

COMPOSERS OF PERU

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WHENEVER I propose to write or lecture on musical minorities, or to perform works by unknown composers, I always meet the same doubts. "If these people were any good, we would have heard about them." The obvious reply is that looking for new art in new places is much more fascinating than to compile catalogues of familiar statuary in the Hall of Fame. Let others collect stamps, pottery, art. My own hobby is collecting unusual composers.

Perhaps the strangest experience I have had to date was with a "Peruvian composer" who shall remain nameless. Following a clue from a music dictionary, I wrote care of his publishers. In due time (which is plenty when corresponding with South American musicians) I received a reply, signed by the publisher, informing me that the man in question was "the most known composer-pianist of his land, Peru, and also in the United States and Europe." The letter stated that he had "debuted in Carnegie Hall in 1919" and created "great success and publicity." Enclosed was a circular, with the autographs of Joseph Hoffman, Pablo Casals and Walter Damrosch who, the letter said, "have endorsed his art." The endorsements were of a very queer nature. Casals wrote "Best wishes from a great admirer of Peru," and Joseph Hoffman signed his name and date. An unexpected addition to these was the tribute, "With best regards, Charles E. Hughes." The final note in this exotic fantasy on the Good Neighbor theme was the discovery that the letter was written by the composer himself on a purloined piece of stationery bearing the signature of the publisher who had been dead for several years.

There does exist however a group of authentic Peruvian composers, who are qualified for that title by national origin, residence and above all, by style of composition. Peruvian folksong has certain characteristics that clearly distinguish it from other South American music. It is based, of course, on the inevitable pentatonic scale, but the rhythms are peculiar to Peru only. There is none of that duality of 3/4 and 6/8 time which is characteristic of Spanish colonial music. Peruvian rhythms are sharp and abrupt. The

syncopation is definite, musical periods are mostly in duple time; at the end of each period there is apt to be a sudden break, a full stop of almost brutal effect. These characteristics are also to be found in the works of Peruvian art composers who have been inspired by this indigenous music, even though they may add a certain amount of French or Russian dressing.

Three men are outstanding in the country — André Sas, Theodoro Valcárcel and Raoul de Verneuil. Sas was born in Paris and educated in Belgium. After living many years abroad he settled in Lima and founded a music school. His chamber music, some of which is published in France, has figured on the programs of the festivals of the International Society for Contemporary Music. His treatment of Peruvian themes and rhythms is direct and effective. There is no elaborate counterpoint, and his polyphony is the polyphony of harmonic blocks, moving in parallel or contrary motion. The two elements of Peruvian folk music, pentatonic chant and rhythmic dance, are employed for contrast, as for instance, in the nostalgic *Siembra* and rhythmic *Kcashwa* (war dance) from his suite for violin and piano.



From *Kcashwa* of the *Suite Peruniä*

Valcárcel is perhaps the most "Peruvian" of the three. His father is of Basque origin, his mother of ancient Peruvian lineage. As a boy, Valcárcel studied in Italy, and later took a few lessons with Felipe Pedrell and Busoni, but the influence of these teachers, or any other European musicians, appears to be totally absent from his music. He has a style of his own which for better or worse is enthusiastically endorsed by reputable Peruvian writers as "authentic." Thus the Director of the National Museum of Peru calls him a "true interpreter of the race and the culture of the Andes," "a son of the city on the border of the totemic lake" (Valcárcel was actually born in Puno, on Lake Titicaca), "creator of Peruvian harmonic expression, equipped musically to reveal the grandeur of the paleo-american world"! The most effective and the most Peruvian work of Valcárcel is his ballet *Suray-Surita*. The harmonic design of the music is fundamentally homophonic, and the device of the pedal point is frequently applied. Valcárcel has also done valuable work in collecting and classifying original Inca chants.

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ANDRÉ SAS



THEODORO VALCÁRCEL



RAOUL DE VERNEUIL

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "Pasquandante" by Valcárcel. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system has a vocal line (labeled "Canto") and a piano accompaniment (labeled "Piano"). The vocal line includes the lyrics "Tu — Ku,". The piano part features complex rhythmic patterns with accents and dynamic markings like "mf." and "mp.". The second system continues the vocal line with lyrics "Tu — Ku, mel a — ja — no — ta — Ku." and the piano accompaniment. The score is written in a style characteristic of early 20th-century musical notation.

From Valcárcel's *Tuku*—Seven Indian Songs

Verneuil is the most French of the Peruvians. He was born in Lima of a French father and Peruvian mother, and went to Europe in 1925. At the outbreak of the present war he returned to Lima, after a brief stay in New York. His instrumental music is in an advanced post-impressionistic style, curiously combined with a professed Bachian tendency. But the material behind this stylized facade is Peruvian, with Inca themes in a pentatonic scale, animated by explosive rhythms of unusual violence. Verneuil has also written much choral music in the style of Spain's "Golden Age."

Sas, Valcárcel and Verneuil belong to the same generation; all three were born about the turn of the century. There are however other Peruvian composers who have been significant figures in the culture of the country. Daniel Alomas Robles, who is now seventy years old, has done valuable work with folk music, and has written several Peruvian dance suites; Ernesto Lopez Mindreau, fifty years old, studied in Germany, and has written an opera on Peruvian themes. There is also Vicente Stea, an Italian in his fifties, who has lived in Lima for many years, written several symphonic works and proved himself an expert orchestrator; he is in fact, reputed to have scored for several of his less well equipped Peruvian colleagues. Eduardo Walter Stubbs who, despite his Anglo-Saxon surname, is a native of Lima, has turned out music of solid workmanship. A new, younger man is Roberto Carpio Valdes, author of several effective instrumental pieces.

Two refugees from Nazi Germany are now working in Lima. One is Rudolph Holzmann, young Austrian composer, who plays the oboe in the Lima symphony orchestra, the other Theo Buchwald who directs it. The orchestra is, incidentally, a very competent body of players. And to help promote the general musical culture of the country there is an informative bulletin, *La Revista Musical Peruana*, edited by Rodolfo Barbacci.