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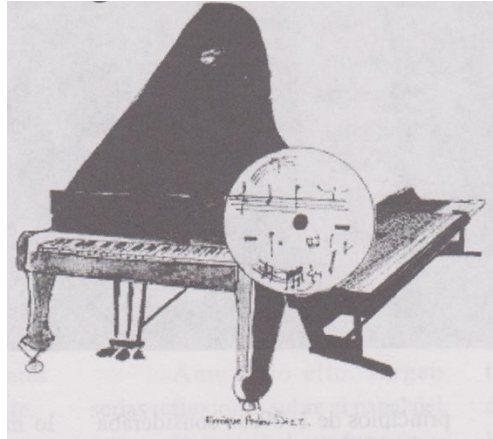
The Music of the 20th Century in Guatemala

Enrique Anleu Díaz.

CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS FOLKLÓRICOS



THE MUSIC OF THE 20th CENTURY IN GUATEMALA



INTRODUCTION

The politicians and economic interests that have occupied since the end of the last century the most importance within the Guatemalan society, together with imminent needs that revolved around an initial industrialization process, in a period in which the coffee oligarchy was consolidating, promote the emergence of an enriched social strata and with a free life of economics concern that allowed the development of activities and amusements.

Thus, we find that art plays a role as a social entertainment within the privileged classes of society, who indulge in the theater, the music in the theater, and the intimate evenings.

Such a rule of the “entertainments” occupied

too much attention of the inhabitants of Guatemala City, and therefore, regularly presented circus seasons, bullfightings, horse races, opera, more of the religious celebrations, and evening parties. The cinema soon arrived, the latter making its appearance in 1898.¹

The gatherings in the homes of the economically better off, which were a considerable amount, forced the demand for instruments, among them pianos, which occupied a place of importance in the private homes of the new wealthy class.²

This is an index that reflects the growing population of wealthy classes of Guatemala City that are allowed to have different motives, a piano, or another musical instrument, which

evidences the interest in music in particularly on evenings, home-loving or or towards musical learning.

Appealing not only to popular taste but to the general public, cinema emerged as a novelty and main attraction, building an exclusive lounge for the projections; thus, the theater-

¹ According to a chronicle of the time, at the arrival of the new century 1900, the public celebration was noisy "There was a movie theater, with the camera mounted on the commercial portal, and scenes were projected relating to great characters of the century that succumbed.

² Sáenz Poggio mentions that in 1880, there were around 1,500 pianos in Guatemala City. Sáenz Poggio, *Historia de la música en Guatemala*. Historia de la música en Guatemala". Ed. Tipo. Nac. Edición 1934.





Cinema with the object of fulfilling the two functions: of theatrical representations and cinematographic projections.

Opens for the case in 1908, the cinema “Variedades”, later the cinema-theaters “Rex”, “Rialto”, “Mundial”, and “Roxi”; in the 1930s the theater “Capitol y Palace”, and the day on Thursday, 30th April 1936 is inaugurated later of a “elegant dance of gala, the temple of of the seventh art, the cinema Lux” calle “the palace of the cinema.”³

Also, it is to be constituted as part of the distractions of the capital company, together with the cinema, the phonograph, which made its appearance in our environment at the end of the 1800s. Popularized in the city since the beginning of the 1900s, it is considered like other “new” or “curiosity”,

for it had not been valued for its value like difusser of important musical culture, above all in the scholarly field, the one who arrived with recordings of 78 rpm. The importance of the phonograph is documented through articles, comments, and announcements that appear in diaries and magazines of the period.⁴

This moment establishes a clear difference between scholarly and popular music, which emphasizes the definition between the professional musician and the amateur.

The “serious art” begins to be seen as a ‘profession’ that differentiates it from “being an ornament or social distraction”, this situation forces it to be considered as art “of, and for minorities”, elitist, as opposed to other massive artistic

manifestations of a more generalized cut.⁵

3 Fernando Poroj. “De los Saraos y tertulia al Cine”. En Revista “Domingo”. Prensa Libre. 16 de octubre de 1988.

4 on this point, already at the end of the 19th century the phonograph had been introduced into the “entertainment” of the capital’s inhabitants, the information is suggestive through the advertisements in newspapers, from which I allow myself to cite even newspaper articles such as the following: “Phonograph Addition”, Diario de Centroamérica, 1889, “New Phonograph”, Diario de Centroamérica, 1896, “A gramophone record has been invented that can play for 15 minutes”, Periódico acción, 1939. (see final art. list)

5 It is possible that in this historical social stage in our country, the most pronounced divorce of erudite art and popular art has occurred, given the rise of the power of the coffee-growing classes, and that it originates other situations extended to social and economic problems, and of course to taste, together with the introduction of the incipient industrialization and technology in the first thirty years of the 20th century.



