



Centro Journal

ISSN: 1538-6279

centro-journal@hunter.cuny.edu

The City University of New York

Estados Unidos

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Reseña de "Jesús María Sanromá: An American Twentieth-Century Pianist" de Alberto Hernández

Centro Journal, vol. XXI, núm. 2, 2009, pp. 306-310

The City University of New York

New York, Estados Unidos

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class. Despite these glaring absences the film is still extremely useful as an entry point into more complex discussions of how race, sex, gender, class, and nation intersect not only within the genre of reggaeton, but also within Puerto Rico and its diaspora. The archival footage of early rap and underground performances alone makes this a valuable resource for fans and scholars alike.

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Jesús María Sanromá: An American Twentieth-Century Pianist

By Alberto Hernández
Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2008
340 pages; \$45.00 [paper]

REVIEWER: EDGARDO DÍAZ DÍAZ, The City University of New York—John Jay College of Criminal Justice

A book-length assessment about the life and deeds of pianist Jesús María Sanromá (a.k.a. “Chuchú”) has been long overdue—until now, when one of his pupils, Alberto Hernández, fulfilled a great deal of the task with an unprecedented volume, *Jesús María Sanromá: An American Twentieth-Century Pianist*.

In the lifetime of Sanromá (1902–1984), the number of published essays or articles about his career (other than concert reviews) came to be relatively minimal if one considers his world-class stature as concert master of the piano. No more than twenty-nine publications in Puerto Rico and the United States are accounted for until 1990 by Donald Thompson and Annie F. Thompson (1990: 321). Even before the release of Hernández’s book in 2009, only Emilio S. Belaval, a lawyer, playwright and essayist, had written a 58-page essay about performances by Sanromá as a child-prodigy (Belaval 1952). But recent re-issuing of some of the pianist’s recordings may have triggered the appearance of countless of internet references and, with it, a surge of public interest in his legacy.

Hernández’s volume of about 340 pages is more about the performances and accomplishments by Sanromá between 1918 and 1952, than about his life and passion as a proud Puerto Rican before and after that period. Through the book, however, one sees a vast amount of data unearthed from the pianist’s family collection and memorabilia donated recently to the Archivo General de Puerto Rico. Although the materials of this collection still remain to be exhausted, Hernández included and digested to his best as much of it as he could possibly deal with, for the sake of English-language readers willing to appreciate the true magnitude of Sanromá as a world-ranked concert pianist. Hundreds of pages of data may have precluded for this book a just deliberation of the information, but one must at least praise Hernández for his feat in selecting key aspects of the legacy by Chuchú from such a vast memorabilia, for further elucidation.

After an index and a page of abbreviations, the book is presented with a foreword by one of Sanromá's daughters, Cherín, followed by a preface by the author and a brief introduction. In general, the main body, comprising 16 chapters, is divided between five parts, the first of which is about the pianist's formative years with a strong background as a Roman Apostolic Catholic, his presentation as a child prodigy to the Puerto Rican public and the arrangements by the Puerto Rican Legislature to finance his studies abroad in 1916. The second part includes details about his education at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston under the tutelage of Mme. Antoinette Adamowski, his close professional relationship with Pierre Monteux and Jacques Thibaud, as well as his job as official pianist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO). His advanced training with Alfred Cortot in Paris, and Arthur Schnabel in Berlin, along with a European tour between 1927 and '29, are the aspects most featured in Part Three, whereas Part Four describes a nine-year-long, intense period of concerts and recordings as piano soloist after his return from Europe. Last but not least is a 12-year period of creative emancipation that entailed solo recordings with RCA for the United States, and his contract as Columbia artist for Latin America, before returning to Puerto Rico in 1952.

