dedicated a \textit{contradanza} to the Italian soprano Erminia Frezzolini (1818–84) one entitled \textit{La Melancolía} to Gottschalk.

Espadero wrote a number of operatic transcriptions (including some presumed lost, such as one based on Bellini’s \textit{La sonnambula}, which Gottschalk often played during his Civil War tours); and most possibly pre-date the \textit{5 Grands [sic] Transcriptions}\textsuperscript{41} featured on this recording. The earlier specimens resemble more closely the typical arrangement destined for advanced amateur pianists in their modest use of manageable accompanying patterns and straightforward setting than the later, more complex, concert versions. There is little doubt that the opera seasons in Havana were the catalyst for the \textit{5 Grands}

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{40} Ramírez, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 304–11.
\textsuperscript{41} Espadero’s early transcriptions (published by Edelmann) include a tenor aria from the Third Act of \textit{Sonnambula}; dance music from the Third Act of Rossini’s \textit{William Tell}; a duo and final trio from the Third Act of Donizetti’s \textit{Maria de Rohan}; and the Miserere from Verdi’s \textit{Il trovatore}. 

\normalsize
Transcriptions, and most of the chosen operas must have been familiar to Espadero, given that they were staged regularly in successive seasons. The Transcriptions are not ‘paraphrases’ or ‘reminiscences’ in a Lisztian or Thalbergian sense, where the material of the opera is used freely, not only to evoke the original drama but also to stretch the technical and expressive capacity of the piano and the pianist. Espadero set about creating faithful pianistic equivalents of sections of acts, arias or choruses. In this way, he is much closer to Alkan in intent than to Liszt. It is difficult accurately to ascertain their precise dates of composition, and the dates of publication vary according to location and publishing house; some bear opus numbers and others do not. A conservative view would date them between the years 1870 and 1880, and the scores used in this recording were all published by Antonio Romero in Madrid around 1880–81.

The transcription of La traviata is dedicated to the Portuguese pianist Arthur Napoleão dos Santos (1843–1925), who settled in Brazil in 1866 and befriended both Gottschalk and Espadero during his visit to Havana in 1860. It covers the last part of Act II, beginning on bar 628 of the general score, where the chorus chastises Alfredo for his insolence after paying Violetta his debt, causing her to faint in shock. The writing suits the instrument to a tee, except for the setting in bars 56–60 of the transcription, which Espadero has conceived as offsetting chords, limiting the impact. I have changed these bars by using a diminished-chord flourish (0:40–0:45). After the dialogue between Germont and Alfredo, the septet and chorus resume their iterations, and Espadero sets these two bars using broken chords requiring a considerably large span (2:19–2:36). Violetta returns to her senses and her celebrated cantabile lines are set by Espadero in a modified three-handed effect he undoubtedly learned from Miró and from perusing its use in Thalberg scores, which is perfectly suited to the ensuing fourteen bars (with repeats) that features the entire ensemble (5:12–6:56). The ending I have also modified by

---

42 The professional relationship between Napoleão’s and Gottschalk’s descendants after the latter’s death resulted in a heated dispute caused by the simultaneous publication of multiple versions of Gottschalk’s works by American publishers: the authorised versions – sanctioned by Gottschalk’s sisters – edited by Espadero for Escudier and Napoleão’s unauthorised ones. The surviving personal correspondence between Espadero and Napoleão yields additional information regarding the existence of one or two piano sonatas composed by Espadero, the whereabouts of which are presently unknown.
using chords in contrary motion, since Espadero’s repeated chords are rather pedestrian, one of two such miscalculations in the transcriptions (7:51–7:56), the other being the omission of some transitional material in Poliuto.

The transcription of Un ballo in maschera, Op. 46 \[3\], is not of an extended part of the opera but rather the relatively short finale to Act I for chorus and soloists, beginning at rehearsal number 77. The action takes place after Riccardo’s fate is foretold by the fortune-teller Ulrica, whereby he is to die by the man who next shakes his hand (Renato). Riccardo dismisses her prophecy and he is acclaimed by the people in a rousing hymn (‘O figlio d’Inghilterra’ – ‘Oh, son of England’). The opening material alternates between the choral sections, set in chordal style, and the accompanied line sung by Riccardo and Oscar (a travesti role), which uses hand-alternation to navigate concurrently bass line, accompaniment and principal melody (0:00–0:53). The middle section, in F sharp minor, represents the three conspirators plotting Riccardo’s death and Ulrica’s commentary (0:54–1:20). The triumphant hymn returns as an ensemble, uniting the two main melodic parts, which Espadero accomplishes with aplomb, using an arsenal of pianistic effects, such as rapid, spitfire interlocking chords and tremolando figures.

