

NAXOS

GINASTERA

Cello Concertos

Mark Kosower, Cello
Bamberg Symphony Orchestra
Lothar Zagrosek



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Bamberg Symphony Orchestra (*Peter Eberts*)



Alberto Ginastera (1916–1983) Cello Concertos

Alberto Ginastera is considered by many music-lovers to be the greatest Latin-American composer of the post-World War II era, but he is also without question one of the most admired and respected musical voices of the twentieth century. His musical vision and language evolved throughout his life, and he successfully pursued ways to fuse the strong traditional influences of his national heritage with experimental, contemporary, and classical techniques.

Ginastera shared his views about modern music in a programme note in 1964, stating: "... art is first perceived by our senses. It then affects our sentiments and in the end awakens our intelligence. Today too much is written and spoken on the subject of modern art and that is possibly because a great part of this art fails to impress the feelings of the public... A work which speaks only to the intelligence of man will never reach his heart... Without sensibility the work of art is only a cold mathematical study, and without intelligence or technique it is only chaos. Thus the perfect formula would be sensitive beauty plus technical skill." Even at his most avant-garde moments Ginastera's music masterfully reaches the hearts of audiences.

Argentina's most famous composer was born in Buenos Aires. He succinctly described one of his favourite childhood memories and its aftermath, relaying: "One day I went into the kitchen and played on all the pots and pans and other things I could get to make a kitchen orchestra. I was spanked." But when he was seven his parents acknowledged his musical interests, providing him with piano lessons; the technical framework for his lifelong passion for music began. At the Conservatoire Williams, he studied piano, composition, and harmony. In 1935, when he graduated from high school, he promptly entered the National Conservatory of Music. The first score he allowed to be published, the ballet *Panamí*, was produced in 1940; he said that the roots of the music came from his earlier kitchen orchestra experiments. From this point he was strongly influenced by nationalism, especially Argentinian folk-tunes and dance rhythms.

In 1941 Ginastera became a faculty member at two prestigious schools, the National Conservatory and the

Liceo Militar in Buenos Aires. He married pianist Mercedes de Toro, and they had two children in the early 1940s. A highlight of his life during this period includes receiving a Guggenheim fellowship that funded a trip to the United States, but the war delayed the project. In 1945 he signed a manifesto with many other respected Argentinian artists and writers defending human rights. As a result he was fired from his position at the Liceo Militar, so he finally made the long-delayed visit to the United States and lived in New York with his wife and children for almost a year.

In 1946 Ginastera studied composition for a short time at Tanglewood, where he was described as "a chubby youth in horn-rimmed glasses, little looking like one likely to succeed." The respected American composer Aaron Copland became his mentor and close friend, however, pushing him to find his unique voice. After Ginastera became internationally famous Copland recalled that he had always noticed "a tremendous contrast between the outward personality and the inner man. He is never off the cuff, but speaks always with due consideration for feelings and decorum... A lot goes on inside we don't know about, obviously. He's a very smart cookie, in the best sense."

Ginastera returned to Argentina in 1947 and founded the Conservatory of Music and Dance in Buenos Aires. He also established an Argentinian chapter of the International Society for Contemporary Music with several of his colleagues. He then completed one of his landmark works, his *First String Quartet*. This prize-winning piece was featured in numerous performances in Europe and the United States. A German critic, writing in *Der Kurier*, felt that the work was "of a very personal structure. It shows how the elements of native folklore can be fitted in the sonorous structure and rigidity of actual European musical language." From this point his works for orchestra, chamber ensemble, and piano were well-received and enthusiastically performed.

During the catastrophic Perón regime in the early 1950s Ginastera was forced to resign as director of the Conservatory that he had founded; he had made his anti-military political views all too clear. To pay the bills and earn a

Mark Kosower

Mark Kosower began to play the cello at the age of 1½ and later studied with János Starker and Joel Krosnick. As a soloist he has appeared with the Orchestre de Paris, the Bamberg Symphony, the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the China National Symphony Orchestra, the National Symphony Orchestra of Taiwan, and the Brazilian Symphony Orchestra as well as the Cleveland Orchestra, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Ravinia Festival Orchestra, and the symphony orchestras of Detroit, Houston, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Minnesota, and Seattle among many others. He has performed in recital at the de Doelen in Rotterdam, on the Great Performers Series at Lincoln Center, at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the Aspen Music Festival, and the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society and recently performed in Nuremberg and Munich with the Juilliard String Quartet. An Avery Fisher Career Grant recipient Mark Kosower has been Principal Cello of the Cleveland Orchestra and a faculty member at the Cleveland Institute of Music since 2010 and was formerly Solo Cellist of the Bamberg Symphony.

