Alberto Ginastera's Piano Sonatas: A Performance Guide

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ALBERTO GINASTERA’S PIANO SONATAS: A PERFORMANCE GUIDE

By

YinJia Lin

A DOCTORAL ESSAY

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

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the requirements for the degree of
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ALBERTO GINASTERA’S PIANO SONATAS:
A PERFORMANCE GUIDE

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Although Alberto Ginastera composed many works for the piano, this study will only address his sonatas. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, Ginastera’s collection of sonatas displays a broad spectrum of his compositional technique and harmonic language and also tracks the evolution of his compositional style, making it a suitable representation of his piano music and a perfect subject for a performance guide to his music. Secondly, the comparison of the popular first sonata and the relatively-unknown Second and Third Piano sonatas makes this performance guide an opportunity for performers to more fully explore Ginastera’s piano output.

The objectives of this study are: 1) to provide a detailed performance guide for pianists who are exploring Ginastera’s piano works, especially focusing on, though not limited to, his sonatas, and 2) to encourage fellow pianists to include these works in their repertoire, especially the under-played Piano Sonatas nos. 2 and 3. In order to achieve these goals, this study examines these sonatas in depth, both historically and musically, and includes a recording of the First Piano Sonata by the author as an addendum to the study.
DEDICATION

To my dearest parents, Lin, ZhangYing and Wu, ShuXia. Your unconditional love, care, support and dedication to me make me go further.

献给我最亲爱的父母，林展英与吴淑霞。你们对我无私的爱，关怀，支持与奉献让我走更远。
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Argentine composer Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983) was one of the most important Latin American composers of the twentieth century. Scholars have “upheld Ginastera as one of the most original creative voices of the Americas.”¹ Shortly after the composer’s death, his output was compiled into a complete catalog, consisting of one hundred and four complete works plus four incomplete works.² Ginastera’s output includes piano solos, two piano concertos³, a guitar sonata, a cello sonata, two cello concertos, a violin concerto, a harp concerto, three string quartets, three operas, two ballet suites, film music, and incidental music. As he was himself a pianist, Ginastera wrote many substantial piano works during his compositional career, some of which are his most famous pieces, including the beloved Danzas argentinas (1937), Danzas criollas (1956), and the popular First Piano Sonata, op. 22, (1952).

Much like the composer’s native land, Ginastera’s music could be described as a cultural meeting place: his music fuses the Western European music tradition in which he was trained with the Ibero-American and Amerindian traditions of Argentina. These


² Ibid., 40-94.

³ There are only two published piano concertos by Ginastera. Pianist Barbara Nissman discovered the manuscript of Concierto argentina at the Fleisher Manuscript Collection in Philadelphia recently. The work was composed at 1935, when Ginastera was a nineteen-year-old student at the Conservatory. Ginastera withdrew the work from publication after the premiere performance by Hugh Balzo. Ms. Nissman gave the world premiere performance of all three piano concertos on December. 10th, 2011 with the University of Michigan Symphony Orchestra. Barbara Nissman Pianist Homepage, “Concierto Argentino,” http://www.barbaranissman.com/#!conciensta-concierto-argentina (accessed April 12, 2013).
influences are intertwined in his compositions, though the extent to which they are
drawn-upon varies from work to work. Vigorous, primitive dance rhythms, and the use of
pentatonic scales evidence Ginastera’s Amerindian influence (although there are recent
arguments that pentatonic scales were not used primarily by Amerindians) while the
Ibero-American tradition can be seen in his music through his use of *criollo* (American
born, but of European descent) thematic material and “guitar chord” notes⁴ (E-A-D-G-B-
E). This note pattern, which appears in most of his compositions in various forms, was
hailed by musicologist, Latin American music specialist, Malena Kuss as the “cultural
focus” in Argentine culture.⁵ Ginastera also benefits from the versatile rearrangement of
the guitar chord notes into minor pentatonic scale, (E-G-A-B-D-E), a unique note pattern
that manifests both influences in his music.

