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Introduction: Realities Inside the Limbo

> Limbo (14c): **1** *often cap***:** an abode of souls that are according to Roman Catholic theology barred from heaven because of not having received Christian baptism **2 a:** a place or state of restraint or confinement **b:** a place or state of neglect or oblivion **c:** an intermediate or transitional place or state.
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> *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*

> We are reminded of a still immovable reality: having the same measure of [artistic] genius, it is easier to become universally recognized being born in New York or Berlin than having seen the light for the first time in Buenos Aires.
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> Tomás Marco, Spanish composer[1]

1. The Exclusion of Latin America's Art Music from the Western Musical Canon

One of Latin America's most significant contributions to the commodity world has been its rich vernacular music. Long before the term "world music" was invented (ca. 1980) as a feasible vehicle to commercialize popular and folk music of so-called non-Western nations, Cuban mambos, cha-cha-chás, Brazilian bossa novas, Mexican rancheras, Andean panpipe music, and Argentinian tangos were being widely performed, recorded, successfully marketed, danced to, imitated, and even placed on the US Top 40s chart. The rapid proliferation of these Latin American music genres reached a peak in 1955, when Cuba's Damaso Pérez Prado made it to the top of the Hit Parade list in the USA and in the UK, ahead of Elvis Presley (Clarke 1989).

But the enormous commercial success and cultural influence of these popular and folk genres has overshadowed the developments of another genre of music from Latin America, one that is, if not as infectious and commercially viable, equally rich in styles and, at one point, rose to international prominence. Despite the neglect of the recording industry and the music establishment, art--or classical--music in Latin America is highly original, and its unique characteristics go back several centuries. To our great misfortune, however, the voices of hundreds of composers, their quality and quantity notwithstanding, remain muted and are unable to reach, much less affect, the musical centers of the world. The truth is that for each of the three Latin American names that ring a bell with music

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[1]Excerpt from the foreword to Eduardo Storni, *Ginastera* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, S.A., 1983), 19.

connoisseurs, namely Heitor Villa-Lobos, Carlos Chávez, and Alberto Ginastera, at least another ten prominent names remain in complete oblivion, some of them of even higher order.

Of course, unlike most popular music genres, the cultural significance, influence, and reach of Western art music are not measured by commercial or media success. If this were the case, not only Latin American art music but most classical music, including the works of Beethoven, Strauss, Brahms, etc., would be considered marginal. Although economic profitability does play an important role in this process, the quintessential success of a work of art music is measured by whether or not the work is incorporated into the Western musical canon. Such an incorporation requires that the musical work first be objectified through the creation of a written document--a score--which, in turn, enables its dissemination through publication, performance, recording, and scholarly analysis. Ultimately, this written document, through these mechanisms, becomes part of a repertoire--"a program of action," as Joseph Kerman describes the musical canon--that serves as a standard model by which to judge all musical works.[2]

It is from this "program of action," from the privileged repertory that constitutes the Western musical canon, that Latin America's art music is almost completely excluded today. This exclusion manifests itself in many ways. It becomes most apparent when one glances at the seasonal calendar of any major orchestra or performance organization in the world, including those in Latin America. The absence of titles by Latin American composers is the overwhelming norm. For instance, during ten consecutive seasons (1987-97) the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO) performed only one work by a Latin American composer. More specifically, out of a total of five hundred different programs performed by the orchestra, only one included a work by a Latin American composer. Other orchestras, such as the Boston Symphony (BSO) or the Philadelphia Orchestra, hold the same bleak record. In statistical terms, on average, over the period of a decade, Latin American works amount to 0.2 percent of the orchestral repertoire. In most cases, this 0.2 percent belonged to the output of one single composer. For the CSO and the BSO programs this composer was Argentina's Alberto Ginastera. In contrast, one finds an increasing incorporation into these orchestras' programming of works by Asian composers such as Takemitsu, Sheng, and Yim, as well as works by former Soviet Union and Eastern bloc composers such as Górecki, Schnittke, Kancheli, and Gabaidulina, as well as works by the Scandinavian Rautavara.[3]

The marginalization of Latin America's art music is also encountered in Western musicological and humanistic narratives. When the Chilean composer Juan Orrego-Salas declared in the

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[2]See Joseph Kerman's "A Few Canonic Variations" in Robert von Hallber (ed.), *Canons* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984).

