

aging more than one man should, the answer is that no one else has either the mastery or the energy. I found him most generous-minded about his bitterest foes, bringing to me their music, with words of praise as well as appraisal.

Urrutia, a younger man of real talent and industry and imagination, recently presented a *Danza del Campo Yermo*, for orchestra, from his ballet *La guitarra del diablo*, and his *Pastoral de Albué*, for small orchestra. Negrete's last work was a *Quartet*, as was also Isamitt's. Santa Cruz' most recent piece was a set of *Madrigals* for mixed chorus, dedicated to Marshall Bartholomew. Bisquertt's novelty was *Metropolis*, five symphonic sketches; but I prefer his older *Miscelaneas*, for piano and orchestra, showing admirable gifts of orchestration and a charming, laconic line. Letelier's latest were a *Quartet* and a *Piano concerto*.

It is a pity that Leng had nothing new, because he is perhaps the most beloved and certainly one the most gifted of Chilean composers. Orchestrally he deals with cloud-formations, neo-Wagnerian "cumuli" which yet, somehow, are ponderable and shapely. There is no counterpoint, but there is a homogeneous solidity of consecutive patterns. There is a tendency to fragmentation. But Leng is always sensitive and elegant. His writing for piano is original and brilliant. And his songs are probably the finest produced in America.

Samuel L. M. Barlow

## STRUGGLE IN MEXICO

*Mexico City*

**F**OR some years I have been struggling to organize the musical education of Mexico, but I cannot yet refer to this effort as a glorious battle happily terminated. Rather, my story is one of frequent failures, partial successes, marches forward and back, renewed enthusiasm, the enlistment of new allies and the desertion of former ones. The road is fascinating, but the end still out of sight.

I had my first educational contact with Mexican children in 1926, as a teacher of solfège and choral singing in the public schools. The district was very poor, the school of the "open-air" type, well ventilated and pretty. A teacher of the fourth or fifth year was busily introducing fox-trots and blues to the admiration of the entire school. The music I began to teach naturally inspired much ill will. Next I joined an absurd school in a small and delightful community. The classrooms were located on separate streets; singing took place in the huge building of the commissary. One could not say that discipline was bad; it simply did not exist. A sixth-year

teacher diverted himself by plotting against me with his small pupils. I had also to cope with the problems of a girls' school in the same locality; and finally I conducted classes in a small and very poor school for country children. Thus I learned about musical education.

In reality, of course, there was no musical education. The pieces we were ordered to teach were either stupid, in any literary or musical sense, or disconcertingly ugly. As for solfège, we did not even know how to teach it. At the Conservatory in Mexico City no one had spoken a word about pedagogy, psychology, or method in general, much less about how they applied to children. Therefore we taught the stuffy and pretentious system of the Conservatory. The children detested this cordially, as they did our foolish songs. It was only when we gave them a piece of folk music that they saw the sky open and then they sang with happiness and ardor.

From May 1933, until the end of 1934, I was Mexico's Chief of Music in the Secretariat of Public Education. During that time I directed the musical education of the primary and secondary schools and the National Teachers' School. First I formulated a plan of action to give the necessary culture to the educators themselves. This took account of the serious economic situation created by the shrinking budget, which declined simultaneously with the great increase in schools and the number of scholars. We had to choose between poor teaching of how to read music, and the cultivation of musical taste through a study of works of art. We decided on the latter course. In the kindergartens we began a progressive education of ears and voice. For the primary schools we turned to the universal musical literature, with special emphasis on American music. We approached the music of Mexico not with the racial or mestizo criterion that sets off indigenous products as inferior, but with the conviction that all diverse qualities of ethnic types in our country should be utilized, and that art would reveal these at their best. The same plan was followed in secondary schools, with emphasis on music more complex or more profound and with the addition of a course in music history. In the Normal School we established a program of solfège to give all teachers enough preparation so that – in addition to their other accomplishments – they could assist the music teachers. The latter were charged specifically with encouraging the study of music intermittently throughout each day.

