

GUILLERMO ESPINOSA

The history of XXth century Latin American art music would not be the same without the maverick figure of Guillermo Espinosa

Aurelio de la Vega, Cuban composer

Indiana University is fortunate to have received Guillermo Espinosa's private musical collection and personal papers, not only because they chronicle the life of an important figure but because they provide invaluable data for research in the area of contemporary American and Latin American music.

Guillermo Espinosa (1905-1990) was born in Cartagena, Colombia. Following studies in Milan and Berlin, Espinosa returned to Colombia where he was active directing Colombia's Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional, teaching, and organizing festivals. Espinosa moved to Washington D.C. to assume duties as an official of the Pan American Union, an influential organization which was instrumental in developing performances, editions and commissions of new American music. He later succeeded the eminent Charles Seeger as music chief of the Organization of American States (OAS), a position that allowed him to champion his cause from an international position from 1953 until he retired in 1975. He established the indispensable musical score series *Composers of the Americas*, founded the *Boletín Interamericano de Música/Inter-American Music Bulletin*, published music scores by Canadian, North and South American composers, assisted musicians through more than seventy OAS grants, and interceded to secure commissions.

Guillermo Espinosa's mission was to make the world appreciate the music of contemporary composers of the Americas. To reach this goal he worked ceaselessly in his capacities as conductor, festival organizer, musical statesman, and advisor to foundations. The qualities mentioned most often by those who knew him are tact, generosity, and perseverance, qualities that took him far towards his goal. Alberto Ginastera, one of South America's greatest composers, expressed his gratitude in a letter: "commissions obtained by you ... in a nearly magic way." Espinosa was instrumental in the commissions and premieres of Ginastera's String Quartet No. 2, the Piano Concerto No.1, the *Cantata para América Mágica* and the opera *Don Rodrigo*, works which established his international reputation.

Espinosa's career permits a true evaluation of the cultural importance of festival organizers, which is often underrated. Festivals can serve important functions as forums for education of the public and stimuli for cultural exchange. Espinosa successfully organized a series of nine important festivals, the Inter-American Music Festivals, in Washington D.C., Madrid, Venezuela, and the Dominican Republic. No fewer than ninety-four world premieres of Latin American works were presented. Lesser-known composers shared the stages with greater names, launching the careers of several Latin American composers.

"Your unequalled contribution to Music in the Americas includes your fomenting of festivals" wrote Robert Stevenson, UCLA Department of Music. Stevenson continues:

“Without the exposure that you gave beginning as well as established composers, Latin American music would have been an almost unknown quantity.” Three generations of American composers were aided by Espinosa’s efforts. By taking a look at the scores, books, and recordings that he owned the researcher can track his education and the most important influences that showed up in his oeuvre.

Many of the items in the Indiana University Espinosa Music Collection have the author or composer’s handwritten dedication. This shows Espinosa’s importance as a leader mostly in the Latin American composers and performers’ community but also among international scholars and music professionals.

The books in the collection include several out-of-print and rare books in Latin American music, written by both Latin American and international authors. This variety of sources can be used to analyze the Latin American field both from internal and external perspectives and to ascertain how these perspectives developed over time, since the books’ dates of publication range from the late 19th century to the late 20th century. Of greatest importance are the books about Latin American composers not well known in America or Europe, like Zipoli, Rozo Contreras, Cluzeau-Mortet, Lugo, and Espinel. In addition, there are some national histories of music from Argentina, Venezuela, Uruguay, Colombia, Panama, and Peru.

The recordings collection includes two very important areas, namely recordings of pieces by Latin American composers and recordings of different repertoires by Latin American performers. The Latin American composers represented in the collection range from colonial times to the twentieth century, and from composers of international recognition (Villa-Lobos, Ginastera, Revueltas, etc.) to lesser known composers, all representing the variety of nationalities and styles characteristic of Latin America. About two thirds of the recordings of Latin American composers were new additions to the Cook Music Library collection, and of these two thirds, half are not found in any other library affiliated to the OCLC association. This will probably make them unique and very important to researchers and performers.

In regards to recordings by Latin American performers, they also range in nationality and career focus. They include LPs by Colombian harpsichordist Rafael Puyana and Argentinean Camerata Bariloche, dedicated to Baroque music, to orchestras and pianists dedicated to romantic or contemporary music. Only few items were already in the Cook Music Library. Of the rest, half are found to have OCLC records and half will be unique.

Not only is the “art music” represented in the recordings. There is also a small collection of “popular music” of different countries, including indigenous manifestations of Brazil and Venezuela.

The collection of scores is divided between standard international repertoire, and scores of Latin American composers. This last section is one of the most important in the Espinosa collection. There are manuscripts, blueprints and printed editions of works by

many Latin American composers. About half of the items were new in the Cook Music Library collection and about twenty items are unique to our collection in the United States. Many items have the composer's dedicatory or signature, which shows the closeness of the Latin American composers/performers community and the high degree of appreciation in which Espinosa was held by his colleagues. Many items have also performance marks, probably all by Espinosa as conductor but possibly also by the composer. This collection of scores is mostly of 20th century composers, especially of Espinosa's contemporary and younger composers. The majority are orchestra pieces, which show the importance of Espinosa as conductor.

Interestingly, there is a very important section of scores by American and Canadian composers. This reflects Espinosa continuous involvement, not only in the Latin American music field, but with the overarching promotion of music of the Americas.

Finally, it is important to consider the Colombian part of the collection. Compared to the overall size of the collection, surprisingly few items are Colombian, but these items represent a very important addition to the state of research and performance of Latin American music. Colombian musicians and pieces have not been in the main stream of Latin American composition and performance, and these items can be a good starting point to a further study of a somehow under represented country in the musical field.