

Music

Ten Centuries of Music in Cervantino Festival

The first International Cervantino Festival was held fifteen years ago in the small, central Mexican city of Guanajuato. Initially devoted primarily to theater, and specifically to the works of the great Spanish writer and creator of Don Quijote, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, and his contemporaries, the festival has now become one of the major artistic events of the Americas.

The 1986 Cervantino Festival was "an embarrassment of riches," as the saying goes. During seventeen days in the fall, Guanajuato was brimming with music, ballet, modern dance, theater, mime, clowns, painting, sculpture, books, lectures and all manner of events. Temporarily suspended in 1985 because of the earthquake, the Festival was reborn with new vigor, ideas and artistic objectives.

Music at the 1986 Festival was particularly rich and varied, as musicians came from all over the world to fill Guanajuato with the sounds of compositions spanning across ten centuries of musical theory and tastes. Perhaps the oldest music was performed by Ram and Aruna Narayan, a father-daughter *sarangi* duo from India. The *sarangi* is a stringed instrument, quite different from the better-known *sitar*, with a more intimate sound quality. The Narayans, following tra-

dition, played improvised, unwritten music based on the classic, Indian *raga* tonal sequences.

There was also European medieval and Renaissance music at the Cervantes Festival. Two groups were particularly noteworthy, the *Camerata Hungarica* from Hungary and *Los Tiempos Pasados* from Mexico, because they offered two very different approaches to the art of old music. The Hungarian group, featuring world reknown lutist Daniel Benko, played

down or otherwise codified. Their performances are mainly improvisations based on certain given themes, and one of their aims was to demonstrate the vast sound palate produced by such ancient instruments as the *huehueltl*, *teponaztli*, *tenabaris* and others that are seldom heard nowadays. Only a few Mexican composers, including Carlos Chávez, Sivestre Revueltas and Blas Galindo, have ever used them in their concert works.

courtesan music from the Old World, using purity and clarity as the main interpretive criteria. *Los Tiempos Pasados*, whose members are mostly amateurs, added a definite Latin flavor to its performances, offering livelier versions of the works of Tielman Susato and his contemporaries, a couple of the famous *Cantigas* written by Spanish King Alfonso X and especially some pieces of Arab-Andalusian origin.

The *Camerata Musica*, from the



The Vilnius String Quartet

Photo by Festival Cervantino

The Cabañas Cultural Institute sent a group from Guadalajara specializing in Mexican, pre-Columbian instrumental music. Like their colleagues from India, these Mexican musicians play music that was never written

German Democratic Republic, earned high marks for its brilliant performance of baroque music. This string and harpsichord ensemble played splendid versions of works by Scarlatti, Bach and Vivaldi. Mexicans also provided some fine baroque music.

Eduardo Mata, a gifted Mexican conductor, currently music director of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, assembled some of the country's best musicians to form a chamber orchestra for the specific purpose of performing Bach's Brandenburg Concertos. Baroque performing techniques were respected, using gut strings, loose hair on bows and recorders, instead of modern day flutes.

Of course, no Festival would be complete without some standard ensembles, such as trios and quartets. Two European trios (violin, cello, piano) coincidentally chose to play the same piece by Russian composer, Dimitri Shostakovich. *Trio Sentire*, a very young Swedish group, played the Shostakovich crisp, sharp and exciting, emphasizing the brighter side of the music. The *Schubert Trio* from Vienna, more mature and experienced, went more for the moody,



Music group from the Cabañas Cultural Institute

Photo by Festival Cervantino

intimate qualities of Shostakovich's score. Afterwards, the Swedes went on to perform a very interesting and mature work by their countryman Sven-Erik Back, while the Austrians roused out their lengthy program with a piece by the relatively unknown composer Alexander von Zemlinsky.

Quartets were also very much a part of the musical scene in the Festival. Mexico's *Latin America String Quartet* selected a well-balanced program beginning with Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* and closing with Bela Bartok's *First String Quartet*. The *Vilnius String Quartet* came from the Soviet Union and offered a very precise and clear performance of one of Shostakovich's string quartets. They also provided a rare taste of their own music, performing a piece by fellow Lithuanian, Osvaldas Balakauskas.

