

## THE COMPOSERS OF CHILE

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THERE is a curiously homogeneous quality to the Chilean music of today. It even has a style which one comes to recognize. True, most of the leading composers have studied in Europe and, like many musicians in the United States, naturally are influenced by trends and fashions abroad. But a native flavor is nonetheless apparent. It is perhaps significant that composers of Chile are quite congenial with one another. They seem happily free of the terrific jealousies, the differences in psychology which are such a striking feature of musical life in some countries of South America.

It should be remembered, however, that although the southern continent is divided into many countries, distinct in character, it is unreasonable to expect such differences of musical style as one finds in Czechoslovakia, Roumania and England. The folk-lore of South America is varied but, on the other hand, the population of many of the countries is small. Chile has only about 4,300,000 and Santiago, its capital, 696,000 inhabitants. There are few choral societies, orchestras, or chamber music groups for which composers can write. Without a particular demand there cannot be a large supply of new music. To expect very different idioms from all the countries to the south of us is like asking Texas to produce a different music from that of New Mexico. On the other hand, Chile has a representative group of sensitive musicians who have already produced a large body of interesting works with a surprisingly regional flavor.

In colonial times Chile was musically dependent on Peru. Many important musicians came from Cuzco, Arequipa or Lima to Santiago and Valparaiso and remained for the rest of their lives. The early nineteenth century witnessed the rise and dominance of Italian models. In 1840 the first important German musician, Guillermo Frick, arrived. The birth of Carlos Lavín, Enrique Soro, Prospero Bisquertt, Alfonso Leng and Humberto Allende in the 1880's, however, marks the beginning of a new and native generation in Chile.

This modern Chilean school divides into three groups. The first, led by Enrique Soro (born 1884) and closely seconded by Melo Cruz, is under Italian influence. Its followers call themselves the Sociedad de Compositores Chilenos, but the membership is small. The music of its leaders, though competent, is mostly watered Hispanicism, hardly likely to set the world on fire. Soro is a very facile individual. His training at the Verdi Conservatory in Milan gave him a fluent technic before he was nineteen. He has been a Director of the Chilean National Conservatory and has conducted concerts in Italy, Germany, France, Switzerland, Argentina and Mexico, and he has more than four hundred works to his credit. Until the middle 1920's Soro was the contemporary Chilean composer best known in Europe, South America and the United States. "Analytische Studien" of his second violin sonata, a string quartet and a piano quartet were even published in German as early as 1919. But today, Soro is no longer so highly esteemed either at home or abroad. Although able and industrious he really has little to say. This is the more unfortunate as he is one of the few Chileans readily available in North American editions (G. Schirmer having brought out over a dozen of his works).

The second group, dominated by Humberto Allende (born in 1885), is more distinguished. Allende had the good fortune not to study in Europe as a young man. He received his training at the National Conservatory of Music in Santiago and has spent most of his time since teaching violin, harmony and composition and studying music education. Though a sensitive musician, his is not a magnetic personality, and pupils like Isamitt and Lavin have tended to break away from him. Nevertheless, his *Tonadas* have been played by Ricardo Viñes and others with great success, and it was a memorable day when twelve of them were published by Séart of Paris in 1922. The *Tonada*, deriving from the Spanish song with a refrain usually having four or five stanzas, is in two parts of eight measures, each repeated twice. The first is slow, the second half lively and gay like a *Cueca*. The text is generally about unrequited love with a chorus denouncing the hard-hearted one. Guitar and hand clapping form the accompaniment. Allende's efforts to capture the spirit of these songs in piano compositions have been quite successful. On a more ambitious scale are his *Tres Tonadas* for orchestra, chorus and soloists.

The symphonic poems *Escenas Campesinas Chilenas* and *La Voz de las Calles* have helped to make his name abroad. *La Voz de las Calles* appeared the same year as Gabriela Mistral's *Poema de las Madres* and

Pedro Prado's *Alsino* and it has been said that these three subjective, expressionist works marked the artistic coming of age of Chile in the twentieth century.

Allende's *Cantos Infantiles* (1921) began to show polytonal influences and led up to his abstract *String Quartet* (1926). In general he is more conscious than intuitive, more skillful at harmonization than gifted with melodic imagination. His is a reflective, reticent temperament. He has worked slowly, carefully and without compromising. His development has been progressive and along the logical lines of his nature. At its best his music is idiomatic; it will probably endure because it has the coloristic nationalism of the Grieg-Dvorak variety. He has been compared to Villa-Lobos but though he also possesses a knowledge of what will "sound," he lacks the Brazilian's imagination. Both men are interested in school music and have devoted time to the education of the young. Allende has written among other things *Música Pre-Modernista y la Música Modernista* published by the National Library of Chile.

The third or eclectic group is headed by Domingo Santa Cruz (born 1899), at present dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts in the University of Santiago. Santa Cruz worked with Soro from 1917 to 1920 and then went into the diplomatic service. Part of the time, while stationed in Madrid, he studied with the highly esteemed composer Conrado del Campo. Forsaking diplomacy and returning to music in 1927, Santa Cruz founded the Bach Society of Chile and subsequently such magazines as *Marsyas*, *Revista de Arte*, *Revista Aulos*, which began to publish the music of contemporary Chilean composers. For the past fifteen years Santa Cruz has been one of the outstanding champions of modern music in Latin America.

