

## CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

# RENOVATION, RUPTURE, AND RESTORATION

## The modernist musical experience in Latin America



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Musical modernism in Latin America is difficult to define. There have been a great variety of aesthetic projects throughout Latin America from the end of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twenty-first century that one could easily understand as responding to a modernist spirit. The music of composers as stylistically different as the Argentine Alberto Williams and the Cuban Leo Brouwer responds to similar modernist concerns, charting fundamental continuities that even divergent aesthetic, geographic, and temporal contexts cannot wholly obscure. Taking its impetus from these continuities, this chapter provides a narrative based on stylistic and aesthetic tendencies that cross national boundaries, instead of focusing on national affiliations or styles. By attending to the presence of women, from Carmen Barradas – who stopped composing in the 1930s, discouraged by her male colleagues' lack of interest in her work – to female composers throughout Latin America at the end of the twentieth century (Adina Izarra, Hilda Paredes, Ana Lara, Diana Arsimendi, Gabriela Ortiz), musical modernism also offers a glimpse into one of modernization's central features: women's advancement into mainstream Western social and cultural life.

To find the common aesthetic and philosophical questions informing the musical activities of the many composers, musicians, and musical movements one could label as modernist, it is necessary to determine the basic ideas shared by modernist artists from the end of the nineteenth through the beginning of the twenty-first century. *Modernismo*, the cosmopolitan literary movement many consider the first true independent Latin American artistic movement, provides a good point of departure. Disillusioned with the traditional literary styles and forms favoured by Spanish and Latin American writers in the nineteenth century, modernista poets proposed to renovate language by appropriating and transforming ideas from French symbolism and Parnassianism according to specific Latin American experiences, to give rise to aesthetic questions beyond both domestic and European traditions. Thus, the modernistas proposed to invigorate the Spanish language through cross-fertilization (Madrid 2008: 88–9). Sometimes taking the reformist path of modernists who sought to expand tradition, sometimes more radically breaking away from tradition, this cosmopolitan desire lies at the core of modernist and avant-garde experiences in Europe and the United States as well as Latin America.

However, it would be unreasonable to measure innovation within specific, geographically and temporally located music and artistic scenes according to criteria perceived as ‘universal’. Artists and musicians developed specific modernist aesthetics and styles as responses to what they experienced as fossilized languages within their own artistic traditions. Thus, modernist styles among music scenes where concepts like ‘absolute music’ or ‘organicism’ were the norm could not develop in the same way as in scenes where salon music was the lingua franca. This observation is essential in understanding a series of Latin American musical practices as modernist expressions, regardless of how they would be considered in Europe.

The modernista spirit shared its moment with modern nation-building projects. The Argentine expansion to Indigenous territory and the process of industrialization of the 1880s; the Peruvian period of national reconstruction and of the so-called Aristocratic Republic in the 1880s; the Brazilian establishment of the early republic in the 1890s; the Cuban independence of 1899; and the Mexican failure to build a liberal nation leading to the 1910 revolution combined to generate the need for new aesthetic icons of both nationality and modernity.

Although there were no musicians among the artists who developed the modernista movement, there were composers throughout Latin America who embraced the modernistas’ desire for the renovation of expressive tools and their cosmopolitan aspirations. Many Latin American modernist composers suggested overhauling the expressive languages dominating their countries’ conservative music scenes – European styles like salon music (waltz, mazurka, polka) and Italian opera – by incorporating elements from local folk or urban traditions. Such a move addressed the modernist desire for renovation and the nationalist political needs for a unique sense of locality.

Early Latin American musical modernisms are frequently connected to issues of identity expressed through nationalist sentiment and rhetoric. Thus, the nativist incorporation of Argentine folk musical elements into European idioms in the works of Alberto Williams, or the amalgamation of Brazilian urban popular rhythms (choro, maxixe, lundu, etc.) with polkas and waltzes in the piano music of Ernesto Nazareth and later in the music of Heitor Villa-Lobos, provide musical counterparts to the modernista spirit and reflections upon – and responses to – experiences of modernization in Argentina and Brazil at the turn of the twentieth century. Manuel M. Ponce’s 1913 nationalist call to take traditional folk Mexican music as the basis of a national musical style (Madrid 2008: 90), and the later Afrocubanista modernist work of Alejandro García Caturla and Amadeo Roldán, which reevaluated the ambivalent role of African heritage in constructing a Cuban identity (Moore 1997: 220–1), extend this modernist/nationalist spirit out of two specific political moments: the Mexican revolution and the machadato in Cuba. These articulations of local musical traditions may also appear as appropriations of the Orientalist desire that informed the work of European modernist composers such as Claude Debussy, Igor Stravinsky, or Darius Milhaud. However, while European modernists engaged the non-Western Other, Latin American composers often referred to the Other within their own discourses of ethnic representation. These composers invigorated and renewed their inherited European musical languages through the self-exoticizing recourse to Indigenous or Afro-Latin American musics. Some of the works best exemplifying this tendency include Williams’s *Cantares*, Op. 70 (1899); the zarzuela

