



# Albéniz in Leipzig and Brussels: New Data from Conservatory Records<sup>1</sup>

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THREE DAYS AFTER Isaac Albéniz's death, fellow composer Tomás Bretón (1850–1923) reflected thus on a career worthy of a novelist's pen: "If his life could have been recorded step by step, the book would constitute one of the most curious and pleasing of its genre."<sup>2</sup> (*ABC*, May 21, 1909, pages 4–5). The purpose of this paper is to present some "curious and pleasing" documentation recently brought to light at Leipzig and Brussels that permits a re-examination of the "step by step" chronology of Albéniz's early years in those cities.

According to his younger daughter Laura, born in 1890 (who in the last two or so years of his life served as his secretary), Albéniz himself supplied information for his first biography, Antonio Guerra y Alarcón's *Isaac Albéniz, notas crítico-biográficas de tan eminente pianista* (Madrid: Escuela tipográfica del Hospicio, 1886)—published when the composer was 26 years old.<sup>3</sup>

In this account, Albéniz returned to Europe in 1874 from a tour of the Americas that took him from Havana to San Francisco. The 14-year-old gave concerts in Liverpool and London before enrolling at Leipzig Conservatory in the fall of that year. His teachers there were Carl Reinecke and Salomon Jadassohn. After nine months he returned to Madrid, where, on the recommendation of the King's secretary, Guillermo Morphy,<sup>4</sup> Alfonso XII

awarded him a grant for study with Franz Rummel and Louis Brassin at Brussels Conservatory. He continued there for three years; after another six months with Brassin, he followed Liszt to Budapest, Weimar, and Rome.

This is the version of Albéniz's early life adopted in the landmark biography by Henri Collet<sup>5</sup> and by the numerous encyclopedists who echoed Collet. Among the latter, Cambridge University professor John Brande Trend's "Isaac Albéniz" article in *Grove's Dictionary*, third edition (1927), I, 54, typifies the outrageously wrong sequence in Albéniz's life to 1880 that invaded even the most respected encyclopedias:

He began to study music seriously at the Conservatoire at Madrid, and received a pension from the King to enable him to pursue his studies at Brussels. He worked at composition with Gevaert and at the pianoforte with Brassin, and subsequently [!] removed to Leipzig to complete his technical equipment with Liszt [!], Jadassohn and Reinecke. After accompanying Rubinstein [!] on a tour in Europe and America, and appearing himself with great success as a pianist, about 1880, he settled down to teach, first at Barcelona and then at Madrid.

An alternate sequence of events is proffered in two more recent biographies, those by Gabriel Laplane<sup>6</sup> and André Gauthier.<sup>7</sup> According to this alternate

<sup>1</sup> English translation of a paper read at the III. Congreso Nacional de la Sociedad Española de Musicología in Granada on May 26, 1990. The Spanish version will appear in the Proceedings of the Congress, scheduled for a future issue of the *Revista de Musicología*.

<sup>2</sup> *Si se pudiera escribir paso a paso su vida, constituiría el libro uno de los más curiosos y amenos de esta índole.*

<sup>3</sup> An extract appeared in *Celebridades Musicales*, edited by G. Arteaga y Pereira (Barcelona: Centro Editorial Artístico, 1886). A reprint of Guerra y Alarcón's biography is now available (Madrid: Fundación Isaac Albéniz, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Morphy (1836–1899), himself a composer and musicologist, spent two years of his childhood in Germany (1844–1846). After

formal music training at Madrid, he studied nine months with Fétis at Brussels (1863). Concerning his associations with F. A. Gevaert, see Edgar Istel, "Isaac Albéniz," *Musical Quarterly*, xv (1929), 120–121. In 1885 he was made a Count by Alfonso XII. His transcriptions of sixteenth-century vihuela music (*Les luthistes espagnols du XVI siècle*, ed. by Hugo Riemann and published in Leipzig in 1902) were seminal in that field.

<sup>5</sup> *Albéniz et Granados* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1926).

<sup>6</sup> *Albéniz: su vida y su obra*, Spanish translation by Bernabé Herrero and Alberto de Michelena (Barcelona: Editorial Noguer, 1958).

<sup>7</sup> *Albéniz*, Spanish translation by Felipe Ximénez de Sandoval (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1978).



account, Albéniz returned from a second trip to the New World in 1876, spent the winter months of 1876–1877 in Leipzig, and returned to Spain in the summer of 1877 before commencing at Brussels, where his studies lasted until 1879. An additional six months of study under Brassin in 1880 preceded Albéniz's pilgrimage to Budapest and a brief encounter with Liszt.

On the other hand, documentation of Albéniz's studies at the conservatories in both Leipzig and Brussels that has survived two world wars compels our acknowledging a sequence that accords with neither Collet, Trend, Laplane, nor Gautier.

The records in Leipzig<sup>8</sup> indicate that Albéniz enrolled there May 2, 1876, but discontinued June 24 of the same year. He took courses in theory and composition, piano, chamber music, and voice. A music teacher at the Thomasschule, Dr. Bräutigam,<sup>9</sup> with whom he resided, at Sebastianbachstraße 57, paid his fees. Not surprisingly, his knowledge of conventional music theory was deemed inadequate upon admission ("Theoretische Kenntnisse fehlen").

Why did he quit after less than two months' instruction? If we may believe Guerra y Alarcón, he ran out of money. At page 24 of his Ph.D. dissertation, "Style and Structure in *Iberia* by Isaac Albéniz" (University of Rochester, 1974), Paul Buck Mast provided this gratuitous explanation:

He studied for nine months with Salomon Jadassohn and Carl Reinecke. Albéniz tired quickly of the concentrated technical study to which he was subjected. He finally returned to Spain in 1875.