The cello played on this recording is the Starker Nebula, generously loaned by the famed cellist.

Lothar Zagrosek

Lothar Zagrosek has been Principal Conductor of the Konzerthausorchester Berlin since 2006. He studied with Hans Swarowsky, István Kertész, Bruno Maderna and Herbert von Karajan, and was appointed Principal Conductor of the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra in 1982, followed by appointments as Musical Director of the Paris Grand Opéra, Principal Guest Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, General Music Director of the Leipzig Opera, and General Music Director of the Stuttgart State Opera. His career as a conductor has taken him, among other engagements, to the Vienna and Hamburg State Operas, the Deutsche Oper Berlin, the Frankfurt Opera, the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels, Glyndebourne, the Salzburg Festival, the Vienna and Berlin Festival Weeks, the Munich Opera Festival and the London Promenade Concerts. Since 1995 he has been first Guest Conductor and Artistic Adviser to the German Youth Philharmonic and a regular guest with the Bavarian Radio Orchestra, the West German Radio Orchestra, the NHK in Tokyo, the Orchestre Philharmonique of Radio France, and the RAI Orchestra in Turin.

Bamberg Symphony Orchestra

The Bamberg Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1946 by German musicians in exile from the former Prague German Philharmonic Orchestra as well as from Karlovy Vary and Silesia. Under its first Principal Conductor Joseph Keilberth the ensemble quickly established itself as one of Europe's leading orchestras, having toured the concert halls of the world more than any other German ensemble through 1968 and having been the first German orchestra to tour Asia, Africa, Europe, and the United States after the war. Keilberth's successors included James Loughran and Horst Stein. A parade of famous conductors has also helped create the orchestra's characteristic sound, including Rudolph Kempe, Hans Knappertsbusch, Clemens Kraus, Eugen Jochum, Georg Solti, and Günther Wand. In more recent years the orchestra has been joined by Christoph von Dohnányi, Christoph Eschenbach, Mariss Jansons, Wolfgang Sawallisch, and Giuseppe Sinopoli. Currently the orchestra is led by Principal Conductor Jonathan Nott, Honorary Conductor Herbert Blomstedt, and Principal Guest Conductor Robin Ticciati, and frequently performs at the most prestigious venues in Europe and throughout the world.

Aurora Nátola-Ginastera and This Recording

This recording is dedicated to the memory of Aurora Nátola-Ginastera, for without her encouragement and support this recording would not have been possible. I had the privilege of meeting her during the summer of 2008 after she replied to a letter I sent her accompanied by my CD of her husband's music; *Alberto Ginastera: Complete Music for Cello and Piano* (Naxos 8.570569) that I recorded with my wife, pianist Jee-Won Oh. Jee-Won and I travelled to Geneva to play for her and upon our arrival she led us to the music room containing her husband's piano. At her request we performed the first movement of the *Sonata, Op. 49*, as well as the *Pampeana No. 2*. Upon the completion of our performance she blessed us as interpreters of her husband's music.

A former guest soloist with the Bamberg Symphony, Mrs Ginastera passed away following surgery for cancer in January 2009 at the age of 85. Her departure was a great loss to the world of music. Knowing her was to know the spirit of her husband's music with her remarkable character and unquenchable zest for life.

Mark Kosower

Photo courtesy of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.



living he wrote movie scores for a few years. When Perón was overthrown in 1955 Ginastera promptly regained his Conservatory directorship.

In a 1962 interview Ginastera stated: "If I could write all the works I have in mind, I wouldn't stop for the next twenty years. But I am a slow composer. I never start until a work lives completely within me, in my spirit, in my mind. This is what I call the gestation period. Then comes the most painful moment, when I try to put on paper the ideas I have developed intellectually. I compare this moment to that of a child's birth."

