

AMERICANISMO MUSICAL

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TO understand the contemporary musical movement in Latin America it is necessary first of all to discard the popular view that music south of the Rio Grande is in content or character unconditionally Spanish.

The predominant early settlement of these southern republics was, to be sure, Spanish, and early Spanish America should obviously derive its first inspiration from the mother country. But in much of today's music no hint of Spanish ascendancy may be detected. Intellectually matching their economic and political liberation, the republics have evolved a music of their own, increasingly independent in its expression.

From the beginning the influences of the native and invader have been reciprocal, but not always equally so. A great autochthonous group—the pre-Cortez and pre-Pizarro Indian Americans—inhabited what today is Yucatan, Peru, Ecuador, the highlands of Venezuela, the lowlands of Brazil, the jungles of Colombia, the mesas of Bolivia-Argentina, and the pampas of Patagonia. Here where the Spanish conqueror met Indian cultures long established and highly developed, the imprint of the music of Spain and of the Gregorian chant—introduced by the Christian padres—was more often inconsiderable than otherwise. The tenacious character of the people who had evolved an indigenous music of consequence perhaps explains why their musical language should remain relatively untouched. Isolation, and peculiar physical and social conditions were added obstacles to Spanish cultural penetration beyond the seacoast. Certainly, this is true of whole sections of the Andean, the Amazon and Central American areas where the extraneous influence of the Spanish and Portuguese settlers has been insufficient to alter, in any marked degree, the basic character of the music, its harmonies and melodies, or to change appreciably the instruments upon

which it was played—facts which have proved of vital importance to twentieth century composers caught up in the contemporary musical movement.

Of equal importance, and of far wider significance in the fusion of musical strains which was to follow, was what might be called an imported aboriginal music. Indirectly a gift of the Conquerors to the New World, it permeates the whole of the Caribbean area, the Antilles, the coast of Colombia and Venezuela, and enriches the art of that vast portion of eastern South America which is Brazil. It is the music of Africa, introduced during the early days of exploration by slaves whom the colonists brought to America. Its mark is lasting, deep, and distinctive, varying in intensity with the prominence the African has assumed in any given locality.

This aboriginal influx on the music of Iberian origin absorbed later supremacies in its wide hypnotic mesh—sonorous, rhythmic and complex. But its synthesis was with the music of the Conqueror rather than with the Indian. Common attributes such as the pentatonic base or similar instruments of percussion did not suffice to create a union between the Indian and African. For the most part, the Indian has remained inaccessible and the division is distinct.

The Indian and African aboriginal cultures are juxtaposed, running from North to South along Western and Eastern Latin America respectively, from Mexico to Magellan and from the Antilles to Uruguay. Mexico and Peru lead the nations with an indigenous American culture and a predominant Amerindian population; after them come the remaining countries dependent on the pre-Columbian era—Central America, Colombia, Ecuador, part of Venezuela, Chile and Bolivia. Another world is that of Brazil and Paraguay, the Guianas, and again part of Venezuela. Here racial elements have crossed and recrossed. Guianian influence and the Portuguese conquest share with the African in determining Brazil's personality, and the African joins the vast Lusitanian territory with the Caribbean archipelago.



And what of the music itself? In both cultures, the Indian and the African, it plays a role of prime importance, religious

and therefore social. Religion was the essential impulse of the whole life of the Aztec monarchy and of the Incas, and religion as an emotional experience was the comfort and refuge of the transplanted African. Religion for either race could not exist without music. The Indian, whose advanced culture expressed the beauty of simplicity, developed a music spiritual, detached, melancholy, yet vigorous and reverent. Imbued with equal religious fervor, the African conjured a mysterious, liturgic art, irresistibly hypnotic, magical, powerful in the emotive force of its rhythms.

In the course of several generations, under the influence of changing conditions, a fusion has taken place. Where the music of Spain, Portugal and Africa have intermingled, where noble Indian melodies have survived or have been deftly touched by the gayer, more dynamic accompaniments of the Conquistadores, where subsequently other nations conquered and were conquered, there arose a music original in character, distinct from that of the Hispanic peninsula.

An essential factor in this development was the element of solitude—the solitude of the gaucho on the wide Argentine pampas, the loneliness of the gold-digger of the Cordillera, the nostalgia of the deported African. It imparts a special and intangible quality to musical utterance. Thus has arisen a music rich in emotional expression, far from primitive, melodically enchanting, haunting, rudimentary in its harmonic content, rhythmically fascinating, and, above all, peculiarly vital.

It is to the heritage of the colonial and the pre-Conquest periods that the contemporary composer has returned. The key to liberation of his talents he has discovered in his own traditions rather than in the European. Previously the musical line of contact has run east and west rather than north and south. The tightening of sympathetic bonds between Portugal, Spain and the colonies was a recognition of ancestral influence. Behind these early homeland influences were the music of France and Italy. After the Latin civilizations, Germany made itself felt, the Germany of the classicists. Later still there was modern Russia. Most recently important were France's impressionism and the Russia of Stravinsky.

