

duo Scarbó

Tel: + 34-92-554 4929

Fax: +1-801-340-1457

pianoduo@hotmail.com

www.pianofourhands.com

ABOUT THE DUO

(Formerly named *Dúo Hammel – Sánchez*)

Elena Hammel (from Puerto Rico) and Laura Sánchez (from Spain) met in 1997 while completing their Master's Degree in Piano Performance at the Royal Irish Academy of Music in Dublin. Aided by the fact that they were the only Spanish-speaking, salsa-dancing pianists in the Emerald Isle, they quickly became great friends. Although they had frequently spoken of starting a piano duo together, their work as soloists inevitably delayed this idea. It was in late 1999, by then living in Spain, that they were offered their first piano duo performance which was to be in one of Spain's most renowned venues. This performance took place in 2000, at *Los Jameos del Agua* concert hall in Lanzarote, Canary Islands. The hall, built into a volcanic cave, continues to be one of the most visually stunning concert halls they have ever played in. From that first moment they sat down to play as an ensemble they both knew this was the path we were meant to take.

Over the first three years, Elena and Laura feverishly built up and performed repertoire for one piano four hands. They chose to focus on this genre before moving on to two pianos because they knew that being in such close proximity was the best way to fine-tune their connection to each other by unifying gestures, breathing, phrasing, timing, etc. A true balance and evenness of tone quality cannot be faked when playing on the same instrument. And then there was also the issue of practicality: there are significantly more venues with one piano available than two.

Their performances generated immediate interest and the duo was soon being booked to perform recitals for two pianos. For their first two-piano performance, they were asked to play Bartók's *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion*, one of the more challenging works in the repertoire and one that explores both the nuance and difficulties of the two piano genre. Although it looks and sounds similar to one piano 4 hands, two-piano performance is in practice quite different. Each piano generates a wall of sound which interferes with the pianists' ability to clearly distinguish what the other is doing nine feet away. Therefore, musical balance is more a factor of the affinity between the pianists than any kind of real-time auditory feedback. The years of dedication to one piano four hands had paid off as this previous "training" allowed a seamless transition from one piano to two.

Perhaps the most important influence on the *Duo Scarbó* has been the two years they were coached by the Hungarian pianist/teacher Ferenc Rados (better known as Andras Schiff's teacher). Rados was instrumental in helping the ensemble attain what they like to refer to as an "organic" vision of the score—the continuous flow of the music surging from its most fundamental rhythmic base—a quality in the Duo's playing that musicians such as Charles Rosen and Michael Colgrass have particularly praised.

They have also had a number of successes in the international competition route. Since 2001, they have received First Prize in every international chamber music and piano duo competition they have participated in (Spain, France, Italy...).

The Duo has also taken a special interest in performing the contemporary repertoire for four hands, in particular that of living Spanish composers. Most recently they have worked closely with José Luis Turina preparing his complete works for piano duo, which he has specially requested the Duo to perform at the *Málaga Festival of Contemporary Music* in a series of concerts in his honor. In their new music performances they have given the world premieres of works by both Spanish and American composers written especially for the *Duo Scarbó*, and

have also performed Spanish and Puerto Rican premieres of major 20th Century works such as George Crumb's *Celestial Mechanics*.

Their performances have taken them to both sides of the Atlantic and to the Pacific in events ranging from piano duo recitals in 2000-seat concert halls (such as the Auditorio Nacional de Madrid and Auditorio de Zaragoza, Spain...) and world renown music festivals (such as the Festival Casals), to educational concerts in intimate venues, engagements with symphony orchestras (Puerto Rico Symphony, National Spanish Youth Orchestra), and radio and television guest appearances. Critics in a wide array of countries have called their duo “*engaging*”, “*brilliant*”, and “*a marriage of true minds*”. Audience appeal and reaction to their performances has also been excellent judging by their frequently sold-out performances and repeat engagements. For their performances, the *Duo Scarbó* particularly enjoys giving the audience a brief spoken introduction about the pieces they are performing, provided the performance venue and the organizers allow for this. Not only does it help remove the silent wall that tends to exist between pianists and audiences but it also actively draws the listeners into the musical experience before the music even starts.

The *Duo Scarbó* has recorded two CDs (under the *Dúo Hammel – Sánchez* name). The first is of music for 1 piano 4 hands by Stravinsky, Schubert, Corigliano and Ravel and the second, *176 Keys to Europe*, is of early 20th Century works for two pianos by Debussy, Infante, Milhaud, Lutoslawski and Rachmaninoff. Both are available for on their website.

For more information please visit *Duo Scarbó's* website at www.pianofourhands.com.