

Biographical Information of Gastón Arce Sejas

Gastón Arce was born in La Paz on December 25, 1963. In 1983, he began formal studies at the *Facultad de Bellas Artes de la Universidad Nacional de la Plata* in Argentina, where he studied with Mariano Etkin. In 1991, Arce was appointed Professor of Composition at the National Conservatory of Music in La Paz. Until 1998, he was also a member of the faculty at the Universidad Evangélica Boliviana, where he served as Director of the Music Department. Trained as a conductor as well as a composer, Arce conducted the National Conservatory Contemporary Ensemble between 1992 and 1994. In 1996, he worked under composers Francisco Kroepfl and Julio Viera at the Laboratory for Musical Investigation and Production at the Recoleta Cultural Center in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Currently, he is Director of the Department of Music at Loyola University in La Paz and Professor of Music Education at the “Mariscal Braun” German school.

Arce’s oeuvre encompasses many genres, including orchestral, solo, choral and chamber works. Additionally, he has written for native instrument ensembles. He has been recognized with many awards, including the second and third prizes in the Adrian Patiño municipal competition in 1994, and the first prize for his Violin Sonata in the “XXIX Concurso de Composición de Promociones Musicales” in 1995. In 1999, the Junior Chamber of Bolivia presented him with the “Young Outstanding Personality in Bolivian Culture” award. A composer of international reputation, Arce has had premieres in Bolivia, Argentina, Cuba, the United States, and Canada, and his works are performed with regularity in his native Bolivia. Along with other compositions, both of his string quartets have been recorded. Recent commissions for Arce include works for musicians and institutions in Spain, Belgium, and Australia.

Una Evocación Andina, Op. 7, no. 1 by Gastón Arce Sejas

Arce's first string quartet is entitled *Una Evocación Andina, Op. 7, No. 1*, and the second, *El Habitáculo del Niño, Op. 20, No. 2*. He has also composed an early short piece, *Pieza para Cuerdas, Op. 2* for string quartet. Arce considers his compositional career to have three stages thus far. The first stage reflects his exploration of modern compositional trends; particularly those exemplified in the avant-garde styles of Stockhausen, Boulez, and Xenakis, which were so popular in the 50's, 60's and 70's.¹ As a student he listened to the music of these icons, and in his works experimented with those styles. In his second stage, he was influenced by Stravinsky. "One may even say that I might have used some of his gestures, as well as those of Ligeti, who composed in different layers of micro-polyphony."² Arce describes his third and current period (1996 to the present), as a period of great freedom.

Today, I don't have any qualms about writing a completely tonal piece, as I had when I was a student. (When I was a student, I would discard what I would now consider wonderful ideas, simply because they were tonal). Now, I believe that I have matured and see things more simply. I will use what I need to use, whether it is tonal or not, in order to create my music.³

Even though *Una Evocación Andina* was written during his second period, Arce would probably classify it as belonging to his third period based on the style in which it was written (tonal, with folk influences). This is likely due to the fact that the piece was commissioned by one of the most famous string quartets at that time in Argentina, the

¹ Arce, interviews.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Cuarteto Almerare.⁴ Regarding the commission, Arce explains:

I used to study viola with the violist of that ensemble. During one of their tours in Latin America, they were going to stop in Bolivia, so they commissioned a piece that would be well-suited to play in their host Andean country. However, due to financial changes to their tour, the *Cuarteto Almerare* did not stop in Bolivia, and therefore did not premiere the piece.⁵

As far as Arce knows, they never performed it.⁶ Written under these circumstances, *Una Evocación Andina* is quite a contrast to other compositions that Arce was writing at that time that were influenced by avant-garde elements such as Stockhausen's electronic music. With a title that reflects the intention of "remembering my native land," this early work is rather conservative and contains Andean folk elements. Arce does not consider the quartet a mature work, but views its compositional style as intuitive rather than rational:

Looking in retrospect, as I see this string quartet I am somewhat surprised that there was quite a bit of intuition while writing this work. It was not a piece written with the full rational approach of a mature composer. This is the kind of thing that one can only see after you have been distanced from the piece and some time has passed.⁷

In reality, this quartet shows more of Arce's current style, and he realizes he has come full circle.

Gastón Arce has never denied the potential of using the resources of Bolivia's

⁴ According to Arce, the *Cuarteto Almerare* performed the entire Beethoven cycle in many Latin American and European countries. They have also recorded and premiered a number of Latin American works. The group consists of three Almerare brothers and Guillermo Jacobobitz. They reside in the city of La Plata.

⁵ Arce, interviews.

⁶ The *Una Evocación Andina* was premiered in Midland, Texas by the Lindsayan String Quartet in November 1998. It was later recorded as part of the CD, *Bolivia: The Unknown Sounds*, released in May 1999.

