



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE CONCERT
OFFERED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF
THE PRINCIPALITY OF ASTURIAS***

Paul VI Hall

Saturday, 26 November 2011

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Distinguished Authorities and Dear Friends,

I warmly thank the Government of the Principality of Asturias and the María Cristina Masaveu Peterson Foundation, together with its President, Mr Fernando Masaveu, for the splendid concert they have offered us. It has given us the possibility of making a sort of inner journey, transported by music through the folklore, the sentiments and the very heart of Spain. A very special “thank you” to the Symphony Orchestra of the Principality of Asturias, conducted by Maestro Maximiano Valdés, for the magnificent performance in which it has also given us a glimpse of the profoundly rich character of the Spanish and, especially, of the people of Asturias. I also thank everyone who has enabled us to enjoy this interlude, as well as the Archbishop of Oviedo and all those who are present on this important occasion.

This evening, a little “piece” of Spain, so to speak, has been brought to this Hall. Not only have we been able to listen to music by some of this country’s most famous composers, such as Manuel de Falla and Isaac Albéniz, but also by the German, Richard Strauss, and the Russian, Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov. We have been enchanted by what the libretto terms as “*more hispano*”, that is, the “Hispanic” customs, as well as the way of composing and interpreting music. And it is this very element that brings together such varied pieces as those we have heard. They have one basic characteristic: the ability to communicate sentiments and emotions, indeed I would say almost the daily fabric of life, in music. And this is especially so because whoever composes “*more hispano*”

is almost spontaneously led to blend harmoniously the elements of folklore, folk songs that come from everyday life, together with what we call “cultured music”.

And a whole range of sentiments has been transmitted to us this evening: the “*alegría de vivir*”, “*joie de vivre*”, a festive atmosphere that shines out in compositions such as the three Dances from “*El sombrero de tres picos*” [The Three-Cornered Hat] by de Falla, or the struggle against evil portrayed by this same composer in his famous “*Danza ritual del fuego* [Fire dance]. The lively existence of the town’s neighbourhoods, as in “*Lavapiés*” from “*Iberia*” by Albéniz; the drama of a life that finds no peace, such as that of Don Juan, who fails to experience authentic love and, in the end, realizes how empty his life is. Strauss’ masterpiece perfectly conveys the switch from the euphoria that enlivens the passage to the sorrow of the emptiness expressed in the melancholy finale.

However, another element constantly surfaces in the “*more hispano*” compositions. It is the religious element with which the people of Spain are deeply imbued. Rimsky-Korsakov grasped this well. In his splendid *Spanish Caprice*, using Spanish folk songs and dances, he included various themes of popular religious melodies, such as in the first part of the piece in which one can pick out an ancient Asturian prayer in which the protection of the Virgin Mary and of St Peter is asked for and in the second movement which features a Gypsy hymn to Our Lady.

These are the wonders worked by music, this universal language that enables us to surmount every barrier and to enter the world of the other, of a nation, of a culture, and at the same time permits us to turn our minds and hearts to the Other, with a capital “O”, to rise, that is, to God’s world.

I once again thank the Government of Asturias, the Foundation, the members of the Symphony Orchestra of the Principality of Asturias, Maestro Maximiano Valdés, the organizers, those who have come from Asturias and all of you. May the Virgin Mary “who shines in the heights more beautiful than the sun and is Mother and Queen”, as we pray in the hymn to the heavenly Patroness of these lands, always protect you with her motherly tenderness.

I wish you all a good Advent journey and warmly impart my Blessing to you.