

ACOUSTIC GUITAR

JANUARY 2018



Sharon Isbin & Isabel Leonard

Alma Española (Bridge)

Virtuosos join forces for powerful homage to Spain's cante jondo

Cante jondo is considered the most pure, serious, and passionate kind of flamenco music—and in *Alma Española* multiple Grammy Award winners Sharon Isbin (classical guitar) and Isabel Leonard (mezzo soprano) masterfully honor this art form with 22 recordings that transport listeners to 19th and early-to-mid-20th-century Spain.

Dominated by a pair of song cycles by poet Federico García Lorca (1898–1936) and Manuel de Falla (1876–1946), the album brings traditional Spanish music to life, with Isbin's commanding and confident approach on guitar adorned by Leonard's intensely soulful vocal prowess. Their artful and respectful treatment of the music allows these far-ranging pieces to remain timeless and continue to feel emotionally relevant in the 21st century.

The diverse offering by the powerhouse duo includes dramatic pieces like “Polo” (Falla) and “Anda, jaleo” (Lorca), as well as soothing songs such as “Canción de cuna para dormir a un negrito” (Xavier Montsalvatge) and “Nana” (Falla). Isbin also offers an exquisite solo guitar rendition of Enrique Granados' famous “Danza española No. 5 (Andaluza),” originally written for piano, and Francisco Tárrega's emotional guitar piece “Caprichio árabe.”

The album's booklet includes background on the composers, providing insight into the historical periods in which the songs were written, and a better understanding of the heartfelt lyrics, which the booklet includes in Spanish (as sung), and also in English translations.

A classical music gem from beginning to end, Isbin's many fans, and others, are sure to enjoy.

—Pauline France