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| Carlos Isamitt Alarcón |
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| omposer, musicologist, teacher and visual artist. He was a noted artist both in the field of visual arts as in music. In painting, belonged to the generation of transition towards a modernist aesthetic and an art with a critical background. In music, pioneered approaching to indigenous roots in Chile, as a researcher and as a composer, synthesizing a style that combined eclectically that material and techniques deriving from differents trends of European music. He becomed a benchmark in his field that remains even to this day. |
| (Rengo, Chile, 1887, Santiago, Chile, 1974)  Composer, musicologist, teacher and visual artist. He was a noted artist both in the field of visual arts as in music. In painting, belonged to the generation of transition towards a modernist aesthetic and an art with a critical background. In music, pioneered approaching to indigenous roots in Chile, as a researcher and as a composer, synthesizing a style that combined eclectically that material and techniques deriving from differents trends of European music. He becomed a benchmark in his field that remains even to this day.  At an early age he is accepted in the Normal School José Abelardo Núñez, graduating as teacher at the age of 17. Subsequently, in 1905, he entered the National Conservatory of Music, where he studied with Pedro Humberto Allende and Domingo Brescia. Simultaneously, he studied painting with Pedro Lira and the Spanish artist Alvarez de Sotomayor at the Chilean School of Fine Arts. He belonged to the Generation of 13, art collective that marks a break with the traditional line of the nineteenth-century visual art in Chile proposing works with social content, near to a realistic trend, such as traditionalist and Creole scenes, and the indigenous and social realities ignored by bourgeois manifestations.  The interest showed in Isamitt painting about traditional culture and especially in the native one finds its correlation in music. While some of his works were composed in a non-representational and traditional language, his most relevant and numerous repertoire are the ones where he draws all the learning obtained in indigenous communities. Between 1931 and 1937 he makes an intense field work in Mapuche reductions of southern Chile, living with them for periods up to seven months a year and assimilating the more detailed aspects of musical culture through collection, transcription and analysis. The relevance of his research is such that even today his articles, many of them available in the Revista Musical Chilena [Chilean Musical Review], remain as a reference for any study to be performed on this topic. All this knowledge was put into his musical creations, generating an own and particular style.  His work's production began at 1913. The catalog comprises essentially chamber pieces for various means and some symphonic works, many of which include Mapudungu language texts. His most representative compositions are the *Suite Sinfónica* (1932) and *Mito Araucano* (1935), both for orchestra, *Friso Araucano* (1931) and *Cantata Huilliche* (1963-65) both for soprano, baritone and orchestra, the ballet *El pozo dorado* (1942) -award-winning in the American Competition of the Municipality of Santiago in the fourth centenary of its foundation- and *Evocaciones* *Huilliches* (1945) songs for tenor and piano.  The aesthetics of Isamitt reacted against the nineteenth-century European nationalism. He criticized the procedures used by most of the nationalist composers, who transcribed or imitated folkloric tunes in art music. He believed that proceeding this way folklore were subjected to a state of servitude. Instead he admitted Bartok and de Falla prospects, as implied to build the music taking as a starting point the folkloric material developing from there a language of their own. Thus, although Isamitt's style appears in most of his works very close to Debussy's Impressionism sonority by influence of his teacher P. H. Allende and especially Carlos Lavin, they who determined that profile for the Chilean nationalism, it is certainly much more rich and complex.  Although his solid work and significant presence in the Chilean musical and pictorial milieu earned him a wide recognition among their peers, their status as "indianist-nationalist" and the ideological nature of his aesthetic decisions found some resistance in the hegemonic circles of Chilean music, akin with Germanic language and aesthetics during the first half on 20th century. Still, though belatedly, he awarded the National Prize of Arts in Music in 1965.  Isamitt's works built on thematic material taken directly from the Mapuche music seek to fully preserve the original melodies and, where it is possible, build harmonies based on the sounds of their own performing context. Thus, the composer's work is to complement by the construction of an orchestral complex, distributing harmony among different instrumental colors to emphasizes the most relevant aspects of the melody, either through the creation of an atmosphere to strengthen its rhythmic character, its emotional nature or, if it uses texts, the poetic sense of them. In this aspect debussian's traits actually appear, as the Mapuche’s tunes suggest a modal language and the composer avoids both the forte intensity and sound agglomerations, preferring instead to highlight the individual timbres or reduced instrumental groups which approximate his symphonic production to chamber music sonority. This is the feature that appears in his *Friso Araucano,* work that won the First Prize in a Composition Contest organized by the University of Chile in 1933, and probably the most representative of his cosmovision.  Despite the impressionist influence, Isamitt pioneered the introduction of Expressionism techniques into Chilean academic milieu since the 1920's decade. Thus, there appear atonality traits typical of Schoenberg and Berg before the development of dodecaphonic system and in the tendency to timbre fragmentation in the manner of Schoenberg himself at an early stage. These aspects are reflected most obviously in *Evocaciones Huilliches.*  The main of Isamitt's contribution is the introduction of new inputs to Chilean art music, from the melodic, rhythmic and harmonic, by the use of materials and stylistic ideas adopted from indigenous culture as well as its own original intervention in such material with an eclectic combination of elements who were so opposed in the European tradition as those own from the Impressionism and Expressionism trends. He was also essential for valuing the Mapuche culture and music in times when it was discredited by considering it revealing of some negative traits of the Chilean psychological profile. |
| Further reading:  (Barros and M)  (Claro)  (Claro and Urrutia, Historia de la Música en Chile)  (Díaz and P.)  (Board)  (González)  (Lago)  (Salas)  (Salas, Creación musical y música aborigen en la obra de Carlos isamitt) |