*El condor pasa...* (1913) by Peruvian composer Daniel Alomía Robles;<sup>†</sup> the opera *Quiché Vinak* (1924) by Guatemalan composer/ethnomusicologist Jesús Castillo; Roldán's percussion piece *Rítmica V* (1930); and García Caturla's puppet opera *Manita en el suelo* (1931).

## MAVERICKS, EARLY AVANT-GARDES, AND -ISMS

In the 1920s, composers throughout the West developed more radical approaches to musical modernism. Functional tonality was one of the first elements of their musical traditions that they wanted to replace. Thus, atonality was a consequence of the ultra-chromaticism that characterized late nineteenth-century music. Coming from a musical tradition that explained music history as a form of teleology, composers were obsessed with discovering and codifying the musical languages of the future that would replace tonality; Arnold Schoenberg's 12-tone technique, Edgard Varèse's incorporation of noises along the lines of Luigi Russolo's *The Art of Noises* (1913), and Alois Haba's microtonal music were among the diverse modernist languages emerging from these preoccupations. Many Latin American composers were also concerned with these issues; some forged their own paths, relatively autonomous from foreign trends, while others found inspiration in the European avant-garde and the numerous musical-isms they generated.

Some of the most remarkable Latin American modernist musical creations came from composers who did not follow European musical tendencies. Julián Carrillo from Mexico and Carmen Barradas from Uruguay both worked largely in isolation and represent an important break from traditional Western notions of tonality. Carrillo developed a microtonal system labelled 'Sonido 13' ('The Thirteenth Sound') based on equal subdivisions of the half tone (up to 1/16 of a tone). Unlike European microtonal composers of the time, Carrillo's system was not developed out of a desire to account for microtonal folk scales; instead, it was the result of the composer's interest in non-tonal scales, and validated a teleological take on the incorporation of partials from the overtone series into harmonies (Madrid 2008: 25). *Preludio a Colón* (1924) – a piece based on 1/4-, 1/8-, and 1/16ths of a tone for which Carrillo had to design special instruments – is one of his most famous compositions. Barradas developed a musical style based on free atonality, polytonality, and use of clusters, and created a graphic notation to overcome the expressive limitations of traditional notation (Santos Melgarejo 2012). Her *Fabricación* (1922), a solo piano work that attempts to reproduce the sound of a factory, predates works of similar futurist character by Arthur Honegger, John Alden Carpenter, and Alexander Mosolov.

In 1922, Mario de Andrade, a writer and musicologist who had a strong influence on the trajectory of musical modernism in Brazil, helped organize the Week of Modernism in São Paulo, an influential arts festival that set the tone for the two modernist tendencies that dominated Brazilian art scenes in the following decades: Oswald de Andrade's *antropofagia* (based on the appropriation of foreign influences) and Plínio Salgado's fascist nationalism (preaching a Brazilian art devoid of foreign influences). De Andrade's vision for music of the future, explained in his *Pequena história da música* (1929), suggested incorporating folk and popular musical elements into the modernist challenge of traditional forms (Luper 1965: 44–5). These ideas resonated with earlier compositional practices by Villa-Lobos and worked as a

modernist manifesto for younger composers like Oscar Lorenzo Fernández and Francisco Mignone. Villa-Lobos's *Danças características africanas* for solo piano (1922), Fernández's orchestral suite *Reisado do pastoreio* (1930), and Mignone's ballet *Maracatu de chico rei* (1939) are good examples of these modernist tendencies.

