

Music

The International Forum for New Music

For historical and cultural reasons that would be too difficult to explain in a few pages, Mexican music lovers who attend concerts are completely hooked on Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and a few other very classical composers, and seem to want nothing to do with work older than Bach or newer than Stravinsky. Twentieth century music is very seldom heard, and the new music that gets played is usually performed before small groups of dilettanti, composers, music students and a few authentic amateurs.

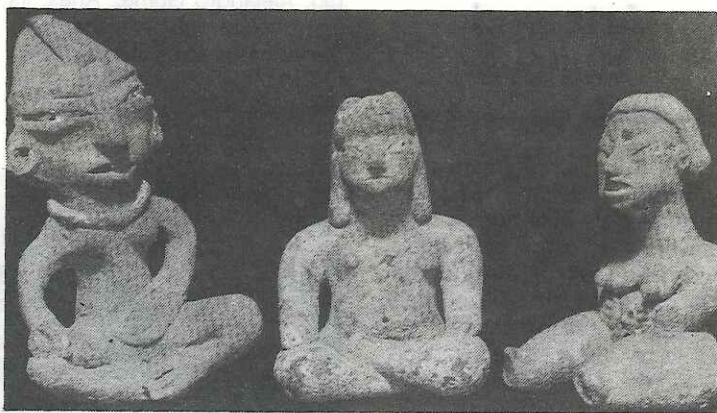
It is often said, and not without reason, that this sorry state of affairs has a lot to do with the box office. In fact, when one of Mexico's important symphony orchestras dares to include a world premiere in its program or when it plays a repeat performance of a very recent piece, more often than not the concert hall will be only half full. Nonetheless, in recent years there have been

several encouraging signs pointing to the fact that, given the opportunity, certain sectors of the music-loving public will at least give new music a chance. No doubt one of this trend's main driving forces has been the International Forum for New Music that has been held in Mexico City for nine years in a row. With exceptions few and far apart, it can be safely said that in a cultural environment that tends to reject contemporary sounds as a matter of principle, the forum has provided the best opportunity to approach 20th century music.

One of the Forum's main features is that the music performed

feature at the Sixth Forum, held in 1984. Robert Aitken, a flutist with a superb technique and an astonishing repertoire, came from Canada. Italy sent master double-bassist Steffano Scodanibbio, who has brought his awkward instrument to the forefront of contemporary music. And from Sweden came Peter Schuback, one of today's most prominent cello players.

Amidst this galaxy of accomplished international soloists, Mexico was represented by the fine guitar duet formed by Margarita Castañón and Federico Bañuelos. Two of the concerts at the forum are especially worth



each year is a very broad cross-section of ideas, styles and musical languages from the world over. At each Forum it is possible to hear works by the big names in 20th Century music alongside compositions by very young and talented musicians, both Mexican and foreign. And of course, no instrument, no sound combination, no musical possibility is left unexplored, as witness some of the main features in the last four editions of the International Forum for New Music.

Some outstanding soloists and ensembles were the main

mentioning. One was a salute to the late American singer Cathy Berberian, a performer who was equally at home singing the operas of Claudio Monteverdi and the avant-garde works by the likes of composer Luciano Berio. The other was a homage to Argentinian composer Alberto Ginastera, who died in 1983 and was one of the most important composers in 20th Century Latin America along with Chávez, Revueltas and Villalobos.

In 1985, the Seventh forum featured the Fine Arts Chamber Orchestra, Cuba's José White Trio and a very interesting multimedia performance in which music mingled with dance, theater, images and assorted elements. That year Mexican audiences were treated to some works by composers that have become classics in their own time, such as France's Pierre Boulez and the Greek Iannis Xenakis. Also present was the music of such interesting personalities as Marius Constant and Thea Musgrave. But perhaps the most interesting and intriguing concert of all was the so-called Photographic Concert in which musical elements were combined with the actual taking of pictures and other activities related to photography. This happening was held by an ensemble deceptive-

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ly called *Música de Cámara*. The pun should not be lost: *Música de cámara* means, literally, chamber music, but the word *cámara* in Spanish also means camera.

The International Forum for New Music of 1986 was perhaps one of the better organized of the whole series. Each concert was arranged around a specific element of musical performance, and the result was a very tight-knit and very interesting event. The elements featured were voice, harp and guitar, wind instruments, electronic music, piano and clarinet, multimedia, double-bass, percussion instruments, harpsichord (indeed, there is fine harpsichord music in our time!), women composers, flute and string instruments. Special notice should be given to the presence of American conductor Joel Thome, who has become a permanent guest at the forum, always conducting very difficult pieces with precision and authority.

