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| Cordero, Roque (Jacinto) (1917-2008) |
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| Roque Cordero was a Panamanian composer, conductor, and educator, and the only twentieth-century Panamanian composer to gain international recognition. During the 1940s, he studied composition and conducting in the United States, returning in 1950 to Panama. In 1966, difficult professional circumstances motivated his return to the United States where he completed his career and died at the age of ninety-one. His lifelong devotion to Panamanian culture is reflected in the music he composed. Most of his works are based on the twelve-tone technique, which he modified for artistic reasons or to impart a subtle Panamanian musical flavour. His prizewinning *Symphony No. 2* (1956) provoked controversy at its Caracas premiere because its advanced musical language offended those who believed that Latin American composers should avoid European avant-garde techniques and conform to a more obvious nationalist style. Cordero’s mature output includes pieces for piano, orchestra, string orchestra, soloist with orchestra, chamber ensemble, chorus, ballet, and film, as well as three pedagogical works and at least sixty articles and lectures. His creativity brought him numerous national and international commissions and honours. Although his output has not been studied in a comprehensive fashion, selected compositions have been analysed in postgraduate theses and dissertations. |
| File: Cordero 2.jpg  Roque Cordero was a Panamanian composer, conductor, and educator, and the only twentieth-century Panamanian composer to gain international recognition. During the 1940s, he studied composition and conducting in the United States, returning in 1950 to Panama. In 1966, difficult professional circumstances motivated his return to the United States where he completed his career and died at the age of ninety-one. His lifelong devotion to Panamanian culture is reflected in the music he composed. Most of his works are based on the twelve-tone technique, which he modified for artistic reasons or to impart a subtle Panamanian musical flavour. His prizewinning *Symphony No. 2* (1956) provoked controversy at its Caracas premiere because its advanced musical language offended those who believed that Latin American composers should avoid European avant-garde techniques and conform to a more obvious nationalist style. Cordero’s mature output includes pieces for piano, orchestra, string orchestra, soloist with orchestra, chamber ensemble, chorus, ballet, and film, as well as three pedagogical works and at least sixty articles and lectures. His creativity brought him numerous national and international commissions and honours. Although his output has not been studied in a comprehensive fashion, selected compositions have been analysed in postgraduate theses and dissertations.  Cordero was born in Panama City to a working-class family. His interest in music emerged during his early teens, when he joined his school orchestra on violin and school band on clarinet. He also joined the municipal Firemen’s Band as a clarinetist and copyist. By his mid-teens, he had begun composing pieces for band in a popular style. Though largely self-taught in solfège, harmony, and instrumentation, he sought additional instruction from Herbert de Castro and Pedro Rebolledo. After the success of his band works, he became interested in orchestral music and in 1938 founded the orchestra of the Musical Union, which later developed into the National Orchestra. In 1939, he completed his first orchestral work, *Capricho interiorano.* He then began studying the melodic and rhythmic elements of Panamanian folk dances in order to give his future works a national flavour without resorting to direct musical quotations.  In 1943, a scholarship enabled Cordero to travel to the United States to study music education at the University of Minnesota. That same year, he received funding from conductor Dimitri Mitropoulos to study counterpoint with Austrian twelve-tone composer Ernst Krenek at nearby Hamline University. Although Krenek believed that the European twelve-tone technique was not congruent with Cordero’s desire to be a ‘Panamanian’ composer, Cordero convinced him to teach him the method so he could use it in the service of his own aesthetic. In 1946, with the completion of Cordero’s *Sonatina for Violin and Piano*, he and Krenek agreed that he had achieved his ideal of combining the twelve-tone system with Panamanian musical elements.  From that point forward, Cordero employed the twelve-tone method for most of his compositions, though he modified the technique. To suggest the flavour of Panamanian folk music, he crafted his twelve-note rows so that they would create melodies or harmonies that had tonal characteristics without being explicitly tonal. Sometimes he violated the rules of the system by repeating pitches or altering their order. He energized his musical textures with persistently repeated short rhythmic figures, meters that changed frequently, and rhythms of Panamanian folk dances such as the *mejorana*, the *punto*, the *cumbia*, the *pasillo*, and especially the *tamborito*.  