It is obvious that under such circumstances, it is required that as a profession it be protected and supported by the state, since it is also an indispensable part of the official educational process, meaning also that any disruption in state policies directly or indirectly affects its development.

I

If the art is a reflection in some way of the society in that development, it maintains with the challenges in the middle and the constant changes that it produces in this.

The arrival of the new century, the speed of information and communication, the advances in transportation, the jet plane, and space travel in the second half of this century give new and varied conceptions about speed, graphic codes, and other aspects of visual and auditory techniques, aspects that influence artistic thought and therefore, the production of artists and their expressions manifested in testamentary, documentary or protest form.⁶

The constant relation in the field of art with works, new authors, theorists, together a the familiarization with the technological advances, has produced a culture almost universally homogeneous in the technological sense.

It is so that Guatemala City acquires its beginnings in the 20th

century, a new physiognomy, producing a transformation in various senses, and propitiating in the cultural environment, new ways of artistic expressions.

The advances of the century modify customs, services, and entertainment, acting artistic expressions, and obligating them to their changes a new way of daily life, propitiating of this way that art is nourished by other different concepts.

Given all this, serious reflections on the role of art in society, its function and necessity, questioning the various criteria of being a "distraction", of alleviating the tensions and repressed actions, To be the object of indoctrination, protest and denunciation, growing in its dimension to places purely outside the "aesthetic ene" and the role it takes between the interpreter, the creator and the "consumer", to conclude its destiny as a commercial object.

In our country, artistic expressions have to be analyzed for the understanding of their development, both as an extension of the currents in other latitudes from where they reach ours in various ways, and in the way in which they are spread in the environment, including sponsorships by societies that can economically sponsor them, being in between the commercial matter, and the personal taste of the organizing group, that although it may not be the most appropriate in terms of the selection of the music and

authors, are the only alternative for the listener, in the face of the lack of interest on the part of of the oficial institutions.

Indeed, such a situation cannot be attributed to the state alone, the problem to be studied has to be directed to the causes of socioeconomic character, which were dominant and determinant in the classist sphere of the beginning of the century, for the direct that "sense of the taste of the period." History in such a case is handled as a class reflection or of political tendencies, which is appreciable in the writings that to convenient of sectors interested they make an effort to relate scientific advances, labor and social achievements to government policies or parties, which is a method used by those who write naively or intentionally, highlighting facts outstanding in the sectors social and cultural external to these governmental policies, in fact, most of the time contrary to them, but which are associated by them for partisan purposes and conveniences.

6 Henry Lefebvre. *Everyday life in the modern world.*

7 The State participates in cultural development when it supports it, its interference is direct in art producers when it stimulates their production and dissemination, and not only by creating a false image of a benefactor towards them, but the political supporters try to magnify the achievements of all kinds that occur, presenting them as a product of the political system they represent and are in power. This is common among the tricks of "politicians", since from the



Examples are enough, and for the case in the musical development of the country will suffice to mention that, still with the more misguided cultural and artistic policies, it has produced these, although not in the right situations. But it should be considered that other facts made it possible, and we will try to point out.

In reference to the years that marked the beginning of the 20th century in Guatemala, we cannot omit the role of the agro-exporting bourgeoisie, the economic crisis of 1930 and the earthquakes of 1917-18, in addition to the tyrannies of Barrios and Estrada Cabrera. The first dictator, because with such tyranny the emergence and establishment of the agro-exporting bourgeoisie was expedited, the second, was in charge of giving rise to the beginning of the large concessions to foreign companies and the enrichment of the aforementioned bourgeoisie.

In such a situation, taste took directions imposed by the agro-exporting bourgeoisie in two directions, those of a *popular* type that included aspects related to tradition, religious festivities, popular evenings, fairs, etc.⁸

Among the fairs, the August fair was one of the most important celebrations in the city.

The other direction of taste remains in *particular hands* of the organization of concerts, the foundation of artistic and cultural societies, which should be seen in another context, outside the vagaries of the state and its rulers, whose disinterest in art and culture is manifest.