[3]Information gathered from the archives of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Philadelphia Orchestra, and from "Primary Study for Boston Symphony Orchestra: Personnel and Repertoire," by Robert D. King (1994), acquired directly from the BSO.

1960s that Latin America was "the one great unexplored area of the world remaining open to musicology,"[4] he hoped to persuade young musicologists to look toward Latin America for fresh research topics. Today the same statement still holds. At the threshold of the twenty-first century, Latin American art music remains one of the world's most neglected and marginalized fields of study.

This shift in rhetorical emphasis--from a persuasive call to an urgent outcry--has become necessary in order to create awareness of the extent to which Latin America's art music is still ignored by writers and appraisers of Western culture. At best, some works by Latin American composers are acknowledged, in the form of brief mentions, in textbooks that concentrate on twentieth-century music. But, for the most part, the composers themselves seldom, if ever, make it into the MVP ("Most Valuable Player") list of contributors to modern culture. Encyclopedias and biographical sources devoted to this sphere are practically restricted areas for Latin American composers. It is common to encounter sources such as *Twentieth-Century Culture: A Biographical Companion* (1983) that, while incorporating authors and painters from Latin America such as Borges, Neruda, Matta, and Rivera, do not list one single composer from the continent and, instead, have entries for lesser European composers such as Jean Barraqué, Hanns Eisler, or Charles Koechlin.

But perhaps equally troubling is the fact that when the Latin American art music repertoire does make it into the canon it is at the expense of its particular aesthetic attributes and its role as significant contributor to the development of Western music. For the most part, literature that concentrates on this sphere of music shows, one way or another, the inability to liberate itself from the effects of conventional musicology's Eurocentric focus. Thus, while art music creation in Latin America thrives, the literature written about it has become a culture, in biological terms, that breeds the manifestations of this inability.

The most common symptom of this culture is the reliance on unexamined assumptions that constrain Latin America's art music to the fringes of a historically and culturally "authentic" Western art music. These derivative assumptions materialize in the form of articles and textbooks that cling to European musical models as the sole reference for music analysis and, paradoxically, at the same time distance Latin America's music history from that of Europe. As a consequence, the musical continuum of Latin America has become ghettoized. This ghettoization has resulted in the proliferation of simplistic musicological narratives--rarely challenged--which place some of the most original musical manifestations of the continent under the umbrella of time-specific doctrines developed in and applicable to nineteenth-century Europe, such as nationalism. This has had the consequence of dismissing very significant musical events in twentieth-century Latin America as anachronistic.

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[4]In a paper entitled "The Acquisition of Latin American Books and Music" read at a meeting of the Mid-West Chapter of the Music Library Association, held at Louisville, Kentucky, 23 October, 1964, published in *Notes* 22 (1965-6), 1008-1013.

2. Reconciliation, Subversion, or Creation?

Looking over the list of contents of Robert P. Morgan's *Twentieth-Century Music* (1991), one may be encouraged by finding one chapter devoted to Latin America. However, reality sets in quickly when the reader becomes aware that the chapter consists of barely eight pages (pp. 315--22), less than a section devoted to one single composer such as Edgar Varèse (pp. 306--14) or to a specific trend, such as indeterminacy (pp. 359--78). The marginal status imposed by the musical canon upon the developments of Latin America's art music within the larger context of Western music is evident not only in this disproportional allocation of information but also in the discursive delivery. Morgan's text is not alone in perpetuating narratives based upon a superficial appreciation of this sphere of music. This appreciation is responsible for certain myths, namely, that the developments of art music in a region comprising more than 20 nations can be reduced to three names--Villa-Lobos, Chávez, and Ginastera--and that these three pillars, in the words of Morgan, were "ardent nationalists committed to a reconciliation of the advanced techniques of European modernism with melodic and rhythmic elements derived from native folk sources," the bulk of their work displaying "unmistakable nationalistic characteristics."[5]