The ninth and latest edition of the Forum was held in May 1987, and for the first time some of the concerts were heard not only in Mexico City but in cities elsewhere around the country as well. Again, flutes were very much in vogue. Canadian flutist Robert Aitken performed and his French colleague Pierre-Ives Artaud was also on hand.

At one point they even joined in a very amusing session of duelling flutes. But the real surprise came at another concert, featuring that long-forgotten instrument, the recorder (known in Mexico as a baroque flute), expertly played by Horacio Franco, a young Mexican musician who studied in Holland. The high point of his performance was the world premiere of Mexican composer Mario Lavista's *Ofrenda*, a splendid study that takes full advantage of the recorders possibilities



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and of Franco's awesome technique.

Also featured in this latest edition of the forum was the monumental organ at the National Auditorium. It was played in a recital by organist-composer-musicologist Felipe Ramírez, who is also curator and plays the organ at Mexico City's Cathedral. On this occasion, percussion and dance were combined with the powerful sound of the Auditorium's organ. Another noteworthy concert could be labeled as the meeting of two worlds. The Música Aurea group (its name means Golden Music) joined forces with composer-engineer Raúl Pavón to produce a fascinating combination of sounds from pre-Hispanic, traditional and electronic instruments.



The Images of Sound were especially interesting. This is a series of works by Pavón in which electronically synthesized sounds are paired with the images they produce on a waveform monitor. From this process Pavón produces abstract films of rare beauty.

Finally, mention should be made of a concert held in memory of the late Mexican composer and pianist Alicia Urreta. Four Mexican pianists joined forces to play pieces from Mexico and Spain that were originally dedicated to Urreta, who died in late 1986.

In wrapping up this brief retrospective of the International Forum for New Music, credit should be given where credit's due. The main driving force behind this yearly session of contemporary music is Mexican composer Manuel Enríquez, who has always been a keen promoter of the sounds of our time.

Juan Arturo Brennan

Radio

Radio UNAM's Fifty Years of Arts and Culture

Radio UNAM has just celebrated its 50th anniversary. University officials, intellectuals and radio listeners all agree on the importance of this station, particularly for cultural issues.

Radio UNAM started work on June 14th, 1937. Beatriz Barros Horcasitas, its present director, has said that this station prides itself on keeping an open mind, even during troubled periods.

The idea of having a radio with an arts and cultural emphasis dates back from the time of the movement for university self-government. Its principal aim was to reach sectors which had nothing to do with academic life, to come into contact with a society of 16 million people, out of which

9 million (66.6 per cent) were illiterate.

Radio UNAM started out with few resources, but as the people who got it going have remarked, enthusiasm was such that it outweighed many financial difficulties.

In this, Radio UNAM is not very different from other non-profit radios stations. In an article which appeared in the *UNAM Gazette*, Alma Rosa Alva de la Selva says that its main concern has been to survive. This has made competition with commercial radio stations very tough.

Even so, this university station has managed to provide its listeners with a new concept in radio. Alejandro Gómez Arias, its first director, has said that from the very beginning Radio UNAM tried to "be different from other great commercial radios, both in

its aims and its programs, and to create a new style in transmissions, without, of course forgetting the main purpose of all university departments: spreading culture".

That is why this radio is considered the first of its kind in cultural aspects. Also, it was the first one to organize its programs so that they would link the university with the rest of society. Radio UNAM has coordinated efforts with radios with a similar outlook, while making very clear how different it is to other commercial stations.

When Radio UNAM first appeared only commercial radio stations existed, and they were in full swing. This gave it the opportunity to come up with and test plenty of new ideas. Today, this radio together with Radio Education (which belongs to the government's Education Depart-



Jorge Carpizo, UNAM Rector, and Beatriz Barros, director of Radio UNAM.

Photo from Gaceta de la UNAM

National Broadcasting



"Shoot Margot, Shoot, a Fair report on Mexican RADIO", by Fernando Curiel, Premiá Editora, México, D.F. 1987. 149 pgs.

"Shoot Margot, shoot" is the end product of the author's explorations in one of the less-known fields of our national culture: broadcasting (radio and t.v.). Here is an account, with knowledge of motive and malice, another history of the facts: a history very different from the view taken by private industrialists, and sometimes even adopted by the state.

Fernando Curiel, critic, essayist and narrator, was on two occasions director of the broadcasting service of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) (see note in this same section). At present he is coordinator of the Difusión Cultural (Cultural Diffusion) of the UNAM.