During the next few years he received accolades for an innovative *Violin Concerto* and his remarkable opera *Don Rodrigo*. At the New York City Opera premiere at the Lincoln Center in 1966, *Life* magazine reporter Ron Eyer enthusiastically noted: "*Don Rodrigo* is the most exciting new opera since Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*. It almost brought down the sky-high new roof with the grandeur of its sound."

One of his most provocative and controversial works was the opera *Bomarzo*. The central character, Duke Pier Francesco Orsini, is a sixteenth-century hunchback who lived a tortured, decadent life. Violence was a key dramatic element that led to a musical scandal of huge dimensions. It was banned by the President of Argentina in 1967, who declared the work to be "obsessed with sex and violence". Huge arguments about censorship erupted. Major opera companies in America, where audiences were apparently less susceptible to shock, produced wildly successful productions. Historian David Ewen thoughtfully noted: "Looking at Ginastera personally, one finds it difficult to believe that this is a man who could create an opera condemned for its emphasis on sex and violence. According to Howard Klein, he 'has all the rakish charm of a bank teller. Of medium height, heavy build, his brown eyes peer placidly through thick black horn-rimmed glasses. His gestures are modest.'" In another interview, Donal Henahan affectionately observed: "Ginastera dresses like a bank examiner and thinks like a computer."

In 1969 he separated from his wife, before they eventually divorced. He became overwhelmed by his disintegrating personal life and was not able to compose for a period of months. He experienced a profound turnaround,

however, when, in 1971, he married the renowned cellist Aurora Nátola. She brought him a great deal of joy and inspiration, and they established a home in Geneva, Switzerland. Aurora became a true musical partner as a collaborator, advocate, and interpreter of Ginastera's extraordinary music. During the next twelve years he wrote some of his most innovative, brilliant, and technically formidable compositions. Suffering from pancreatic cancer, Ginastera died at the age of 67.

Concerto No. 1, Op. 36, was commissioned in 1968 by Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, the Hopkins Center Congregation of the Arts, and was first performed as part of a music festival that showcased Ginastera's music. Nine years later, in 1977, Ginastera revised the score prior to publication and in 1978 the revised version had its premiere with Aurora Nátola-Ginastera as soloist and Mstislav Rostropovich conducting the National Symphony Orchestra.

The *Concerto No. 1* was written on the heels of *Bomarzo* and shares a similar backdrop in regards to the musical language and content. Like *Bomarzo* it is a neo-expressionist work written using the twelve-tone technique and, at times, quarter tones. The concerto contains dark and sinister undercurrents that prevail throughout the composition but, at the same time, there are other forces at work. In the foreground the solo cello, as the protagonist, is heroic with its provocative singing lines, Latin dance rhythms, and virtuosic feats in the face of a threatening landscape.

Written in a three-movement structure, the first movement *Adagio molto appassionato* features an astonishing palette of colours and powerful dramatic urgency. As the soloist and orchestra exchange dialogue, the full ranges of all the instruments are explored, from great depths to both glorious and terrifying heights. Being a composer strongly rooted in tradition Ginastera employs the B-A-C-H motif frequently throughout the movement embedding it in his tone rows. As the motif appears most often at climactic moments it becomes a particularly interesting feature given its historical links to the great Lutheran composer.

The second movement, *Presto sfumato; Trio notturnale*, is a scherzo written in ABA form. The word *sfumato* comes from the Italian verb *sfumare* meaning "to evaporate, fade out, come to nothing, tone down." *Sfumato* is also a painting

technique that dates back to the Renaissance where sharp outlines are blurred by the gradual blending of one tone to another. The scherzo A sections contain a rhythmic vitality spearheaded by the virtuosic solo cello playing in perpetual motion almost throughout. The solo line is encased by an abundance of percussion sounds and splashes of orchestral colours that build in waves of intensity. The trio B section is dramatic in contrast, being sparsely scored for French horn, harp, and solo cello. The three instruments combine to create an atmospheric world of intimacy that is equally quiet yet intensely passionate. When the opening scherzo section returns, the ensemble is assigned to play *il più pianissimo possibile* (as quietly as possible).

The last movement, *Assai mosso ed esaltato; Largo amoroso*, consists of two defined sections, the first of which dramatically juxtaposes cello recitative- and cadenza-like passages with violent and sinister orchestral commentary, and the second of a reflective and transcendent epilogue. In the face of madness the solo cello remains introspective and expressive throughout. While the opening tutti assaults the senses with chord clusters set to Latin rhythms, the stunning conclusion of the work features a single note on the cello splashed with orchestral chords before the cello is left to dissolve into a remarkable, emotional silence.