Among the musical societies formed from 1898 to 1930 by people interested in maintaining musical activities, we find in 1898 the society formed by Luis Felipe Arias, Rafael Castillo, and Manuel Martínez Sobral. Rafael Castillo founded the Unión Musical de Guatemala (1911) in support of the added element, which was not to the liking of the musicians of the decadent orchestra that survived at that time.

Castillo's life shows us another facet of the artistic medium that already clearly marked the differences between “amateurs” and “professionals” in art, with the pertinent reservations on the matter. According to some people, including historian Rafael Vázquez, Castillo's personality and his passion for music were considered by his peers as “crazy”, and the more enthusiasm he showed for art, the more extravagant he seemed to everyone's eyes.

dictatorship of Rufino Barrios to the present day, the lack of interest, indeed, the desire to uproot teaching and artistic and cultural institutions has been manifest, evidenced to some extent as in the case of the government that created the useless “Ministry of Culture and Sports”, a political prize for those involved in the political lottery of the party, but null for national art, which suffered and is suffering a tremendous crisis (see articles and reviews in the newspapers of those years) the same as in the years before this one, among them, we know of a certain minister who, when members of the OSN asked him for an improvement in the very low salaries they were earning, reasons why many master musicians looking for better economic opportunities, found themselves playing in orchestras in Europe, in North and South America, he responded – How good that Guatemala exports musicians to other countries...!

8 Even in the most terrible political situations that the Guatemalan people have suffered, the activities of artists continue, as occurs everywhere and with activities independent of official spheres, that is to say in the private sector, at a personal and particular level, so that in the study of history, the existence of such productions, in a certain way, do not reflect the political situation, such argument being the object of study in the historical method in relation to the spolitical-social context. (The history of art from the official point of view, draft research by the same author).

9 In the history of Guatemalan rulers, almost without exception, and even more so today, their lack of interest in culture and art is evident, to the point that is official acts related to such activities, where they “would necessarily have to attend” or which includes exhibitions, concerts, recitals, etc., they send a “representative”, which they do not do when it comes to receptions, mass shows, sports games, (without the sport being at fault) where they always attend, in many cases as a “political image” for the people and foreign nations.



Its merits and faculties were denied by the “professionals”, who did not lend him their participation, because they said that “as founder of the society” he would also want to be the conductor of the orchestra, and that “in the presidency of the society Castillo was fine, but in the direction of the orchestra it was another thing”.¹⁰

However, because of a few who did not agree to accept him in such a position in the orchestra, he succeeded by a majority. Its “opponents” agreed on the outcome of the election, on the surface, but deep down, they were ready to make their opinion prevail.

Vázquez refers that the Sunday following this election had been designated for the first rehearsal, with everyone committing themselves - “this was the bad thing”- not only to attend but also to invite those who were not present. Sunday arrived, and Castillo, “full of joyful hopes, went to “Colón” with the certainty of finding the orchestra, which then consisted of forty teachers, together. Castillo glanced at the orchestra's place and a tear came to his eyelids; only he and the bursar were in the theater!...”¹²

Castillo did not give up the idea of the MUSICAL UNION and worked until it was realized; he left it organized, and when he considered that he was no longer indispensable, he left for the United States and never returned.¹³

Other societies arose in those years, such as the “Sociedad Musical” closed in 1917 due to the earthquakes, although it was reorganized in 1923, this society seemed to have interference in official matters since among its purposes in “favor of the philharmonic” were the separation of a musician who was in charge of the direction of the conservatory, the implementation in the conservatory itself of a new system of boarding school and the reform of the statutes of the society.

In 1923, a philharmonic union was founded, which was closed the following year due to some measures taken, especially regarding dues that the musicians could not pay. In 1926 the UNION MUSICAL DE GUATEMALA appears, its work was recognized by all, even obtaining a subsidy from the state, at first modest for the orchestra of the union, then the legislative assembly because of the constant and tenacious work done by the Symphony, creates a “subsidy that it enjoys until today” (1929-Vásquez).¹⁴

During this period, there was a great deal of activity in terms of shows that included opera and zarzuelas at the Colón theater. When gradually reaching the year 17, the musical taste was “Italianized”, in musical composition, the names of Luis Felipe Arias, Rafael Castillo, and Raúl Paniagua cover the first two decades, along with Anselmo Sáenz and Salvador Iriarte.

Then, a Romantic-nationalist tendency occurs with Julián Paniagua Martínez and Jesús Castillo.

