

### ***Three Latin-American Sketches***

**Aaron Copland (1900–1990)**

Written: 1949 and 1971

Movements: Three

Style: Contemporary American

Duration: Eleven minutes

“People forget now that when I began in the twenties, I was considered to be a wild-eyed radical in musical terms,” Aaron Copland wrote. “I got consistently razed in the newspaper.” However, in the 1930's he “felt that it was worth the effort to see if I couldn't say what I had to say in the simplest possible terms.”

In 1932, Copland spent four months in Mexico at the invitation of Carlos Chavez. While he was there, he visited a nightclub described in a tourist guide as a “Harlem type night-club for the peepul [*sic*], grand Cuban orchestra, Salón México.” That encounter led to Copland's first explicitly Latin-American piece, *El Salon Mexico*. In addition to returning to Mexico several times in the 1930s, Copland also visited other Latin-American countries. In 1941 he travelled throughout Central and South America as a cultural attaché for the U.S. government. He took another four-month tour of South America in 1947. Copland became a champion for Latin-American composers little known in the U.S. He also studied the folk music of the region. “I myself am far from being expert in this area, but I do retain vivid impressions of an unbelievably rich and comparatively little-known territory of folk expression in Latin America,” he wrote.

Copland wrote two Latin-American inspired pieces—*Paisaje Mexicano* and *Danza de Jalisco* for Gian-Carlo Menotti and the Spoleto Music Festival while in Acapulco in 1949. Then, in 1971, Andre Kostelanetz asked Copland to write something for a pops concert. He wrote *Estribillo*. and attached it to the two former works to make *Three Latin American Sketches*.

Angular rhythms and disjointed melodies—a full-blown tune never seems to develop—

characterize *Estrillo*. Quite the contrary happens in *Paisaje Mexicano* (Mexican Landscape). It features a beautiful, serene melody first played by the woodwinds. The strings and trumpet help extend the melody for the rest of the movement. *Danza de Jalisco* (Jalisco is a region in Mexico) features a typical Mexican rhythm that alternates six notes first accented on one and four and then on one, three and five. Copland gives this simple description of his *Three Latin-American Sketches*:

The tunes, the rhythms, and the temperament of the pieces are folksy, while the orchestration is bright and snappy and the music sizzles along — or at least it seems to me that it does.

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### ***Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas (The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires)***

**Astor Piazzolla (1921–1992)**

Written: 1964–1970

Movements: four

Style: Contemporary

Duration: 23 minutes

On November 28, 1971, the *Buenos Aires Herald* reported that “Last week a genius of jazz was playing to full houses in one of the largest cinemas of Buenos Aires . . . Duke Ellington. Everyone raved about him. Half a mile away, someone arguably as great as Ellington has been playing to half-empty houses in one of the smallest theaters of the capital: Astor Piazzolla.” Acknowledged worldwide as one of Argentina’s greatest musicians, Astor Piazzolla was often more reviled than feted in his home country.

Piazzolla was born in Mar del Plata, Argentina, to a family of Italian immigrants. His father moved the family to New York City when Astor was just four. When Astor was eight, his father bought him a bandoneon, a sort of button accordion that is so prominent in the *orquesta tipica*, (the group that plays that steamy Argentinean dance, the tango.) In spite of a natural affinity to the instrument, Astor was a reluctant student. "In my head I had Bach and Schumann and Mozart, and very little tango," he said.

The Piazzollas moved back to Argentina when Astor was sixteen. He began to play in dance bands and actually formed his own *orquesta tipica*. He studied composition with Argentina's most famous composer, Alberto Ginastera, and eventually won a scholarship to study in Paris with the famed Nadia Boulanger. She criticized the modernist music that he wrote for her as being "well-written but lacking feeling." Coaxing Astor into playing one his tangos for her, she exclaimed "*This* is Piazzolla! Don't ever leave it!"

Back home in Argentina, Piazzolla infused elements of jazz, tonal dissonance, and rhythmic complexity into the tango and called it "Nuevo Tango." Tango traditionalists were incensed, explaining the lack of popularity in his own country.

Unlike Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, Piazzolla's *Four Seasons of Buenos Aires* are more ensemble pieces than concertos. He wrote them for his quintet, but all sorts of arrangements have been made for various groups, including saxophone quartet, piano trio and guitar quartet. In 1999, the Russian composer Leonid Desyatnikov cleverly included bits of Vivaldi's *Seasons* and even Pachelbel's *Canon in D* in his concerto version for the violinist Gidon Kremer. Each of Piazzolla's *Four Seasons* is a highly rhapsodic and colorful evocation of the sultry tango and a climate that we Northerners can only dream about.

