

***Danzas del Ballet Estancia* (Dances from the Ballet *Estancia*), Op. 8bis**

Alberto Ginastera

Alberto Ginastera made a greater impact on the international classical music scene than did any other Argentine composer. Born into a family with Catalan and Italian roots, he was schooled entirely in his native country, principally at the National Conservatory of Music in Buenos Aires. By the time he was 18 he was awarded first prize in a composition contest, and in quick succession he produced numerous pieces with a distinctive flavor, often employing native Argentine rhythms or folk melodies. Many of these early works he would later destroy or withdraw, denouncing them as immature examples of his art. Nonetheless, some have found at least borderline places in the repertoire, including his *Danzas argentinas* (for piano, 1937), his ballet *Estancia*, and his chamber composition *Impresiones de la Puna* (1934).

Argentina endured a period of political oppression in the mid-20th century under the regime of Juan Perón. Ginastera did not flourish in that climate, and in 1945 the government forced him to resign from his position on the music faculty of the National Military Academy because he had signed a petition in support of civil liberties. Fortunately, the then 30-year-old composer was able to travel with his family to the United States, where he studied from 1945 to 1947 with the support of a Guggenheim Fellow-

ship. On his return to Argentina he formed a national composers' organization similar to the League of Composers in New York. Not until after Perón was overthrown, in 1955, did Ginastera assume several political-academic posts in Argentina and begin to introduce some of the most important new music from Europe and North America to eager minds in his country. In 1969, exasperated with the political situation in Argentina, Ginastera left definitively, and he spent most of the rest of his life in Geneva, where he died in 1983.

Ginastera's later works moved toward an abstracted Modernism, even exploring serial composition and polytonality. Nonetheless, the composer remained concerned about the gap that separated audiences from serious musical composition during his lifetime, and he proclaimed that the proper aspiration of a composer was "to be integrated into society, not stand apart from it."

Outwardly, Ginastera was reserved, polite, and formal. In the late 1960s, just when his opera *Bomarzo* was leaving audiences aghast from its alleged lewdness, his fellow-composer and longtime friend Aaron Copland commented on "the tremendous contrast between the outward personality and the inner man." He observed of Ginastera:

In Short

Born: April 11, 1916, in Buenos Aires, Argentina

Died: June 25, 1983, in Geneva, Switzerland

Work composed: 1941; dedicated to Lincoln Kirstein

World premiere: May 12, 1943, at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, Ferruccio Calusio conducting the Orquesta del Teatro Colón

New York Philharmonic premiere: February 20, 1969, Seiji Ozawa, conductor

Most recent New York Philharmonic performance: July 19, 2003, Roberto Minczuk, conductor, at the Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival in Vail, Colorado

Estimated duration: ca. 12 minutes

He is never off the cuff, but speaks always with due consideration for feelings and decorum. He's the last man in the world you'd expect to shock people with a sensational opera. A lot goes on inside we don't know about, obviously.

Estancia resulted from a commission tendered in 1941 by American Ballet Caravan. The group's director, Lincoln Kirstein, envisioned an evening of three one-act ballets by three Latin American composers — Ginastera, Francisco Mignone of Brazil, and Domingo Santa Cruz of Chile — choreographed by George Balanchine. The troupe disbanded in 1941, before the project could be realized, but Ginastera had finished his score and was able to get some instant mileage out of it by extracting four sections to stand as his *Danzas del Ballet Estancia* (Op. 8bis), a huge hit at its premiere, which took place in Buenos Aires. Indeed, the ballet would not be staged until 1952, also in Buenos Aires, but with choreography by Michel Borowski instead of Balanchine.

When Ginastera composed *Estancia*, he was going through his phase of objective nationalism (as he termed it), transposing elements of folk music directly into a classical format. The ballet's scenario was perfectly suited to this approach. Its plot is minimal — city boy falls in love with country girl, who grows to like him only when he develops the skills of a ranchman — but its five scenes add up to a celebration of rural life in Argentina. The complete ballet (though not the *Danzas* suite) even includes sung and recited passages from *Martín Fierro*, José Hernández's epic poem from the 1870s about the lives of the gauchos on the pampas, a text that is deeply ingrained in the psyche of all Argentines.

Instrumentation: flute (doubling piccolo) and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, timpani, triangle, castanets, tambourine, snare drum, tenor drum, cymbals, bass drum, tam-tam, xylophone, piano, and strings.

Música Argentina

As with all Latin American countries, Argentina made its first steps in Western art music under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church. Jesuit missionaries — not just from Spain, but also from France, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland, and Germany — helped establish a flourishing musical culture in Argentina from the 16th through the 18th centuries, and the eminent Italian composer and organist Domenico Zipoli arrived in 1717 to oversee music in Córdoba, Argentina's principal cultural center at that time. In 1776 the capital of what was by then the viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata was officially established at Buenos Aires, which from then on would be the hub of Argentine musical



Buenos Aires in the late 18th century

life. Numerous Argentine composers emerged in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, but most were appreciated principally within the nation's boundaries. A handful, however, achieved prominence beyond them, including — apart from Ginastera — the neo-Romantic Carlos Guastavino (1912–2000), the “new tango” proponent Astor Piazzolla (1921–92), and the theatrical avant-gardist Mauricio Kagel (1931–2008), who worked largely in Germany. Among Argentina's current contributions to the musical scene are three particularly notable figures whose careers have unrolled mostly in the United States: Lalo Schiffrin (b. 1932), Mario Davidovsky (b. 1934), and Osvaldo Golijov (b. 1960).