The earthquakes of 1917-18 temporarily interrupted daily life and cultural and artistic activities, which soon resumed, although the paths taken to make this possible sharpened the differences between an elitist public and a more generalized “not very erudite” one.¹⁵

10 Vázquez, Ídem.

11 Vázquez, Ídem.

12 Vázquez, Ídem.

13 Rafael Castillo is a case we could say exceptional, his activity is also known as a composer, popularized as a waltz author, discriminated by a group of musicians who had influence in the environment and the time, it is said that he composed a PIANO CONCERTO imitating classical models, and works of pianistic workmanship such as the Rhapsody on the Aragonese Jota, several salon waltzes, and although not known in our country, it is said that he wrote a violin concerto and string quartets, and was the first composer to tackle the sonata. The influence on his music would have to be sought in affinity with Karsokoff and Brahms. The criticism from musicians of the time that he had performed his main works NOT IN GUATEMALA but in Washington where he went to seek better horizons is not justified, since the rejection and a bit of envy on the part of the professional musical environment, practically left him no other alternative, given the enormous enthusiasm he left for music, than to dedicate his artistic work to another more benevolent environment.

14 This orchestral group was in operation until 1931, when it was closed due to economic reasons.



We can appreciate, in the works that became known in the milieu since the beginning of the 20th century, the efforts to introduce a new sense of taste, which was the concern of the conductor Disconzy and the Guatemalan composer and orchestra conductor Luis Felipe Arias.¹⁶

This is felt at the end of the XIX century, with a series of five concerts that served as background, conducted by Disconzy, where the following works were performed: MEANY (Guatemalan) “Capricho sobre motivos de aires nacionales” (piano solo). DISCONZY “Serenata de romántico”. MENDELSON “Wedding March”. BEETHOVEN “Sixth Symphony, Pastoral” (complete). BURGMEIN “Le Roman du Pierrot et Pierre” (suite). MENDELSON “Serenade and Allegro (piano and orchestra). GRIEG Peer Gynt, suite No. 1; these concerts were performed in 1895.

In 1990, Luis Felipe Arias directed such European authors as the Guatemalan with the following works: GRIEG Peer Gynt, LISZT Rapsodia Húngara No. 2, RODRIGUEZ “Victory”, a triumphal march for orchestra.

If the matter of taste was a situation that historically can be interpreted as the result of a new artistic aesthetics, the assimilation of these new currents by the public and the artists created controversies about being

considered for certain groups as an art that was “worthwhile” because it was still misunderstood at the time; although there were reasons for and against, they were within the field of aesthetics.

However, in the following years, ideologies and political interests influenced the evolution of art, both in personal expression and in the support for its dissemination. These situations are far removed from the problem of “taste”, about its character as an aesthetic current.

ART AND CULTURE

Imposition and repression in taste

State policy, which is very different from “art policy”, is a factor that intervenes against or in favor of the development of certain ideologies and directly affects art manifestations and artistic creation. It translates into an “imposition of taste”, based on cultural repression.

In Guatemalan art, as in any latitude and time, certain conditions are established by the state to allow or cancel artistic expressions when they are considered ideological germs contrary to state policy, being in this context deemed dangerous, so they must be banned or eliminated.

Such criteria have been lacking in most of the governments that have

succeeded one another in our country. A period that perfectly exemplifies this situation is the ideological imposition on artistic expression in our country during the 1950s, which affected its development until after the 1980s, leading to the emergence of “artistic policies” under the government of 1986, which contributed to the crisis in which the country found itself. The emergence of “artistic policies” contributed to the crisis in which it was immersed since the 1980s.

During such a period (54), the opposing political ideology is given the name

15 We must consider the socio-economic disaster of the earthquakes for the arts. The damage caused to the most important cultural center, the Teatro Colón, is significant and although it was not in such bad condition, political passions led to its demolition, causing an irreparable loss and contributing in many ways to elitist musical art for a smaller audience, a phenomenon that can be seen in our country in this century.

16 It is interesting to note that these changes to the established taste were received with comments such as the one that appeared in a newspaper of the time, where the director was told that the program was “very classic” and “attractive” only to a limited number of knowledgeable people.



“atheistic communism”, the state is stepping up its efforts to suppress all opposition in every field, whether political, philosophical, or religious, accusing such opposition of all the ills that may befall the nation.

The measures taken in the economic aspect are supported for the agricultural exporter, whose interests, like dominant ideology, are directed towards economic exploitation. In the field of culture and art it is noted that all artistic expression contrary to the interests of the regime as “Marxist-Communist art”.¹⁷

This overview, a consequence of political interests, evokes painful and sad memories for the country’s art due to the despotic behavior of the authorities, which led to a repressive period in Guatemalan art this century.

