

REVOLT IN MEXICO

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THE first university in North America was founded in Mexico City in 1553. For almost four hundred years it has served as transmitter of European culture to the students of Mexico. In curriculum, in texts, in methods and in aims it has been considered at its best when most like, first the universities of Spain, and then those of France. The entire orientation has been toward importing wisdom and imposing it on the students, rather than toward developing men able to make their own contributions to culture, science, and art.

The history of Mexico's musical education, in particular that of her composers, is somewhat shorter, (of course leaving purely ecclesiastical music out of account). But it has been much the same. During the long period when opera was the leading form of European music, musical education in Mexico was Italianate; Italian methods taught Mexican composers to produce operatic works as nearly Italian as possible. When symphonic and piano music was dominant in Europe, education in the Mexican Conservatory became French and German. The courses were modeled on those of world-famous schools in Berlin, Vienna, and Paris; the texts used in those schools were preached as gospel to young Mexicans, who were distinguished from French, Austrian, and German composers only because their works were of necessity *pastiches*.

The Academy of San Carlos followed the same course in painting, and that precisely is why neither the Conservatory nor the Academy produced a strong, personal art. The Conservatory classes instructed their students in harmony, counterpoint, fugue, musical forms and orchestration. The course was divided into nine years, at the end of which it was declared that the pupil was able to compose.

This so-called "science of music" is considered by academicians to be the only way of giving young people a knowledge of *music*. He who has memorized it is assumed to be in possession of that unique truth called music. The books of Jadassohn, Richter, Durand, and others—including their feeble Mexican imitators—taught that the only expressions of real beauty were those of the German school culminating in Bach, Beethoven, and Wagner, and of the French school of Rameau, Saint-Saëns, and Franck. They taught that music, thus conceived, grew from a superior technic, *the* technic of music—the one they pretended to teach. In short, they said, let a composer but learn this so-called science, and his problems are solved.

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That is the attitude which we of the younger generation now recognize as academic. We no longer believe that music is beautiful because it contains unique and absolute truths according to unique and quite immutable laws. We believe that technic is the concrete means of artistic expression, and that consequently each example of authentic music implies its own particular technic. No kind of music is *the* music, and there is no absolute technic containing the whole truth of all music.

In short, the academic musical technic explains only a few composers and isms. The music of Bach and Palestrina is beautiful—and so is that of a Chinese, Mexican, or Balinese musician. They are different, however, and the difference is one of complexion of technic. If a Mexican musician uses Bach's technic, he is selling his birthright for a mess of pseudo-Bach.

Our younger generation has simply refused to be subjected to this unilateral education. The academic mouthpieces could tell us nothing of Mexican music, nothing of music that was not Bach, Saint-Saëns, or Verdi, which may interest us very much but does not satisfy us. We want more, we want a universal education, without restrictions and impositions, without unique dogmatic truths.

There is little doubt that a student familiar with the rules of the academic science of music will be able to compose. But his own creative talent will be annihilated in the process. He will have mastered the technic of certain great composers—which henceforth will forever master him. For technic is the most in-

dividual part of artistic creation. It is the inner feeling converted into a tangible value, an external reality. During the process of artistic creation, the internal material—emotion—is converted into external form.

A student cannot develop his own technic if from childhood there are imposed on him ironclad rules, the means with which he is told to express himself so as to achieve beauty. The only way he can develop the medium to express his inner material is by constantly exercising the functions of his art. Art is a continuous exercise of thought, feeling, and imagination, and by this practice an individual develops his own means and form of expression. Only in this way can he become truly creative.

Great artistic manifestations have not developed as products of a technic formulated and codified in advance. For example, the technic of Negro sculpture did not exist before the sculpture itself. On the contrary, it achieved its present individuality and forms during the long period in which the Negroes have been sculptors. The constant, active practice of an artistic function—in music or painting or sculpture—has been the way in which all peoples and individuals have achieved their original creations. Technic is an infinite process, always enriching itself and changing, never coming to a full stop.

We believe that creative talent and imagination are functions to be cultivated as a muscle is cultivated. Any rule, any formula or procedure which a pupil is obliged to follow, far from developing his own imagination, prevents him from exercising the prime function of his art, that of imagining and creating sounds for himself. He may learn to assimilate all the rules, and develop great mental agility in applying them. But these are the very opposite of the qualities a creative artist ought to develop. The creator does not repeat, he originates.

The student ought constantly and progressively to exercise his creative abilities. Whatever rules make his efforts of imagination easy do him harm. Whatever difficulties and even limitations he must conquer, benefit him. He should know and analyze in orderly progressive fashion the music of all cultures and all epochs. He should do this in a way which will permit him to discover universal experience without destroying his own characteristics.

He should know and analyze Beethoven's sonatas, Chinese pentaphony, Protestant chorales, and negro polyrhythm as particular flowerings of creation, but not as models to be copied.

