The fractured rhythm, suggesting anguished sobbing and hiccups, is quite obsessive, Albeniz varying an idée fixe with consummate skill and hispanic musicianship. We are again deep in Andalusia with palo flamenco, a dance in which a cantaor sings of suffering while the troubled and melancholic pulse further accompanies a nostalgic second theme.

Debussy was inspired by and indebted to the music of Albéniz, and Messiaen considered El Polo a masterpiece (Yvonne Loriod performed all 4 volumes of Iberia).

This particular flamenco style originated in 18th century Spanish music and was a source of emotional intensity for Bizet in the creation of Carmen. The third volume of Iberia was dedicated to Marguerite Hasselmans, a fine pianist and Fauré’s mistress, although Albéniz also added a dedication to Joaquin Malats, the Catalan pianist who gave the first performance of Iberia in Madrid — “Al más querido, al único, al artista vibrante y universal, a Malats !!!”*

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* The image contains a note about piano practical editions, which is a warning that the editions may not be urtext and should be consulted with a traditional version. It also mentions a contact email for comments and error reports.
When I first heard Alicia De Larrocha perform Albeniz I was amazed and impressed by the language and technical mastery of both composer and interpreter. And when I was finally able to attempt Iberia, I noticed that the text (Éditions Salabert) was often difficult to study: there were inaccuracies, many accidentals and too many instructions, coupled with sub-standard engraving; so I decided to edit the music myself.

In spite of passing through a number of key changes, the composer has curiously written this work entirely with a key signature of 4 flats. Was this through negligence or by design? If the former, I humbly offer this edition which makes quite a few changes of key and time signature, rendering, I believe, the text easier to comprehend and play by eliminating quite a few challenging accidentals.

I plead guilty to not having religiously copied every dot, accent, sign, pedal marking and many others. Albeniz was very zealous in having often embellished many, sometimes conflicting, instructions and I have tried to simplify the music within reason relying upon present-day sophisticated pianists and teachers reading the score philosophically.

Albéniz was an extrovert with a keen sense of humour, loved and respected by all who knew him. In this wonderful and imaginative music, he was also flamboyant with long descriptions in French and pedalling directions which sometimes seem to be a whirlwind of far-fetched impossibilities — unreasonable and endearing as they are.

In addition to some suggested fingering, the appendix contains comments, afterthoughts and a French vocabulary. Redistribution between the hands comes under close scrutiny to make certain passages easier or more persuasive.

* "To the most loved, to the unique, vibrant and universal artist, to Malats!!"
* A heightened state of emotion, expression and authenticity, often connected with flamenco
Allegro melancólico  \( \frac{\text{\( \downarrow \)}}{66} \)

\( p \) mordant

\( \text{dolce} \) bien rythmé

\( \text{sans pédale} \)

doux en sanglotant
le chant marqué et très souple

[Ped.]
bien rythmé et détaché

sans pédale

effleurant les notes
sempre un poco rubato
gracieux et piquant
con anima

molto sforzato
con molto brio

117

fff

toujours fort et viril

120

fff

123
Appendix

Comments, afterthoughts & vocabulary

- In the original editions there are several pedal signs and an observation by Debussy can provide a pertinent object lesson: “Pedalling cannot be written down. It varies from one instrument to another, from one room, or one hall, to another.”
- As with El Albaicín and Triana (and indeed most of Iberia), Albeniz presented El Polo with a unique key signature, appropriately modified in this edition.
- In an effort to simplify the text and eliminate accidentals, the time-signature of 3/8 has been replaced with 6/8, which also serves to clearly reveal hemiola and other rhythmic variants.
- For further simplification, short staccato notes and chords are written as quavers, and a crotchet replaces the combination — dotted quaver and semiquaver rest. Except where necessary, rests have been largely omitted, the clearly defined empty spaces serving to show silence.
- There has been some pruning of the composer’s multiple instructions in Italian and French.
- The number of staves varies according to the text, and in general stems up = RH and down = LH.
- *poco sforzato* has been replaced with the marcato sign.
- Some subsidiary grace notes have been omitted.
- *El Polo* stretches a pianist to the limit, with hair-raising changes of register and dynamics. As often as possible the text layout is presented with maximum clarity to enable the reader to choose the most musical and practical use of the meagre ten fingers at his or her disposition, keeping in mind that an Albeniz leap will improve balance in thick chordal writing and add a certain piquancy to the sound.

**Duration: 7'15**

This is Albeniz commenting on his own music written before Iberia: “Here are among them a few things that are not completely worthless. The music is a bit infantile, plain, spirited; but in the end, the people, our Spanish people, are something of all that. I believe that the people are right when they continue to be moved by Córdoba, Mallorca, by the *copla* of the Sevillanas, by the Serenata, and Granada. In all of them I now note that there is less musical science, less of the grand idea, but more colour, sunlight, flavour of olives. That music of youth, with its little sins and absurdities that almost point out the sentimental affectation... appears to me like the carvings in the Alhambra, those peculiar arabesques that say nothing with their turns and shapes, but which are like the air, like the sun, like the blackbirds or like the nightingales of its gardens. They are more valuable than all else of Moorish Spain, which though we may not like it, is the true Spain”.
mordant  biting
doux en sanglotant  gently sobbing
le chant marqué et très souple  the melody marked and flexible
sans pédale  without pedal
bien rythmé et détaché  strong pulse and staccato
effleurant les notes  stroking the notes
bien atténué  very subdued
sans retarder  without slowing down
élargir  broaden
en traînant  dragging
reprenez  back to the original tempo
un peu indécis  a little hesitant
bien chanté et bien en dehors  cantabile and well marked
gracieux et piquant  graceful and spiritied
toujours fort et viril  loud and virile
sec  crisp
véloce  swift