

## The Film Music of Alberto Ginastera A Preliminary Review of the Sources

by Deborah Schwartz-Kates

Although the Argentine composer Alberto Ginastera (1916–1983) is widely recognized as one of the leading musical spokesmen of the Americas, many facets of his contribution remain unknown. One unfamiliar subject involves the composer's unpublished film scores, a body of eleven cinematic works that he elaborated between 1942 and 1958. *Table 1* provides a list of the dates, titles, directors, genres, and awards of these compositions.<sup>1</sup>

Date	Title	Director	Genre	Awards
1942	<i>Malambo</i>	Zavalía	art film	Academia de Artes y Ciencias Cinematográficas, Premio Nacional
1945	<i>Rosa de América</i>	Zavalía	art film	
1949	<i>Nace la libertad</i>	Saraceni	historical drama	Academia de Artes y Ciencias Cinematográficas; Asociación de Cronistas Cinematográficos de la Argentina
1950	<i>El puente</i>	Gorostiza	historical drama	
1952	<i>Facundo: el tigre de los llanos</i>	Tato	Argentine literary classic	Academia de Artes y Ciencias Cinematográficas; Asociación de Cronistas Cinematográficos de la Argentina
1953	<i>Caballito criollo</i>	Pappier	patriotic drama	Asociación de Cronistas Cinematográficos de la Argentina
1954	<i>Su seguro servidor</i>	Togni	comedy	
1956	<i>Los maridos de mamá</i>	Togni	comedy	
1956	<i>Enigma de mujer</i>	Salaberry	melodrama	
1958	<i>Hay que bañar al nene</i>	Togni	comedy	
1958	<i>Primavera de la vida</i>	Mattson	melodrama	

*Table 1:* The film scores of Alberto Ginastera.

A principal reason why Ginastera's film scores remain unexplored relates to the logistical difficulties of undertaking their investigation. The visual films reside in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where they are randomly dispersed throughout national archives and private collections. The corresponding music manuscripts are housed at the Paul Sacher Foundation, where Ginastera bequeathed his musical legacy. Until recently, geographic factors posed insurmountable obstacles to researchers, who were unable to coordinate study of the sources in two remote locations. Nevertheless, through a series of persistent investigations and on-site inquiries, it was possible to obtain research copies of ten out of the eleven films under investigation.<sup>2</sup> Following a four-month period of residence at the Paul Sacher Foundation, the sources were successfully reconstructed and film and score brought back together again.

A detailed study of the film repertoire not only fills in a map of the composer's uncharted territory, but serves as a site for exploring critical issues in Ginastera scholarship. One such issue involves the relationship between Ginastera and Aaron Copland. Even though twenty-first century scholars acknowledge that the two musicians shared a close personal friendship and a meaningful aesthetic connection, this relationship has never been explored in the scholarly literature. Moreover, the question of how film music may have entered into the relationship has never been considered.

The two composers first met in 1941 in Buenos Aires, when Copland traveled to South America on a tour to promote cultural exchange. One of the most popular events of this trip involved a series of lectures he gave on "Music for Films," which included footage from his recently released motion pictures.<sup>3</sup> Shortly after Copland's trip, Ginastera began composing his own cinematic works. At the same time he applied for, and received, a Guggenheim Fellowship to travel to the United States. In his grant application, Ginastera stated that the primary purpose of his visit was to study "music in the theater, cinema and radio." He cited Aaron Copland as "one of the North American musicians who has explored this subject most deeply" and with whom he would like to receive the "necessary instruction."<sup>4</sup> From this documentation, one can readily conclude that film music served as a core focus in the early relationship of these two composers, and that Copland's Argentine lectures provided a critical stimulus for Ginastera's first work in the cinematic genre.

Ginastera's film scores reinforce and promote Copland's aesthetic convictions. They avoid Hollywood clichés, such as the overuse of *leitmotifs* and the excessive reliance on a postromantic musical idiom. Each Ginastera film score uses an original sound and style that allows the composer, in Copland's words, "to create a more convincing atmosphere of time and place."<sup>5</sup> In his diverse range of early cinematic works (from the kinetic ballet style of *Malambo* to the ethereal sonic landscape of *Rosa de América*), Ginastera poses an inventive alternative to the conventional Hollywood style that

dominated the Argentine film industry. As such, his music adapts and reformulates Copland's cinematic precepts as a new model for South American composers.

Ginastera's cinematic repertoire also clarifies the composer's knowledge of Argentine folk traditions. Even though twenty-first century scholars agree that Ginastera drew upon vernacular sources to inscribe his national essence, scholars still have less information about the way that he obtained his practical knowledge of Argentine folk music. Because Ginastera conceived his film scores for popular consumption, they contain numerous examples of the vernacular genres that he elsewhere stylized in non-cinematic works. *Caballito criollo*, for example, includes a traditional malambo (an improvised Argentine dance based on recurring two-bar chord progressions). In the original manuscript of this work, Ginastera first sketched the piece in pencil (*Example 1*, No. 5), later recopying it in ink (*Example 2*). Both sketch and score exemplify the composer's musical handwriting of the period.<sup>6</sup> Although the melody of Ginastera's piece is original, its harmonies replicate those of the traditional genre. This similarity can be seen by comparing the IV–V–I progression in Ginastera's final score (*Example 2*) with an Argentine fieldwork transcription of the folkloric dance (*Example 3*).<sup>7</sup>

Similar appropriations of traditional sources characterize the composer's film music. They contrast sharply with the image that Ginastera projected

*Example 1*: Alberto Ginastera, *Caballito criollo* (1953), draft of nos. 3, 5, and 10 (Alberto Ginastera Collection).