Two appended sections provide a partial list of the Sanromá concerts and recordings with appendix A providing a list of works drawn on the pianist's personal notebooks and on concert programs with the BSO. For each musical composition, readers may get a glimpse concerning the year he began to perform, the number of performances (for a total of 935 listed overall), as well as the accompanying orchestra(s) and conductor(s). The list is not comprehensive enough to assess a greater range of presentations by Sanromá as piano recitalist or small-ensemble pianist; the actual number of such performances is estimated to be more than 3000 in 21 countries, with Sanromá acting as a soloist in nearly 150 orchestras between 1926 and 1944.¹ Anyhow, the reader might be pleased with the reasonable scope by Hernández of the pianist's amplitude and the wide spectrum of skills (from the styles of Johann Sebastian Bach of the 1700s to the techniques he confronted with contemporaries Walter Piston, George Gershwin, Paul Hindemith, and Ferde Grofé). Equally valuable is Hernández's assessment of the Sanromá U.S. premieres of Honneger's *Concertino*, Ravel's *Concerto in G*, Stravinski's *Capriccio* and Toch's *Concerto* among many.

The account by Hernández of several recorded performances by Sanromá, gathered from various sound-archive collections in Appendix B, seems to be more inclusive both in terms of stylistic movement and location, again with works, among others, by Bach and Mozart during the 1700s, by Romantics Lizst, Schumann, and others, up to the music of his contemporary European and North American friends. Notable, but not observed by Hernández, are the first recordings of works by many of these composers, including Arnold Schoenberg's *Six Little Piano Pieces* in 1939,² not to mention those by composers from Puerto Rico and other parts of Latin America. Sanromá's mission as a recording artist culminated as pianist-percussionist for the 1982 production of *Dípticos*, a work for piano and percussion by Amaury Veray.

Readers may encapsulate the theme of the book as one about a U.S.-trained 20th-century pianist, a tiny but significant modification of the summary suggested by the actual subtitle of the book (*An American Twentieth-Century Pianist*) likely tailored for marketing purposes. In the United States, the term

“American” usually refers to the identity of things or people as related exclusively to the United States, although Hernández by-passed any discussion concerning the implications of the book’s title. However, without recurring to superlatives, he skillfully if timidly develops the view that Sanromá effectively became the forerunner among all U.S.-trained pianists of his time for his promotion of new musical works by American and European composers that were otherwise discarded by the musical establishment for being “too exotic” or “unfamiliar”.

A letter written to Sanromá by world-renowned Polish pianist Mme. Antoinette Adamowski serves as evidence for Hernández to show the pivotal mission given to the pianist to break the musical hegemony then enjoyed by European composers:

I am sure that your good sense & honesty will always make you acknowledge that you are really a product of America & that you owe everything you really are, to this country [the U.S.A.]. It will be interesting to reverse the usual process, so that something worth while could come from here to Europe, instead of vice versa which usually happened until now—Americans received and applauded artists & born and bred on the other side.

I will be always very keenly interested in all that happens to you & so will Mr. Adamowski...(p. 123—emphasis added).

In the opinion of Mme. Adamowski (a student of Ignaz Paderewski), it was Sanromá the American pianist who would reverse trends that granted European musicians the privilege they enjoyed in playing their own music, in contrast to the music produced and performed by Americans. Hernández does not make an in-depth approach to identity as a related issue, but the words by Mme. Adamowski take a central position more or less coherently developed for the rest of the book; that is, by implying that Sanromá as the catalytic agent for the American audiences, helping them to acknowledge the worthiness of American music as compared to the prevailing European masterworks. Hernández does not give much emphasis to this contribution (either due to lack of space, or due to overabundance of information). However, the reader may end up convinced that Sanromá had a definite role in establishing a true U.S.-based tradition for twentieth-century concert music for major established venues.³

Noted in the book are details of the pianist’s training in the early 1920s when, as a chamber music student, Sanromá “conspired” with his friend Louis Krasner to stun their venerable elder teacher from Poland, Joseph Adamowski, by bringing to class the newest music of the time (p. 55) by Charles Ives and George Antheil instead of the Grieg Sonata, “which was Adamowski’s idea of new music.”⁴ Musical nationalism may have been a factor at the root of the nativist tendencies embraced by Sanromá, but then, the extent to which he exposed conservative benefactors and recalcitrant audiences in the United States to the unfamiliar sounds of twentieth-century music, especially by native composers, is what made him worthy of being considered to be among the foremost twentieth-century pianists of his generation.

