

# “¡Espíritu Latino!”

## SONES DE MARIACHI

BLAS GALINDO | 1910-1993

Blas Galindo composed *Sones Mariachi* in 1941 for an exhibition *20 Centuries of Mexican Art* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. It is a medley of traditional Mexican music, including some newly-invented tunes, but it is the orchestration that stands out: section solos, call-and-response dialogue between small ensembles, and lively solos. The piece is held together by a pervading rhythmic pulse.

Galindo studied at Mexico's National Conservatory with Carlos Chavez and at Tanglewood with Aaron Copland. He subsequently became director of the National Conservatory and held numerous other positions in service to Mexico's music. Awarded a fellowship from the Secretary of Public Education in 1960, he decided to devote himself to composition full-time. In his compositions, Blas Galindo attempted to merge Mexico's folk and popular music into formal classical forms, including seven concertos and three symphonies.

## OBLIVIÓN LIBERTANGO

ASTOR PIAZZOLLA | 1921-1992

Astor Piazzolla's name has been inseparably associated with the tango. During the Depression, Piazzolla's family moved to New York, where he studied piano and the *bandoneón*, a type of concertina with a 38-button keyboard that had become the central instrument in the tango ensembles of his native Argentina. After a stint in Paris, studying composition with no less an eminence than Nadia Boulanger, Piazzolla returned to Argentina to form his first Tango Octet and later his renowned Tango Quintet, made up of the *bandoneón*, violin, piano, electric guitar and bass.

Influenced by his studies in Paris and classical forms, Piazzolla aimed his compositions a cut above the traditional tangos. No longer dance music, they became concert music, although for the nightclub rather than the concert hall. Nevertheless, the psychological intensity and sophistication of his music so infuriated the traditionalists that Piazzolla was repeatedly physically assaulted and even threatened with a gun to his head during a radio broadcast.

Piazzolla in turn has inspired such jazz artists as Gerry Mulligan and Chick Corea. His tangos have been arranged for classical violinist Gidon Kremer and for the renown eclectic Kronos Quartet.

When you write for something as restricted geographically as a *bandoneón* ensemble, transcriptions are inevitable. *Oblivión*, composed in 1982 for a film, has been transcribed for many combinations, including a piano trio. It is a dreamy, slow tango, expressing longing and pain.

Piazzolla composed *Libertango* in 1974, the title reflecting the composer's break from traditional Argentine tango to a more inclusive form, the *nuevo tango*. Like most of Piazzolla's compositions, it has undergone innumerable transcriptions.

## SYMPHONY NO. 2, SINFONIA INDIA

CARLOS CHÁVEZ | 1899-1978

Mexican composer Carlos Chávez was the best-known musical ambassador of his country for more than 50 years. Educated primarily as a pianist, he had haphazard training in composition and conducting, resulting in his being largely self-taught. He composed more than 200 musical works in nearly all genres and conducted many major orchestras in the United States, Latin America and Europe. He also held important government positions in the arts in

Mexico, lectured and wrote extensively about music and its place in society.

In 1921, Chávez established himself as the foremost exponent of Mexico's cultural nationalism in music with the ballet *El fuego nuevo*, based on an Aztec theme. His nationalistic bent culminated in the Second Symphony in 1935 but that did not prevent him from composing concurrently in other styles. His love of Ancient Greek drama inspired his Symphony No.1, the cantata *Prometheus Bound*, and the ballet *La hija de Colchide* (The Daughter of Colchis), based on the legend of Medea.

Symphony No. 2 is in a single movement. Chávez employs three authentic Indian themes from different parts of Mexico, as well as some authentic pre-Columbian percussion instruments. The rhythms of the original melodies are complex—there are 13 changes of rhythm in the first five pages of the score. It received its premiere in New York, where the composer was invited to conduct the CBS Orchestra.

## SYMPHONIE ESPAGNOLE, OP. 21

ÉDOUARD LALO | 1823-1892

Edouard Lalo came from a military family in Northern France, his father having fought for Napoleon. Although his parents at first encouraged his musical talent and he studied both the violin and cello, his more serious inclinations towards music met with stern opposition from his father. He left home at the age of 16 to pursue his musical studies at the Conservatoire in Paris. While working for a long time in obscurity as a violinist and music teacher, in 1855 he started a string quartet to popularize the quartets of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. It was only in the 1870s that Lalo got a break as a composer.