His own evolution as an artist has been interesting. The early works were impressionistic, some of the songs, for example, echoing Duparc. Then he became a student of polytonality. Today his style is distinctly abstract. And yet such recent part songs as his *Canción del Alcanfor* could not be more melodic or direct. The sadness that is felt in so many Chilean works is in Santa Cruz's *Cinco Poemas Trágicos*, but he possesses greater depth than most of his contemporaries. He is not prone to clichés nor does his music ever seem cheap. He has distinction and skill and his work is always personal. One of his most recent productions, a suite of five pieces for orchestra (1938), when heard by members of the American Ballet Company in Santiago last summer, made a profound impression; the composition is being included in the repertory of this group under the title

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DOMINGO SANTA CRUZ



HUMBERTO ALLENDO



SAMUEL NEGRETE



ALFONSO LENG



BY SANTELICES

*Noble Dances of the Viceroy.* It lasts about twenty minutes and could well become a standard piece with orchestras in the United States; though written for strings and piano, the effect is thoroughly orchestral. It has a purity of style which is both noble and moving, simple but not naive. Its flavor is curiously provincial, as though reflecting an idea conceived in Spain but carried out in the new world and the materials are somehow indigenous although it is absolutely without folk-lore. Santa Cruz knows exactly what he wants and carries out his ideas with impressive logic. There is a slight affinity to Hindemith but the atmosphere is scarcely European. One might compare his music to a dry Chilean wine with a perfectly balanced bouquet.

He has another large work for chorus and orchestra about the rivers of Chile, which I have not heard but understand to be the most ambitious work he has yet undertaken. A performance is scheduled for 1942 when the 400th anniversary of the founding of Santiago is to be celebrated. Santa Cruz is probably the most powerful musical personality in Chile today. It is a pity that his administrative duties take so much of his time from composition.

There are several tendencies within the eclectic group which deserve further mention; for instance, the French impressionism of Prospero Bisquertt who orchestrates with rare skill; the able if Teutonic treatment of folk songs by Jorge Urrutía Blondel, and the Indian idiom of Carlos Isamitt, one of the most arresting of all Chilean artists. Isamitt is both a painter and a composer and his music has a logic and color which are ingenious, if not always convincing. This sympathetic musician has spent a great deal of time studying the music of the Araucanian Indians and he is perhaps more distinguished as a folklorist than as a composer. The problem of Indian music and western civilization is complex. Arthur Farwell, Edward MacDowell, and Frederick Jacobi, to mention but a few figures here, have made explorations in this field — but so far no school has been built on this source nor do we feel that a convincing synthesis has been achieved. Indian melodies when clothed in the harmonic garb of modern orchestration do not sound particularly Indian. The melodic lines might just as well have been composed as taken from the red men's chants. But Isamitt will undoubtedly continue to work with Araucanian material and musicians will enjoy listening to his solutions of the problem.

Another member of this group, Alfonso Leng, is a sensitive poet whose intuitive qualities have made him an outstanding scientist and physician as well as a composer. Like Borodin he is a musical romanticist

who must express himself in notes. Leng is rather reticent and something of a miniaturist. From the beginning, his excellent craftsmanship has found an outlet in Nordic "Sehnsucht." The second prelude, written about 1906, and performed by the Colon Orchestra, was his first work of any importance. The *Doloras* of the pre-war days fit into the nostalgic Scriabin pattern. Leng is at his best writing *Lieder* with traces of Wolf and Fauré; even the texts are in German or French. *Cima* (1922) on a poem by Gabriela Mistral is one of his few settings of Spanish. Perhaps the best large work of consequence is his symphonic poem *Alsino* based on Pedro Prado's novel. Leng likes diminished seventh chords. His style is completely devoid of polyphony, it is primarily a pattern of changing harmonies – even melody being frequently subordinate. The rhythmic ideas are impressionistic rather than decisive.

There are other musicians such as Acario Cotapos (when he lived in the United States he was associated with the Salzedo, Varèse, Cowell group). Cotapos unfortunately is artificially imaginative rather than profound. Javier Rengifo has a flare for improvisation in various styles; Juan Casanova is undoubtedly talented, especially in instrumentation, but he has not yet produced anything outstanding. Casanova conducts the *Bandas del Ejercito* of the Chilean army and some of his compositions have been published by the Ministerio de Guerra. If he could be induced to write more, he might make a signal contribution to Latin American band music which is sadly in need of good contemporary works. At the present time, however, he seems to be more interested in conducting than composing.

The most promising younger creators are Alfonso Letelier Llona and René Amengual. Letelier has sound technical training and a rare sensitivity which is very appealing. He writes effectively for the voice, and has composed some part songs for small chorus. He himself sings folksongs and madrigals in a group made up of his wife and several relations. A *Canción de Cuna* and an arrangement of *La Palomita* give a good idea of his charming talent. Letelier's interest in folk melody does not however restrain his larger works. The song *La Noche* shows him as an expert orchestrator, somewhat in the Ravel manner to be sure, but nevertheless skillful and individual. He is a man to watch. René Amengual began his career as a pianist—a fact which shows in his compositions. He has a facility for setting down notes but time alone will show whether he will develop into a first-class composer. He is undoubtedly gifted. The piano sonata is reminiscent of Santa Cruz, but it is more idiomatic, and its discordant nostalgic slow movement is somehow very Chilean in feeling.