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**NIGHTS** *from the* **ALHAMBRA**

I once came across a quote by the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu: “A good traveller has no fixed plans and is not intent on arriving.”

I had long intended to make a pilgrimage to Spain, and to visit the palace called Alhambra, but it wasn't until I learned that the ancient Celts had settled on this Iberian peninsula that I finally traveled there. I discovered Moorish towers built by a 13<sup>th</sup> century sultan; interior courtyards with pools of water, elegant pillars and intricate tracery... all designed to duplicate the famous descriptions of Paradise in Islamic poetry.

For centuries, it served as an oasis for nomads and travelers, a meeting place for cultures and traditions. A crossroads for religions, where Muslims, Jew and Christians coexisted in harmony.

It is a place where darkness gives way to light, where every stone has heard a thousand and one secrets, and where distance feels so near.

It's a place of infinite beauty; a mystic's dream

I remember the Alhambra rising out of the Sierra Nevada mountains, surrounded by a fertile flatland. It was a perfect place to build a defensive fortress and the castle grew organically on the top of its own mountain, down through the centuries.

Moorish poets described it as a pearl surrounded by emeralds. The Alhambra exists out of time. In my mind, it's nestled right next to eternity, and the architectural details everywhere are overwhelmingly Arabic. The Alhambra palace was at the apogee of civilization when it was built.

Even the courtyard where we are performing our concert, constructed by King Carlos the Fifth, pays tribute to the brilliance of the unknown Muslim architects who first erected turrets and storehouses here, centuries earlier.

The name Alhambra means “the red” in Arabic. Some say that this derives from the colour of the bricks on the outer walls. Some say it refers to the red colour of the torches by which construction was carried out.

For me, Alhambra means mystery. It means eternity. It represents the human spirit.

I first came to Spain in search of the Celts. I was surprised to learn that Celtic tribes had lived in Galicia, in northwestern Spain, before being pushed north towards Britain and Ireland by invading Roman armies.

In fact, Galicians still play bagpipes, and there are aspects of their music which almost sound Scottish or Irish. So it was this pan-Celtic connection that led me to the door of Spain and a whole new path of discovery.

When I arrived at the Alhambra, I felt as though I'd always been there, and as though I'd never ever leave. It's a magical and mystical place filled with inspiration, and the music that one hears here is eternal. The civilization that one feels here knows no borders. But as the philosopher says, A good traveller has no fixed plans and is not intent on arriving.

For me, a journey is a never-ending road. A discovery that there is so much more to bind us together than to tear us apart. These are the dreams that we hold in the palms of our hands.