

Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983)

Alberto Ginastera was the leading Argentinian composer of the twentieth century, as important in giving the Argentinian folk heritage a voice in art music as Bartók was in Hungary. Ginastera was born in Buenos Aires on April 11, 1916. He studied music privately as a child, later enrolling at the National Conservatoire of Music in his home city. His first compositions date from his early youth; he was 22 when his *Piezas infantiles* for piano won first prize in a competition. The works that followed (e.g. the ballet *Estancia*) initially developed the nationalist tendencies announced in the *Piezas infantiles*.

In 1946–47, Ginastera spent a year in the United States on a Guggenheim fellowship, joining the teaching staff of the National Conservatory upon his return home. He was later the Dean of the Faculty of Musical Arts and Sciences at the Catholic University. His first opera, *Don Rodrigo*, was premiered to immediate acclaim in 1966 and was soon followed by two others, *Bomarzo* (1967) and *Beatrix Cenci* (1971). A fourth opera, *Barrabas*, was unfinished at the time of his death. In 1969, finding himself out of sympathy with the prevailing political climate in Argentina (indeed, he was twice ejected from his academic posts because of his protests against the repressive regime), Ginastera left the country, settling in Geneva with his second wife, the cellist Aurora Natola.

In the early 1950s, the nationalist element in his music gradually lost its dominance, and more explicitly modernist characteristics began to make their presence felt in what Ginastera called his 'neo-expressionistic period'. He actively adopted the twelve-tone technique and his works also incorporated microtones and polytonality. By the time of his death, on June 25, 1983, his modernism had softened, and he began to look again at the tonality and folk-music inflections of his early output.