By the time Cordero returned to Panama in 1950, he had graduated from Hamline University, married Elizabeth Johnson, won a Guggenheim fellowship, interacted with notable Latin American and North American composers, and studied conducting with Leon Barzin, Stanley Chapple, and Dimitri Mitropoulos. In Panama City, he obtained a teaching post at the National Conservatory, where he became Assistant Director in 1951. When the conservatory was restructured in 1953 and renamed National Institute of Music, he was appointed Director. In that capacity, he introduced a number of reforms to the curriculum, student body, and staff.  In 1957, Cordero’s *Symphony No. 2* won the Caro de Boesi prize at the Second Festival of Latin American Music in Caracas. Arriving at the festival for the premiere, he was faced with a controversy about the modernist idiom of his symphony. Some believed that his twelve-tone musical language was unsuited for Latin American compositions, which should conform to a more obviously nationalist style. Cordero explained, as he would many times in the future, that nationalism is an aesthetic but the twelve-tone system is a technique, anda composer may use any technique in the service of an aesthetic.  File: Cordero 1.jpg  After his international exposure in Caracas, Cordero began receiving commissions from abroad including one from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation for his award-winning violin concerto (1962). He began traveling periodically in the United States and Latin America to give lectures, guest conduct, judge composition contests, and participate in the Inter-American Music Festivals in Washington as well as the meetings of the Inter-American Music Council.  In 1964, Cordero resigned as Director of the National Institute of Music to become conductor of the National Orchestra. His plans to professionalise the ensemble, however, were not supported. This disappointment, combined with the frustrations he had experienced while Director of the music institute, led him in 1966 to return to the United States as Professor of Composition and Assistant Director of the Latin American Music Centre at Indiana University.  Cordero left Indiana University in 1969 and moved to New York to serve as a music consultant for Peer-Southern publishing company. In 1972, he relocated to Normal, Illinois to become the first Professor of Composition at Illinois State University. There, his creativity was stimulated by the excellent performers on the teaching staff, for whom he composed many solo and chamber works. During his twenty-seven years at Illinois State University, he established a series of campus concerts of Latin American music, fulfilled commissions, presented his music at festivals, and accepted invitations to lecture and guest conduct. He also composed his most ambitious work, *Cantata para la paz* (1979). His accomplishments were rewarded with grants, commissions, and honours including the Koussevitzky International Recording Award (1974) for his violin concerto.  File: 01 I. Largo - Allegro strepitoso - Allegro moderato, Concerto for Violin and Orchestra.mp3  File: 02 II. Lento, Concerto for Violin and Orchestra.mp3  File: 03 III. Allegro vigoroso, Concerto for Violin and Orchestra.mp3  Although he retired in 1987 from full-time teaching, Cordero continued to teach part-time at Illinois State University until 1999. The following year, he moved to Dayton, Ohio, to be near family. In 2008, after a short illness, he passed away at the age of ninety-one. His remains were repatriated and buried in Panama City on his ninety-fifth birthday, 16 August 2012. Selected List of Compositions:Piano *Sonatina rítmica* (1943)  *Rhapsody for Two Pianos* (1945)  *Nine Preludes* (1947)  *Duo 1954* (1954, for two pianos)  *Sonata breve* (1966)  *Five New Preludes* (1983)  *Sonata for Piano* (1985)  *Tres meditaciones poéticas* (1995) Solo instruments *Soliloquios No. 1* (1975, flute)  *Soliloquios No. 2* (1976, alto saxophone)  *Soliloquios No. 3* (1976, clarinet)  *Soliloquios No. 4* (1981, percussion)  *Soliloquios No. 5* (1981, bass)  *Cinco mensajes para cuatro amigos* (1983, guitar)  *Rapsodia panameña* (1988, violin)  *Three Preludes* (1988, guitar)  *Soliloquios No. 6* (1992, cello)  *Tres veces 13* (1997, harp) Chamber music *Two Short Pieces* (1945, violin and piano)  *Sonatina for Violin and Piano* (1946)  *Quinteto* (1949, flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano)  *String Quartet No. 1* (1960)  *Sonata for Violoncello and Piano* (1963)  *Tres mensajes breves* (1966, viola and piano)  *Circunvoluciones y móviles* (1967, chamber ensemble)  *Permutaciones 7* (1967, clarinet, trumpet, violin, viola, bass, piano, timpani)  *String Quartet No. 2* (1968)  *Paz, Paix, Peace* (1969, harp and four trios)  *Música veinte* (1970, voices and chamber ensemble)  *An mar tule* (1971, film music for chamber ensemble)  *String Quartet No. 3* (1973)  *Variations and Theme for Five* (1975, wind quintet)  *Double