Morgan's appraisal is the bread and butter of the field. It has been so for many decades. Yet, this common discourse is very problematic because it denies composers from Latin America their well-deserved title as true modernists, like their contemporary European or North American counterparts, and, instead, claims that their greatest accomplishment was to serve as mediators between two seemingly opposite elements, European modernism and native folk music. It is not hard to become aware that in this act of musical "reconciliation," to use a term employed by the author, the composer's own original voice remains confined to a subservient role, juggling two outer identities while his/her self-identity remains trapped in a state of limbo.

With very few exceptions, this type of discourse, which underscores reconciliation rather than creation, has been embraced by the inside and has taken firm root in the continent's collective unconscious. The dramatic effects of this paradigm are evident in the source of motivation and response surrounding festivals, conferences, and publications devoted to Latin American art music. A case in point is the music festival entitled "Viva: Impressions of Latin America," which took place in London in 1989.

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[5]It is important to point out that even these three great masters have never been fully incorporated into the Western musical canon. They remain some of the most famous unknown composers of the world. We can see by the chart Figure 1 how each of them had their golden decades followed by periods of precipitous decline, all three eventually reaching an almost complete void, which reduced the performance frequency of their works to that 0.2 percent margin mentioned before--or less. The case of Carlos Chávez is interesting. Of the three, his works were performed most consistently during several decades only because he was an active conductor who had frequent engagements in the USA up to the early 1970s.

Its organizers, among which were influential Latin American artists and artistic managers, went out of their way to advertise Latin American contemporary music not as reconciliatory but rather as subversive, alleging that composers from the region were challenging European influences by drawing elements from their own popular and folk-music tradition and incorporating them into their compositions. This defiant characterization prompted reviewer Keith Potter to respond equally contentiously by concluding that, overall, the music performed in the festival was "subservient rather than subversive." Describing most of the music as either full of Latin American clichés or "obvious emulations of European works," Potter belittled its originality. In a hostile tone, he wrote in *The Musical Times*:

> If Latin-American composers are going to challenge the major European forms, whether with nationalistic materials or avant-garde ones, they must surely provide a formally convincing modification of their models if they don't choose simply to follow them straightforwardly. (Potter 1989)

On the surface, it is easy to see from this response how the festival fared on two fronts. On one hand, it was victimized by an ethnocentric view on the part of the reviewer, the type that denies non-Westerners the presumably exclusive Western privilege of self-representation. On the other hand, it was a victim of a self-inflicted pseudo-exoticism on the part of its organizers.

On a more profound level, the circumstances surrounding this event are recent manifestations of the "us vs. them" syndrome that the music establishment, Western and otherwise, has been unable or is unwilling to eradicate. This syndrome is what anthropologists, borrowing from the field of psychology, have characterized as the dilemma between the "self" and the "other." It translates into the topic of our concern as the asymmetrical dynamic that exists between the musical canon dictated by the self-proclaimed Western nations, namely Germany, France, England, Italy, and more recently the USA, and music created by other nations, which is not incorporated into this canon. In this master plan the former nations are presented as the creative source of art music, providing the text, while the other nations produce by-products, mere commentaries on the original text, whether to conform or subvert it.

Some Latin American composers, like Argentina's Gerardo Gandini, have adamantly rejected this hierarchical scheme by arguing that "it is a false assumption that Europeans create the styles. What they create is the marketing infrastructure which we [Latin Americans] do not manage, much less control. This is how they are able to sell us new fashions every five years."[6] Like reviewer Keith Potter's response, Gandini's counter-response also widens the gap of the West/Latin America polarization, but at

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[6]Speaking at a conference entitled "Musical Creation and Cultural Identity in Latin America," Santiago de Chile, October 1987. Excerpts can be read in Rodrigo Torres's "Creación musical e identidad cultural en América Latina: Foro de compositores del Cono Sur," *Revista musical chilena* 42, no. 169 (1988), 58-85.

the same time it underscores some difficult questions that so far have gone unheeded and must be addressed.