How Espadero came to transcribe part of Act II of Poliuto by Donizetti is a matter of conjecture. The opera, also known by the French title Les Martyrs when it was premiered in Paris on 10 April 1840, was enlarged to four acts to satisfy the usual requirements of the Paris Opéra (persistent objections from the censors prevented it from being staged in Italy until after Donizetti’s death in 1848). The plot centres on the martyrdom of St Polyeuctus under the Roman occupation of Armenia, permitting high drama and splendour. It is possible that Espadero acquainted himself with the score when his friend Gottschalk was preparing to conduct it in the city of Matanzas, some 90 kilometres east of Havana. Gottschalk was offered some conducting dates with the Italian opera at Teatro Tacón in Havana in the 1860–61 season, but he was thrust into this unusual role only because of a feud between the impresarios of competing opera troupes, and his eventual debut as an opera conductor was not an auspicious one. The varying tepid receptions given to Poliuto and the other operas he conducted, allied to an unsuccessful
staging of his own *La nuit des tropiques* a short time later, sealed his fate in Cuba, and he departed the island in early 1862, never to return.\textsuperscript{43}

The music that Espadero transcribed (the opening half of the Act II finale)\textsuperscript{[5]} comes from the original three-act Italian version. The action takes place in the Temple of Jupiter, where the populace and Roman magistrates have gathered to condemn those who have profaned the sacred cult, among them Poliuto. Espadero’s pianistic treatment works very well: the grandiose processional march sections are skilfully varied, following Donizetti’s orchestration precisely, contrasting the bombastic *tutti* with the female chorus (0:30–4:58). Intervening recitatives are logically excised, but the ensuing lyrical instrumental section (5:00–5:34) is not followed by the thirteen-bar transition in the score, which it requires and which I have therefore inserted (5:35–5:59). Espadero, uncharacteristically, transcribes the next seven bars in an uninteresting, matter-of-fact manner, which I also strengthen (6:02–6:14). The rest of the scene is, however, adeptly handled, and Espadero manages to clearly present the multilayered construction. The transcription was dedicated to Édouard Wolff (1816–80), a member of Chopin’s circle of Polish émigrés in Paris and a former pupil of Josef Elsner, one of Chopin’s Warsaw teachers.

The *Faust* transcription, Op. 51\textsuperscript{[6]}, features only the celebrated bass aria ‘Ronde du Veau d’or’ (‘Rondo of the Golden Calf’) from Act II, scene 3, of Gounod’s opera. In it, Mephistopheles exalts paganism and the ever-corrupting power of gold on humans. Espadero’s familiarity with the opera was derived from first-hand practical experience. Along with Cervantes and Ramírez, he participated in a production staged in 1871, although his role was probably confined to rehearsing the chorus. The transcription is dedicated to Dr Eduard Belot, a talented amateur pianist who studied with Espadero but was not considered by Ramírez as belonging to the rank of concert performer, despite his unquestionable technical proficiency.\textsuperscript{44} In the Romero edition used for this recording, four-and-a-half bars are missing from the return of the main reprise theme (approximately bars 42–46), which I have duly inserted. Espadero has also included


alternative additional notes throughout the reprise, which add considerable difficulty and are included in this recording. The *Ped. Tenuto* markings – possibly implying the use of the *sostenuto* pedal developed by Steinway in 1874–75 – cannot be taken literally every time on modern instruments as marked in the score, because of the frequent harmonic changes indicated, but its approximate effect can be rendered, including the extended pedal duration markings.

The transcription from Verdi’s *Il trovatore*, Op. 44 [12], is dedicated to ‘my eminent pupil Madame Natalia Broch de Calvo’, which obviously indicates that it was written and published before Broch’s untimely death in 1876. It is perhaps the most demanding of the five Grand Transcriptions, given its unstoppable momentum, frequent and precise hand-alternation, and its ‘high-wire’ jumps, usually assigned to the left hand. Espadero eschews the accompanied *recitativo* that sets the scene (Act IV, scene 13), electing to begin it at the explosive chord in bar 23 of the score. In its original form, this operatic fragment is one of the most popular duets between soprano and baritone in all of Verdi’s operas, commonly extracted from the work and sung as an independent number on special occasions; admired for its gripping music, its underlying raw emotion and its vocal virtuosity, which gives a foretaste of *verismo*.