One of the most treacherous attacks perpetrated against freedom of artistic expression was the closure of the School of Fine Arts (before 1957) by the government that came to power through a coup d’état, because it was imparting “communist teachings” referring to some works done in the engraving class, whose themes were related to agrarian reform and the Atlantic Highway, the professors were asked to resign from their positions and when this was not done, it was closed down. In such terms, a mural painted in the Congress of the Republic, alluding to similar themes, is also questioned.

In public and private primary and secondary schools, a list of literary works “banned” for their “dangerous” “Marxist-atheist” content is published, including the works of Darwin, the soviet school of psychology, works of Miguel Angel Asturias, the same that novels whose theme relate to dictatorships and the political problems of our history.

Russian, Czech, and other films with similar themes are prohibited, as are books containing texts with Soviet characters.¹⁸

One of the spectacles that demonstrates this political repression in art is the burning of “works with communist content,” books that existed in public and private libraries, where a “hunt” for them took place, and which, before being burned, were put on display in the passageway of the National Palace.

In this context, artistic productions and movements in Russia and the Soviet bloc countries were unknown, or there were few or vague references to them, transmitted and manipulated by the state, or reports that were transmitted to groups interested in the development of art in those latitudes. Only minorities who were also persecuted for their political ideas were aware of such tendencies.

Regarding Russian art, works by Prokoffiev and Stravinsky were known in music; in painting, Chagall, to name a few, who had been filtered through Western

capitalist ideologies and taken as examples of personalities who had “fled the communist hell”. This was debatable from various angles, since in the case of those mentioned, along with other names such as the great concert artists Jascha Heifetz, David Oistrak or the eminent conductors who fled from Nazi Germany, and later from Germany dominated by the communists, it was the result of other different reasons, related to their Jewish ancestry, a fact that occurred in the wake of the Second World War, when the persecution of Jews by Nazism took place, and not because of the new turn in Soviet policy, at least for those cases cited.

Even though such a situation exists, the introduction of new aesthetic trends that were experimented with by artists in the 1960s, misunderstood by the public, and, of course, due to the ignorance of the

17 A president of Guatemala expresses at a popular festival in the republic of El Salvador where melodies sound to the rhythm of cumbias, corridos, merengues, etc., more or less in these terms: “This is music, not the communist stuff that the communist musicians of the symphony of my country play...!” (Ydígoras Fuentes publicly at a Salvadoran town fair).

18 Russian music or magazines whose only content was art information were prohibited, let alone traveling to countries of the so-called “Soviet bloc”.



government officials, allowed to express under new tendencies (as an example, the “new realism” in the plastic), an art of denunciation that until a certain point could be exhibited publicly, without the political ideologists of the time knowing about its content, neither plastically nor its social and political message, until this became very evident due to various circumstances.

An escalation of violent repression has been unleashed in recent decades by the various governments that have come and gone against students, intellectuals, teachers, trade unionists, artists, ideologues, and the people, constituting a danger to all kinds of expression, not to mention artistic expression. All this does not, however, succeed in nullifying the creation of artists, who also participate as “people” in popular demonstrations and meetings of intellectuals to analyze and repudiate government actions.¹⁹

When studying the artistic problems with the political ideology of the 1950s until the year 2000, which is just two years away, the constant practice of prohibiting (that is the intention) the works of certain authors persists, an office today in the hands of “new inquisitors” who have been allowed to question the support or dissemination of art in the official sphere.

Although, as in every era and context, there will be exceptions, but

without any major force to pronounce or act, since in general there is the phenomenon of allowing only what benefits the interests of political parties, as well as those of a personal nature, taking advantage of government positions to achieve effectiveness in its implementation.

Portrait of a city on the brink of 2,000.

Artistic cultural portrait.

During the last decades of this 20th century, contemporary societies have undergone rapid transformations, which have been associated with the process of industrialization that has extended to the present day.

In the fifty years that comprise the half-century in which we currently live, profound changes have been felt in humanity, these are associated with various social, economic, technological, political, and other causes that have given rise to different social phenomena, as a result of systems that have currently become widespread in the world. Relations and interests, first political, then economic, have generated capitalist models in society, imposing decisions in this sense on the rest of the world with which they relate in any way.

