



Isabel Aretz: Composer A Birthday Tribute

THE CONSTELLATION OF ethnomusicologists (alphabetically listed) who rank as composers of international magnitude includes such stars as Peter Crossley-Holland (January 28, 1916, London, England), Mantle Hood (June 24, 1918, Springfield, Illinois), Mieczyslaw Kolinski (September 5, 1901, Warsaw, Poland; May 7, 1980, Toronto, Canada), Fredric Lieberman (March 1, 1940, New York City), and Joseph Kwabena Nketia (June 22, 1921, Mampong, Ashanti Region, Ghana). However, no name shines more brilliantly in both the firmaments of ethnomusicology and composition than does that of Isabel Aretz.

Her list of compositions itemized in *Composers of the Americas*, Volume 17 (1971), pages 27-32, included 25 works dated 1937 through 1969. Scored for large orchestra, small orchestra, voice with orchestra, voice with piano, piano, harpsichord, string trio, and timpany with magnetic tape, her 1971 list of works also contained four variously scored ballets dated 1954, 1958, 1960, and 1961. The biographical introduction to her 1971 *Composers of the Americas* works list mentioned among her teachers the composer and theorist Athos Palma (June 7, 1891, Buenos Aires; January 10, 1951, Miramar [Argentina]), and (for orchestration) Heitor Villa-Lobos. In this same introduction to her works list, she commented thus on the relationship of her two fields:

Isabel Aretz considers that the indigenous and Afro music of Latin America can be a source of creation if its phenomenology is studied in depth, and if it is used with a modern criterion (and with modern techniques, including those that are electronic). This was her intention in her work *Birimbao*, on which Sonia Sanoja mounted a ballet called *Initiation Dances* that was given by the Contemporary Dance Group of INCIBA [Instituto Nacional de Cultura y Bellas Artes] at the Eisner and Lubin Auditorium in New York, November 7, 1971.

The present birthday tribute provides a welcome opportunity to update, amplify, and correct her works list published in 1971.

ORCHESTRA

1933-36 *Danzas con Interludio*. Piano and string orchestra.

1937 *Puneñas*. Consisting of three evocations of the high Andean landscape, *Ocaso en los cerros* ("Nightfall in the mountains"), *Pastores, llamas, queñas* ("Shepherds, llamas, and queñas"), *Danza y algarabía* ("Dance and din"), this suite was premiered in the Teatro Cervantes at Buenos Aires by the Orquesta Miguel Giannone directed by Bruno Bandini, October 24, 1937. 10 minutes.

1938 *Serie infantil*. String orchestra. *Zamba, Vidala, and Bailecito* ("Little Dance"), premiered November 13, 1939, Mario Régoli conducting.

1940 *Dos acuarelas* ("Two Watercolors"). String orchestra. *Día gris* ("Gray Day") and *Sol en la placita* ("Sun in the little square"). Premiered in Teatro del

- Pueblo at Buenos Aires December 16, 1940, Mario Régoli conducting. 4 minutes.
- 1949 *Serie criolla*. Small orchestra. *Cueca*, *Vidala*, and *Triunfo* constitute this suite, premiered over Radio del Estado, Argentina, 1949, with Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera conducting. 10 minutes.
- 1950 *Segunda Serie Criolla*. String orchestra. Buenos Aires Municipal Music Prize, 1950.
- 1952 *El llamado de la tierra* ("The Call of the Earth"). *La Ciudad* and *La Tierra de los Antepasados* ("Land of the Ancestors"). 30 minutes.
- 1958 *Ahónaya*. Ballet, small orchestra, consisting of *Danza guajira de iniciación*. Commissioned by Venezuelan Ministry of Labor. 9 minutes.
- 1960 *Movimiento de percusión*. Ballet, 11 players of 40 percussion instruments, choreographed by Kiril Pikieris for Danzas Venezuela, a troupe directed by the Mexican dancer, Evelia Beristáin. Commissioned by Venezuelan Ministry of Labor, which sponsored the recording in LP 001 (1961) of this ballet and the next. 10 minutes.
- 1961 *Páramo*. Ballet, small orchestra, five movements. Ministry of Labor commission, premiered June 11, 1961, in Aula Magna of Universidad Central by Danzas Venezuela, Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera conducting, Griskka Holguín, choreographer. 10 minutes.
- 1968 *Birimbao*. Four timpany and magnetic tape. Commissioned by the North American Jesse Kregal and premiered by him at the International Festival in Mérida, Venezuela, September 1968. The magnetic tape amplifies the sound of the so-called jew's or jaw's harp, a favorite instrument of the Venezuelan Guajiro Indians. The timpany simulate talking drums. 25 minutes.
- 1972 *Yekuana*. Eight solo voices, orchestra, magnetic tape. Commissioned by Ward Swingle for Swingle Singers, premiered by Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela conducted by Yannis Ioannidis, in Aula Magna, Universidad Central, Caracas, 1974. Awarded José Ángel Lamas National Music Prize in 1972, this work was in 1976 mounted by the Royal Netherlands Ballet in various Dutch cities, Carlos Orta choreographer. The tape interludes contain recorded bird songs. According to the Yekuana Indians, sacred birds communicate with the souls of the departed and converse with the lord of the universe. The eighth and highest heaven, called Wanadi by the Yekuana Indians, can be reached solely by the souls of men who have not killed. Aretz's *Yekuana* fittingly concludes with the words *no matar* sung in various languages.
- 1975 *Argentino hasta la muerte*. Speaker, chamber orchestra, two magnetic tapes. Synchronized with music, slides satirize the various postures of the typical Buenos Aires man about town. Poem by Argentine César Fernández Moreno. Premiered by Venezuelan Orquesta de Radio Nacional directed by Yannis Ioannidis, Aula Magna, Universidad Central, Caracas, 1975.
- 1979 *Gritos de una ciudad*. Two speakers, small orchestra, magnetic tape. Settings of 3 poems by Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera, entitled respectively *La Puerta* ("The Port"), *El Vagabundo* ("The Vagabond"), and *El Teléfono*. The poems—alternately recited by a man and a woman, with musical background furnished by small orchestra and tape—were inspired by three scenes witnessed by the composer and her husband during their attendance at the