A wide variety of Latin American composers during the 1920s and 1930s shared the cosmopolitan spirit of modernism, coupling a break from functional tonality – through atonality as well as polytonality – with the desire to incorporate local folk and popular music elements into new musical languages. Many engaged these issues by seizing the two most dominant compositional approaches of the first half of the twentieth century: Schoenberg's 12-tone technique and Igor Stravinsky's neoclassicism. Most Latin American composers, free from the dogmatic constraints that prevented many European composers from intermingling the two, cavalierly borrowed from the two styles according to their own expressive needs. The Mexican and Argentine scenes – especially the activities of Grupo Renovación – illustrate the stylistic heterogeneity within specific Latin American compositional communities. In Mexico, the 1910 revolution profoundly transformed the artistic scene, as demonstrated by the 1926 National Congress of Music, the old guard's attempt to control and guide those changes, and the birth of *estridentismo*, the country's first avant-garde movement.

Carlos Chávez and Silvestre Revueltas originally embraced the estridentistas' radical avant-garde agenda, epitomized in their motto 'Chopin to the Electric Chair', but soon developed eclectic styles borrowing from neoclassicism as well as folk and popular local traditions. This heterogeneity manifests in their futurist-influenced pieces, like Chávez's *Energía* (1925) or Revueltas's *Esquinas* (1930), the first an abstract musical representation of a factory (Madrid 2008: 73), the second a piece incorporating the sounds of Mexico City's streets (Kolb Neuhaus 2012: 105–7). Other examples include neoclassical works such as Revueltas' four string quartets (1930–2) or Chávez's six symphonies (1933–61), as well as Chávez's *Invención* (1958) in which the composer avoids repetition and Revueltas's *Sensemayá* (1936), a repetitive, almost primitivist work inspired by a poem by the Afro-Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén.

The same proclivity for heterogeneity appears among Argentine composers active with the Grupo Renovación, founded in 1929 as a reaction against early nationalist movements (Veniard 1986: 94). The group included composers interested in neoclassical techniques and Argentine folk and popular elements, as in Symphony No. 3 'Argentina' (1934) by Juan José Castro; Luis Gianneo's string quartets Nos. 1 and 3 (1936 and 1952) (Veniard 1986: 100–101, 104); Juan Carlos Paz's Octet (1930); and 12-tone techniques, as in Paz's *Passacaglia* (1936) (Corrado 2010: 126).

Neoclassically-inspired aesthetics, often spiced by local folk-music, dominated Latin American art music through the 1950s, including Guatemalan Ricardo Castillo's *Sinfonietta* (1945); Ecuadorian Luis Humberto Salgado's Symphony No. 3 (1955); Brazilian Mozart Camargo Guarnieri's Choro for piano and orchestra (1956); Venezuelan Antonio Estéves' *Mediodía en el llano* for orchestra (1942); Chilean Juan Orrego Salas' Piano Concerto No. 1 (1950); Uruguayan Héctor Tosar's Toccata for orchestra (1944); Cuban Julián Orbón's *Tres versiones sinfónicas* (1954); and Peruvian Celso Garrido-Lecca's *Elegía a Machu Pichu* for orchestra (1964).

Early in his career, Argentine Alberto Ginastera embraced a neoclassical style infused with local musical elements similar to that of the composers discussed above;

later, he moved away from this nationalist neoclassicism to embrace serialism and even the type of controlled aleatorism privileged by European and American composers of the 1960s. Late in life, Ginastera developed a musical language integrating his interest in Argentine folk music, serialism, and aleatoric techniques, including his *Sonata for Guitar*, Op. 47 (1976) (Basinski 1994).

Other composers from this generation were also interested in 12-tone music, but few embraced it as energetically as the Panamanian Roque Cordero and the Mexican Jorge González Avila, who dedicated most of their lives to composing 12-tone and serial music. For many, including Luis Humberto Salgado and the Brazilians Luiz Cosme and Edino Krieger, experimenting with the 12-tone method was a way to free themselves from the constraints of functional tonality; however, their interest in it quickly faded. For others, 12-tone music and serialism worked as the common ground between the neoclassical generation and the younger avant-garde composers who became active in the 1960s, as in the case of Cuba's Grupo de Renovación Musical, founded as a neoclassical musical endeavour by the Spaniard-Cuban José Ardevol in 1942. Many group members also experimented with serialism, open aleatoric forms, and electroacoustic music. Puerto Rican Héctor Campos Parsi engaged neoclassicism, serialism, aleatorism, and electroacoustic music throughout his life. These composers' aesthetic concerns bridge the modernist generation's desire for renovation and the radical shift away from such an idea in the late 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s avant-garde composers.

