

GURIDI *Sinfonía pirenaica*. Amaya: Sword Dance¹ • Juan Jose Mena, cond;² Bilbao SO; Theo Alcántara, cond;¹ Bilbao Choral Society & SO • NAXOS 8.557631 (52:42)

Jesús Guridi (1886-1961) was born in Vitoria, and, as a young man, left for Bilbao in order to seek musical training. From thence he gravitated to Paris, Liège, and Cologne to further his studies. Returning to Spain, he ultimately became Organ professor at the Madrid Conservatory, rising to the post of director in 1956 which he held until his death in 1961. He worked in many genres, including Zarzuela, but made quite an impact in Spain early in his career, shortly after being appointed as director of the Bilbao choral society, with his arrangements of Basque folk songs—an influence that informs the *Sinfonía pirenaica* (“Pyrenean Symphony”) of 1945. Its language is more akin to that of Obradors rather than the harmonically spikier Falla. The piece is a 49-minute three-movement travclogue—tuneful, often modal, and handsomely orchestrated. It upholds its 49 minutes with ease, and its Basque melodic gestures provide an insight into at least one half of Ravel’s musical psyche. In sum, it’s a worthy piece that deserves to be heard...and enjoyed.

Having said this, the three-and-a-half minute filler to this offering—the *Espatadantza* (“Sword Dance”) culled from his 1920 opera *Amaya*—gives us a better fix on the art of Guridi. Its subtle cross rhythms, resourceful exploitation of melodically minimal gestures, and its tapping into something primordial evoked the music of Mexican composer Silvestre Revueltas. I’d truly like to hear that opera in its entirety.

The Bilbao Symphony Orchestra acquits itself admirably as a world-class ensemble. The sound is up to the best of current standards.

Once again Naxos proves that there is an infinity’s worth of life beyond the standard repertoire.

William Zagorski