⁷ Arce, interviews.

folk music. Nevertheless, he believes it is very important to state that when he uses folk material, he does not do it to deliberately identify his music with the Bolivian Andean culture, simply because he is Bolivian. Rather, he uses folk elements because he finds those sonorities interesting. In this quartet his sources of inspiration were the characteristics of Andean music:

...such as my use of the interval of the minor third, which is typical of Andean music. Also, in the *Danza Lunar*, I believe I capture the spirit of the Andean dances, with their binary rhythms. In the *Canon*, I use rhythms typical of the *huayño*.⁸

Arce feels that the interpreters of this work would not need much of his input. "If you follow exactly what I put in the score, the piece plays itself."⁹ However, he says there can be two interpretations: "One interpretation would be absolutely faithful to the score, with all the dynamics and rhythms just as the score calls for. The other way to look at the work is through the lens of a romanticist, which might somehow make the end product different."¹⁰

The first movement, titled *Preludio*, is brief and very similar to the final movement. Both incorporate use of the minor third. From a performer's perspective, this is not a difficult movement. However, it is important that the lower three voices have a good blend in the tremolo in measure 2, as well as arriving at measure 3 together.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

“una evocacion andina”

CUARTETO N.º1

1. PRELUDIO

Gastón Arce Sejas
1988/96

Lento e molto espress. (♩ ca: 50 / ♩ = 100)

violin I
violin II
viola
violoncello

Example 22. Minor thirds.

The second movement is entitled *Canon* and includes a five-measure theme that is first introduced in the viola. This theme incorporates *huayño* rhythms.¹¹ The eighth-notes in the canon theme should be played in a short and articulated manner. Essentially a three-voice canon, this movement only includes the cello voice in the last five measures.

¹¹ “The *huayño* is a two-step dance of indigenous origin characterized by syncopated pentatonic melodies.” Pinell, 49.

2. CANON

Allegro con ánimo (♩ ca. 144)

vn. I

vn. II

vla.

vc.

Example 23. Five-measure theme in the viola, including syncopated *huayño* rhythms.

The third movement, titled *Interludio*, is slow and lyrical. Divided into four sections (ABCA), the whole movement is muted. The B section uses left-hand *tremolo* in the lower three voices to set up an atmosphere of calm for the entrance of the first violin. This section closes with intensified *tremolo* in combination with *sul ponticello*. The brief yet contrasting C section includes lush sonorities and major thirds. The A sections are scored for second violin, viola, and cello, with the first violin returning at the final end of the A section. Heard for the first time in the quartet, artificial harmonics close the movement. The textures and tonal harmonies in this movement are Romantic sounding and they stand in stark contrast with the work's other movements.

Example 24. Left-hand *tremolo* in section B.

The image shows a musical score for a section titled "Allegretto deciso (Jca 78)". It consists of four staves. The top staff is a vocal line with a "v" marking. The second staff is a treble clef staff with a "p" dynamic marking. The third staff is a bass clef staff with a "pp" dynamic marking. The fourth staff is a bass clef staff with a "pp" dynamic marking. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. A "sord. mp" marking is present above the second staff. The score is numbered 70 in a circle at the beginning.

Example 24. Left-hand *tremolo* in section B.

Example 25. Artificial harmonics at the end of *Interludio*.

The image shows a musical score for a section titled "Ritenuto". It consists of four staves. The top staff is a treble clef staff with a "pp" dynamic marking and a "(sutil)" marking. The second staff is a treble clef staff with a "p" dynamic marking. The third staff is a bass clef staff with a "p" dynamic marking. The fourth staff is a bass clef staff with a "pp" dynamic marking. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. A "VLA SORDINA" marking is present on the right side of the score. The score is numbered 101 in a circle at the beginning.

Example 25. Artificial harmonics at the end of *Interludio*.

Danza Lunar, the fourth movement, is a rustic, driving dance. The title translates as "Moon Dance," which is evocative of ritual dances from the pre-Columbian tradition. According to Arce, it is very important to emphasize all of the accents, especially at the beginning in the viola and cello parts. The effect should convey a primitive sound.

Arce notes that there are some Bartókian influences in this movement¹² such as the *pizzicato* in measure 128 and the off-beat accents at the opening in the viola part (see examples 26 and 27).

Example 26. *Pizzicato* in measure 128.

4. DANZA LUNAR

Rústico e fogoso (No. 132)

Example 27. Accents in viola part at the opening.

¹² Arce, interviews.

In a cyclical manner, the *Postludio* marks the return of the themes of the first movement, with slight variations. Arce incorporates the use of artificial harmonics, and marks *sul tasto* in all four voices to close the work. The movements of this quartet are brief, yet each creates an atmosphere evoking elements of the composer's Andean folk culture.