

**Estancia, Four Dances op. 8a**  
**ALBERTO GINASTERA**

Is there a natural human urge to divide the works of great composers into three stages (“youth,” “middle,” and “late”)? Though there is considerable controversy as to the appropriateness of the Beethovenian stages of “Classical,” “Heroic,” and “Late” (one early biographer who couldn’t appreciate the last works termed this final stage as “Decadent”), one thing is certain: Beethoven, himself, didn’t sort his works into those or any such terms.

The great Argentinian composer, Alberto Ginastera, (1916-1983) evidently did self-classify his works into "Objective Nationalism" (1934–1948), "Subjective Nationalism" (1948–1958), and "Neo-Expressionism" (1958–1983). Ginastera, in a manner similar to Bartok with Hungarian folk songs, incorporated Argentinian folk music into his compositions more directly in his earlier works, indirectly in his “middle” period, and finally just sublimated the spirit or essence of the indigenous music in his later opuses which are cosmopolitan in a rigorous manner – we experienced *Puneña # 2 op. 45* in Joshua Roman’s challenging solo cello IPO concert (with chocolate truffle accompaniment).

Ginastera moved to Europe in 1970. He died in Geneva, Switzerland, at the age of 67 where he was buried in the Cimetière des Rois. (Though Ginastera was born in Buenos Aires, his mother was of Italian descent and, perhaps as a reflection of her heritage, later pronounced his name with a soft “g” like “Giorgio,” not like the voiceless glottic fricatives of “Jorge” in Spanish. Pronounced either way seems acceptable. Just, please, don’t use a hard “g” like in “Chicago.”)

The *Four Dances from Estancia* is an early work op. 8a (1941) written only a few years after Ginastera graduated in 1938 from Williams Conservatory in Buenos Aires. *Estancia* was commissioned by Lincoln Kirstein (who had earlier commissioned Copland’s *Billy the Kid*), but his Ballet Caravan folded before *Estancia* could be produced. The ballet had to wait until 1952 for an official premiere, but the four dances Ginastera excerpted have been an orchestral “hit” since their premiere in 1943, and the “Danza Final, malambo” is so exciting that it is often performed as an orchestral encore – including by Gustavo Dudamel when he toured the U.S. with his Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela.

*Estancia* means a farm or cattle ranch, and the ballet is a tale of a “gaucho” (Argentinian cowboy) on the vast, grassy Argentine Pampas and his striving to gain the love of a girl by various feats of gaucho manhood. This setting was deeply important to Ginastera. "Whenever I have crossed the Pampa or have lived in it for a time, my spirit felt itself inundated by changing impressions, now joyful, now melancholy, some full of euphoria and others replete with a profound tranquility, produced by its limitless immensity and by the transformation that the countryside undergoes in the course of a day." *Estancia* follows the Aristotelian mandate to have all action completed in one 24-hour period.

The first dance “Los trabajadores agrícolas” (The Farm Workers) depicts the laborers who come into town. This malambo is an Argentine folk dance that has been described as a battle between gauchos, who stomp to the music. Ginastera alternates triple and duple rhythms – evoking Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring with far fewer “modern conveniences” as Debussy slyly described the extreme complexities of the 1913 work. The quieter “Danza del trigo” (Wheat Dance) feels like another of those “cowboy waltzes” where the guys are under the stars dreaming of their absent partners. Actually, this is a

depiction of dawn. The lovely melodies of the solo flute and violin are fragrant – of a harvest? “Los peones de hacienda” (The Ranch Hands) is another vigorous movement with notable timpani flourishes. The “Danza final” (Final Dance) returns to the spirit and rhythm of the malambo. The highly syncopated hemiola patterns depict the spirited movements of both hands and feet, and there seems to be whoopin’ and hollerin’ in the concluding mix. Don’t be surprised if you have a “mind meld” with the infectious, insistently repetitive closing rhythm.

- *IPO Board Member Charles Amenta M.D.*