Espadero’s extant *œuvre* – published and unpublished – contains, besides the aforementioned compositions of a nationalist bent, primarily works for solo piano based on European models: character pieces, scherzos, a few *pièces d’occasion*; dance music other than *contradanzas*, études, etc. The loss of at least one sonata and additional operatic transcriptions is particularly regrettable. His excursion into chamber music was minimal, although it included arrangements of one of Anton Rubinstein’s piano trios for piano quartet, of a pot-pourri based on national airs by his friend José White and several of his own piano pieces with violin obbligato. There are no concertos, orchestral or extended chamber works. He composed several songs, including a much extolled and performed *Chant de l’esclave*, Op. 21, written in 1856 and cited by Tíeles Ferrer and
others\textsuperscript{45} as a notable example of Espadero’s nationalist feelings and opposition to slavery, which was finally outlawed in Cuba by Royal decree only on 7 October 1886.

The short \textit{Preludio}\textsuperscript{2} dates from approximately 1889 and was published by Torres y Soler (Barcelona) in the Spanish \textit{Ilustración musical hispano americana}, a publication that had included numerous articles, reviews and news about Espadero and other contemporary Spanish composers. The nineteen bars of the \textit{Preludio} manifest Espadero’s talent for chromaticism and voice-leading as the music undulates between the tonalities of F major and A major.

\textit{Innocence-caprice}, Op. 23\textsuperscript{4}, was, according to Tieles Ferrer, one of Espadero’s earliest compositions, dating from approximately 1850. The edition used in the recording was published by Léon Escudier in 1869 and bears no dedication. Its formal plan is: introduction–ABAC–coda, and it exudes a delicate Chopinesque air, with an abundance of nuance indications in Italian and French in the score. Its form is thus tightly controlled, with prescribed rubato, and indicates a young composer’s firm grasp of his craft, not the undisciplined efforts of a formless romantic.\textsuperscript{46}

\textit{Pureza y calma}\textsuperscript{7} dates from 1889, was published by a number of firms; the score used for this recording was brought out in Leipzig by C. G. Röder around 1901. This edition was dedicated to the pianist Angelina Sicouret Destruge (1880–?), who studied primarily with Fernando Arizti until his death in 1888, whereupon she transferred to Espadero. Apparently, she may have represented something of a consolation after

\textsuperscript{45} According to Ramírez (\textit{op. cit.}, Vol. II, p. 116), the Italian text set in \textit{Chant de l’esclave} was written by Alejandro [sic] Lorenzana, who is identified as an Italian baritone and vocal teacher who never fully gained acceptance in Havana. Notable figures who praised the work include none other than Cuban-born patriot and writer José Martí (1853–95).

\textsuperscript{46} In his original extensive preface – heavily truncated by Escudier and in the English translation that appeared in the United States – to the complete works by Gottschalk (1873), Espadero addresses the age-old criticism of lack of form in Romantic music. By then, Liszt, Wagner and other followers of the ‘New German School’ were already engaged in a raging battle with the conventional, ‘Classical’ Romantics (Brahms, Schumann \textit{et al.}) for artistic supremacy, and so it comes as no surprise that Espadero’s text extols Romantic ideals, particularly when he discusses ‘form’: ‘In matters of art […] form is, in our judgement, secondary’, followed by a description of ‘form’ as the ‘inflexible mold upon which artists’ aspirations are poured’; among the shortcomings of ‘form’ are that it should ‘pretend to contain and regulate the impulse of feelings, prescribing a measurement, a limitation, a form that imprisons and chains the inspiration’ (translation of the original Spanish as it appears in \textit{Gottschalk}, by Luis Ricardo Fors (1843–1915), La propaganda literaria, Havana, 1880, pp. 304–5).
the death of Natalia Broch and, thanks to Sicouret’s dedication to Espadero, many manuscripts auctioned after his death were acquired by her and thus saved. The piece is in simple tripartite form, akin to a barcarolle in its swaying rhythm. The contrasting middle section, in C sharp minor, contains yet another example of Espadero’s mastery of chromatic harmony. The reprise is printed in two versions: an easier one based on the initial section and the one included on this recording, with its harp-like arpeggio effects.

The epic character of Ossian, largely a literary invention of the Scottish poet James Macpherson (1736–96) in his attempt to ‘translate’ the poetry of a fictional third-century bard, exerted an enormous influence on the Romantic era in all of the arts, especially painting and music. Countless composers of all ranks flocked to the task of Ossianic representation, with differing results: Gottschalk’s Ossian, Op. 4, is composed of two ballads for solo piano and includes carefully chosen strophes as an introduction before each ballad in the printed score; Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov (1859–1935) created an orchestral work; and in 1816 Schubert, as a young lad, wrote the Lied Lorma, d376.

Espadero represents Ossian by a scintillating and witty polka in G flat major, perhaps influenced by Gottschalk’s own Danse ossianique, Op. 12, written for solo piano around 1850. The publisher Louis Gregh (1843–1915) issued the score around 1882, though it is an early work, possibly dating from the late 1850s, initially published in Cuba by Edelmann. Gregh published two additional versions, a salon and a four-handed one, both transposed to G major to facilitate execution by amateurs. The form is that of a rondo, encased by an introduction and a coda: introduction–ABACAD–coda.