There are two interpretations of Ginastera’s compositional style periods offered by
the composer himself. The first interpretation appears in an early published interview
with musicologist Pola Suarez Urtubey in 1967, in which the composer divided his music
into three periods: Objective Nationalism, Subjective Nationalism, and Neo-
Expressionism. The second interpretation occurred in a later interview with pianist Lillian
Tan, published in *The American Music Teacher* in 1984. When Tan asked about the
distinctions between his stylistic periods, Ginastera replied: “I think that there are not
three but two. The first I would call tonal and polytonal. Then a second period where I

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⁵ Malena Kuss, “Identity and change: Nativism in Operas from Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico” in
*Explorations, Encounters, and Identities: Musical Repercussions of 1492*, ed. Carol E. Robertson
use atonality.’”³⁶ Most scholars adopt the first interpretation of the periods of Ginastera’s music:

Objective Nationalism (1934-47), in which he referred directly to Argentine folk materials while using traditional tonal techniques; Subjective Nationalism (1947-57), in which he integrated dance rhythms and Argentine folk elements with original thematic ideas, and Neo-Expressionism (1958-83), in which he combined serialism with dodecaphony and avant-garde procedures.⁷

In the interview with Tan in 1984, Ginastera clearly combined the first and the second periods into one, which covers his compositions from 1934 to 1957, while the second period encompasses his output from 1958 to 1983. Musicologist Debora Schwartz-Kates suggested a new interpretation of Ginastera’s style periods in her article on Alberto Ginastera in the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, published in 2001. Schwartz-Kates suggests that a fourth period, “final synthesis,” should be added from 1976 to 1983.⁸ She states:

Beginning with the Puneña no.2 (1976), Ginastera applied complex post-serial techniques to recreate the spirit of the Americas as exemplified in its collective indigenous heritage. It is therefore reasonable to add a fourth period, ‘final synthesis,’ to account for this unique blending of tradition and innovation.⁹

After carefully reviewing the existing literature relating to Ginastera’s music, This author has chosen to adopt the composer’s second, simplified interpretation of his own works for the purpose of this study, which divides his output into early period (1934-57) and late period (1958-1983). This choice is based on the strong shift of direction in

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⁹ Ibid.
compositional techniques employed by the composer after 1958, rather than the cultural influences the composer draws inspirations and materials from, which can be extracted from the whole of his output, regardless of the timeline. In his early period, Ginastera’s music contains a strong sense of tonal center, although he incorporated twelve-tone technique freely, for example, in the second movement of his first piano sonata (1952). After 1958, the twelve-tone method was the primary technique Ginastera employed for pitch organization; more avant-garde procedures such as microtones were used in his music. The music is more abstract in this later period.

Alberto Ginastera’s three piano sonatas provide the scope of the composer’s compositional style and process in both his early and late periods. Although he used the large-scale forms of the Western tradition, such as sonata-allegro form, he utilized non-traditional techniques, including tone clusters, widely spaced registers and non-traditional functional harmonies in his works. Ginastera incorporated gaucho (cowboy) influences in a relatively traditional Western tonal language in the first sonata, while using an atonal idiom, combining with the Amerindian traditional dance rhythms and songs in the second sonata, and a mix of tonal and atonal harmonies in the third sonata. Tonality, however, is not the only contrast to be found amongst the three sonatas, as Ginastera also varied the number of movements in each work: while there are four movements in the first sonata, there are three in the second, and only one in the third. As will be discussed later, some sources suggest that the composer intended the third sonata to be a multi-movement

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work, but was prevented from completing the final movements due to his failing health.

Ginastera’s three piano sonatas form an important and valuable portion of his output, evidencing the transformation in his compositional style. Amongst the three sonatas, the first sonata is a favorite for piano recitals. The second sonata is rarely heard due to its challenging technical demands, and the problematic third sonata is similarly neglected. Though quite a number of theses, books and articles have been written concerning Ginastera’s piano music, there is no performance guide for his complete piano sonatas. This doctoral study aims to provide a much-needed resource for interpreters of Ginastera’s piano music.