A likelier possibility is that difficulties with the language discouraged him. According to one professor, Carl Piutti, he remained absent from sessions in theory due to his insufficient command of German ("wegen mangelnder Kenntnis der deutschen Sprache").

Albéniz was accepted for study at the Conservatoire Royal in Brussels four months later, on Octo-

<sup>8</sup>Preserved in the library of the Hochschule für Musik "Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy." The documents are two in number and include the following: a record of Albéniz's admission (no. 2513), with personal information pertaining to his background, financial support, etc.; and, a "Lehrer Zeugniß" (also numbered 2513), which lists courses taken and provides comments of the respective professors.

<sup>9</sup>Bräutigam may have been serving as a guardian for the young artist, conveying to him funds sent from Spain.

ber 17, 1876.<sup>10</sup> In addition to piano he took courses in harmony and solfège. After winning the 1879 piano competition in Brassin's class, *avec distinction*, he terminated his studies at the conservatory in September of that year.<sup>11</sup>

The brevity of Albéniz's studies in Leipzig and the date he entered the Brussels Conservatory do not coincide with any previous chronologies. Why the discrepancies? In 1891, Albéniz was living in London. Early that year, an article appeared in *The Pall Mall Gazette*<sup>12</sup> entitled "Señor Albeniz at Home: An Interview with the Spanish Pianist." In this interview, Albéniz declares that after spending three years touring in South America, he returned to Spain and was granted a stipend from the King with which to study in Leipzig. He studied for three years in Leipzig with Reinecke and Jadassohn, and after that he spent a year with Liszt in Italy.

Here is an account of his career at odds with both the documented record and the earliest Spanish-language biography. Even Albéniz's own diary states that he was with Liszt only briefly in Budapest, in the summer of 1880.<sup>13</sup> To the Leipzig Conservatory authorities he gave 1861 as his year of birth—perhaps to make his qualification seem even more

<sup>10</sup>According to a "Demande d'Admission" (no. 886) preserved in the records of the administration of the Conservatoire Royal.

<sup>11</sup>More information on Albéniz's activities in Brussels can be found in Enrique Fernández Arbós, *Arbós* (Madrid: Ediciones Cid, 1963). Albéniz's participation in concerts at the conservatory and his winning of the 1879 piano competition are mentioned in the *Annuaire du Conservatoire Royal de Musique de Bruxelles* (Librairie Européenne C. Muquardt, 1878–1880).

<sup>12</sup>January 30, 1891, 1–2.

<sup>13</sup>Isaac Albéniz, *Impresiones y Diarios de Viaje*, edited by Enrique Franco (Madrid: Fundación Isaac Albéniz, 1990), 24–34. Also cited in Michel Raux-Deledicque, *Albéniz, su vida inquieta y ardorosa* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Peuser, 1950), 170–179. Albéniz's contacts with Liszt pose additional problems for the biographer. According to Istel, "Isaac Albéniz," *Musical Quarterly*, xv, 122, Albéniz paid Liszt his first visit August 15 [1878]. But in his diary, Albéniz states that he played for Liszt only once, on August 18, 1880.

Liszt appears not to have been in Budapest at that time! Margit Prahács, ed., *Franz Liszt, Briefe aus ungarischen Sammlungen 1835–1886* (Kassel: Barenreiter, 1966), 232, includes a letter from Liszt addressed to the Ödenburger "Liederkrantz" dated "18 ten August, 80. Weimar." On the previous day Liszt had written to Ferenc Erkel from Weimar informing him that he would return to Budapest in the middle of January of the following year.



astounding (the correct year is 1860).<sup>14</sup> He also stated that he had been playing the piano since age five ("seit 5 Jahren," which could also mean for a period of five years); in fact, he gave his first public concert when he was only four. He did study briefly with Jadassohn<sup>15</sup> at Leipzig. But with Reinecke he studied not at all. Instead, he studied piano with Louis Maas<sup>16</sup> and theory and composition with Carl Piutti,<sup>17</sup> names never mentioned in any biographical account.

The implications of this research for future biographers of Albéniz are important. Secondary sources should not continue being blindly quoted without corroboration from primary material. Statements concerning his early life need to be carefully sifted and the chronology of his life established, whenever possible, from independent sources. In particular, Albéniz scholars based in the Western Hemisphere should retrace his fascinating itineraries and establish the concert calendar in the Americas of a prodigy without parallel in Spanish annals.

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<sup>14</sup>Arnold T. Schwab's "Edward MacDowell's Birthdate: A Correction," *The Musical Quarterly*, LXI, no. 2 (April, 1975), 233–239, shows that, contrary to all previous biographical accounts, MacDowell was born in 1860, not 1861. For Albéniz, a baptismal certificate exists (reproduced in Michel Raux-Deledicque, op. cit., 17) verifying the year 1860.

<sup>15</sup>On the *Zeugniß* form, "S. Jadassohn" states that the young student was diligent and started out making fine progress ("*War ständig fleißig und fing ansonst an hübsch Fortschritte zu machen.*").

<sup>16</sup>Louis Philipp Otto Maas (1852–1889) was both a composer and a piano virtuoso. He taught at the conservatory in Leipzig from 1875 to 1880, afterward moving to Boston, where he remained until death. See *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, American Supplement (Revised)*, 1935 edition, 277.

<sup>17</sup>Carl Piutti (1846–1902) was a composer and organist who began teaching at the conservatory in 1875. In 1880 he was appointed organist at the Thomaskirche. See Hugo Riemann, *Musik Lexikon*, 11th ed. (1929), II, 1399.



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