

**CULTURAL COUNTERPOINTS:
Examining the Musical Interactions between the U.S. and Latin America**



**Hess, Carol A. (Michigan States):
“Music and Pan Americanism: New Directions in Historiography?”**

Abstract:

What do we in the United States know about Latin American art music and how do we know it? For several decades now, our understanding of this repertory has been informed by constructions of difference, often sustained by exoticist, nationalist, or essentialist rhetoric. One scholar, for example, proposes that Latin American music is filled with “irresistible, exotic color” whereas another proffers unelaborated references to “national effect” and “national character.” As for essentialism, adjectives such as “distinctive” or “characteristic” abound, ensuring that Latin American art music is perceived as “particular and thus oppositional,” to quote Ruth A. Solie’s pioneering study of musicology and difference. Indeed, as recently as 2005 one US scholar argued that Aaron Copland was attracted to Latin American music for its “potential for transgression.”

Yet things were not always this way. From the 1920s through the early 1950s, any number of US critics, scholars, composers, and performers considered Latin American music in terms of what Kofi Agawu has called “embracing sameness.” Instead of situating some tantalizing Other in a “colorful” South-of-the-border locale, these historical actors embraced universalism, sometimes waxing poetic on Latin American composers’ “sublimation” of nationalist impulses. Were they influenced by the explosion of Pan Americanist sentiment during the Roosevelt administration’s Good Neighbor policy? Are such discursive shifts purely arbitrary? This paper explores the epistemological chasm between the two outlooks just described. Drawing both on the discourse of Pan Americanism and on recent models of cosmopolitanism, I argue that representational practices that take difference as axiomatic be retired. Rather, exploring constructions of difference with historical processes can reshape the historiography of Latin American music and, by extension, of “American” music in the broad sense of the term.

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Editorial Disclaimer:

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