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CHAPTER 2
HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

The Republic of Argentina is the second largest country in South America. Located in the southern cone, it is bordered by Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil, and Uruguay. Argentina can be divided into different “cultural areas”\(^\text{12}\): Patagonia, the area of Pampa, the area of Cuyo, the northwestern area, the central area, the area of Chaco, and the littoral zone.\(^\text{13}\) The country has abundant natural resources, and a skilled workforce, providing a solid foundation for the country’s economic growth. The heart of Argentina is the Pampas—the endless, grassy plains that cover the provinces of Buenos Aires, La Pampa, Santa Fé, and Córdoba, containing seventy percent of the country’s population and eighty percent of its agricultural output. Its rainy seasons and mild temperatures make it ideal for the country’s ranching and grain farming industries. The national capital, Buenos Aires, with its bustling shopping centers and cultural heritage sites such as the opera hall, Teatro Colón, the magnificent national palace, Casa Rosada, and the prestigious residential palaces, remains a great cosmopolitan city. In addition to its rich natural resources and prosperous urban culture, Argentine people are recognized as some of the most well-educated citizenry in the Americas. In the last two centuries, Argentina has produced many distinguished dancers, singers and actors, as well as renowned scientists, physicians, engineers, and architects. Argentine people are also known for their


\(^{13}\) Ibid.
competitive sportsmanship. Since 1978, the Argentine national soccer team has won the World Cup twice, and Argentinian polo players are the finest players in the professional polo circuit, bringing their traditional *gauchito* horsemanship to the game.\(^\text{14}\)

Modern Argentine culture is an amalgamation of ancient South American civilizations and European culture brought to the continent by colonists. Music historian, critic and author Gilbert Chase describes the modern Argentina in 1957:

> Argentina is more “Latin” than most of the other countries in the area that we call “Latin America.” Only a small remnant of the Indian population has survived; and the Negroes, never numerous, have gradually disappeared. The tide of immigration which, beginning about one hundred years ago, peopled the land with wave upon wave of new settlers, proceeded mostly from Italy and secondly from Spain. If to this we add the cultural influence of France, preponderant since the “Enlightenment,” the process of “Latinization” is complete.\(^\text{15}\)

There are three primary cultural influences in Latin America: the Amerindian influence, including the civilizations of the Mayans and Aztecs of Mexico and the Incas of Peru and the Andes, the Ibero-American influence brought to the Americas by the conquering Spanish, and lastly, the Afro-American influence brought by African slaves to the continent, although the impact of this last influence is found most notably in Brazil and the Caribbean Islands.\(^\text{16}\)

Before Columbus arrived in the New World, there were about one million inhabitants in the region that we now call Argentina. This population consisted of several

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different groups of people spread throughout the region. The Diaguita people from northwest Argentina were agriculturists who shared Andean culture with the Incas of Peru; the Mapuche people were hunters adapted to agriculture in the area of the south of modern Chile; the Guarani people were a group of agriculturists who resided in northeastern Argentina, Paraguay, and southern Brazil; the Charrúa people were southern hunters who inhabited the Gran Chaco, among the Córdoba mountains, and the nomadic peoples of the Querandí, Puelche, and Tehuelche were hunters who settled in the Argentine Pampa and Patagonia.17

Although the land of Argentina is blessed with rich soil and abundant natural resources, the native inhabitants were using “Stone Age technology” before the arrival of the Europeans.18 Pre-Colombian civilizations, however, had highly developed literature, poetry, drama, music and dance which symbolized aspects of the spiritual world. These native people possessed a fatalistic view of destiny, and a deep sense of melancholy about death. Indigenous music and dance played a significant role in the culture of these people, creating peace and balance with nature. Music was primarily used in sacred rituals such as the nguillatún, an annual fertility ritual (see Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2), as well as in rituals pertaining to childbirth, childhood, healing, death, and thanksgiving, such as the arête avati ritual during corn festivals. Music was also used secularly for mating dances, love songs, and lullabies.19

17 Brown, A Brief History of Argentina, 3-16.
18 Ibid., 3.
Figure 2.1 During fertility rituals, the congregants would drum and chant before an altar. In this picture, the carcasses of two dead sheep hang before the altar. Photo by Carol Robertson, 1972.  

