



ENCANTAMENTO

Nationalism has been a recurring theme in Latin American music. From the direct influence of pioneers of this concept, emblematic early 20th century Europeans such as Bartok, Kodaly, Smetana, Dvorak, to what could well be described as a more recent neo-nationalism, involving a rebirth of its own authentic language, with the purity of inspiration of folk or popular music by composers of the generation of Arturo Márquez.

Nationalism, in the broadest sense of the term, can be everything we view as having more of a thematic than a conceptual connection with things local and native. Even so, in the case of our music, it has remained closely tied to its European roots; it is not by chance that we come across names as whimsical and suggestive as Mozart Camargo Guarnieri.

When the Brazilian author Otto Maria Carpeaux, with all the audacity characteristic of a thinker from our latitudes, says that the West would not exist without Beethoven, we need only look around and see his indelible imprint everywhere, the full length and breadth of our continent. More than a thematic or formal influence, it is an awareness of his monumental oeuvre that underlies and makes him, for good or for bad, the undisputed master. Two centuries later the burden of history has done nothing to eliminate it; on the contrary, there is even further confirmation of the wealth of an extremely varied influence of styles, where the “Debussy-like” impressionism of Antonio Estévez happily coexists with the “Stravinskyish” dissonance of Silvestre Revueltas, and the more irreverent *porteño* twists of Astor Piazzolla.

Although pleasure and immediacy are well-intentioned virtues of the works chosen for this anthology, it is worthwhile to point out that the composers represented here obediently followed in the footsteps of the European academic school. Even so, the most noteworthy features of our land, the abundance of color, the great contrasts of its natural settings, the richness and diversity of its peoples, are evoked and make themselves felt in each and every note of these scores.

Just as the Venezuelan painter Carlos Zepa brought daring sparks of tropical light to the classic engraving of Theodor de Brie that illustrates our cover, appropriation, both thematic and instrumental, is also an intrinsic part of a musical form that seeks to reinvent itself constantly by using a language that, although it may seem simplistic, is triumphant because of its ability to seduce us with each new measure, with the turning of each page.

Perhaps the most noteworthy and original feature of this first volume of *El Nacionalismo Sinfónico* is the opportunity to have our music performed by a famous European orchestra. Listening to ourselves through the mature and tempered sound of the Berliner Symphoniker, above

and beyond being a significant recognition of our people, implies a responsibility and awareness that our music has “traveled back” to the old continent. Thus, filled with pride, we appreciate the way in which these emblematic works gain vitality, take on new weight, thanks to a fresh reading, tasteful and filled with the curiosity, by our illustrious colleagues from Berlin.

Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992) is a singular figure in Latin American music, perhaps because he occupies a niche all of his own, with a distinctive quality that, although it has no label of its own, boldly straddles both classical and popular music. Piazzolla made the tango and the accordion his own, changing them forever, a faithful interpreter of an urban form previously unknown in the classical context of our continent. This unprecedented approach was never easy for the Argentine composer; quite the contrary, his obsession was accompanied by the drama of the hypersensitivity of an innovator who is aware that he is exploring forbidden paths. The flexibility that, on the one hand, equates his music with jazz insofar as thematic treatment is concerned, and, on the other, endows it with a lack of formal rigor that holds it apart from classic academic spirit, has meant that his work is permanently being reviewed, reinterpreted, rethought, rearranged, again and again, depending on inspiration, on the fashion of the time.

OBLIVION (1984), one of Piazzolla’s last works, was written especially for the movie *Henry IV* and earned the composer a posthumous nomination for the Grammy Awards in 1993. Based on the composer’s own original score for strings and accordion, the first recording of this unpublished version, in a special arrangement for the Berliner Symphoniker, took full advantage of the timbre of instruments such as the oboe and solo flute, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, percussion, and the characteristic “glissandi” of the kettledrums, using a faster tempo for the express purpose of achieving a less desolate, more classical and elegant rendition of a melody that captivates the listener with its opening measures.

ADIOS NONINO (1959), undoubtedly the work that is played most often ---in one or another of its close to 200 versions---speaks of the composer’s life. It was written after the death of Nonino, his father. Our arrangement for orchestra, also completely new, is based on a version for string quintet and piano by the Argentine cellist and composer José Bragato, one of the best known interpreters of Piazzolla’s music.