Immersed in such an environment, the modern man in the city, situated in any position on the social scale, forms this

contemporaneity of daily existence, subject to facing all types of needs that the city itself brings forth, along with trades and professions, his participation being obligatory in any form.

With such involvement, the city's profile and spirit are taking shape.

Approaching this situation from personal angles that involve everything mentioned above and based on group interests, the areas in which each of these groups operates contribute traits that give a certain idiosyncrasy to each city. In the variety of such interests, there will be common points that concern everyone, and others that are directed exclusively to certain professions and certain trades.

¹⁹ During the government of Ydígoras Fuentes, and due to the repression of the months of March and April of 19, a pictorial exhibition entitled “Tribute to the deeds of March and April” was organized at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of San Carlos de Guatemala. We list below the names of the artists participating in this exhibition who are Dagoberto Vázquez, Roberto Gonzáles Gyri, Guillermo Grajeda Mena, Max Saravia Gual, Juan Antonio Franco, Enrique Velázquez Vázquez, Víctor Vázquez Kestler, Marco Augusto Quiroa, Roberto Cabrera, Enrique Anleu Díaz, Elmar René Rojas, and Gilberto Hernández.



However, even if this is the case, everyone is affected by economic and political situations, which have profound repercussions on general development, reflected in various ways in cultural and artistic expressions.

At this point, we see the advance of the “mass society” that uncontrollably overwhelms the established systems, envelops all existing groups against their will, attacking individualism and self-determination and using “resources” from the so-called “strategies” as well as technologies that are complicit in the process of universal massification, including computers and communication and information systems that already today create new problems in social behavior, affecting education and family ties.²⁰

It must also be considered that the basic needs that initially determined the character of the city and its various forms of expression are the same as those that identify it, such as the relationships between citizens, religious beliefs, and cultures and social, are lost with the physical and economic growth of the same, creating new needs, more pronounced group divisions, rivalry between them, insecurity for certain sectors, which leads at a certain point to the physiognomy of the city being lost both physically and spiritually and culturally becoming a sad imitation of foreign capitalist cities, taking shelter in some way by

the state to which they are brought, in “universality” and “international relations”, which are only symptoms of uncontrolled overpopulation and the exploitation of the voracity of merchants.

The New Guatemala of Asunción at the turn of the year 2000 has gradually begun to suffer from all these changes, which “in favor of progress” have affected above all the less favored social groups established there, discrimination through housing sectors that are forbidden to any citizen, arguing that with the idea of having more security, they limit movement in residential neighborhoods, making the differences between economic class positions in the environment more evident.²¹

The “economic policies” supported by recent governments have favored these “policies” as allies in accelerating the disappearance of certain social groups, especially the middle class.²²

Relations between the economic and social positions of the city’s inhabitants are gradually deteriorating, generating deep conflicts that extend to culture and religion. This is observed at a global level, among the major religions, Judaism, Christian, Catholicism, Islam, etc., then, in the “mass culture” with the creeds of the recent capitalist fundamentalist sects and that they insist on calling themselves churches, and in the cultural aspect, with the appearance in the cultured art

of avant-garde expressions, which create great controversies between the public and the creator, then, in the “musical demonstrations” of the masses, which reflect the social and cultural decomposition with various implications. The latter extends to organic lesions caused by pollution caused by noise, and ecology.²³

20 The state of reflection on noise and involuntary togetherness that Marcuse points out “are characteristic of mass society”. It eliminates the need for tranquility, isolation, independence, initiative, and freedom of movement (Marcuse, p. 55. *Aggression in Contemporary Society*, Alfa 1971). Mass society reaches an excess of socialization to which the individual reacts with the most varied frustrations, repressions, aggressions, and phobias that soon degenerate into neurosis.

21 In the written media, there are endless reports of public protests, generated by government arbitrariness, which have yielded to demands of international organizations to “execute the middle and lower class population, with the impossible cost of living, onerous taxes, and state abuse of public services, which lead to their privatization.

22 As a theory expounded by Marx, it would not be out of date, at least for situations like ours, when he concentrates his analysis on the internal technological-economic tendencies of capitalism, or when he estimates the final phases of capitalism in the formation of what he has called “the opulent society”, and which in still embryonic form is appreciated in our environment.



How then does the cultured art and the artist of our country behave in the development of their work in the face of all this confusing sense of values?...

The last two decades of this century have brought about various events that have had a significant impact on the art of the country, as a result of both neo-liberal politics and the dynamics of official artistic institutions that have meant and mean, in different orders of appreciation, the thermometer of the culture and art of the country.

