

INDISPENSABLE LATIN AMERICAN COMPOSERS

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LATIN AMERICAN MUSIC: WHY INDISPENSABLE?

In Argentina **Alberto Ginastera** (pr: Ahl-behr-toh Hee-nahss-teh-rah) sought to legitimize the sounds of the music of his country rather than mimic the international sound of European music. By age 25, he had attained an international reputation.

The great Romantic composers found inspiration in the geography of their countries of birth: Grieg vividly painted the rugged landscape of Norway with his piano pieces, and the Brazilian pioneer composer **Alberto Nepomuceno** (pr: neh-poh-moo-seh-noh), who was a protégé of the Norwegian master Grieg, brilliantly painted with music the landscapes of Brazil.

First under the yoke of the Spanish *Conquistadores*, then the Austrian Empire, then through wars with the United States, and finally through a bloody 10-year-long Revolution, Mexican culture and its arts were never stifled. With the newly acquired freedom, composers such as **Manuel Ponce** enjoyed enormous opportunities to create authentically Mexican music and find an audience for it.

Cuba's **Ignacio Cervantes** was one of the first musicians in the Americas to consider *nationalism* in music as the ideal way to compose. His greatest work is his forty-one *Danzas Cubanas* for piano.

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#### **THE MUSIC IN THIS LECTURE**

ARGENTINA: Alberto Ginastera – Suite from the ballet *Estancia*

BRAZIL: Alberto Nepomuceno – *Serie Brasileira*

MEXICO: Manuel Ponce – *Estampas Nocturnas*

CUBA: Ignacio Cervantes – *Danzas Cubanas*



**Argentina: Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983)**

Four Dances from the ballet *Estancia* <https://youtu.be/EhACD-PwNv4>

Alberto Ginastera brought to his music for the ballet *Estancia* (pr: ess-tahn-see-ah) a feel for the immense expansiveness of the *Pampas* (plains) that extend for hundreds of square kilometers to the southern tip of the South American continent. His composition mines the native dance rhythms of the Argentine *Gauchos* (cowboys) who live and work in the southern part of their country.





Rhythmic patterns underpin the various sections: *Little Dance...Rodeo...Dawn...Malambo.*



***Malambo dancers***



**Brazil: Alberto Nepomuceno (1864-1920)**

*Série Brasileira* <https://youtu.be/joo8n3HbPRE>



Nepomuceno's music is tinged with *saudade* (melancholy...homesickness...longing...) and Brazilian to the core in its harmonies and in its wafting hesitations from major to minor keys, yet at times joyful in melody and inexhaustibly inventive in orchestration.

In Nepomuceno's *Série Brasileira* (pr: seh-ree-eh bra-zee-ley-rah) (*Brazilian Suite*), the opening *Alvorada na Serra* (*Sunrise in the Mountains*) begins with a delicate duet for oboe and flute that gradually ascends melodically, evoking the ascent of the sun. Birdcalls from the woodwinds are added, underpinned by a hymn-like melody given to the strings. It is a perfect evocation of nature, and it alone qualifies Nepomuceno as a brilliant orchestrator.

The composition includes three more sections: *Interval*, *Naptime*, and *Batuque* (pr: bah-too-keh) - a Brazilian dance.



*Batuque* dancers

Nepomuceno melds and molds all the exotic threads and strains of the folkloric feast of South America's largest country into music as original, as pleasing to the ear, and as emotionally charged as ever heard from the pen of a South American composer.



**Mexico: Manuel Ponce (1882-1948)**

*Estampas Nocturnas* (Nighttime Scenes) [Manuel M. PONCE: ESTAMPAS NOCTURNAS, Serie Sinfónica para Orquesta de Cuerdas \(1923\) \[Vídeo-Score\] - YouTube](#)



Depending on whoever you ask, the term *Crossover* Music can describe any musical composition that “crosses over” from “highbrow” to “lowbrow” and vice-versa. Unlike with other composers throughout Latin America some of the music that Manuel Ponce wrote was unashamedly “crossover” and not meant for the concert hall, but for the café, for film, for radio and television, and for the home.

Ponce’s *Estampas Nocturnas* (Nighttime Scenes) a four-part tone poem for string orchestra is made up of four sections: *La Noche* (Nighttime); *En tiempos del rey sol* (In the time of the Sun King); *Arrulladora* (Lullaby), and *Scherzo de Puck* (Puck’s Scherzo.) A tone poem is essentially a loosely structured composition that seeks to tell one or more stories through music.

In the case of Ponce's *Nighttime Scenes* the composer evokes in four vignettes of nocturnal moods described in the titles of its movements: the quiet of nighttime in the city, a memory of what that time of day may have been like in the years of the French King Louis XV set to an 18th century minuet dance, a quiet lullaby as a mother lulls her baby to sleep, and a playful movement that depicts the nighttime pranks of Puck, the child-like elf from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.





**Cuba: Ignacio Cervantes (1847-1905)**

*Danzas Cubanas* <https://youtu.be/YwYd6bFCPrw>

Silvia Navarrete plays six of the 41 *Danzas Cubanas* of Ignacio Cervantes: *Soledad*, *Los 3 golpes*, *La Celosa*, *Ilusiones perdidas*, *Adios a Cuba*, and *No bailes más*.

**Ignacio Cervantes** was a Cuban pianist and composer who was encouraged by the visiting American pianist **Louis Moreau Gottschalk** to study at the Paris Conservatory, where he was then awarded first prizes in composition in 1866 and 1867.





*Salon* music became a popular form of domestic music-making in Latin America during the 19th and early 20th centuries, as it already had in Europe. Performed sometimes by the composers themselves in private homes, *salon* music compositions were usually short and showy, with a focus on the entertainment value of the music, rather than its artistic merit.

As we listen to these compositions, we should keep in mind that they were conceived to be performed in informal settings, rather than in a traditional concert hall, and in that sense, they were a form of “popular” music though written by a “serious” composer in a light-hearted mood.

This lecture resonates for me personally, as the *Danzas Cubanas* of Ignacio Cervantes comes from my birth country and remain as some of my favorite and earliest childhood musical memories.

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