Concerto No. 2, Op. 50, "To my dear Aurora", was composed as a tribute to Aurora for their tenth anniversary. Ginastera noted: "My Second Cello Concerto is organized in four movements, each of which bears epigraphs by different poets and a brief commentary alluding to the sonorous, expressive and formal climate within which the movements unfold. I believe this to be sufficient for the listener to become acquainted with my work. But, for the record, I must point out that the unifying element throughout the first movement is a famous cello theme by a great composer, whose identity should be discovered by the listener (a reference to the cello solo from the third movement of the Brahms Piano Concerto No. 2); that the Scherzo sfuggevole must be performed within the strictest pianissimo; that in the third movement one hears the coqui [coqui] (tree frog), that minute and musical nocturnal creature from Puerto Rico; and that in the last movement appear the Quechuan rhythms of the carnavalito, of Inca origin."

- i. *Metamorfosi di un tema (Metamorphosis of a theme)*
"Aurore, je viens à toi avec ce chant né de la brume."
("Dawn, I come to you with this song born of the mist.")
 Auguste Martin
Four transformations of a theme, like the four cardinal points at the hour of dawn, metamorphoses of color from shadows to light.
- ii. *Scherzo sfuggevole*
"¡Esa brisa reciente en el espacio esbelta!"
("This new breeze slender in space!")
 Luis Cernuda
Polychromatic canvas of tones and timbres, like a musical kaleidoscope formed by an introduction and a concertante structure that retrogrades itself.
- iii. *Nottilucente*
"La nuit s'étoile et la paille se dore
Il songe à celle qu'il adore."
("The night shines with stars and the straw turns to gold.
He dreams of her whom he adores.")
 Apollinaire
Through the night of luminous moons and iridescent clouds, an impassioned five-part dialogue emerges, songs veiled in the whispers of the distant jungle.
- iv. *Cadenza e Finale rustico*
"Tiemble y estalle la fiesta."
("The festival shimmers and explodes.")
 Pablo Neruda
Rhythms of the Carnavalito, festival songs, colours of fire in dances invoked from the depths of Andean times.

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In comparison with *Concerto No. 1* Ginastera synthesizes his neo-expressionistic language with that of his earlier years in his *Concerto No. 2, Op. 50*, featuring the Argentine folk idiom more prominently. Written in four movements the *Metamorfosi di un tema* not only involves a musical "play on words" involving the famous Brahms cello solo but around his wife's name. The word *aurora* comes from the Latin word meaning 'dawn' and also stems from Roman mythology; Aurora the goddess of dawn. The four *metamorfosi* in the movement are generally always on the

rise, building in intensity from their very beginnings in accordance with the epigraph. Ginastera even writes *crescendo poco a poco come una aurora* (increase the intensity little by little like the dawn) at the beginning of the fourth metamorphosis, a section that depicts the overwhelming intensity and brilliance of the rising sun.

After a mysterious orchestral introduction highlighted by the flutter-tonguing of the flutes the *Presto mormoroso*, *come un soffio* unfolds as a palindrome and represents one of Ginastera's "magic movements." The murmuring sounds are mysteriously captivating as the orchestration brilliantly enhances the score.

Like the trio section from the second movement of *Concerto No. 1*, *Nottilucente* is both quiet and intensely passionate. The *Nottilucente* is, however, more substantial in length and scope, being scored for full orchestra. Sounds of the jungle are portrayed by an array of percussion instru-

ments along with a creative use of various woodwind and string instruments (for example, the whistling tree frog can be heard throughout the opening as played by the concertmaster). Each episode transforms the night until the final episode, an epilogue scored for strings, harp, and solo cello, transcends the movement before the music evaporates.

The Cadenza begins in reminiscence of the *Nottilucente* before the main theme of the last movement and the rhythms of the *Karnavalito* begin to emerge and evolve. The *Finale rustico* involves wild and tumultuous festivities that are carried out through both obsessive and syncopated rhythms. The orchestration is cleverly scored to the solo cello, while making use of the entire orchestra in an incredible array of colours. This finale is a celebration of the life and union of Alberto and Aurora Nátola-Ginastera.

Susan Wingrove

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