Concerto without Orchestra* (1978, violin and piano)  *Music for Five Brass* (1980, brass quintet)  *Poetic Nocturne of the Min River* (1981, flutes, bass clarinet, marimba, percussion)  *Petite mobiles* (1983, bassoon and trios)  *String Quartet No. 4* (1983)  *Three Permutations 3* (1984, violin, cello, bass)  *Serenatas* (1987, flute, clarinet, viola, harp)  *Dodecaconcerto* (1990, chamber ensemble)  *Four Messages for Flutes and Piano* (1992)  *Duos for Oboe and Bassoon* (1995) Concertos *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra [No. 1] in E Minor* (1944)  *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* (1962)  *Concertino for Viola and String Orchestra* (1968)  *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 2* (2000) Orchestra *Capricho interiorano* (1939)  *Panamanian Overture No. 2* (1944)  *Symphony No. 1* (1945)  *Ocho miniaturas* (1948, for small orchestra)  *Introducción y Allegro burlesco* (1950)  *Rapsodia campesina* (1953)  *Setetule* (1956, ballet)  *Symphony No. 2* (1956)  *Cinco mensajes breves* (1959)  *Symphony with One Theme and Five Variations (Symphony No. 3)* (1965)  *Momentum jubilo* (1973, fanfare)  *Six Mobiles for Orchestra* (1975)  *Obertura de salutación* (1980)  *Symphony No. 4, ‘Panamanian’* (1986)  *Fanfarria jubilosa* (1994, brass, woodwinds, percussion)  *Centennial Symphonic Tribute* (1997) String orchestra *Movimiento sinfónico* (1946)  *Adagio trágico* (1955)  *Danza en forma de fuga* (1958)  *Mensaje fúnebre* (In memoriam Dimitri Mitropoulos; 1961, with solo clarinet)  *Elegy* (1973) Cantata *Cantata para la paz* (1979, baritone solo, mixed choir, orchestra) Selected List of Writings Cordero wrote articles and lectures throughout his career. For reasons of space, the following list omits very short articles, newspaper articles (most of which were published in Panamanian newspapers), concert reviews, and unpublished lectures.  (1952) ‘El folklore en la creación musical panameña’, *Universidad* (Panama City) no. 31: 103–13.  (1956) *Curso de solfeo*, Panama City: Departamento de Bellas Artes y Publicaciones [del] Ministerio de Educación [de la] República de Panamá. (Reprinted in 1963 [Buenos Aires, Ricordi] and 1975 [Mexico City, Ricordi].)  (1957) ‘¿Dodecafonismo versus nacionalismo?’, *Clave: Revista Musical Venezolana* (Caracas) 6 no. 5: 13.  (1957) ‘Actualidad musical de Panamá’, *Buenos Aires Musical* (Buenos Aires) 12 no. 197: 5. (This was later expanded and updated to become ‘La música en Panamá’, *Revista* *Lotería*, 1962; see below.)  (1959) ‘¿Nacionalismo versus dodecafonismo?’, *Revista Musical Chilena* 13 no. 67: 28–38.  (1962) ‘La música en Panamá’, *Revista* *Lotería* (Panama City) 7 no. 75: 56–61.  (1964) ‘Relaciones de la educación musical con los conservatorios de música’, *Revista Musical Chilena* 18 nos. 87–8: 63–67.  (1964) ‘Música y educación’, *Tierra y Dos Mares* (Panama City) 4 no. 20: 3, 26, 44.  (1966) ‘La música en Centroamérica y Panamá’, *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 8 no. 3: 411–18.  (1967) ‘El público y la música viva’, *Music in the Americas,* ed. by George List and Juan Orrego-Salas, [Bloomington, Indiana]: Indiana University Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore, and Linguistics, 57–63. (This is the transcript of a lecture given by Cordero in 1965 at a joint meeting of the First Inter-American Seminar of Composers and the Second Inter-American Conference on Ethnomusicology, Indiana University.)  (1977) ‘Vigencia del músico culto’, *América Latina en su música*, ed. by Isabel Aretz, 154–73. Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores; Paris: Unesco.  (1980) ‘Panama’, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. by Stanley Sadie, vol. 14, 151–54. London: Macmillan.  (1984) ‘Music of the Americas, Its Influence on a Multicultural Society’, *ISME Yearbook* 11: 41–43. (This is the transcript of a lecture given by Cordero in 1984 at the sixteenth conference of the International Society for Music Education, Eugene, Oregon.)  (1986) ‘Economic Realities and People’, *ISME Yearbook* 13: 36–39. (This is the transcript of a lecture given by Cordero in 1986 at the seventeenth conference of the International Society for Music Education, Innsbruck, Austria.)  (1987) ‘Remembranzas de Roque Cordero’, *Revista Lotería* (Panama City) no. 368: 15–25. (Reprinted in 1988 with a brief introduction but without the curriculum vitae as ‘Roque Cordero: Testimonio de un artista’, *Panameños ilustres* [N.p.; printed in Costa Rica]: J. Conte-Porras, 371–81.)  (2001) (With T. Scruggs) ‘Panama, II. Traditional Music. 1. Instruments; 2. Songs and Dances’, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. by Stanley Sadie, vol. 19, 25–28. London: Macmillan. (The same article is available in *Grove Music Online.*) |
| Further reading:  (R. Cordero, Remembranzas de Roque Cordero)  (Townsend)  (Béhague, The 1930s and 1940s and Countercurrents: Since 1950)  (Béhague, Cordero, Roque )  (Chase)  (Sider)  (Brawand)  (Casal)  (Cruz de Gracia)  (De Dobay)  (Engle)  (Ennett)  (Filós Gooch)  (Greaves)  (Guevara)  (Kerr)  (Paputsas) |