In 1926, the Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO) created the post of staff pianist on a permanent basis. Music director Serge Koussevitsky viewed Sanromá as a perfect candidate for the job, given the efforts by the young Puerto Rican pianist play fresh pieces by his American contemporaries. The incorporation of the piano as part of the regular roster for the BSO was an unprecedented move in the United States, designed to fulfill the creative needs on the part of twentieth-century composers. Friends like the U.S.-born Aaron Copland, Ferde Grofé, Walter Piston, William Schuman, and Roger Sessions, together with the Germans Ernst Bloch, and Paul Hindemith,

the Italian Ottorino Respighi, and Russian Igor Stravinsky, converged around the BSO and other ensembles to hear Sanromá play some of their works for the first time.

Musicologists and pianists alike might benefit greatly from the much-needed abridgement, done by Hernández, of Sanromá's archival legacy. In the course of the book, readers are provided with a wealth of details concerning the pianist's self-imposed discipline, as well as his training with major celebrities of the instrument. Aspects like the stylistic and reportorial trajectory of Sanromá—as reflected from concert reviews and countless letters—constitute a genuine achievement by Hernández.

But the book is not free of shortcomings. Two discernible gaps are concerned with poverty of details about two periods in Sanromá's artistic life in Puerto Rico: his earlier education, as well as his last thirty years. Perhaps most sensitive is the earlier gap. In the letter cited above, his teacher Mme Adamowski advised him to appreciate the pianistic training he had in the United States: "You are really a product of America & that you owe everything you really are, to this country." The inclusion and emphasis by Hernández to this letter required considerable clarification about Santromá's early background and economic support in Puerto Rico. A vast nation like the United States would be best situated to draw prospects from within its rich pool of musical talents and child prodigies, who were supposed to exist across the nation. However, the director of the nation's flagship in musical education at the time, the New England Conservatory, acknowledged young Sanromá as superior to his peers for the privileged training history he seemed to have had received in Puerto Rico.

In other words, Sanromá did not emerge out of a vacuum. His early training needs to be taken in greater consideration than the attention given in this book. As detailed by Hernández, on August 15, 1915, at the age of 13 in San Juan, Sanromá skillfully played Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody #2*, a piece known to demand full color, tonal contrast, and brilliance from the best-trained virtuosi. That night, the program included works by Kuhlau, Pons, Balseiro, Mozart, and Rossini, and by the same Ignaz Paderewsky who shaped the professional career of Mme. Adamowski. Additionally, at age seven, Sanromá is remembered as a piccolo player in the eastern township of Fajardo, enthusiastically playing Sousa's famous obbligato of *Stars and Stripes Forever* under the leadership of Francisco Verar, one of the most renowned directors in an environment of orchestras and bands flourishing in Puerto Rico by the hundreds—until the U.S. occupied the island in 1898.

Such a degree of artistic competence, for a child, did not result entirely from his training in the U.S. as Mme. Adamowski proclaimed. Instead, Sanromá's early musical competence speaks persuasively about the musical and intellectual sophistication existing in Puerto Rico, with at several world renowned pianists: Anita Otero Hernández (d. 1905), Gonzalo J. Nuñez (d. 1910), Julio Arteaga (d. 1923), and Francisco Cortés (d. 1950). The former three, like composer Manuel G. Tavárez (1841–1883), were trained at the Paris Conservatory. Following his predecessors, Sanromá planned to study in Paris in 1916, but this did not happen when the United States entered the First World War, and the young pianist was forced to study in Boston.

As for his latter thirty years, the legacy of Sanromá is highly praised in areas like activism, piano education, and curricular development of music. After he helped create the Music Department at the University of Puerto Rico, he became a faculty member of the Puerto Rico Music Conservatory in 1959. Aspects of his early education and latter contribution to Puerto Rico's musical education will hopefully be addressed in subsequent studies that may potentially enhance the contributions of the now indispensable book by Alberto Hernández.

