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| Héctor Tosar (1923-2002) |
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| Héctor Tosar was a composer, pianist, director, and composition teacher in Uruguay, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and United States. One of the best-known Uruguayan composers of his generation, his works have been presented in festivals worldwide. He started studying piano with Wilhelm Kolischer, harmony with Tomás Mujica, and composition with Lamberto Baldi, and completed his studies in the United States and France where he studied composition with Aaron Copland, Arthur Honegger, Jean Rivier, and Darius Milhaud, and orchestral direction with Serge Koussevitzky, Eugène Bigot, and Jean Fournet.  The defining characteristics of his works are his use of a compositive principle based on ‘groups of sounds,’ and his search for musical communication by means of expressiveness and lyricism. His catalogue includes soloist works, mainly for piano, as well as symphonic, chamber, and vocal works, and, in his last period, compositions with new instruments, such as the synthesiser. |
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In his book about Tosar, Coriún Aharonián made a stylistic periodisation of Tosar’s work, outlining several periods: the first one, according to Aharonián, is characterised by the use of tonal procedures that become polytonal, or 'free atonal;' this period includes various pieces for piano: *Sonatina n° 1* and *Danza criolla* (1940), and *Suite para piano* (1944), among others. It also includes musicalisation of texts, like the songs for piano and voice *En tu alma, Soledad,* and *Mundo,* with a text by Jacques Després (c. 1939); the six songs in *Seis canciones de ‘El barrio de Santa Cruz,’* with words by José María Pemán (1942); and *Solitude,* based on a poem by R. M. Rilke (1943). Orchestral pieces, such as his first symphonic work *Toccata* (1940), which was directed — like *Concertino*, for piano and orchestra (1941) — by Lamberto Baldi, with the *Orquesta Sinfónica del Servicio Oficial de Difusión Radioeléctrica* [*Official Radio-Electric Broadcasting Service's Symphonic Orchestra]* (OSSODRE) also stand out as significant.  Between 1946 and 1951, Tosar received the Guggenheim Foundation scholarship as well as scholarships from the French and Uruguayan governments to continue his studies in composition and orchestral direction in the United States and Paris. He composed, among others, *Sonata para violín y piano* (1948), *Momento sinfónico* (1949), and *Sinfonía para cuerdas* (1951), one of the most representative pieces in his catalogue, which was performed in Venezuela, Mexico, and the United States. That same year, Tosar created *Oda a Artigas* for the centenary celebration of Uruguay's national hero, Gervasio Artigas’; it was a piece for reciter and orchestra with words by Luis Bausero, as well as other songs for choir, with the outstanding *Cinco madrigales* (1956) among them. *Salmo 102* (1957), for soprano, choir, and orchestra, is a piece in one movement, highlighted by Tosar for its ‘exacerbated lyrism’ and use of chromaticism which, as in *Te Deum* (1960), for bass, choir, and orchestra, characterises the passage towards a wider harmonic freedom. Invited by Juan José Castro, Tosar taught from 1961 to 1966 at the Music Conservatory of Puerto Rico. There, based on the total chromatic, he composed the last of his *Cuatro piezas* (1961-1963) for piano with ‘tango rhythm.’ His gradual change in style materialised in *Stray Birds* (1963), for baritone and eleven instruments. A text by Rabindranath Tagore served as inspiration for the piece, which used serial procedures with ‘groups of sounds’ to replace harmony, thus creating ‘fixed zones in the musical space,’ according to Tosar (Aharonián44).  In the 1970s, Tosar composed a series of eight *Reflejos* for various instrumental formations. In 1976, he returned to the piano with *Tres piezas para piano,* thus beginning a new compositive period, followed by *Nómoi* and *Ecos* (1977), and *Sul re* (1981), a fundamental piece of the period in which the repetition of the D note was considered structural by the composer. From 1979 to 1981, he lived as a composition teacher, first in Venezuela at the Simón Bolivar Music Institute, and then at Indiana University in Bloomington, USA. In those years he composed the *Concerto* for piano and orchestra (1979), *Cadencias* (1979), for orchestra, and *Trio para cañas* (1980) in addition to *Sul re*.  Although Tosar continued to write instrumental pieces like *Cinco piezas concertantes para violín y orquesta* (1987) and *Septeto* (1989), the early 1980s marked the last period in his production, characterised by the timbral exploration with the synthesiser. *La gran flauta* (1988), which uses flute timbres, was followed by *Música festiva* (1988), characterised by rhythmical exploration, and *Voces y viento* (1989), with moments of improvisation. His last work, *Passacaglia sobre el nombre de Bach* (1994) was composed for organ. Selected Works:Orchestra *Toccata* (1940)  *Sinfonía nº 1* (1945)  *Momento sinfónico* (1949)  *Sinfonía para cuerdas* (1951)  *Serie sinfónica* (1953)  *Cuatro piezas para orquesta* (1965)  *Recitativo y variaciones* *para orquesta* (1968)  *Reflejos III* (1973)  *Reflejos VII* (1974)  *Cadencias* (1979) Soloist and orchestra *Concertino* (for piano and orchestra; 1941)  *Oda a Artigas* (for reciter and orchestra; text: Luis Bausero; 1951),  *Salmo 102* (for soprano, choir and orchestra; 1957)  *Sinfonía concertante* (for piano and orchestra; 1959)  *Te Deum* (for bass, choir and orchestra; 1960)  *Concerto* (piano and orchestra;1979)  *Cinco piezas concertantes* (violin and orchestra; 1988) Choir *Infinito* (1952)  *Tres canciones nocturnas* (1953)  *Cinco madrigales* (1956)  *Magnificat anima mea* (1957) Voice and other instruments *En tu alma, Soledad and Mundo* (c. 1939)  *Seis canciones de ‘El barrio de Santa Cruz’* (1942)  *Solitude* (1943)  *Stray Birds* (for baritone and eleven instruments; 1963) Chamber music *Sonata para violín y piano* (1948)  *Divertimento para quinteto de vientos* (1957)  *A cuatro* (1969)  *A Trece* (1970)  *Reflejos I* (wind quintet; 1972)  *Reflejos II* (wind quintet; 1972)  *Reflejos IV* (string quintet; 1973)  *Reflejos V* (string quintet; 1973)  *Reflejos VIII* (1975)  *Trío para cañas* (1980)  *Septeto* (1989) Pianoforte *Sonatina nº 1* (1940)  *Danza criolla* (1940)  *Suite para piano* (1944)  *Sonatina nº 2* (1954)  *Cuatro piezas* (1961-1963)  *Tres piezas para piano* (1976)  *Nómoi* (1977)  *Ecos* (1977)  *Sul re* (1981) Other soloist works *Soliloquio* (oboe; 1978)  *Gandhara* (guitar; 1984)  *Homenaje a Debussy* (synthesiser; 1988)  *La gran flauta* (synthesiser; 1988)  *Música festiva* (synthesiser; 1988)  *Voces y viento* (synthesiser; 1989)  *Passacaglia sobre el nombre de Bach* (version for organ; 1994) |
| Further reading:  (Aharonián, Héctor Tosar (1923-2002): Muerte de un gran compositor)  (Aharonián, Héctor Tosar: Compositor Uruguayo)  (López Chirico)  (Orquesta de Cámara Mayo)  (Salgado, Breve Historia de la Música Culta en el Uruguay)  (Salgado, Tosar (Errecart), Héctor)  (SODRE Choir and Symphonic Orchestra)  (Tosar) |