

by Isabel Aretz

Ethnic Music of the Americas in the Creation of Contemporary Music.

Indigenous music in Latin America differs totally from the folk music, which has been studied and spread sufficiently in our continent in the past decades. Folk music has received certain attention of the academical musicians who often moulded it into their musical creations - a nationalistic trend implanted from Europe to the Americas. Besides, in some cases it has been used by popular composers to make songs and dances which have been spread out even beyond the countries where they were created; they often gave rise to new composed musical species resembling the original ones.

found The *Foundation for Ethnomusicology and Folklore* in Venezuela - of which I ^{was} am the Director - has the anxious task of documenting and studying this wealth of ethnic music which we find preserved in the forest areas in America and especially in Venezuela, for being prehispanic expressions existing in our days with their own musical characteristics, totally different from the folk music and from the indigenous music from other continents. This is because indigenous music is based on different concepts and objectives: it relates mostly to ancestral myths and to the rituals through which those are represented; rituals among which we find the shamanic sessions. I would like to give some examples which takes us to the magic world of our indigenous people in Venezuela.

A yanomami song of the most primitive Indians in Venezuela, who, however, have an extremely rich and even complicated philosophy. Their music is expressed by intoning only a few sounds, full of effects like those we can hear - and which are produced on a couple of notes and a superimposing voice imitating the croaking of frogs - in order to attract the rain to fall.

Yanomami music example.

The Piaroa Indians, also from Venezuela, have a myth of origin which explains that the Sun who is the Father of all the Deities sent to the World two of his sons, *Wahari* and *Buoka*. They heard singing coming from the inside of the mountain, they took a stone out from the peak and amorphic animals came out which became the first Piaroa. *Wahari* created five peccaries (wild amazonic forest boars) which nowadays are represented by the five masked shamans at their main festivity of the *Warime*. During this event they play the sacred instruments making up the weird music ensemble we can hear now. Every instrument represents the call or cry of an animal or the song of a bird.

Music example: the Warime orchestra.

The Wahibo Indians, on their turn, have a variety of songs, with a large extension, like the *Anakwe*, a female song in which a normal voice register is used and another one with falsetto, of which we can hear an example.

Music example: Female Wahibo song "Anakwe"

Now - as an intermission in the thread of my presentation - I need to introduce myself as a composer to explain how I, as a young woman, I became interested in Ethnic Music in search of new modes of expression which would make me less dependant of the famous musical creations from Europe. To be technically up-to-date means to have access to all the tools which, in a certain period, are needed to create music, although the music will not be the result of the techniques used by the composer but from the particular expressive devices (*e/ lenguaje*) which he/she may have acquired. To me, getting to the expressive modes of the indigenous people was like getting to the musical roots of America, and from there I could start with new sounds, ways of doing things - a phenomenology in short which could take me

gradually to create what I, as a composer, was looking for: a contemporary language rooted in America, liked or not afterwards, for this depends after all on the better or less particular talent and on the openness of the audience.

To get there I had to go through different stages of my preparatory training, specialized reading and research fieldtrips in ethnomusicology which implies the necessary knowledge of the indigenous mythical world.

The path which I followed as a composer required in the first instance the task of harmonizing the folk melodies, which made it possible for me to transmit to the concert public valuable pieces of traditional music, especially from Argentina, which became relatively valued afterwards. Secondly, I learned the composition of suites with the forms of the songs and dances of my home country Argentina, as replica of the European suites which we analyzed at the composition classes. Thirdly, I got to the use of folklore themes and elements in the creation of my larger works for which I introduced indigenous instruments to the orchestra. In this period we may count various pieces for ballet composed for DANZAS VENEZUELA in the sixties.

Then followed the creation of my works in contemporary style with the use of the corresponding techniques. Thus, for example, I wrote Three Indian Songs (Tres Cantos Indios), in which I made series with pentatonic scales. I wrote Birimbao for magnetic tape and four kettledrums, in which I transformed electronically a Birimbao piece of the Guajiro Indians of Venezuela and put them in dialogue with the drums.

The progress made in the field of Venezuelan ethnomusicology and anthropology has permitted me to conceive my work for orchestra and eight voices titled Yekuana, based on an anthropological description of this amerindian group from Venezuela who believe that the souls of the dead must pass through seven heavens to obtain immortality in the eighth heaven where the supreme God resides, but this only for those who never have murdered. That's why the work, of which we will hear some fragments, ends with the voice Do Not Kill!!! - expressed in different languages. The work is constructed serially. The concert recording is used only as a document.

Music example: Yekuana

I composed Kwaltaya already in 1980, an ethnodrama in three ecstasies, based on ethnic music of the Americas, but with a totally different conception. For this work I made a collage of indigenous, afro and authentic folk music.

For the first ecstasy I superimposed the singing to shaman music, both vocal and instrumental. The afro music I used for the second ecstasy and the folk and indigenous music for the third which develops the hidden dimension of the word Kwaltaya, a ceremony to search for a glow-worm which represents the wandering soul of the deceased and which has to be reintegrated to the grave so the soul could reach heaven in peace.

We will listen to the second half of the first ecstasy, in which the singer enters in dialogue with the birds in heaven and ends by representing the low voice of the shaman.

Fragment of Kwaltaya

This is the ethnomusicological and creative world in which I am submerged, according to my conviction that the American musicians should create a musical language based on their own roots, using the techniques of our epoch.