3. Western Music in the Non-Western Frontier

How accurate is the perception that, say, Chávez's *Sinfonia India* (1936) or Celso Garrido-Lecca's String Quartet no. 2 (1988), while showing all the signs of Western compositional procedures and purpose, do not fully belong to the category of Western music? Where could they properly be located? If they are incorporated into this category, are they at risk of becoming stigmatized as lesser forms of Western music?

These questions may seem irrelevant to acquiring an appreciation of the music created by composers in Latin America. Who cares how they are categorized? These works are what they are. However, indifference toward the dilemma these questions pose contributes to perpetuate the aforementioned "us vs. them" syndrome and, consequently, to confine Latin American works to a state of neglect. Tackling these questions, on the other hand, provides a means to set the record straight with regard to the deep-seated presence and practice of Western music traditions in Latin America. It also focuses a bright light on the futility behind the ongoing struggle to decipher what is Western and what is non-Western in the creative output of native composers.

While statements such as Mexican Carlos Fuentes's "We are and we are not from the West"[7] serve to fuel the fire of ambiguity surrounding this issue, statements by other more pragmatic Latin American authors help to dissipate it. In his *El laberinto de los tres minotauros* (1993), J. M. Briceño Guerrero writes:

> When we take a good look at ourselves, it becomes evident that we are first and foremost Europeans. Language and dress code, religion and architecture, art and political institutions, school and cemetery, are unequivocal testimonies that we belong to the European cultural milieu. (15)

Briceño Guerrero's view, of course, is not that simple. According to him, three main discourses govern Latin America's thought: the discourse of the "Second Europe"; the Christian-Hispanic discourse; and the Savage discourse. They exist in Latin Americans in different degrees of intensity according to social class, discipline, geographical location, psychic states, and even time of the day. When it comes to the

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[7]Speaking at a Harvard University commencement; published in *Myself with Others: Selected Essays* (Toronto: Collins Publishers, 1981).

discipline of composing art music, certainly one discourse prevails: the "Second Europe" thesis. Departing from the premise that America is the result of Europe's expansion, Briceño Guerrero postulates that its inhabitants are "Europeans in America," possessing the same type of reason, theoretical foundation, and means to achieve modernity and progress. By all accounts, the music created in Latin America over 500 years, initially for the purpose of accompanying Christian religious services and later for performance in the concert hall, is European in essence and manufacture. It belongs to the continuum of Western music.

The historical evidence makes this bond very difficult to ignore. It began with the establishment in Mexico of the first school of music in 1524 and the publication in 1556 of the *Ordinarium,* containing the earliest examples of printed notation in America. This remarkable start was followed by the rapid proliferation of masses, Magnificats, villancicos, and hymns by extraordinary composers from the colonial period such as Juan Lienas, Hernando Franco, Miguel Bobadilla, Juan Araujo, and Jose Orejón y Aparicio. A little over one century after the first encounter between Native Americans and Europeans the genre of opera took root in the New World: in 1701 in Lima, almost 300 years ago, Tomás Torrejón y Velasco produced *La púrpura de la rosa,* the first opera of the entire Americas. According to musicologist Luis Hector Correa de Azevedo, 107 operas by 59 Brazilian composers were written between 1830 and 1900, including those of Carlos Gomes, a composer widely performed in Italy, to whom Verdi once referred as a "true musical genius." By the middle of the 19th century, Argentina had such fervent opera audiences that sold-out performances of the hits of the time, including Wagner's *Lohengrin,* triggered competition between two theaters of Buenos Aires, the old Teatro Colón and the Teatro de la Opera. The battle peeked in 1888, when Verdi's *Othello,* only one year after its world premiere, was performed simultaneously by two different companies in these two theaters.

