

Harold C. Schonberg was chief music critic at *The New York Times* from 1960 to 1980:

composition. The chances are that Franck was an extremely gifted pianist.

So was the composer of *Carmen*. Marmontel, in his *Pianistes célèbres*, writes about his “regretted friend, and pupil, Georges Bizet,” who “played the piano like Hummel, Heller and Chopin, with that exquisite perfection and that particular taste of the great virtuosos, the masters of the art of song.” Bizet had something of Liszt’s ability to hear a piece of music and immediately play it back. He did this once in the presence of Liszt himself. Liszt played one of his works to a group of musicians including Halévy. He finished and said that in all Europe only two pianists could play it—von Bülow and himself. Halévy prodded Bizet to the piano, and the young man played the most difficult episode right back. Whereupon a somewhat startled Liszt procured the manuscript and Bizet read it at sight, with verve, accuracy and rapidity. Liszt rose to the occasion with an apology. “Now there are three of us, and I must add, to be just, that the youngest of us is perhaps the cleverest and the most brilliant.”

Although Isaac Albéniz had an impressive career as a pianist, it is primarily as a composer that he is remembered today. His was one of the more interesting lives in music, and certainly the most stagger-