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| Revueltas Sánchez, Silvestre (1899–1940) |
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| Silvestre Revueltas was a Mexican modernist composer and violinist. Known mainly for his references to modern Mexican culture, Revueltas is regarded as an essential figure during the Mexican modernist and nationalist movement in music. He composed chamber works, vocal pieces, and music for larger symphonic orchestras, and was also one of the most successful film composers in the Mexican film industry during the 1930s. Suffering from severe alcoholism and health problems, Revueltas died of pneumonia in December 1940. |
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In 1916, during the armed uprisings of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920), Revueltas performed in the Cine Cartagena’s silent film orchestra located in the westside neighborhood of Tacubaya. His stay in Mexico City came to end in September of 1917 when Revueltas and his brother Fermín enrolled in St. Edward’s College in Austin, Texas. Fermín pursued his studies in painting while Silvestre continued his music education. Here, Revueltas was exposed to works by French Symbolist composer Claude Debussy (1862–1918), which had lasting effect on his compositional output. The transition to Austin from Mexico City proved to be difficult for the Revueltas brothers and, as a result, they moved to Chicago in 1918 where Silvestre enrolled in the Chicago Musical College and Fermín went to Chicago Art School. Silvestre entered a new chapter in his musical education through his studies with Feliz Borowski (1872–1956) and violinist Leon Sametini. While in Chicago, Revueltas performed in silent film houses close to his home and, due to the rise in Prohibition policies and radical politics, he was exposed to leftist ideologies. He later married an opera student, Jules Klarcey. With her, he had one daughter, Carmen, born in 1922. The 1920s During the 1920s, Revueltas moved back and forth between Mexico and the United States. After a brief stay in Mexico, Revueltas returned to Chicago and studied violin with Czech violinist Otakor Sevcik (1852–1934) and continued his studies there until 1923. He later returned to Mexico after the death of his father, José Revueltas Gutiérrez.  In 1924, composer Carlos Chávez organized a series of New Music concerts that featured Revueltas on works by Milhaud, Varèse, Satie, and Poulenc. During his sojourn, Revueltas formed a trio with pianist Francisco Agea and soprano Lupe Medina. The trio traveled through major cities in Mexico and in 1928, ventured to San Antonio, Texas to perform at Beethoven Hall. Enthralled by the vibrant theatre culture and the rich diversity of a Mexican diaspora community, Revueltas stayed on after the trio disbanded. Continuing his performance career in silent film theatres, Revueltas joined orchestras at the Aztec and Texas Theaters in addition to joining the string faculty at the San Antonio College of Music.  In 1927–28, Revueltas moved to Mobile, Alabama to perform in another silent film theatre, but his time there was short-lived due to the utilization of synchronized sound technology, resulting in his return to San Antonio. At the end of 1927, Revueltas received an invitation from Carlos Chávez to conduct concerts of the Orquesta Sinfoníca de México. During Revueltas’s time away from Mexico City, he composed several small chamber works including *Batik, Tierra p’ las macetas,* and *El Afilador.*  After returning to Mexico in 1929, Revueltas held directing positions with the Sinfoníca de México and the Conservatorio Nacional de México. Revueltas continued to hone his composition skills by enrolling in Chávez’s compositional classes in order to develop new music for the symphonic orchestra. The 1930s The early to mid 1930s mark the most productive and experimental decade of Revueltas’s career, consisting of new conducting appointments and conservatory teaching opportunities, new collaborations with dancers, poets and artists, work in the burgeoning film industry, and the composition of full orchestral works.  After Revueltas returned from San Antonio, Chávez immediately emerged him in the music scene in Mexico City, inviting him to perform with the Orquesta Sinfónica de México and providing positions in the newly formed Sinfónica de México and the Conservatorio Nacional de México. While working for the Sinfónica de México, Revueltas conducted and organized several concerts and wrote the program notes. Here, he began to develop his own style of satirical program note writing reflecting approaches utilized by the French Dadaists and the newly formed avant-garde Mexican literary movement, *Estridentismo*.  