Even in nations considered less musically prominent--that is, in comparison to Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico--one encounters a significant history of Western musical life. Take, for instance, a country like Venezuela. The legacy of Pedro Ramón Palacios y Sojo (Padre Sojo), who in 1770 found a music school in the outskirts of the capital city of Caracas (Escuela de Chacao), was strongly felt throughout the 18th and 19th century. Under his tutelage, a group of Venezuelan composers, in the midst of the war of independence, succeeded in bringing Venezuelan art music up to date with the European fashions of the time. The works of these composers were in the style of their Viennese contemporaries Haydn and Mozart. Over the following century (1770-1870) these developments affected the musical and social fabric of Caracas to such a degree that it attracted cosmopolitans like Fritz Brahms, a pianist and composer of reputation and brother of the great Johannes Brahms, who spent several years teaching composition and piano in Caracas around 1860. These developments are also credited with giving birth to one the first female piano virtuosos. World-renowned Teresa Carreño was born in Caracas in 1854 and by 1885 she had gained the admiration of Anton Rubinstein and Paderewski and had established herself

as the finest living woman pianist. She not only performed in halls around the world the great European masterpieces, but she also single-handedly championed the music of her fellow American, Edward McDowell, which helped establish his worldwide reputation. And during the 20th century, Venezuela's active classical music scene is evident in the fact that it gave one of the most prominent composers of the century his first chance at the podium. In June of 1956, while touring South America as music adviser for the Renaud-Barrault Company, Pierre Boulez conducted the Venezuelan Symphony Orchestra--his first time in front of a symphony orchestra--under an impromptu invitation by its artistic director Antonio Rios Reyna.[8]

4. Voices in Limbo

And yet, precedents like these--which abound and attest to Briceño Guerrero's "Second Europe" discourse--are still insufficient to dispel uncertainties as to whether or not Latin American art music may be considered part of the Western music continuum. In fact, for most Latin American composers today, this solid evidence does not provide any sense of continuity, relief, or comfort. On the contrary, it is a motive of great inner conflict. Many composers from the region find themselves either justifying the need to disassociate themselves from the Western music tradition or claiming this lineage as their own; some struggle to find a middle ground. The reality is that no matter how deeply rooted and familiar the Western music tradition is, it is always approached as a backdrop to the continent rather than as an organic part of it. This backdrop was already described in 1941 by the father of Argentinian musicology, Carlos Vega, as "the mountain which a large number of generations of European theoreticians have built up in collaboration . . . block[ing] the way, immovable, like a real mountain" (Paraskevaídis 1995, 49). How they stand against this "mountain," whether in defiance, capitulation, or acquiescence, has become the Achilles' heel of every Latin American composer.

We encounter this preoccupation expressed by the composers themselves. Uruguayan Graciela Parakevaídis, for instance, paints it very dramatically by offering two extreme alternatives:

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[8]These historical accounts are corroborated in the following sources: Luis Correa de Azevedo, *150 anos de música no Brasil (1800{n}1950)* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria José Olympio Editora, 1956); Juan Bautista Plaza, *Temas de música colonial venezolana* (Caracas: Fundacion Vicente Emilio Sojo, 1990); Robert Stevenson, *Latin American Colonial Music Anthology* (Washington, D.C.: Organization of American States, 1975); John Storm Roberts, "The Latin Tinge," *Inter-American Music Review* 2/2 (1980); Eduardo Storni, *Ginastera;* and Jean Vermeil, *Conversations with Boulez* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1993).