1979 International Musicological Congress in San Francisco. Winner of the Juan Bautista Plaza National Music Prize in 1979, this 25-minute work was premiered by the Orquesta Sinfónica de Venezuela in the Sala José Félix Rivas, in 1980.

- 1982 *Padre Libertador* ("Father Liberator"). Speaker, vocal soloists, chorus, orchestra, tape. In 3 movements, setting poems by Eduardo Blanco (*Venezuela Heróica*), Alberto Baeza Flores (*Poema Coral para el Retorno de Simón Bolívar* ["Choral poem for the return of Simón Bolívar"]), and Pablo Neruda (*Canto para Bolívar*). In the second movement, commentary on Bolívar's heroic march through the Andes is reinforced by taped recordings of various indigenous battle calls. Winner of the 1982 Premio Municipal de Música at Caracas, this oratorio was premiered in the Kennedy Center at Washington, D.C., by Paul Hill Chorale and Festival Symphony Orchestra, Paul Hill conducting, April 29, 1983 (performance reviewed in *Washington Post*, April 30, C4:3).
- 1982 *Constelación espectral*. Commissioned by the Ateneo of Caracas, this work was premiered by the Caracas Orquesta Sinfónica Municipal in 1982.

VOCAL WITH ORCHESTRA

- 1950 *Poema araucano*, soprano with small orchestra. Recorded by RCA Victor, Buenos Aires, Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera conducting, P1507 (78 rpm), 1950.
- 1954 *Soneto de la fe en Cristo*, soprano and strings. Poem by Manuel Felipe Ruzeles. Vocal-piano arrangement, 1956.
- 1957 *Tocuyana*, ballet suite, voices and orchestra. Kiril Pikieris choreographed this work for Danzas Venezuela. Ministry of Labor commission. Premiered 1957, under direction of Atilio Ferrara.
- 1964 *Simiente*, cantata for speaker, soprano, mezzo, tenor, and bass, accompanied by 20 instrumentalists (flute, clarinet, bassoon, horn, trumpet, trombone, vibraphone, 2 harps, piano, percussion section [including 3 African drums, 3 kettledrums], violin, viola, cello, string bass). Text "Los Negros" from Juan Liscano Velutini's *Nuevo Mundo Orinoco*. Musical motifs inspired by Afro-Venezuelan rhythms and melodies. 25 minutes.

CHAMBER MUSIC

- 1936 *Suite Altipampa*. Vocal soloist, flute, piano. Consisting of *Pastoral*, *Campesina*, and *El Casamiento* ("The Wedding"), this unpublished suite was premiered at the Teatro del Pueblo in Buenos Aires July 17, 1941, by Alman Reyes and Angel Martucci with the composer at the piano.
- 1937 *Altiplano*. Voice, flute, piano.
- 1965 *Tres en sonata*. Violin, viola, piano. Premiered at Audición n° 50 of the Asociación Argentina de Compositores, Buenos Aires, August 11, 1966.

VOICE WITH PIANO

- 1933 *La Luna se llama Lola*. Published Buenos Aires, M. Calvello, 1937.
- 1937-40 *Primera serie criolla*. Consisting of *Cueca*, *Vidala*, and *Triunfo*, these songs set poetry by Margarita Silvano de Régoli. Premiered at Montevideo,

- Uruguay, October 7, 1941. Published Buenos Aires by Ricordi Americana, 1941, preface by Carlos Vega, drawings by Aurora de Pietro.
- 1938, 1951 *La Imilla*, carnavalito.
- 1949 *Poema angaité*. Premiered at Caracas in the Sala Biblioteca Nacional with Lucía Guillitz as vocalist, 1969.
- 1960 *Tres Cantos Indios*. Dedicated to the Venezuelan soprano Fedora Alemán, who premiered them in the Sala de Conciertos of the Universidad Central, Caracas, April 12, 1966, these songs employ Andean pentatonic melodies. The piano plays a no less important role than the voice.
- 1965 *Cinco fullías sobre melodías folklóricas venezolanas*. Published Buenos Aires, Ricordi Americana, 1966.

