



ARGENTA/LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA:

España

Produced by Erik Smith

Engineered by Gordon Parrry

Reissue produced by Kai Seemann

Analog remastered by Tony Hawkins

Speakers Corner reissue of Decca SXL-2020/London CS-6006

One of the greatest sounding records in the Decca (UK)/London (USA) catalog, or in any other catalog for that matter. Originally recorded in December 1956 through February 1957 in London's famous Kingsway Hall and conducted by Adolfo Argenta (who tragically died in a car accident in 1958, cutting short a career that showed remarkable promise), this record was the second in a series of recordings Argenta made for Decca/London Records consisting of music from, or written about his native Spain.

Originally available domestically as a London Records 'Blueback' release (catalog no. CS-6006) as well as the UK/Decca release listed above, this record has been a long time member of *The Absolute Sound* editor Harry Pearson's "Super Disc" List and deservedly so. It's one of those all too rare occasions where exceptional performances and interpretations are complemented by equally exceptional sound.

España consists of several short pieces with side one containing one of the finest readings of "Capriccio Espagnole" ever put to disc. Rimsky-Korsakov, a Russian by birth (who spent all of three days in Spain as a youth) provides a fascinating, outsider's view of Spain which Argenta and the LSO bring to life with passion and color. Side two contains Chabrier's "España" which to this day is arguably the single piece of classical music most closely associated with Spain. Originally composed in 1883, "España" is rich with the texture and sounds of traditional Spanish folk and flamenco music.

Speakers Corner of Germany's reissue features the original UK Decca album cover artwork, inner sleeve and record label.* As with all Speakers Corner titles, *España* was remastered by Tony Hawkins (who originally mastered these UK/Decca records over 35 years ago) using a restored

Neumann VMS-80 cutting lathe identical to the one utilized on the original issue. The cutter head amplifiers are Neumann solid state units which have been used extensively for years throughout Europe.

Speakers Corner cuts all of its UK/Decca series reissues (with only two exceptions to date) flat from the master tapes, with no added equalization or reverb. This approach, similar to what Chesky Records does for its reissues, allows the listener to hear what was originally on the master tape.

Currently, all Speakers Corners reissues are pressed in limited runs on 180 gram virgin vinyl at the Pallaz in Germany (located about an hour south of Bremen). My review copies were dead flat with reasonably silent surfaces.

The Speakers Corner reissue gives no quarter to the original sonically, being somewhat softer in the treble, but with greater resolution. By this I mean that the original London Records 'Blueback', while being marginally more extended in the treble, suffers from occasional breakup – apparently due to the original cutter head and cutter head amplifiers not being able to handle the treble region.

An original London 'Blueback' of *España* will set you back upwards of \$200, which makes its purchase, if you can find one, out of the reach of most of us. For the uninitiated, 'Blueback' is slang which refers to the powder blue color of the back jacket of original London Records albums.

Original London issues can also be identified by the red record label which has a horizontal silver band about 3/8" wide with the words Full Frequency Stereophonic Sound or "FFSS" in red letters. A great reissue of a recording of exceptional music and performances.

* The cover art reproduction is third rate, and the spine information is printed upside down. Fortunately the sound is stupendous!