## THE AVANT-GARDE

Musical modernism in the 1950s experienced a shift of meaning, from the reformist expansion and renovation of language that had characterized it since the beginning of the twentieth century into a radical tradition of discontinuity and continuous experimentalism that 'implies the negation not only of tradition but of discontinuity as well' (Paz 1974: 1). This new phase of modernism makes 'widespread use of subversive or openly disruptive artistic techniques' and rejects existing institutions (Calinescu 1987: 95).

Although many young Latin American avant-garde composers were interested in the methodological rigour of serialism, they gravitated towards aleatoric practices and indeterminacy. Inspired by Karlheinz Stockhausen, Iannis Xenakis, and John Cage, young Latin American composers delved into open forms and new graphic notations that implied higher degrees of collaboration with performers and audiences alike. They felt these trends allowed them more creative freedom. In some cases these tendencies were radical challenges to the ontological boundaries of the work of art as well as to authorship. The vibrant experimental avant-garde scenes from Buenos Aires, Havana, Mexico City, and São Paulo-Bahia became referents for young composers throughout Latin America and beyond.

The music branch of the Di Tella Institute in Buenos Aires, the Centro Latinoamericano de Altos Estudios Musicales (CLAEM), was created with support from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1962 at the height of the Cold War, under the direction of Alberto Ginastera. Its centre offered instruction by prominent international avant-garde composers – Luigi Dallapiccola, Bruno Maderna, Olivier Messiaen, Luigi Nono, Xenakis, etc. – and one of the first electronic music laboratories

in the region. It became an immediate magnet for talent from throughout South America: composers linked with it include Argentines Alcides Lanza, Gerardo Gandini, and Mario Davidovsky; Brazilians Marlos Nobre and Jorge Antunes; Colombian Jacqueline Nova; Peruvian Edgar Valcárcel; and Uruguayans Coriún Aharonián and Graciela Paraskevaídis. Most were progressive leftists whose radical music came to be considered a challenge to bourgeois lifestyles. Politically conservative factions accused the centre of propagating communism, giving Juan Carlos Onganía's military dictatorship an excuse to censor its activities (Herrera 2012: 28–9). Most of the fellows at the CLAEM became leading figures after the centre closed in 1971.

In São Paulo and Bahia, Brazil, *Musica Nova* and *Grupo Bahia* challenged the previous generations' nationalist-modernist music. They emphasized individual expression over the homogenizing compositional styles and techniques that had become the compositional norm. Composers associated with these two groups include Gilberto Mendes, Ernst Widmer, Rogério Duprat, Jarmy Oliveira, Lindembergue Cardoso, and even the celebrated tropicalista songwriter Tom Zé. Their eclectic multidisciplinary artistic influences include everything from Rob Rauschenberg and Cage to Henri Pousseur and Franz Kafka. One feature that characterized them was their attempt to break the barriers between highbrow and lowbrow musics; the central role of Duprat and Zé in the trajectory of *tropicália*, one of Brazil's most notable avant-garde popular music movements, is a consequence of their involvements with these groups. The insolence of *Motet em ré menor – Beba Coca-Cola* (1966) by Mendes is an icon of the type of work produced within these scenes.

The triumph of the Cuban revolution in 1959 and its turn towards socialism in 1961 increased support for modernist and avant-garde music that differed radically from the treatment of music in the USSR. While the avant-garde was considered a formal expression of bourgeois decadence in post-1930s USSR, in Cuba it was understood as expressing the rebel spirit that had triggered the revolution. During the revolution's early years, the government sponsored many young composers' educations and expanded their artistic horizons abroad. Particularly important was Leo Brouwer's participation at the 1961 Warsaw Autumn Festival, where he was introduced to the avant-garde works of Krzysztof Penderecki and Stockhausen. This event catalyzed an avant-garde Cuban scene that emphasized creative freedom, music's role in shaping a revolutionary society, and engaging with a non-prejudiced audience. The use of musical quotations and collages to create dissonant textures in Brouwer's *La tradición se rompe...pero cuesta trabajo* (1967), the controlled aleatorism, clusters, and innovative uses of theatrical space in *Relieves* (1969) by Carlos Fariñas, and the incorporation of pre-recorded elements into a type of musical happening in *Contrapunto espacial No. 3* (1969) by Juan Blanco (Brouwer 1986: 35–6) exemplify a musical and aesthetic freedom that reflected the utopian and radical promise of the revolution.