In 1931, Revueltas traveled to Cuernavaca with Chávez’s support to work on a full orchestral work. The piece *Cuauhnáhuac* (the *náhuatl t*ranslation for Cuernavaca) initiated another practice for Revueltas of naming works after geographical locations and programmatic titles. Works that followed in this vein include*,* the dissonant *Esquinas* (1931)*, Ventanas* (1931)*,* *Colorines* (1932), and the picture postcard work *Janitzio* (1933)*.* These works featured compositional elements known as the Revueltian style such as polytonality, persistent syncopation, references to folk and popular material, and eclectic timbres.  Continuing his career in film music, Revueltas transitioned from performer to composer. In 1934, Revueltas collaborated with leftist photographer Paul Strand pseudo-documentary, *Redes.* Revueltas performance career in the silent film houses in the United States and Mexico allowed him to compose the film’s full underscoring. Directly after his involvement in the film, director Fernando de Fuentes acquired Revueltas for his 1935 Revolutionary melodrama *¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa!* in which he also played a small role as the bar pianist. Revueltas’s score incorporated several well-known *corridos* from the Mexican Revolution in order to construct the appropriate atmosphere. His cinematic film score solidified paradigms for the Revolutionary melodrama for years to come. He composed for eight feature films including Chano Ureta’s *La noche de los mayas* (1939), in which composer and conductor José Luis Limantour later turned Revueltas’s underscoring into a four-movement symphonic suite in 1960.  Revueltas’s political support surfaced in 1938 when he travelled to Spain during the Spain Civil War with the leftist organization the *Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios* (LEAR), demonstrating his support for the Republican cause. When he returned to Mexico, he continued teaching at the conservatory and composing, including his Afrocuban inspired tone poem *Sensemayá* (1938).  Revueltas died in 1940 due to complications with alcoholism and pneumonia. List of WorksBallet Music *El renacuajo paseador* (1933) reorchestrated in 1936  *Troka* (1933)  *La Coronela* (1940) Instrumental Chamber Works *Tierra pa’ las macetas* (1924)  *Prelude* (1924)  *Batik* (1926)  *El Afilador*, for piano and violin (1924-29)  *Cuatro pequeños trozos* for two violins and cello (1929)  *Pieza para doce instrumentos* (1929)  *Cuarteto de cuerdas no. 1* (1930)  *Cuarteto de cuerdas no. 2, Magueyes* (1931)  *Cuarteto de cuerdas no. 3* (1931)  *Madrigal* for violin and cello (1931)  *Cuarteto de cuerdas no. 4 Música de feria* (1932)  *Tres Piezas,* for piano and violin (1932)  *8 x radio* (1933)  *Toccata (sin fuga)* (1933)  *Planos* (1934)  *Canto de guerra de los frentes leales* (1938)  *Tres sonetos* (1938)  *Dos pequeñas piezas serias* (1940) Chamber Orchestra *Cuauhnáhuac* (1931)  *Colorines* (1931)  *Alcancías* (1932)  *Homenaje a Federico García Lorca* (1936)  *Sensemayá* (1937) Film Scores *Redes* (1935)  *¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa!* (1935)  *El Indio* (1936)  *Ferrocarriles de Baja California* (1938)  *Los de abajo* (1939)  *La noche de los mayas* (1939)  *El signo de la muerte* (1939)  *¡Que viene mi marido!* (1940) Orchestral Works *Pieza para orquestra* (1929)  *Esquinas* (1931), reorchestrated in 1933  *Ventanas* (1931)  *Cuauhnáhuac* (1932)  *Janitzio* (1933)  *Caminos* (1934)  *Danza geométrica* (1934)  *Sensemayá* (1938) Piano Works *Adagio* (1918)  *Tragedia en forma de rábano (no es plagio)* (1924) Theatre Music *Los caballeros* (1936)  *Un retablo for the revista Upa y Apa* (1939) Vocal Music *Chanson d’automne* (1920)  *Elegy* (1926)  *Dúo para pato y canario* (1931)  *El tecolote* (1932)  *Ranas* (1932)  *Parián* (1932)  *Amiga que te vas* (1936)  *Caminando* (1937)  *Frente a Frente* (1937)  *México en España* (1937)  *No sé por qué piensas tú…* (1937)  *Canto de una muchacha negra* (1938)  *Siete canciones de niños y dos canciones profanes* (1938)  *Hora de junio* (1938) |
| Further reading:  (Contreras Soto, Silvestre Revueltas: baile, duelo y son)  (Contreras Soto, Silvestre Revueltas En Escena y En Pantalla: la música del compositor en el cine, el teatro y la danza)  (Kolb)  (Parker, Revueltas, the Chicago Years)  (Parker, Revueltas in San Antonio and Mobile) |