PIANO

- 1931 *Sonata en mi mayor* (E Major). Premiered by Aretz November 4, 1933, Buenos Aires, Dirección Nacional de Bellas Artes.
- 1932 *Alma curu*. Song (without words) and dance. Published Buenos Aires, M. Calvello, 1933. Municipal music prize, 1935.
- 1935 *De mi infancia* ("From my childhood"). *Cajita de música* ("Music Box"), *El arrorró de la muñeca* ("The doll's lullaby"), *Micifuz* ("Kitten"). Buenos Aires, M. Calvello, 1937.
- 1935 *Por la Senda de Kh'asana* ("In the path of Kh'asana"). Buenos Aires Municipal Prize, 1935. Published *Boletín Latino Americano de Música*, iv (1938), Musical Supplement, 38-40.
- 1939, 1950 *Tres preludios*.
- 1954 *Tres preludios negros*. Recorded by Lia Cimaglia Espinosa for Municipalidad de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, Secretaría de Cultura, 1954.
- 1961 *Comentarios musicales a tres poemas de Andrés Eloy Blanco*. *Hilandera* ("Spinner"), *Silencio*, *Giraluna*.
- 1965 *Sonata 1965*. 3 movements; Moderato-Agitato, Andante-Ostinato-Scherzando, Toccata. Premiered Bloomington, Indiana, Spring Festival, April 4, 1967, by Renata D'Arrigo. Published Washington, Pan American Union, 1969.

HARPSICHORD

- 1967 *Suite para clave*. Preludio, Aria, Burlesca, Fughetta.

BANDONEÓN

- 1954? *Habitat n° 1*. Dedicated to Alejandro Barletta [born 1925, Buenos Aires].

SOPRANO VOICE WITH MAGNETIC TAPE

- 1980 *Kwaltaya*. Ethnodrama in three scenes, the first inspired by the cosmic views of Venezuelan aborigines, second by vodun = voodoo = voodoo rites, third by creole world vision. Lasting 75 minutes, the taped music includes a collage of disparate Caribbean musics—indigenous, Afro, and mestizo. Iris Guiñazu, Argentine singer and actress, worked closely with Aretz an entire year to create this ethnodrama, performed three times at the Caracas Teatro Municipal and over a space of three months at the Buenos Aires Teatro Planeta.



ENSEMBLE OF INDIGENOUS LATIN AMERICAN INSTRUMENTS

1982 *Chimiterías*. Written for ODILA Youth Orchestra playing Latin American indigenous instruments collected for INIDEF, Inter-American Institute of Ethnomusicology and Folklore, during ten years of INIDEF participants' travels throughout Latin America, this work was premiered in the Sala José Félix Rivas, Caracas, February, 1983. José F. Abreu subsidized the Youth Orchestra, which was conducted by Emilio Mendoza. *Chimiterías* are a folkloric, narrative dance type of eastern Venezuela, in which the merengue rhythm alternates in ritornello fashion with other short dance interludes.

Apart from original compositions and compositions incorporating ethnic material, Isabel Aretz alone, or in cooperation with her husband, Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera, has published numerous harmonizations and arrangements of Argentine and Venezuelan traditional airs and dances. These began with 62-page *Primera Selección de Canciones y Danzas Tradicionales Argentinas, para escolares recogidas y armonizadas por Isabel Aretz* (Buenos Aires: Ricordi Americana, 1943, 1946, 1950), containing 22 pieces. Next came *Selección de melodías populares de Tucumán recogidas y concertadas para piano, canto y piano, coro a cappella, trío, una voz con orquesta de cuerdas y piano*, derived from her *Música Tradicional Argentina, Tucumán. Historia y Folklore* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Tucumán, 1946), pp. 650-726. With her husband she published 129-page *Cantos Navideños en el folklore venezolano* (Caracas: Edición Casa de la Cultura Popular, Ministerio de Trabajo, 1962). In 1955 the Caracas periodical *Educación; revista para los maestros* included her arrangement of *El pájaro guarandol* in n° 77 (June), *La burriqueta* in n° 79 (October), *Toquemos los instrumentos. Temas de Navidad* in n° 80 (December). In 1956 *Educación* included *El mampulorio* and *El carite* in n° 81 (February), *El chiriguare* and *Los Chichimitos* in n° 82 (April), and *El maremare* in n° 85 (June). In 1962 *La sirena* appeared in n° 102. In *Música popular del Estado Tachira. Armonizaciones y arreglos para piano* (San Cristóbal, 1961 [Colección Miguel Ángel Espinel N.º 1]) she arranged melodies from her husband's native region.