The dynamics of art itself, that is, the natural sense that it follows under different conditions as an implicit cause in it, as an internal reason and subject of course to external causes that condition its existence, diffusion and permanence in another way, being related to political and educational decisions, it bears the brunt of these decisions, as they are determining factors for the existence and support of artistic expressions, which are part of public education and training. This situation has remained uninterrupted for more than four decades, from the 1940s to the 1980s.²⁴

The art history of our country will have to judge the stage that, as a result of the situation described in all that previous, produced the crisis of the late 80s, in the national art and that lasted for a period of approximately 5 years, in

these, although it mutilated a cohesive line that started in the 40s, it would have to be studied under other aspects, with a measure of analysis that contemplates the socioeconomic change that was brewing in those years by different systems, although more akin to preparing the sense of privatization of public services, as currently occurs, and which cannot be denied are common in high capitalist societies.

Missed opportunities.

For systems like ours, it is incomprehensible that the “raw material”, that is to say the artist who is in the middle, has studied in other more advanced countries in terms of art, has acquired new experiences, knows effective methods for teaching art, and that again in the country, with very rare exceptions, can put them into practice.

The artist in such a situation feels frustrated, seeing that it could be possible to create modest but effective positions that would benefit the artistic movement, and this is not done, due to official disinterest. This is not a fantasy, it has been a reality suffered until a period that is framed by the 80s.²⁶

These resources, wasted by the state, gradually disappear in the middle, creating the void that has always surrounded the development of Guatemalan

art in the sense of official education.

Given all the transformations in our society, is it not then the case that these attitudes on the part of the ruling party have begun to prepare the use of resources of this nature by the official counterpart, that is to say, the private initiative?.

23 This has been brought up as a problem in the “noise law”, which has not been applied drastically in the country, and which surpasses the barrier of respect and the rights of second and third parties, since the exaggerated horns of vehicles, radios with deafening volume in cars and public sales, as well as the loudspeakers, where sales are promoted for various reasons, just like the cries of current sects, they create noise pollution, causing irreparable damage to the hearing organs, creating increasingly “deaf generations” for such reasons.

24 After these years, privatization and the way of feeling and judging the path that art has taken in the face of new parameters, together with government interests and their political commitments, require a reflection on the context in which official artistic institutions currently operate.

25 If we take a timid look at the art institutions in capitalist nations, we see that in the case of music, symphony orchestras, chamber groups, recorded material, etc., are managed by societies, private groups, and are not national orchestras, to become “philharmonic orchestras”, the same thing happens with the Fine Arts schools, transforming into private societies, all managed by money, leaving out free official education.

26 In contrast to such situations, it happens that in more culturally and artistically advanced societies, scholars who retire after many years of work move on to a new position in “senates,” where their knowledge and experience are used to teach the young people who now occupy their positions.



If we accept this fact in this way, it would justify the process we are experiencing as a further step towards the final stages of capitalist society as enunciated by Marx and Marcuse.²⁷

Already in a modest work that was printed by the University of San Carlos de Guatemala and the National Typography of the 60s, I pointed out that the interest in art, and the support for it should be a concern of the new private universities of the country, today, these have art departments, some sponsor concerts, they publish publications and have included imminently artistic careers in their curriculum, all at a private level. Art, as defended by some, “must be remunerated as a job”; it has ceased to be, for them, a matter of “hobby”; this simply fits into the panorama to be followed by the societies called “opulent” in Lefebvre’s quotes.²⁸

Finally, two points deserve at least mention as a testimony to current art, the first referring to the activity carried out by particular groups outside the various governments that have succeeded each other. It is necessary to mention such activity, since we would see in some way in these, that in the development of the Guatemalan society itself, we have currently reached a propitious moment due to all the existing conditions, to play a vital role (although the issue of money is involved) by constantly maintaining the cultural life of the city.

When the crisis of the arts is palpable in the official sphere, these societies have been holding concerts, recitals, and high-level activities, which call for reflection on the paths taken by art sponsorship.

The case of composers is something completely different, it seems

that they don’t fit into any of the established models, their work is always subject to profound, individual situations. Composition can not be judged on economic grounds.²⁹

Even in the most difficult circumstances, the composer will create work without expecting remuneration, sometimes not even encouragement for the dissemination of his work; it is something stronger, “the need for personal expression in the medium”, whether accepted or rejected. The consequences of the lack of support or encouragement have repercussions, above all, on the teaching of composition, for which there will undoubtedly be another period of “vacuum” in its historical trajectory.