The debacle of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 and its aftermath created havoc in France's musical life. However, the rapid reconstruction that followed gave rise to the creation of the *Société nationale de musique* and the inauguration of three concert series under three great conductors, Jules Pasdeloup, Edouard Colonne and Charles Lamoureux, producing a demand from Young French composers, including Lalo, for new works.

Lalo's name is primarily associated with a series of works he composed for the Spanish violinist Pablo Sarasate, one of the most spectacular violin virtuosos of the late nineteenth century. Sarasate was known for his beautiful tone, perfect intonation and élan on the stage. Many composers dedicated works to him, including Max Bruch, Camille Saint-Saëns, Joseph Joachim, Henryk Wieniawski, Antonín Dvořák, and in particular, Lalo.

In 1873 Lalo composed his Violin Concerto Op. 20 for Sarasate and a year later followed up with another work for violin and orchestra, the *Symphonie espagnole*, the composer's most enduring work. Sarasate premiered both with the Colonne Orchestra.

*Symphonie espagnole* is neither a real symphony, nor a traditional concerto. It is more like a five-movement suite, especially in its incorporation of dance rhythms. But Lalo hated the term "suite," considering it "a tainted and discredited title." The *Symphonie* is French in character, but Spanish in rhythm. What it lacks in musical depth it makes up for in bravura and a wealth of catchy themes. Although the five movements are not named for dances, they all correspond to Spanish dances and folk rhythms, the structure of the movements corresponds to classical symphonic and concerto models.

The first movement is a *habanera*, with three themes in the same rhythm – although not the same mood. The second movement, a *seguidilla*, is a modified ABA form. The middle section is almost a recitative for the soloist, with dramatic shifts of tempo.

The Intermezzo opens with an introduction for orchestra of Spanish-Moorish origin, based on a two-beat measure alternating triple and duple meter. The violin then introduces a series of themes, all with the underlying Moorish rhythm.

The *pavane* is a slow, stately dance supposedly related to the gait of the



peacock. The movement's slow tempo and minor key suggest a funeral procession.

The lighthearted mood of the fifth and final movement breaks the lugubrious spell. The orchestra begins by setting up an ostinato pattern over which the violin weaves delicate counter melody with elaborate embellishments. The movement contains a *malagueña* in its slower middle section.

## BOLÉRO

MAURICE RAVEL | 1875-1937

"I have written only one masterpiece," remarked Maurice Ravel to fellow composer Arthur Honegger, "that is *Boléro*. Unfortunately, it contains no music." Ravel's self-irony notwithstanding, *Boléro* is one of the most popular musical compositions of all time. It was created for the dancer Ida Rubinstein, who was the inspiration for numerous artists of the 1910s and '20s, including Claude Debussy, Igor Stravinsky, André Gide and Darius Milhaud. In 1927 Rubenstein asked Ravel to orchestrate for her some of Isaac Albéniz's dances from *Iberia*, but the composer discovered that someone else was already working on those.

*Boléro* was born out of this confusion. Its premiere on November 22, 1928, with Rubinstein as the solo female dancer and 20 male dancers mostly standing around ogling her, created a sensation. The whole piece consists of the insistent repetition of a single melody of slightly irregular phrasing, accompanied by an ostinato rhythm on the snare drum. Its magic is almost childishly simple: repeating the melody, changing the instrumentation, gradually increasing the volume, and adding more instruments. But the true genius of the piece is in its "punch line," a sudden unexpected and drastic change of key, at which point the whole meticulous structure explodes.

The Spanish *boléro* is usually a couples dance of moderate tempo in triple meter, different from the Cuban dance by the same name, which is in duple meter. According to tradition, it was invented in 1780 by the dancer Sebastian Cerezo. In the nineteenth century, it became popular with classical composers, including Beethoven, Chopin, Weber and Berlioz.

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