

Concerto for Harp and Orchestra, Op. 25

Alberto Ginastera (1916—83)

Written: 1956—65

Duration: 23 minutes

In the pantheon of South American composers—most of whom are woefully unknown in this country—Alberto Ginastera stands at the apex. He made his mark early on in his own country of Argentina and by the time the 1960s came along, he was something of a worldwide phenomenon.

Ginastera received almost his entire musical education in his native Argentina. He entered the National Conservatory of Music when he was twenty, and barely a year later an orchestral suite from his ballet *Panambi* received its first performance. In 1941, the American Ballet Caravan commissioned Ginastera's second ballet, *Estancia*. (Americans are most familiar with this work.) He began teaching at about the same time, but when the Peron regime forced his resignation in 1945, he came to the United States. While here, he became friends with Aaron Copland who became an influential advisor. Upon his return to Argentina, continued run-ins with the Peronist government meant more job losses for Ginastera, so he supplemented his income by composing for the films. In 1971, he moved to Switzerland and devoted the rest of his life entirely to composition.

Ginastera divided his musical output into three periods. He called the first period "objective nationalism," where he concentrated on including Argentinean folk elements in his music. The second period he called "subjective nationalism," with less obvious folk elements and a more personal style. Ginastera's third period mixed avant-garde styles with surrealism. His *Harp Concerto* falls right in between his second and third periods.

The first movement bursts into action right away with jagged and insistent percussive rhythms. Diaphanous glissandi played by the harp shift the movement into a gentler section. The movement alternates between these two ideas until a final ethereal cadenza for harp ends it.

The second movement starts with the strings playing a little fugue as an introduction. The harp and woodwinds then trade phrases of a lyrical melody. A central section has the harp

playing sharp punctuations over orchestral “night-music.” An extended but gentle harp cadenza acts as a link to the last movement. It is a wild romp featuring insistent dance-like rhythms with lots of percussion. The harp and orchestra play off against each other until the percussion finally overpowers everything with a dramatic ending.

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