



Review

Cárdenas, Mónica, pianist. *10 Preludes and Fugues of Latin America. Sonata Herencia*. Tonada VP, 2021.

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We are in receipt of a remarkable recording of new works by pianist composer Mónica Cárdenas and wish to bring it to our readers' attention here.

Cárdenas is originally from Peru but is now based in Berlin. She is known to international audiences for her superb interpretations of Latin American repertoire as well as her original compositions. Not surprisingly, these express her Latina heritage in ways that are both traditional and progressive. Outstanding among them is a recent collection of *10 Preludes and Fugues of Latin America*, which have deep roots in the Central European heritage as well as Latin American music.

Of course, the deployment of “preludes and fugues” immediately harkens to the definitive essays in that genre, the forty-eight Preludes and Fugues of J.S. Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. Cárdenas is by no means the first Latin American composer to lay a musical wreath at the tomb of the great Bach. Agustín Barrios's magisterial guitar solo *La Catedral* was inspired by a Bach toccata, while Heitor Villa-Lobos sought to explore the commonalities he perceived between Bach's music and that of Brazil in his nine suites of *Bachianas Brasileiras*. Many another example could be cited from the twentieth-century Latin American repertoire.

These most recent contributions to the marriage of Latin America and the music of Juan Sebastián Bach are notable for their compositional ingenuity as well as their pleasing accessibility. They bear an unmistakable pedigree of modernity without sacrificing anything of the melodic charm and rhythmic drive that conjure their Latin *ambiente*. The ten titles suggest their geographic sweep throughout the Americas, including the Caribbean and Brazil, though not Central America, which also offers an attractive plethora of traditional songs and dances:

1. Prelude – Fugue Yugo
2. Prelude Joropo – Fugue Feeling
3. Prelude Zapateo – Fugue Para un Encierro
4. Prelude Zamacueca – Fugue Festejo
5. Prelude Malambo – Fugue Tango
6. Prelude Bossa – Fugue Chorinho
7. Prelude Mambo – Fugue Habanera
8. Prelude Reina Cristina – Fugue Andalú
9. Prelude Sin Tierra – Fugue De Vuelta a Casa
10. Prelude Fugue Huapango

Clearly, the remarkable diversity of traditions invoked here is united by the compositional procedure employed to express them, i.e., the prelude-fugue format. Of this variegated assortment of pieces, the composer herself has said that as of March 16, 2020, she was “locked

down” at home because of the pandemic. She then reveals the silver lining to this otherwise very dark cloud:

It wasn't my intention to use this time for composing since I was working on another project. However, as I sat at my piano musing, a composition came to me set to a rhythm that does not reflect my roots: the Venezuelan Joropo. At this moment the Prelude #2 was born with its respective Fugue. This is not simply traditional Venezuelan folk music since the Fugue looks to the nostalgia of nightclub Jazz which entertains with harmony. Over the next few days, I completed my work composing nine Latin American Preludes and Fugues. I actually wrote the first in 2019 but, back then, I didn't think it would become a cycle of 10 Preludes and Fugues. The Fugas present themes that overlap and alternate along with counter-themes. Both Prelude and Fugue are composed of conventional harmonies and Jazz in which I combine classical with Latin American folk. It is a total 'fusion' of styles which is still full of Latin fun, as reflected in the rhythms of each country. Particular traditions stand out, such as Yugo, Zamacueca and Festejo (Peru), Joropo (Venezuela), Malambo and Tango (Argentina), Bossa Nova and Chorinho (Brazil), Mambo and Habanera (Cuba), Huapango (Mexico) as well as the influence of Andalú (from Spain).

The recording concludes with the *Sonata Herencia* (Heritage) of 2019, whose three movements are marked 1. Allegro moderato (Festejo), 2. Waltz moderato, and 3. Allegro (Festejo) moderato Allegro. Of this work the composer has written:

Within contemporary classical music, the *Sonata Herencia* connects Latin America with Europe. The Festejo (Afro dance from the coast of Peru) is first heard in the 1st and 3rd movements. At times the rhythm tries to imitate the Peruvian cajón, the main accompanying instrument of Afro-Peruvian dance. The European element is traditional music used to compose an idea with a unique essence while the fusion is complemented with some Jazz. The 2nd movement is a wistful waltz that develops serenely until reaching a point of fury and pain, then calming down once more until complete.

According to Cárdenas, this sonata is her tribute to Afro-Peruvian culture and to the Africans who came to Peru and Latin America with the sixteenth-century conquerors.

This impressive recording (on the Tonada VP label) is available on Spotify and will repay many times over the minimal effort required to find it there.

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