

A Study of Latin American Music

MUSIC OF LATIN AMERICA. By Nicolas Slonimsky. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co. 1945. 374 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by GILBERT CHASE

A GOOD book on Latin American music has long been needed, but this is not it. The biographical sketches and the dictionary of musical terms included in the work contain quite a lot of useful information, but the critical and historical sections are superficial, inaccurate, and unreliable. If the author had confined his book to factual accounts of contemporary Latin American composers, he might have produced a mediocre but usable volume. Apparently such a scheme would not allow sufficient scope for the exhibitionism that seems to be such a prominent element in Mr. Slonimsky's character. The first part of his book, titled "Panorama of Latin American Music," is largely a colorful first-person narrative of what Slonimsky did to the Good Neighbor Policy in the course of various tours. These are some of the momentous facts we glean from this account: that Slonimsky's concert in Panama netted \$168; that he had a troublesome molar attended to in Santiago; that a Cuban critic called him "King of the Baton"; that in El Salvador four hundred persons attended his concert, while the leading daily devoted four columns to its review. Fearing that these figures will not be sufficiently impressive, he is at pains to point out that an audience of four hundred in El Salvador "would be proportionate to 32,000 people turning up at Madison Square Garden," and that four columns in *El Diario Latino* "is proportionate to thirty-six columns of print in a week-day issue of *The New York Times*." That certainly should give the reader an idea of Mr. Slonimsky's importance.

Between these outbursts of self-glorification, Mr. Slonimsky imparts some rather odd information about Latin American music, such as the density of composers per area and per population, calculated according to his private "Formula for Musicological Eligibility." This display of "frivolous profundity" may amuse the author if not his readers, but it is difficult to tell when he is trying to be serious and when he is merely being frivolous, with or without profundity. Is he being profoundly frivolous or frivolously profound when he makes such statements as these: "The creative musician occupies an exalted place in the social fabric of the Latin-American countries. He is the pride of the nation. And he

is given whole-hearted support by the government." This must be "Slonimsky in Wonderland!" In support of this view, he cites the case of the Cuban composer Lecuona, who received a gold medal—a truly magnificent gesture from the Cuban government. Lecuona is a highly successful and completely commercialized composer of popular music—his kind are always pampered everywhere. Another case: in 1943 the Mexican Government paid to the descendants of Jaime Nunó, composer of Mexico's national anthem, the sum of 368 pesos (\$92) in payment of a bill for copying expenses incurred by the composer in 1854. A noble example of "whole-hearted support by the government!" Anyone really acquainted with the situation knows that most Latin American composers are badly off and that government intervention is more often obstructive than constructive.

If composers in those countries were really the privileged beings described by Mr. Slonimsky, it is hard to understand why he should state elsewhere that, "The majority of Latin-American musicians practise other professions

besides music." As one example, he specifies: "Domingo Santa Cruz is a lawyer." Santa Cruz studied law, but never practised it, and music has been his profession for many years. Checking thirty biographical entries at random, I found only one musician who practised a non-musical profession.

According to Mr. Slonimsky, "Music publishing is a prolific business in Latin America." Actually, except in one or two countries, it is miserably backward and inadequate. He refers to Carlos Vega as "the editor" of "*Fraselogía Musical*," which he calls an "immense publishing project." But Vega is the author, not the editor, of this treatise on musical analysis. Slonimsky also refers to Vega's "*Panorama de la Música Popular Argentina*" as being profusely illustrated with choreographic drawings, whereas it does not contain a single choreographic design, being solely concerned with musical analysis. In discussing Argentine folk songs and dances, he ascribes a Spanish origin to them, simply because they have Spanish names, and in the same paragraph cites as authority Carlos Vega, whose theory is quite the opposite. This book should carry a notice, "Use with caution."

Your Literary I. Q.

By Howard Collins

WORKS OF ART IN FICTION

Mary Jo Vines, of Dallas, Texas, asks you to name the title and author of the stories summarized below, in which pictures play an important part. Allowing 5 points for each correct answer, a score of 60 is par, 70 is very good, and 80 or better is excellent. Answers are on page 44.

1. A prominent churchman's family hires a limner to paint their portraits at 15 shillings a head, each as a different historical character, in a rivalry with a neighboring family, but when the canvas is completed it is too large to fit in the house.
2. The valet of a famous English artist is accidentally buried under his master's name, and when the artist tries to paint later under the valet's name his pictures are considered forgeries.
3. A charitable art patroness is preyed upon by a gang of crooks who hold her as a prisoner in her own house after forcing her to buy a bad painting.
4. The second wife of a wealthy Englishman attends a costume ball given in her honor in a dress copied from a portrait of her husband's great aunt, only to find that his detested first wife had done the same thing on a previous occasion.
5. An Italian duke shows the envoy of his future father-in-law the portrait of his former wife.
6. The oldest son of a lordly house is haunted by the picture gallery of his ancestors, who all, with the exception of one bishop, agree that he must kidnap a fair maiden.
7. As a pioneer child she liked to hear stories about the beautiful painting of her aristocratic Scotch grandmother, but she sees the picture itself for the first time when her granddaughter receives it as a wedding gift.
8. As a versatile woman is putting the finishing touches on the portrait of her lodger as The Discus Thrower, the family of her daughter's boy friend interrupt her by coming for dinner a day ahead of time.
9. For a wedding present a wealthy collector gives his daughter a picture of a white monkey holding the rind of a squeezed orange in its outstretched paw.
10. An early masterpiece, done in his student days in Paris, is the picture of his sweetheart's foot, etched on his studio wall with the point of a compass.

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that ever possessed
a woman



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NOVEMBER 3, 1945

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