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In 1931, I launched a detailed program for the composition class in the Conservatory of Mexico. The Department of Public Education approved the initiation of a course in free composition. For Mexico this was a new departure in music, though it had already been effected in the plastic arts, through the Open Air Schools of Painting and the School of Sculpture and Direct Cutting (as opposed to modelling in clay and then copying in stone). The difference between the Conservatory and these Schools was that it aimed at the development of professionals, while they prepared only a sort of introduction to plastic creation. Thus the Open Air Schools did not need to supply their students with more or less complete information on the various universal expressions of the art, while the composers' class at the Conservatory did.

To this class there came, in 1931, a few older, established musicians, including Vicente Mendoza, Candelario Huizar, and Silvestre Revueltas, as well as four boys under twenty, Francisco Contreras, Blas Galindo, Jose Pablo Moncayo, and Daniel Ayala. Two of these, Galindo and Ayala, are full-blooded Indians.

We used no text. All the students worked untiringly, writing melodies in all the diatonic modes, in a melodic scale of twelve tones, and in all the pentatonic scales. Hundreds of melodies were written, but not merely as exercises on paper. We had instruments in the classroom, and the melodies were played on them, and found to be adequate or inadequate to the resources of the specific instruments. The result is that the young boys in particular now write melodies with amazingly acute instrumental feeling.

In 1932, these boys, out of their own sense of necessity, began to write melodies for two, three, and four instruments. They wrote more than one melody not as an exercise in applying rules, but because they themselves felt a need for greater richness; through this expression of their inner material, they were achieving pure counterpoint.

At the same time I instituted an Academy of Investigation in the conservatory. Vincente Mendoza and numerous others began a labor of wide research into Indian music, its instruments, harmonies, and melodies. A very fine collection of pre-Cortesian and more recent percussion instruments (huehuetls, teponaxtles, etc.) and wind-instruments was made. The Department of Fine Arts, in cooperation with the National Museum published the first volume of a projected comprehensive work on pre-Cortesian instruments, *Instruments of Percussion*, by Daniel Castañeda and Vicente Mendoza.

From chronicles, from music still played in more or less untouched regions, from knowledge of the resources of the instruments, much early Indian music was reconstructed and written down. The still living music of the Yaquis, Coras, Huicholes, Maya and other groups was likewise notated. Much of this, in simple versions, was circulated throughout the public schools, and thus became familiar to the children of Mexico.

This research work had an immediate and deep effect on the members of the composers' class. The first, and more superficial, fruit was that of actual arrangements of melodies for the group of instruments we call The Mexican Orchestra. This consists of a specially balanced ensemble of conventional instruments, with the addition of huehuetls, teponaxtles, chirimias, and various kinds of water-drums, rasps, etc. Two of the works I recently played over the Columbia network—Luis Sandi's *El Venado* and Daniel Ayala's *U Kayil Chaac*—were originally written for this ensemble.

The more important result of this research was that it gave the young composers a living comprehension of the musical tradition of their own country. It will never be necessary for them, from lack of a background of their own, to imitate European musical forms and formulae. It is not that they will go on arranging folk-tunes, or writing music in imitation of folk music. Rather, the elements of that music which find response in their own feelings will assist them in creating their own idiom, giving it color and vitality, rhythmic vigor and harmonic variety.

In 1933 and 1934, we began our study of the historical development of music. For the first time we used a text—but of history,

not of theory. We had studied the music of antiquity, and of the Church up to Palestrina, when the class was interrupted by political change. Since 1934, the boys have gone on studying and writing, producing works for piano, string quartet, and orchestra.

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The varying effect of this class on its individual members is noteworthy. Vicente Mendoza, who was unable to attend it regularly, had undergone exactly the academic freezing of the creative ability against which we were in revolt. The failure of this talented and intelligent man is an object lesson in the stultifying effects of academic instruction. Candelario Huizar responded to the liberating atmosphere, and since 1931 has produced his finest compositions, both of which I have played with The Symphony Orchestra of Mexico—*Pueblerinas* and *Surco*. Silvestre Revueltas began to compose in 1931; his first expressions were facilitated by his sympathy with the aims of the class.

The four young boys, Contreras, Galindo, Moncayo, and Ayala were easily directed toward the development of a personal style of composition. They were also affected by the Indian music which two of them, Ayala and Galindo, had known since childhood, and with which all became familiar by playing it during the class. Their really outstanding talents given free rein by their education, they continue to compose, developing their own sense of form. It is to them that we may look for the future great music of Mexico.

This plan of education prevents many mistakes in the pursuit of a vocation. If a student creates from his first day in class, the evolution of his capacity, its products, and the strength of his leaning are apparent. He then follows in his individual training the course of the historic evolution of music. This encourages the full development of his individual creative capacities, for he functions at once in his medium. He regards foreign artists not as expressions of absolute beauty, to be copied, but as individual cases. He remains free, receiving as fundamental influences those of his medium and his society. He feels the emotions of life direct, and not filtered through those of other artists. His creative capacity then consists simply of converting into music his own concept of the world around him.