Faced with such a perspective, the art of composition in Guatemala was ready to be introduced in the year 2000,



27 Marcuse. “The Oppressive Society.” Alianza Editorial, Buenos Aires, Madrid.

28 Henri Lefebvre. “Everyday life in the modern world.” Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 1972.

29 Nowadays, the crisis of composition is also evident in the sense of not having a creative movement that reflects the aesthetic circumstances of the medium. Some authors, in their work, reinforce the criterion of independence or disengagement from the economic phenomenon. Although some argue otherwise, considering remuneration as a profession, this one argues that creative motivation is absent.



it only has a few names of composers and works that cover the current era, from the innovations of José Castañeda to the latest expressions within a new language, a significant achievement and revolution within the musical history of Guatemala, of which José Castañeda wrote, referring to the aesthetic phases of the “country”... Guatemalan composition has surpassed the stage of outdated romanticism or sterile Neoclassicism. As has that of naive pseudo-folkloric nationalism. At the forefront of this renewing, or rather, revolutionary movement in Guatemalan music are names such as Humberto Ayestas, Jorge Sarmientos, Joaquín Orellana, and Enrique Anleu Díaz. These last three innovators in the medium of traditional musical writing, using almost personal symbols and spellings for sound recording, a phenomenon that had not occurred in Guatemalan music, an achievement that must be recognized by future generations...”³⁰



Some personal interests and efforts by authors and their works have been recorded on magnetic tape, very few on acetate discs, and others on laser, always according to the criteria of the person who produces such articles. The authorities are obliged to publish the names of authors and their works, at least in an anthology, as has been done in other countries, to leave it to local musical history, but do not show any interest in doing so,³¹ which will be a regrettable loss for our

scholarly music.

Lately, we have the efforts to introduce children and young people to the study of orchestral instruments (1997), and youth orchestras have been formed, with the participation of some people,

³⁰ José Castañeda, in the National Symphony Orchestra's 21st season concert program, 1975. The same commentary on Guatemalan musical art. OSN 1976.

³¹ There has been in recent years (1996-98) information from some newspapers about the activity of groups of children forming children's orchestras, I have personally seen such an invigorating attitude on the part of some tireless people in such a struggle, on the other hand I can testify to these activities, having had the good fortune to work alongside the young conductors Isabel Ciudad Real and Igor Sarmientos who have organized an orchestra of talented young people, an orchestra in which I have been the resident conductor since the beginning of 1998, and with which we have performed a series of concerts with works by Mozart, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Ginastera, Moncayo, etc., in and outside of Guatemala City, I share this position with the aforementioned conductors.



foreign institutions and music professionals, enthusiastic Guatemalans, this is the great hope for the year 2000, because those who are between the ages of 9 and 15 today are undoubtedly the element that will be ripe fruit in the first decade of the next century.

to the new independent and modern Guatemala.

New Guatemala of the Assumption, July 1998.

If we have to meditate and analyze the new paths that societies can be pushed to by the current political and economic systems, it is certain that the different attitudes caused by depending on entities that are not state-owned will be different, it will provoke new forms in the functioning of artistic activities, just as it is expected that the love for the arts will increase, in these terms, among the new youth. Since the system established by the state to date (1998), given the lack of interest that has always existed in it for what education and artistic culture represent, if we make a comparison with other types of activities that also belong to the town, it is discouraging. In the field of music, you can count the number of composers on the fingers of one hand, or the 70 musicians that make up the national symphony orchestra, in proportion to a population of 10 million inhabitants... it is unbelievable, lacking logic, as a thermometer of the culture of a country where art is breathed everywhere, from literature, dance, sculpture, architecture and pre-columbian music, passing through the art of the colony,

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Director:

Celso A. Lara Figueroa.

Senior researchers:

Celso A. Lara Figueroa.
Ofelia Columba Déleon Meléndez.
Alfonso Arrivillaga Cortés.
Carlos René García Escobar.

Pre-tenure researcher:

Aracely Esquivel Vásquez.

Interim researchers:

Julio Taracena Enriquez
Mirna Annabella Barrios Figueroa

Musicologist researcher:

Enrique Anleu Díaz.

Style review and editorial assistance:

Guillermo Alfredo Vásquez González.

Interior layout:

Elmer Eduardo Estrada Ramírez.

Photography area:

Jairo Gamaliel Cholotio Corea.

Cover design:

Jaime Homero Solares Rodríguez.

