

content of this music after its performance. But the musician must be satisfied that what one gets from any work depends upon what one brings to it. In the *Symphonie des Psaumes* he will sense unmistakably those elements he seeks in real music. Stravinsky has written a piece of occasional music which has all the characteristics of a piece not written for an occasion.

Walter Piston

THE "SONES" OF CUBA

CUBA possesses both a highly original Negro folk music and talented cultivated composers who have developed some of the unique features of the primitive material into the basis of a sophisticated style. Its art is well worth consideration.

Of course, not all the folk-music heard when one travels about Cuba is of major interest. A good deal of it is saturated with the most commonplace type of Spanish song, and even shows some alarmingly poor Italian opera influence. Nothing is really Cuban here except the words and some minute distinctions of rhythm.

It is the Afro-Cuban "Sones" or songs with accompaniment of a whole set of unique native instruments, which have a genuine and exciting character of their own. Many of the words are of African origin, others are said to have sprung up in Cuba among the Negroes, having no recognizable roots either in Africa or in Spain. The instruments used are Cuban inventions. The rhythms are indigenous and although the melodies and harmonic outlines are not so unique, the whole effect of these songs is of a tonal texture utterly distinctive.

Though many lands have an original native music, it does not always follow that they have composers of originality. Cuba has at least two cultivated men of wide musical experience who use the Sones in their music or have built up certain aspects of their style from the line of musical thought suggested by these. They are Alejandro Caturla of Remedios, in central Cuba, and Amadeo Roldan, concertmaster of the Philharmonic Orchestra in Havana. Before attempting to explain just what they have done and the difference in their works, it will be essential to give a more detailed account of the Sones themselves.

Sones are performed by a group of Negro players, usually five or more. Only the players sing, and any one of them is apt to break into song at any time. Sometimes but one sings alone; sometimes several will be possessed at the same moment and perform chorally in different parts.

No idea of the rhythmic fascination of these Sones can be given without describing the extraordinary and original percussion instruments. More of these instruments are used together than is usual in purely primitive music. Cuban music is really folk-song with a barbaric accompaniment.

The original instruments are the "botita," a jug which is closed and opened at the mouth by the player's hand and blown through a small hole flute-wise; the "mariembula," a box to which is fastened a series of metal thorns, each of which produces a different pitch when plucked; the "maracas," a gourd with a natural handle in the hollowed end of which seeds are rhythmically rattled; the "clave," two resonant sticks of different pitches which are clapped together; the "guiro," a long smooth gourd from the back of which strips are cut, and which is scraped with a sharp-pointed implement; and the "bombos," a set of native drums often made by stretching skins over hollow cooking-pans. Besides this orchestra of battery, there are guitars and a double-bass with three strings, always played pizzicato.

When all of these instruments are in full swing the sound is bewitching. Hypnotic in its onward-moving sweep, it is punctuated with dynamic explosions of distinctive rhythm from each individual player. The lilt is full of verve, counter-rhythmic but not jazzy. A typical scheme is for a basic 4/8 meter to be outlined by the maracas in a straight line of eighth notes diversified by an occasional sixteenth; the clave playing a cross-meter of a slow three and a fast six in alternate measures; the bombo (a root name for any kind of a drum) gravitating between a strong thump on the first beat, and an incisive syncopated off-beat on the next measure. The double-bass often has an ostinato which is interrupted by a dazzlingly fast outburst of explosive rhythms leading to some new vocal entrance of the Sone.

Against this background of battery, which is sharp but never extremely loud, the voices are usually lyric, suave and melting.

The turn of the tune is often ingenious but there is no distinctively new usage; it is very Spanish. All the tunes I heard were in either the major scale or in the Mixolydian mode. The harmony is always felt to be dominant and tonic to the exclusion of everything else but it is outlined rather than actually played in full.

Amadeo Roldan takes over these Cuban percussion instruments themselves into his symphonic music and with great subtlety retains the native rhythmical scheme as a background for his style. This style was at first much influenced by French standards but has lately grown more personal. His music is cultivated, elegant, mature. The accompaniment of primitive instruments in rhythms only slightly varied from their original use makes a curious contrast to the polished harmonies and melodies.

Alejandro Caturla rarely uses the Cuban instruments. Having heard Sones until they are a part of his musical background, he attempts to create a style which is a synthesis of the impression produced on him by the primitive means; a style which has been refined and filtered until it has become a thoroughly sophisticated one. It no longer needs the actual primitive instruments to obtain its effect. Notwithstanding the processes of culture, his music still vividly suggests the barbaric strength of the Cuban Sones and has lost none of their "punch." His work is more erratic than Roldan's and somewhat cruder but displays a more vigorous talent. At moments he is breathtakingly original, and his work is growing in stature.

Neither composer has as yet tapped all the remarkable resources which the folk-music of their country suggests. These could be utilized to build up a full-blooded, tropical style, gigantic but unsentimental; diversified, and with less ostinato than is used by Roldan and Caturla. Perhaps some other as yet unknown composer will come forward and achieve the wide sweep and glory of rhythm presaged by these Sones.

Henry Cowell