***Alcancias***

**Silvestre Revueltas (1899–1940)**

Written: 1932

Movements: Three

Style: Contemporary

Duration: Twelve minutes

Silvestre Revueltas was born on the very last day of the nineteenth century in northern Mexico. He showed an early interest in music, and when his family moved to Mexico City, he studied at the National Conservatory of Music. In 1917, he moved to Texas to study in San Antonio at St. Edward College and then completed his education at what is now Roosevelt University in Chicago. He became friends with Carlos Chavez, the leading Mexican composer of the early twentieth century, and after moving back to Mexico in 1929, partnered with him to promote contemporary Mexican music.

Gilbert Chase, that great chronicler of American music, described Revueltas as “a smaller-scale Mexican Villa-Lobos—independent, always rebelling against authority, disrespectful of the establishment, and deeply committed to the popular traditions of his native land.” In a review of his music, Aaron Copland wrote

His music is a spontaneous outpouring, a strong expression of his inner emotions. There is nothing premeditated or unspontaneous about him. . . . [Revueltas's music] is derived from the more usual everyday side of Mexican life. It is often highly spiced, like Mexican food itself. It is full of whims and sudden quirks of fancy and leaves one with a sense of the abundance and vitality of life.

The bulk of Revueltas work comes from the 1930s. He wrote songs, chamber music, music for orchestra, and composed for the films. *La Noche de los Mayas* is his best-known film

score, while *Sensamayá* is his most iconic orchestral work. *Alcancias*, meaning “piggy banks” (or, interestingly, “brothelkeepers”) provides a short synopsis of Revueltas’s style. The first movement begins helter-skelter. Short popular and folk-style musical fragments are juxtaposed and piled on top of each other. It’s as if the listener is in the midst of a great musical fair with a variety of music groups competing against each other. The second movement is more cohesive. The oboe and piccolo clarinet present a beautiful melody accompanied by strings with occasional comments thrown in by the brass. The melody grows to a loud, dissonant climax and then quickly dissipates. An insistent, driving rhythm unifies the third movement, a sort of frenetic dance. It is characterized by clashing cross-rhythms and off-placed accents. The intensity never lets up until the sudden ending.

About his own music, Revueltas once wrote: “Everything is rhythm . . . my rhythms are booming, dynamic, tactile, and visual. “

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***Raíces (“Roots”): Concerto Suite for Orchestra***

**Gabriela Lena Frank (1972–)**

Written: 2012

Movements: Six

Style: Contemporary

Duration: Fifteen minutes

Identity has always been at the center of Gabriela Lena Frank’s music. Born in Berkeley, California, to a mother of Peruvian and Chinese ancestry and a father of Lithuanian and Jewish descent, Frank explores her multicultural heritage most ardently through her compositions.

"There's usually a story line behind my music; a scenario or character," Gabriela Frank writes.

To enhance the listener's experience, she has provided the following program notes to *Raíces*:

*Raíces* is inspired by the enduring insistence of Latin America's racial soul. As an American-born gringa-Latina who only began to travel in her mother's homeland in Perú while in her late twenties, I still marvel that I "get" to claim heritage in such a culture, rich in ethnic variance and history. . . . A transformation happens when culture travels over continents and through generations, haphazard and personal. In *Raíces*, I pick up strands, poetic and musical, explored in other works of mine, and continue the journey:

I. Allegro Nazca: This clamorous introductory movement is inspired by the Nazca culture, a fiery pre-Inca coastal civilization that had a curious habit of ritualistically destroying its ceramic panpipes.

II. Sombras ("Shadows"): The shadows I encounter in the highlands, the coasts, or on the islands in the great Lake Titicaca have always struck me as stranger, more otherworldly, than the ordinary ones at home... Or is it just my imagination?

III. Muñequitos de Madera ("Little Wooden Dolls"): I love the small humble museums with their collections of toys. One such collection of colonial dolls of Quechua men and women hewn from wood finds its expression here in a virtuoso tour de force for the principal violin and cello.

IV. Danza Selvática ("Jungle Dance"): I confess that I have a great wariness of the jungles, and have only flirted with the border just east of the Andes. In this movement especially [there is] a restless nervous quality to the music.

V. Adios al Altiplano ("Goodbye to the Highland"): [This movement is] inspired by

a visit I made to Churín, a highland Andean town where the youth have been leaving for more prosperous places.

VI. Allegro Costenõ: I think of this finale, a romp inspired by coastal music, as a ballet as I can imagine dancers stomping it out! The “concerto” spirit pervades the orchestra in a mostly egalitarian way.

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