Sur la tombe de L. M. Gottschalk, Op. 68, is Espadero’s homage to his friend, a funereal elegy of considerable dimension. The edition used is that published by Vidal y Roger (Madrid) in 1872. The work was finished on 19 February 1870, scarcely two months after Gottschalk’s death, and Espadero orchestrated it for memorial services in the USA (according to a letter addressed to Napoleão). As a preface, Espadero includes a note in which he pleads with performers to obey all his indications of nuances, fingering and pedalling, and to apply all precepts of style and expression from vocal music. The work abounds in sublimated expression and pathos, gradually traversing its multiple
episodes until the advent of the key of E flat major, which reaches a climactic moment in
the ‘Apothéose’ section, only to gradually return to its funereal garb in the Coda.

The *Valse idéale*, Op. 60[10], was issued by Escudier in 1874. Its form conforms to the
typical multi-sectional chain of waltzes (introduction–ABCDFA–coda), and the scope
of expression ranges from the coquettish introduction, through lyrical episodes that
display exemplary writing and finesse without a touch of banality, to a whirling coda.

*Souvenir d’autrefois*, Op. 11[11], is an early work, probably dating from the late 1850s,
dedicated to Ernest, one of Edelmann’s sons, and published by the firm. A nocturne
by name and barcarolle by feel, its sustained lyricism glides through its form
(introduction–ABACD–coda), with plentiful felicitous moments to spare.
José Raúl López is Coordinator of the Keyboard Department at Florida International University in Miami, President of the South Florida Chapter of the American Liszt Society and Secretary of the Alkan Society, based in London. He is a founding member of the Deering Estate Chamber Ensemble and co-founder of The Deering Estate ‘Chamber Music Concert Series’. A versatile pianist and enthusiastic performer of chamber music, his interest in contemporary music has resulted in frequent world premieres and collaborations with composers, along with the keen pursuit of resurrecting rarely heard works by Romantic and Classical composers. He received his MM and DMA degrees from the University of Miami School of Music, where he studied with Dr Rosalina Sackstein, a former pupil of Claudio Arrau and Rafael de Silva. He has recorded for the SNE, Albany and Innova record labels. His previous recordings for Toccata Classics presented the complete piano music of Riccardo Malipiero (тocc 0129) and the complete Mozart transcriptions of Charles-Valentin Alkan (тocc 0240), of which a reviewer in Fanfare wrote: ‘In his hands the faster passages sparkle, while the slower, more lyrical ones truly sing. […] He knows just when and where to hold a note, to push forward, and to tonally alter the sound to get the maximum effect out of this music’. The first recording in his Toccata Classics series devoted to unfamiliar Cuban composers featured the music of José Comellas (1852–88), released on тocc 0347.
19 December 2018 (Op. 44), 20 December 2018 (Ossian), 28 May 2019
(Op. 68, Pureza y calma, Op. 60, La traviata), 29 May 2019 (La traviata)
in the Hugh Hodgson Concert Hall at the University of Georgia, Athens
Engineering: Paul Griffith
Piano: Steinway
Piano technicians: Tony Graves and Scott Higgins

This recording is made possible by a Provost Humanities Grant
from Florida International University

Booklet essay: José Raúl López
Cover design: David M. Baker (david@notneverknow.com)
Typesetting and lay-out: KerryPress, St Albans

Executive Producer: Martin Anderson

© Toccata Classics, London, 2019
Join today to discover unknown music from Renaissance to the present day. Experience our Classical music discoveries from around the world, before anyone else!

toccataclassics.com/discovery
NICOLÁS RUIZ ESPADERO Piano Music, Volume One

5 Grands Transcriptions (1870–80)
1 No. 5 La traviata
2 Preludio (c. 1889)

5 Grands Transcriptions
3 No. 3 Un ballo in maschera, Op. 46
4 Innocence-caprice, Op. 23 (c. 1850)

5 Grands Transcriptions
5 No. 1 Poliuto
6 No. 2 Faust, Op. 51
7 Pureza y calma (1889)
8 Ossian Polka (late 1850s?)
9 Sur la tombe de Gottschalk, Op. 68 (1870)*
10 Valse idéale, Op. 60 (publ. 1874)
11 Souvenir d’autrefois (Nocturne), Op. 11 (late 1850s?)

5 Grands Transcriptions
12 No. 4 Il trovatore, Op. 44

TT 71:52

José Raúl López, piano

ALL EXCEPT * FIRST RECORDINGS