Two very different kinds of quartets from the United States also performed. The *Sonora Quartet* played music for four saxophones; they were equally at home with transcriptions of works by composers such as Byrd, Pepsus, Scarlatti and Beethoven, as with original works by Alexander Glazunov. Moreover, the night before their classical concert, they performed in a jazz session with the American band *Jazzberry Jam*. The *Los Angeles Guitar Quartet* dazzled the audience with their performance of music by Mozart, Morley, Falla and Mexican composer, Armando Lavalle. A highlight of their concert was Copeland's *Hoedown*; the transcription for four guitars managed to capture all of the charm and fun of the Wild West.

Jazz was very much present, as groups from seven countries played, representing a wide spectrum of contemporary jazz forms, from the classical Dixieland style of *Jazzberry Jam* to the combination of free jazz, electronics and music from the Huasteca region played by the Mexican group *Alacrán del Cántaro*. Also present were virtuoso Polish saxophonist, Zbigniew Namysłowski, and the Cuban ensemble led by José María Vítier, from the same generation of musicians that make up the *Nueva Trova Cubana*, the main trendsetters for Cuban popular music.

Los Leones de la Sierra Michú, from Guanajuato, performed some very authentic Mexican po-

pular music on chilly nights in small open squares. They are committed to preserving the authentic art of troubadors, singing witty, alternating verses. In this same vein, the *Mono Blanco* group put on a great show of *fandango* music and dance from the state of Veracruz.

This truly international festival would not have been complete without the music from Down Under, represented by the chamber ensemble *Terra Australis*. They performed a series of contemporary works by Australia's most prominent composers, Carl Vine, Anne Boyd, Michael Smetanin and Vincent Plush.

Mexico's National University sent its crack percussion ensemble with a program that combined original works by Polish composer Penhersky and Ricardo Gallardo, one of the ensemble members, with transcriptions of a string quartet by Silvestre Revueltas and the famous orchestral piece *Huapango* by José Pablo Moncayo.

From El Salvador came Germán Cáceres, a talented oboe player who is also a composer and conductor. Accompanied by young Mexican pianist, Alberto Cruzprieto, he played a very balanced program with works by Loeillet and Telemann, as well as music by Hindemith and Lutoslawski from the twentieth century. Along with Mr. Cáceres supple playing we heard Mr. Cruzprieto's surprisingly powerful rendition of Argentine composer Alberto Ginestera's *Sonata for Solo Piano*.

If I had to single out one evening from this rich musical panorama as extraordinarily special, I would probably choose Francisco Araiza's vocal concert. Born and trained in Mexico, this gifted tenor has spent the last few years in Europe, where he has become an important performer at major opera houses. The highlight of his homecoming was his impeccable rendition of Schubert's song-cycle *Die Shone Mullerin*, performed at Guanajuato's Teatro Juárez, to Irwin Gage's masterful piano accompaniment.

All in all, it can be safely said that the variety and quality of the musical performances from Mexico and the world over was the main attraction of the 14th International Cervantino Festival. ★

Juan Arturo Brennan

ALFONSO REYES PEDRO HENRÍQUEZ UREÑA

CORRESPONDENCIA 1907-1914

Edición de
José Luis Martínez

"Rubén Darío, a quien al fin no me dio gana conocer, me hizo saber, enviándome un saludo, que se iba a Barcelona a vivir. Creo que en busca de economías. El pobre es un hombre inútil. Blanco Fombona está huertista por antiyanquismo. [...] Cuando yo dejé de ver a Chapa, era paquidermo de estupidez, monstruo Franscuálico. Me habían ponderado su renacer espiritual, su dedicación estética... Le pedí consejo sobre una materia de historia del arte y me contestó citándome al enmohecido Taine, al conocido Burckhardt y al inesperado ¡Michelet! (Las vías del señor son maravillosas.) [...] No saben multiplicar 2×2 y confunden a Bergson con el ocultismo. Creen que es una hazaña vivir en Europa y que Unamuno vale más que Nietzsche. [...] Sólo Diego Rivera vale. De Montenegro me han llegado espeluznantes historias de alcahuetas y otras cosas villanas, mezcladas confusamente con nombres de argentinos ricos o gastadores."

*De la carta de Alfonso Reyes
a Pedro Henríquez Ureña
(París, 19 de mayo de 1914).*



FONDO DE CULTURA ECONÓMICA