

## SYLVESTRE REVUELTAS

PAUL BOWLES

THE first time I met Sylvestre Revueltas was in Mexico City, during the invasion of Spain; he was leaving shortly for Valencia at the behest of the Loyalist Government. He asked me eagerly if I had read Lorca and Guillen. Then he bade me go with him to the Conservatorio where he conjured up an impromptu orchestra in less than an hour, and conducted a magnificent performance of *Homenaje a García Lorca*. While the music in no way suggested anything popular, the listening experience for me was violently moving as it can be only in the case of folk music.

In certain ways Revueltas was a Mexican Falla. Far from being an ascetic hermit, he was hedonistic and gregarious. However in each man one had the sense of an organism attaining complete expression in the creation of music which was an accurate and very personal version of the life that went on around him in his country. In each case there was an intuitive functioning that transformed folk music into art music with a minimum of purity lost.

It was Revueltas who first took me to such humble spots as Tenampa in the Plaza Garibaldi where the rival mariachi groups play each night until dawn. The Indian elements in Mexican popular music delighted him, but it is difficult to find any conscious evocation of it in his later music. I am told that the earlier things such as *Colorines* were definitely Indianoid, and I should like another opportunity of hearing them. (Conductors please note.)

Revueltas knew the bases of music: the noises that accompany drunkenness and abandon. He had played in border bars and dives and movie houses in his youth. With this education his approach could only be healthy.



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drawing by

**FERNANDO GAMBOA**

He knew what music was for and what it was about. The younger composers, especially Galindo, Argote and Contreras, felt this and admired him to the point of veneration. He represented to them the true revolutionary composer who in his work went straight toward the thing to be said, paying as little attention as possible to the means of saying it. Because he was musically a romantic, that thing to be said was usually an effect to be made rather than anything else. There is none of the preoccupation with form or conscious establishment of individual style that makes Chavez's music an intellectual product. With the instinct of the orator he made his effects, barbaric and sentimental, after which he might have remarked with quiet pride: *He dicho*.

The way in which he so grandly disregarded the poverty and disease always present in his life perhaps helped to make him a great romantic figure. Whatever it was that did it, none who knew him escaped the conviction that here was someone who, if not a great composer, was all the same a great man who wrote music.