

**ASTURIANA: SONGS FROM SPAIN AND ARGENTINA** • Kim Kashkashian (va); Robert Levin (pn) • ECM 967902 (72:04)

**FALLA** *Seven Popular Spanish Songs*. **GRANADOS** *Tonadillas al estilo antiguo*. **GUASTAVINO** *La rosa y el sauce. Se equivocó la paloma. Abismo de sed. Pampamapa. Bonita rama de sauce*. **GINASTERA** *Triste*. **MONTSALVATGE** *Cançons negres*. **BUCHARDO** *Prendiditos de la mano. Oye mi llanto*

Wow! That is really almost all I can think of to say. This is a remarkable, absorbing, beautiful recording, one I have returned to many times in the month since *Fanfare* headquarters sent it my way. Kim Kashkashian is one of the finest violists of our time, and she and Robert Levin have been performing together for many years. One of the results of that is an extraordinary chemistry between them—and in this case we are the beneficiaries.

These are not pure transcriptions of Spanish and Argentine songs—they are transcriptions-plus. The “plus” factors are subtle additions, modifications, ornamentations, enhancements—none of which disguise or distort the original melodies, and all of which add interest. Kashkashian’s beautiful, dark, richly varied tone inflects these as completely as any singer could, and Levin plays with beauty of line and remarkable rhythmic vitality. The piano opening of “Polo,” the last of the *Seven Popular Spanish Songs* of Manuel de Falla, is so brilliantly articulated and rhythmically alive as to snap the listener to attention.

Three of the songs appear twice on the disc, including the title piece, “Asturiana.” It is one of the Falla songs, and it opens the disc alone and re-appears (in what seems a different performance) later on in its proper place in the Falla cycle. The other two are Ginastera’s dark “Triste,” and “La rosa y el sauce” by Carlos Guastavino. The repeats fit into the shape of the program perfectly.

It is that shape, along with the gripping performances, that makes this disc unique. The recorded sound is up to ECM’s usual very high standards, resulting in the feeling of having the musicians in the room with you. ECM even provides English texts for the songs, despite the fact that the words are not sung. A truly memorable disc. **Henry Fogel**