



CARLOS GUASTAVINO

Do not touch anymore, so is the rose.

– Juan Ramón Jiménez –

Guastavino makes me think of a tree. Immovable. With its roots deep and well in the earth. An Argentine tree. A tree that has stoically stood the test of time. Of bad weather. Or at least of a turbulent and fierce time in which experiments were conducted in music to exhaustion. Almost to the point of rendering it soulless.

The twentieth century was the period in all of music history in which there were the most trends and aesthetic movements. Ideas so solid and well-founded that they were impossible to ignore and even inevitably follow. Literally by some, readapted by others. The powerful intellect of those composers who opened the doors to new sonorous universes, eventually, in the long run, did both good and 'bad'.

Impressionist music and neo-classical music was created. Music was released from tonality and rhythms became more complicated. Music was created based on ancient Greek, Asian and African modes. New sounds were created and combined in novel ways.

New musical notations and new techniques to organize the musical discourse were invented. There was dodecaphony, serialism, pointillism, polytonalism, aleatorism. Electro acoustic music. Music based on birdsong. Songs in invented languages, songs between the spoken and sung. Music of chance, based on mathematical calculations, based on micro polyphony. Futurism. Microtonal music composed in quarter tones and sixteenth tones. Music for metronomes.

New musical instruments were invented. Minimalism. There was even silent music. We explored and explored. The music then began to sound more dissonant, more complex, denser, more arid and became, in most cases, intellectual exercises. Forceful and impressive intellectual exercises, but you can count on the fingers of one hand the living works, the works with soul, the works of art.

The dire need for extreme liberation and reform ended up transforming truth (to paraphrase María Zambrano). It ended up strengthening the intellect at the expense of emotions. And when that balance is disrupted art suffers, Beauty suffers, which is what time respects. Music is in essence an emotional art, if the speech is too abstract it defeats its purpose. "... Oh, if would fall /

my heart, in the water / in that way / the world would be a castle hollow and cold ..." as the poet Juan Ramón Jiménez wrote.

Carlos Guastavino, in his corner, continued to make a traditional, emotionally romantic music very much attached to the Argentine sentiment. The gales came to his door and they came with fury, but Guastavino barricaded himself with simple things; no more than simple things. He closed doors and windows and surrounded himself with flowers and memories: he wrote songs. He sang to the Pampa and the branch of a willow. To the sparrow, to the dawn, the clouds and his flowers; He recreated in hundreds of works the Milonga, the Cueca, the Gato, the Zamba, the Malambo and the Vidalita for different music formats. He based almost all of his work on the Argentine popular genres, and infused it with his simplicity and purity.

"Time knows most," goes an old Afro Cuban saying. Today, very few works of these composers who thundered in the twentieth century are heard in concerts. Many of them nowadays already have only historical value; museum pieces, musical archeology for future scholars. Guastavino still lives.

I like to imagine a dialogue between these two poets, these two sensitive souls who worshipped immediacy, who felt eternity in all things simple offered by Creation. These two poets who saw reality as a symbol and not an end; who found beauty in everything and poetized everything. Those two men who felt God everywhere. Sitting in the meadow, under a willow; surrounded by "little pink, blue and yellow flowers"* accompanied by a little donkey, soft as if made from cotton*:

"Juan Ramon, the world is moving very fast."

"And blindly, dear Carlos, also blindly".

* Quote from and reference to 'Platero y yo', J.R. Jiménez