NOTES

- 1 “Jesús María Sanromá, 81, former pianist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra,” in the Obituary section of the *Boston Globe*, October 18, 1984, p. 55.
- 2 “Haendel comes back to home of her first triumph,” by Richard Dyer, Arts section of *The Boston Globe*, June 23, 2000, p. D16.
- 3 In previous decades, pianists in the U.S. filled their concert programs predominantly with the standard master works of European composers, just as Mme. Adamowski observed in her letter. Perhaps a notable exception—among 19th-century pianist during the Romantic period—is the eminent American Louis Moreau Gottschalk, most of whose compositions were inspired on African-American sounds (in the widest sense of the term) he notated during his tours, especially in Louisiana, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Brazil. But even in this case, only a few of Gottschalk’s works (like his *Souvenir de Porto Rico* and the New Orleans-inspired *Bamboulá*) may have appeared in concert programs, while his minute salon pieces for piano most likely appeared as encore performances.
- 4 See article “Virtuoso of violin leaves rich legacy,” by Richard Dyer, Section “Living,” in *The Boston Globe* on May 5, 1995, p. 57.

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Militarismo y clases sociales en Vieques: 1910–1950

By Miguel Ángel Santiago Ríos
San Juan: Ediciones Huracán, 2007
192 pages; \$21.95 [paper]

REVIEWER: JOSÉ BOLIVAR, Independent Scholar

Few authors are jailed defending their beliefs. Miguel Ángel Santiago is one of these. On Mother’s Day 2000, Santiago was headed for the Naval Base of Roosevelt Roads with dozens of other protesters, detained for trespassing on naval property on the Island of Vieques. And so began the author’s battle against the Navy and his quest for justice.

Santiago delights in sharing with his readers his struggles searching through multiple archives in order to obtain his most prized possession: a record detailing the expropriations. He studied the population census and income tax file returns. He searched for documents at the National Archives, the Architecture and Construction Archive at the University of Puerto Rico, the Puerto Rican Collection at the University of Puerto Rico’s library, the General Archives of Puerto Rico, the Conde de Mirasol fort in Vieques, and the Luis Muñoz Marín Foundation. With this information at his disposal, Santiago details in *Militarismo y clases sociales en Vieques*, the expropriations on the Island of Vieques between 1910 and 1950.

The period studied in *Militarismo* covers the agricultural heyday in Vieques, traces the social and economic web of the powerful and influential Benítez family,

Considered by many to be one of the most accomplished pianists of the 20th century, Jes s Mar a Sanrom n made his debut in 1913 in the Fajardo Municipal Theater    he was only eleven years old.  Recognizing the incredible talent and potential of the young pianist, de Diego persuaded the Puerto Rican government to give him a grant to develop this talent through musical education in the United States, launching him on a most rewarding career. In 1920, Sanrom n graduated from the New England Conservatory of Music, based in Boston, Massachusetts, having been awarded the prestigious Mason and Hamlin Prize. Jesus Maria Sanroma: his birthday, what he did before fame, his family life, fun trivia facts, popularity rankings, and more.  One of the most important figures in 20th-century piano. His artistic partnership with Arthur Fiedler was especially fruitful. Before Fame. He was a student at the New England Conservatory of Music, graduating in 1920 and receiving the Mason and Hamlin Prize. Trivia. He was named a Knight of the Order of Saint Sylvester by Pope Paul VI. Family Life. His father had to flee Spain after publicly criticizing the Spanish plebiscite. Jes s Mar a Sanrom n: An American Twentieth-Century Pianist By Alberto Hern ndez reviewed by Edgardo D az D az. Militarismo y clases sociales en Vieques: 1910  1950 By Miguel  ngel Santiago R os reviewed by Jos  Bolivar. Indigenous Resurgence in the Contemporary Caribbean: Amerindian Survival and Revival Edited by Maximilian C. Forte reviewed by Gabriel Haslip-Viera. Learn about Jesus Maria Sanroma (Pianist): Birthday, bio, family, parents, age, biography, born (date of birth) and all information about Jesus Maria Sanroma.  Jes s Mar a Sanrom n was a Puerto Rican pianist who is one of the 20th century's most accomplished and important pianists. In 1932 he gave the first North American performance of Maurice Ravel's Concerto in G under the baton of Serge Koussevitzky, the same day as Sylvan Levin did with the Philadelphia Orchestra. Born: November 7, 1902, Carolina, Puerto Rico.