To these activities in which students participated, we added others in which they were spectators or promoters of performances. Concert societies were formed and students undertook to plan musical seasons. Groups of concert-giving teachers also appeared in the schools themselves.

Research into our popular music, and especially our indigenous music, then near the vanishing point, was the constant preoccupation of the Music Section. Through organized study trips, indigenous melodies of unquestioned authenticity were gathered for our archives. Now these are in the public domain where they have established their great cultural significance.

To carry out this part of the plan and to obtain the best results of its work of investigation, the Music Section intensively promoted original composition, much of it inspired by popular indigenous music. A group of young composers has now produced sizable results, both in the creation of a repertory of good quality, suited to interpretation by children, and in the production of works built on our native scales and the rhythms. In these, use has been made of the instruments which the people, both Indian and mestizo, still employ.

Up to this time the conditions affecting professorial posts of the Music Section had been absolutely vicious. Recommendations, orders and suggestions for appointments were passed from politician to politician, from chief to chief. So that the State might be assured that its music professors were at least competent, and not amateur "favorites," a new rule was established requiring that a qualifying examination be taken.

These goals the Section of Music achieved in the face of a reduced budget, lack of public confidence, general disdain for the so-called "cult" of indigenous music – which was termed barbarous – and the resistance of a small group of professors in the Section itself. In our favor, however, we had the decided support of most scholastic authorities and the efficacious and enthusiastic cooperation of the majority of the professors. Supported by their comprehension and discipline, the educational program became a renovating and vital effort. Whatever course Mexico's musical education may take in the future, our plan will have made a deep impression on the taste and the intelligence of the generation now being educated, on part of the public, and – most important – on the educators.

As 1934 came to a close, a change of administration took me out of musical education. Returning in March, 1938, to the Chief Office of the Music Section, I found that much of the work had been destroyed and nothing constructed in its place. But there remained the group, now somewhat diminished and a little weary, of faithful collaborators, with whom I started at once to reorganize our system. Our former plan was even improved in several important points. One of these was the concentration of forces in a relatively small number of schools. Another – a consequence of the first – was the starting of a class in solfège.

The problem of teaching solfège in Mexico has been the most difficult of all. In the first place we had to produce a book that, in easy form, would show the child musical signs. The book ready, we had to find a publisher. The Government was solicited, but when it became clear that the Government would not undertake it, a private publisher was found to bring our humble, but attractive and effective book to light. Still it was so expensive that many children could not buy it. Besides, the idea of buying a book to study music was so new and so strange that those who would easily make an effort for a geography or a history, found this absurd and refused outright to do so. We had to resign ourselves to producing a more limited and cheap edition. We also prepared popular pamphlets whose sale constantly increased. One other problem still has not been completely solved. Because of a shortage of professors, not all the schools have music classes; furthermore, each year a considerable number of students change schools.

To increase the number of teachers, I inaugurated an Institute of Musical Preparation for Normal-School Professors. Here the teachers of General Education could fill the musical deficiencies in their professional training. With difficulty at first, but with better results each year, the Institute has endured and is now in its sixth year of life.

To reinforce the group of concert-givers who began to attend schools where illustrated lectures were given, I formed a Chorus of Madrigalists, of which I took charge. Its repertory was made up largely of works of the sixteenth century filled out with choral versions of folk and modern music. The Chorus has won fame, and now gives concerts in many cities of the country. But for six months each year, it still produces music for the primary and secondary schools.

This year our struggle enters a crucial phase of expansion. The present aim is to establish instrumental groups in the majority of schools, to have at least one group in each school study part-singing, to supply each school with a radio receiver, a phonograph, and a library of records, to broadcast nationally at least one series of concerts for children, and to establish classes in musical appreciation and creation. All this, using music of the highest quality and in the midst of a thousand hostile forces which may well give the coup de grâce to all the work begun. As I said at the beginning, our activities cannot be taken as the culmination of a long, cultural struggle. They must be assessed as the first slow and tentative steps of a country which is, in many ways, still a child.