In 1956, painter José Luis Cuevas published 'La cortina del nopal' ('The Prickly Pear Curtain'), a harsh critique of Mexican nationalism and a call for artists to engage with the international art scene that quickly became the manifesto of the Mexican avant-garde. Composers Manuel Enríquez, Alicia Urreta, Mario Lavista, and Julio Estrada represent four distinct ways of taking up these ideas. In the 1960s, Enríquez was one of the first Mexican composers to incorporate graphic notation in his scores. Works as diverse as *Cuarteto II* (1967) or *Canto a un dios mineral* (1992) show his use of different degrees of chance (Alonso Minutti and Portillo 2013: 38–42). Urreta's



*Salmodia I* (1971) combines elements of temporal and melodic indeterminacy with a more controlled harmonic practice (Vilar Payá 2000). Lavista's early compositions embraced a variety of avant-garde techniques, from chance and serialism to de-contextualized musical quotations. But Lavista's work with Quanta, an improvisation group that presented concerts on Mexico City's streets, truly marked his avant-garde period. *Jaula* (1976) for prepared piano, a piece of conceptual art/music created in collaboration with painter Arnaldo Coen to celebrate Cage's 64th birthday, best exemplifies this phase (Alonso Minutti, forthcoming). Initially influenced by ideas about indeterminacy, Estrada developed a style based on exploring the continuum of rhythm and sound by synthesizing pitch and gesture, exemplified in his opera *Pedro Páramo* (Fürst-Heidtmann 2001: 347).

Other Latin American composers worth mentioning are Argentines Mauricio Kagel, Alicia Terzian – who incorporates tape, dance, improvisation, and audience participation in *Musidanza visión* (1972) – and Elsa Justel, an advocate of electroacoustic music; Peruvians Aurelio Tello and Pedro Seiji Asato, whose aleatoric pieces reveal the remarkable avant-garde scene in 1970s Lima (Tello 1986: 71, 76); and Puerto Rico-based Francis Schwartz, whose multi-sensorial musical theatre *Auschwitz* (1968) shocked audiences at its premiere.

## MODERNISM AFTER THE AVANT-GARDE

The radicalism of an avant-garde that emphasized the destruction of languages over their creation sharply disconnected composers from their audiences. In the 1990s, many Latin American composers moved away from this tendency in efforts to develop musical languages that, even when dissonant, allowed for the possibility of sharing musical codes with their audiences. Lavista developed a modernist musical language based on renaissance and medieval techniques and structures, and explored extended techniques in traditional instruments, as in *Reflejos de la noche* (1984), a classic of Latin American modernism (Alonso Minutti, forthcoming). Pieces like *Tríptico* (1989) by Puerto Rican Roberto Sierra and *Altar de neón* (1995) by Mexican Gabriela Ortiz combine complex rhythmic patterns inspired by popular music within a synthetic yet rigorous musical language that comments on the seeming contradictions between cosmopolitanism and local hybridity among Latin American artists. Brazilian Arthur Kampela developed a personal language that reads popular and traditional Brazilian music styles, genres, and techniques through the aesthetics of New Complexity and Elliott Carter's notion of metric modulation, including his series of Percussion Studies for solo guitar. Using the term 'sonic textures' to describe his compositions, Chilean Pablo Aranda avoids traditional notions of form, melody, and motivic development. *Dí* (1995) exemplifies a delicate language of resonances based on the sonic and timbric combination of instruments so that their individuality melts into a larger super-instrument (Díaz and González 2011: 59–60).

The historical trajectories of Latin American modernist and avant-garde musics have developed in a continuous dialogue with international musical tendencies and aesthetics. However, these practices have also acquired meaning through complex local networks of political, cultural, social, and economic relations. As such, Latin American modernisms provide unique spaces to explore the kinds of transcultural processes that inform local articulations of cosmopolitan ideas in post-colonial contexts.

## NOTE

1. The *plegaria* from this zarzuela was covered and recorded as ‘If I Could’ by Simon and Garfunkel in their LP *Bridge over Troubled Waters* (1970).

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