6<sup>a</sup> en Re

*p<sup>2</sup>3*

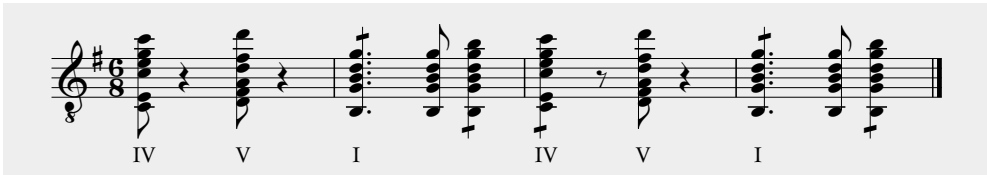
*Tempo de zamba . 6<sup>a</sup> en re*

*N<sup>o</sup> 5*

*Tempo de tucumano*

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Example 2: Alberto Ginastera, *Caballito criollo* (1953), fair copy of nos. 3 and 5, p. [1] (Alberto Ginastera Collection).



Example 3: Folkloric Malambo, transcribed by Isabel Aretz, mm. 1–4.

as a composer of “imaginary folklore,” who avoided literal references to vernacular traditions.<sup>8</sup> Although publicly Ginastera may have found it advantageous to maintain this position, his film scores reveal that he had a solid working knowledge of Argentine folk music. Clearly such knowledge informed the broader context of Ginastera’s nationally inspired production and therefore merits consideration in future analytical studies of his work.

A final point concerns the composer’s skillful musical cinematurgy. In a characteristic scene from *Nace la libertad*, Argentine soldiers tell a lie to their wives in order to plan an armed rebellion. The wives uncover the truth when they compare different versions of the story. Musically, Ginastera sets this scene as a canon, long upheld as a metaphor for confusion in the history of Western opera. The busyness of the counterpoint, otherwise an absurdity in such a short piece, provides a perfect foil to the women’s gossip on screen. Here Ginastera displays an innate capacity to write ingeniously crafted music that captures and enhances the cinematic action. His experience working with film music thus predicts and prepares for his career as a successful composer of opera.

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<sup>1</sup> Brief mention of Ginastera’s film music appears in: *Alberto Ginastera: Musikmanuskripte*, Inventare der Paul Sacher Stiftung, no. 8, comp. Malena Kuss (Winterthur: Amadeus, 1990), pp. 28–31; Malena Kuss, “Alberto Ginastera,” *Mitteilungen der Paul Sacher Stiftung*, no. 2 (January 1989), pp. 17–18; Pola Suárez Urtubey, *Alberto Ginastera en cinco movimientos* (Buenos Aires: Víctor Lerú, 1972), p. 19, pp. 56–57.

<sup>2</sup> Many thanks go to Clara Kriger, Fernando Silberstein, Melanie Plesch, Julio Azamor, María del Carmen Vieites, Pola Suárez Urtubey, Ana Lucía Frega, Carlos Ruta, and Martín Bode for facilitating access to these materials. The one missing film, *Facundo*, awaits restoration.

<sup>3</sup> Aaron Copland, “South American Diary,” 26 September–23 October 1941, Aaron Copland Collection, Library of Congress, Box 243; Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1984), pp. 323–26.

<sup>4</sup> “De los tres temas que abarca mi proyecto, considero que el primero, *La música en el teatro, en el cinematógrafo y en la radiotelefonía: su técnica y sus problemas actuales*, es el más importante.” “Uno de los músicos norteamericanos que más ha profundizado estos estudios es el maestro Aaron Copland de quien desearía recibir las indicaciones necesarias.” Alberto Ginastera, “Proyectos de Estudios,” Guggenheim Foundation Archives, 1942. I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Senior Vice President, G. Thomas Tanselle, for

granting access to this material, and I extend special thanks to Aurora Nátola Ginastera for her kind permission to reproduce this passage here.

<sup>5</sup> Aaron Copland, "Tip to Moviegoers: Take off Those Ear-Muffs," *New York Times* (6 November 1949): 28; Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (New York: Henry Holt, 1999), pp. 341–50.

<sup>6</sup> Typical paleographic features include the straight line that Ginastera used as the final stroke of his treble clef, the unusual direction of his note heads, and his distinctive penmanship.

<sup>7</sup> Isabel Aretz, *El folklore musical argentino*, second edition (Buenos Aires: Ricordi Americana, 1965), p. 181. For ease of comparison, Aretz's transcription has been transposed up a perfect fifth from *c* to *g*.

<sup>8</sup> Consider his following statement: "Mein zweites Werk (*Danzas argentinas*) [...] hat großen Widerhall gefunden: Zum ersten Mal benutzte ein Komponist volkstümliche argentinische Quellen, und er ging nicht wie ein Musikwissenschaftler oder wie ein einfacher Arrangeur vor. Ich war und ich bleibe fasziniert von dem, was man 'imaginäre Folklore' nennt." Cited by Luc Terrapon, "Gespräch mit Alberto Ginastera," in *Alberto Ginastera*, ed. Friedrich Spangemacher (Bonn: Boosey & Hawkes, 1984), p. 13.