It may be too early for an objective analysis of the works of a composer who has achieved the same popularity as The Beatles. Obviously, universal fame is not something that comes automatically with a diploma from the conservatory. In 1954, recognizing his great talent, the eminent composition professor Nadia Boulanger gave him some advice: *“Astor, your classical works are well written, but the true Piazzolla is in the tango; don’t ever abandon it.”*

Brazilian composer **Mozart Camargo Guarnieri** (1907-1993) has suffered the unmerited fate of remaining in the shadow of his fellow countryman Heitor Villalobos. With a language that is, perhaps, less bold but no less original, Guarnieri’s music has begun to receive recognition. Both **DANSA NEGRA** (1946) and **DANSA BRASILEIRA** (1928) were originally written for the piano, then

later orchestrated by the composer himself. Guarnieri had a successful career as a conductor, allowing him to become thoroughly familiar with all the tones that can be drawn from orchestra. The use of the bassoon and kettledrums at the beginning of *Dansa Negra* is idiomatic and suggestive, as are the piccolo and percussion in *Dansa Brasileira*.

In **ENCANTAMENTO** (1941), Guarnieri explores a hypnotic texture with impressionistic features, a harbinger of the minimalist style, in contrast with a central interlude rooted in folk music and an extraordinary rhythmic power.

The Cuban *danzón* has caught the fancy of many composers who are not natives of that Caribbean isle, particularly in Mexico, where it is known as a “fancy ballroom dance.” In the skilled hands of **Arturo Márquez** (1950), it has been turned into a purified and expressive symphonic style.

His **DANZON N°2** (1993) is probably the most noteworthy and best-known example, thanks to a unique selection of episodes evoking great sensuality, from the very first bars, with its most original dialogue between the characteristic claves and the clarinet, to the moments of greatest rhythmic density, where he writes brilliantly for percussion and brass. Márquez’s *danzones* are a landmark in Latin American symphony music, paving the way for a whole new generation of uninhibited composers who write in a simple and clear language, gaining their inspiration directly from our most authentic roots.

The masterful way in which he portrays the incandescent sun of the plains, the fantasy used in evoking the sound of the wind and the singing of the birds, make **MEDIODIA EN EL LLANO** (1942) one of the most emblematic works of the entire repertoire of Venezuelan symphonic music. Many are of the opinion that the most universal of **Antonio Estévez’s** (1916-1988) works deals with the nationalistic concept of an exquisite impressionist style, a pointillist approach to the tones of an orchestra. Although there can be no question regarding the melodic wealth of Estévez, it is the ingenious use of form that allows him to achieve a musical architecture where the binary structure of the work (A-B-A) flows within an organic order, where it seems that nature itself has dictated every bar of this exhilarating piece.

The Mexican **Silvestre Revueltas** (1899-1940) is, without question, one of the most important composers in Latin American history, both for the legacy of his works and the influence he has had on the generations that followed. Revueltas may well have been the first of our composers to make a conscious effort to achieve a dramatic break with the European aesthetic models in pursuit of a language of his own, refusing to be tamed by the anemic neoclassicism of the ‘30s. His words at the time were as eloquent as his music is today: *“There are only two paths in art, either you become a virtuoso or you become a clown. I say ‘virtuoso’ in the sense of mastering the technique and the profession. That takes a lot of work: it is hard. I say ‘clown’ in the sense of losing all professional scruples. That is relatively easy for some, and it can even bring in money. Time to choose!*

JANITZIO (1933) is a popular tourist spot, which the composer himself describes as: *“an island of fishermen, lulled by Lake Pátzcuaro. Lake Pátzcuaro is ugly. Romantic and sentimental travelers have embellished it with kisses and post-card music. Not to be left behind I, too, add my little grain of sand in an infinite yearning for glory and fame. Posterity will, undoubtedly, be grateful for these efforts in favor of tourism.”*

With his quaint sense of humor, Revueltas brings joy and revelry to a work reminiscent, with keen fidelity, of the dissonant music of small town bands and the late-night serenades of the *mariaquis*. With admirable mastery of orchestral music, he weaves together a wide range of themes and fanciful rhythms, to then come to rest in a central portion immersed in an atmosphere of pathos and contemplation.

It is said that Revueltas' music would not exist without the recourse of transcribing, almost note for note, the popular twists on which it is based. In that were case, there probably would be no music by Mozart, Schubert, Brahms, Tchaikovsky or, who knows, perhaps not even by Beethoven either!

Eduardo Marturet