> To be a composer (male or female) born under the imposed strong influence and inheritance of Western European, white, Christian, and bourgeois culture, and willingly living in the Third World, implies the assumption of dangers and challenges of such choice, a choice defiantly facing culture and music models established by the dominant--first Eurocentric and then North American--imperialistic First World . . . dependence has always been carefully nourished and supported by the powers imposing these models, from the inside and the outside. There are two kinds of answers to them: comfortable continuation of epigonalism on the one hand, confrontation through self-taught awareness, on the other. (Paraskevaídis 1991, 15)

Others like Panamanian Roque Cordero take a more conciliatory stance:

> It is possible to follow the teachings of European masters and still be an authentic Latin American composer in the same way one is authentically Mexican, Colombian, or Panamanian speaking the mother tongue but without the Spanish accent. (Cordero 1977, 158)

But there are composers like Uruguayan Héctor Tosar who find that rupture with the European music continuum is the only right choice:

> The historical times we are living in obliges us to a greater or lesser extent in all Latin America, and even in all the world, to a deeper awareness about the true end for which we live. This will come, in one way or another, to influence beneficially the results of music production. But it is necessary not to stop in the middle of the way and to arrive to a reconciliation between how we live, how we think and how we create . . . in many cases [this] implies a total or almost total rupture with many things to which we were accustomed and that were too comfortable . . . I think that the most important thing is to have convinced ourselves of the importance of our mission, considering it independent of the European guardianship we are accustomed to.[9] (Aharonián 1991, 59-60)

And there are those like Mexican Julio Estrada who, while acknowledging Latin America's predicament, do not advocate conciliation, confrontation, or rupture with Europe’s music traditios but, instead, recommend overriding it altogether:

> Novelty and originality in art does not demand at all that the product be originated in the evolution of a supposedly universal European aesthetics, nor in the abundance of a progressive and modern

[9] Excerpt from an interview conducted by Coriún Aharonián published in *Marcha*, Montevideo, June 2, 1972.

> technology, but in the reflection on the idea of cultural society and of the individual that must exist in it and on new proposals of a new perception of music. . . . The history of our [Latin American] countries is still too short to anticipate itself to the failure of trying to elaborate an art of its own. (Estrada 1993, 83)

No matter the approach, these statements speak of a realm of music particular to Latin American nations that is perceived to be in a transitional, intermediate state of development. The tacit consensus among these composers seems to be that art music in Latin America is not only an unfinished project--one could actually say this about any realm of art in the world--but a project in which the greatest results are deferred to some future time.

5. Strategies to Exit the Limbo

It is not the goal of this book to judge whether this tacit consensus is indeed appropriate, whether the bulk of the creative efforts by composers from Latin America is at an early stage of development, and whether the continent's best concert music is still to come. The music should speak for itself. What I do seek is to put to the test the mental space this music inhabits by deconstructing the intellectual framework that fuels current characterizations of Latin America's art music.

No doubt there are concrete and very practical reasons inherent in the continent that contribute to the marginalization of this genre of music: lack of communication among the different American nations, which hinders exchange of works; resistence to the objectification of art music, which results in lack of financial assistance for publishing and recording; prevalence of the composer-caudillo figure, which monopolizes resources allocated by the State and contributes to fracturing the continuity of the musical developments of a nation or region.

These are all issues very worthy of examination. However, I would lay the heavier burden on less tangible causes. The greatest problem is in the way Western music has been conceptualized and mapped out and on how poorly Latin America fares within the boundaries of this conceptualization. In other words, it is not so much the composers themselves and their works that are in a state of limbo. In reality, the fault lies with the language and terminology used to categorize and characterize these works, what Adorno calls "the explanatory framework for their interpretation."[10] This framework has never been scrutinized. It has been accepted thus far without question.

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[10]See Theodor W. Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory,* trans. C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

In a revisionist spirit, the following chapters provide a diagnosis of the current predicament of Latin American art music through a close examination and critique of two complex issues that deeply affect our understanding of music: *identity construction* and *representational strategies.* The art music from Latin America itself is a reality. What I seek is a less distorted picture of it than is now available in the hope of finding an alternative mental space for this music. If anything else, this study contributes to raise awareness about the urgent need to change, as far as the field of music is concerned, the current polarized dynamic--"self vs. other," "us vs. them"--that perpetuates the arbitrary distancing between art music in Latin America and the Western musical canon.