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| Miguel Aguilar Ahumada (1931--) |
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| Miguel Aguilar Ahumada is a Chilean composer, academic and musicologist. His value in the Chilean and Latin American musical panorama lies in his role as a key figure for understanding the development of musical institutions outside the main centres of production. His work is a benchmark in the singular transition to Chilean avant-garde music in the mid-twentieth century, particularly as an outstanding example on the adoption of the twelve-tone system. He was instrumental in promoting avant-garde music until the 1973 putsch compromised his ability to maintain his connections in Santiago. Aguilar received the Municipal Prize of Art in Music (1986), the Charles Ives Award for Composers (1996), the Regional Award in Musical Arts (2006), and the President of the Republic Award in the Classical Music category (2006). |
| File: aguilar01.jpg  Miguel Aguilar Ahumada is a Chilean composer, academic and musicologist. His value in the Chilean and Latin American musical panorama lies in his role as a key figure for understanding the development of musical institutions outside the main centres of production. His work is a benchmark in the singular transition to Chilean avant-garde music in the mid-twentieth century, particularly as an outstanding example on the adoption of the twelve-tone system. Early Career Although Aguilar received some formal instruction on the piano beginning at age 10, he was mainly self-taught as a musician. In 1954 he joined the National Conservatory of Music of the University of Chile, where he worked as an assistant in the library and the sound archives. There he received lessons in composition from Domingo Santa Cruz (1899-1987), Jorge Urrutia Blondel (1905-1981), and Juan Orrego Salas (1919--). He quickly became recognised as a talented student and became a teaching assistant in music history, auditory analysis, compositional analysis and harmony, without obtaining an official appointment.  Aguilar was influenced in style by the Dutch musician Fre Focke (1910-1989), who lived in Chile between 1947 and 1957. From Froke, Aguilar learned the techniques of orchestration. He deepened his understanding of the twelve-tone system, which he had already discovered through his acquaintance with the writings of René Leibowitz (1913-1972). Although some early compositions adopted a neoclassical style inspired by Hindemith, they were destroyed by the author. Consequently, all of his known works transit between the twelve-tone system, some free derivations thereof, and techniques of aleatory (chance-based) music. By the early 1960s, he had also incorporated electronic media, under the influence of his friend and colleague José Vicente Asuar (1933--). Several of Aguilar’s first known works were premiered at festivals and composers’ meetings, thereby earning him a reputation on the national circuit. His first published articles in the *Revista Musical Chilena*, mostly consisting of musical analysis, as well as musical criticism published in *El Mercurio* (after he replaced the composer Juan Orrego Salas (1919--) following the latter’s departure to the United States), also contributed to his growing reputation.  In 1956 he moved to Santiago to work at the Conservatory of the Corporación Sinfónica [Symphonic Corporation] in Concepción, the city that would become his permanent home. There he began to intensively promote concert music by organizing musical events. His close ties with the capital city Santiago were crucial to the legitimization of the musical events he was supporting in Concepción — such as the first local performance of contemporary music, which featured his own composition *Metamorfosis Sobre Un Lied De Mozart* (1956). Later Career In 1963, he received a scholarship that allowed him to study conducting with Wolfgang von der Nahme at the Höchschule of Music in Cologne, Germany, where he also studied counterpoint with Friedrich Blume. This same year, the Corporación Sinfónica joined the University of Concepción, becoming the *Escuela Superior de Música* [Higher School of Music]. Thus, when Aguilar returned from Germany in 1965, he became a university professor, a position that he maintained until 2000, serving for several periods as director of the *Escuela Superior de Música*, later named the *Instituto de Arte* and finally the *Departamento de Música*. His university position allowed him to become a major proponent of the musical avant-garde in Concepción. In October 1965, he organized the first concert entirely devoted to contemporary music in the city of Concepción, causing a reaction comparable, on a local scale, to the notorious 1913 *Skandalkonzert* of the Second Viennese School.  His work was mainly disseminated through the *Festivales de Música Chilena* [Chilean Music Festivals] that took place in Santiago until 1969. After the putsch in 1973, the new political order caused deterioration in the cultural exchange between Concepción and Santiago. The festivals in the capital were closed and, without a feasible venue for the promotion of contemporary music in the province, the possibilities of performing these repertoires were greatly reduced. As a result, Aguilar concentrated on academic research. He continued his creative work without interruption until 2003, at which time his output decreased significantly.  Aguilar received the Municipal Prize of Art in Music (1986), the Charles Ives Award for Composers (1996), the Regional Award in Musical Arts (2006), and the President of the Republic Award in the Classical Music category (2006). Style and technique Aguilar's music is based almost exclusively on the guidelines of the serial dodecaphonic (twelve-tone) language, finding its main reference in the music of Anton Webern. This creates a tension between radical and conservative attitudes in the composer’s work. On the one hand, his aesthetic orientation shows a strong resistance to the compositional techniques prescribed by the hegemonic circles of Chilean art music. These favoured Post-Romantic, Neoclassical and Expressionist styles. On the other hand, the dodecaphonic system was adopted by Aguilar for the possibilities of control it offered over what is traditionally understood as both sound material and structure. This resulted in a musical language that was constantly evolving within well-defined limits, and earned him the reputation of the father of Chilean twelve-tone music.  Aguilar’s catalogue contains mostly chamber works for various groups and solo instruments, as well as some vocal and symphonic works. He displayed an abiding interest from an early stage in the piano repertoire, including four piano sonatas that revisit Scalatti’s sonata, as well as three Webernian *Microscopías*.  File: aguilar2.jpg  His *Obertura Al Teatro Integral* (1954), inspired by Kafka and composed using Focke’s system of orchestration, is another important work; this and his *Concierto Para Siete Instrumentos* (1958, rev. 1988), remain among his best known. Thereafter, his production tended towards chamber music with various instrumental formats. After his return from Germany in 1965, he also began to incorporate aspects of aleatoric techniques influenced by John Cage. Another important aspect of his music is its relationship to literature, embodied in instrumental works inspired by Kafka (*Obertura Al Teatro Integral, Sonata No. 2* and *Fragmento Sobre ‘El Castillo’ De Kafka*) and Samuel Beckett, and in some settings of poems by Vicente Huidobro (*Tour Eiffel, Arte Poética, Poema De Huidobro, Canción De Marcelo Cielomar*), all writers with whom Aguilar empathized owing to their ironic vein. |
| Further reading:  (Claro and Urrutia)  (Masquiarán) |