Cultivated entirely on the music of Europe, the classic, the romantic, the modern, it was to be expected that the music of South America should assume a form imitative in its technical aspects, inspired by Old World esthetics, limited in creative expression. But gradually, following the achievement of political autonomy, a national consciousness has arisen to flourish in its full strength as a movement of intellectual independence. To a greater or less degree this liberation is in progress in all of the twenty Latin American republics.

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The contemporary movement in those countries where it has become a vogue has a certain generic character. Broadly the ultimate purposes if not the individual means of attainment, are identical. Variousy inspired, the movements are the expression of a commendable race pride, a desire to maintain and develop the heritage of indigenous earlier civilizations. In no two countries is this ancient heritage more divergent, are the colonial traditions less alike than in Mexico and Brazil. Yet in both these republics the campaign to free the music from imitation of European influence and European methods has reached vast proportions. These efforts are similar in their fundamental purposes. And they are each inspired by a single, audacious figure—Carlos Chavez in Mexico, Hector Villa-Lobos in Brazil. Through their respective Departments of Fine Arts of the Secretariat of Public Education, they bring their conviction of the values of indigenous music to bear on the problems of education. Both men have founded choruses, improved orchestras, instigated wide artistic and historic research, collected and studied native music and native instruments, promoted the distribution throughout the schools of simple arrangements of native melodies, encouraged composition in native idioms. In short, they have made music, their music, a vital reality, giving it a place among the people. In Mexico the emphasis has been on the expansion of the orchestra, on larger forms, and new uses of instrumental combinations. In Brazil the imposing ideal was set that all the people should sing, sing the songs which have sprung up throughout the whole of Brazil, the enormous territory stretching over more than three million square miles of continent. This

ideal is partially realized at the musical festivals in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, when 18,000 voices join in song to the accompaniment of hundreds of orchestra and band musicians.



That nationalism so generously and spaciouly conceived will reveal new tonal conceptions and re-energize the art of composers, is the general hope. It is already destroying former limitations. Chavez has done much to publicize the works of his countrymen, Daniel Ayala, Luis Sandi, Silvestre Revueeltas and others. Brazilian composition so long represented abroad by the lonely figure of Carlos Gomez, exponent of the Italian school, famous for his *Il Guarany*, today is largely identified by men whose music discloses fresh idioms—Henrique Oswald, whose chamber works deserve mention, Luciano Gallet who has made remarkable researches into native folk music, J. Octaviano and Alberto Nepomuceno who have written in a variety of forms.

A different picture is presented by Argentina, Cuba, Peru and Chile. Here the contemporary groups are localized, the sphere of their activities is less encompassing. National conservatories and national orchestras serve as their organization and their outlet. Argentina, already working with broader scope and an eye to the future, has its society of contemporary composers, the *Grupo Renovación*, and according to rumor the Department of Education looks to Brazil for methods of organizing mass music education. The very name, *Grupo Renovación*, "of renewal," is significant of the purpose of its composer members—Juan José Castro, Carlos Isamitt, Juan Carlos Paz, Honorio Siccardi, Carlos Pedrell, Felipe Boero, Carlos Buchardo. They have turned to traditional music for a revival of its qualities in a new and meaningful expression. In Chile there are Humberto Allende, Alfonso Leng, Enrique Soro, leaders of the moderns, and Luis Sandoval of the National Conservatory, famed as a folklorist.

So important is the contemporary movement of Latin America to the University of Uruguay that it has instituted a Division of Musical Research, directed by Professor Francisco Curt Lange, with an ambitious program for the publication of instrumental, choral and vocal music. The organization boasts the support of

six hundred individuals and one hundred and twenty institutions throughout Latin America, all interested in creative work and musical research. There are others, Eduardo Fabini and Luis Cluzeau Mortet in Uruguay, the very important modernists Caturla and Roldan in Cuba, Robles and Valderrama in Peru, Calvo in Colombia, Xisto Duran in Ecuador.

These and many more live in our day, in the day of "Americanismo" as it is understood to the south of us. For material they utilize the treasures of melody and rhythm, here intense and melancholy, there gay and intricate, which were once the musical achievement of their people. The spirit of research dominates one group, another turns to new instrumental combinations or to song, with no deliberate effort at "modernism," but with results that are individual and arresting. Relentlessly they are rediscovering Patagonia in the Argentine, the Guarani in Northern Argentina which was once Peru and Indian, the extraordinary figure of the gaucho on the pampas here and in Uruguay, the Araucanians and the Spaniards in Chile, and the African in Cuba. The new forms are stimulating, the expression vigorous, and the purpose of the contemporary composers of Latin America always high and truly American.