Figure 2.2 Dancers resting between fertility dances. Photo by Carol Robertson, 1972.

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21 Ibid.
The musical instruments commonly used by the indigenous people included gourd rattles or *maracas*, water drums, chordophones, wooden panpipes like the *pifulka*, flutes made from bones and ceramics, and natural trumpets made of bamboo, like the long, end-blown *trutruka.*

(Figure 2.3) Stringed instruments such as lutes, guitars, violins and harps were completely unknown to the native people of Argentina. Their music was based on tritonic and pentatonic pitch systems, and, as they had no musical notation system, all of their music was improvisatory.

Figure 2.3. A *Mapuchu* artist trying a newly made *trutruka*. Photo by Cristina Argota, 1983.

In 1516, Spanish explorer Juan Diaz de Solis discovered Argentina. The colonists brought not only their political and religious values, but also their social and cultural

traditions to the new land. Roman Catholicism was introduced by the Spanish, which was used as “a tool for cultural penetration and domination.” They taught the natives European music, such as the Gregorian chant, and instructed them on how to build musical instruments. The church also took advantage of the Indians’ love of music to convert them to Catholicism and train them to sing and play music for church services.

A number of religious celebrations in the rural areas of Argentina exhibit characteristics of both Roman Catholic religious practice and indigenous beliefs.

By importing their songs, dances and instruments from Europe, the Spanish contributed tremendously to the development of folk music in its colonies. The guitar and accordion became the most popular instruments. An important Argentinian folk figure is the gaucho, who works with cattle and horses in huge cattle ranches called estancias of the Pampa. The term gaucho first appeared around 1810, at the time of Argentina’s independence; it was derived from an Araucanian Indian word meaning “motherless.” The gaucho figure is the result of Spanish, native Indian, and African influences, though this figure is mostly recognized as criollo because of his prominent Spanish heritage. With their fine horsemanship, the gauchos were legendary figures equivalent to the cowboys in the Old West of the United States. Wild in behavior, they were brave fighters

25 Ibid., 389.
26 Ibid.
29 Mark Brill, Music of Latin America and the Caribbean, (Boston, MA: Princeton Hall Press, 2010), 344.
and talented entertainers.\textsuperscript{31} The \textit{gaicho} singers, \textit{payadores}, did not tend to settle down in one place. They were like the gypsies or the troubadours, moving from one \textit{estancia} to another, performing their songs with guitar accompaniment, telling old tales from the past and announcing current affairs to people in return for room and board. The songs they sang often reflected the melancholy, lonely nature of their rural lifestyle.\textsuperscript{32} The \textit{gauchos} invented folk dances such as the \textit{gato}, a courting dance, and the \textit{malambo}, a competitive male dance in 6/8 meter.\textsuperscript{33} Gilbert Chase organized the basic \textit{malambo} rhythmic pattern and possible variations of this rhythm:

Figure 2.4. Basic rhythmic patterns of \textit{malambo}.\textsuperscript{34}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{malambo.png}
\end{figure}


\textsuperscript{32} Brill, \textit{Music of Latin America}, 348-49.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 348.

\textsuperscript{34} Chase, “Alberto Ginastera: Argentine Composer,” 455.
Although Argentina declared its independence in 1816, the European heritage predominated its art and music until the last two decades of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{35} During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Argentine government opened its borders to immigration, and European immigrants, particularly Italians, flooded the country. Naturally, these European immigrants brought their culture with them. The social scene became more European due to the immigration influx. Theaters, concert halls and opera houses were constructed and orchestras, concert series and music schools were sponsored by the government and through private enterprise. However, the civilized, sophisticated urban life of the city was very far from the wild, outlaw lifestyle of the rural Argentine Pampa. This “rural-urban dichotomy”\textsuperscript{36} had profound impacts on the country’s politics, arts and music. While European and international music was featured in the developing urban centers, Ibero-Indian traditional dance songs and folk songs were still being performed in rural areas.\textsuperscript{37} In spite of the rural-urban dichotomy, Argentine composers at that time tried to write music that emulated leading European composers.\textsuperscript{38} In an article in \textit{Revista música chilena}, Ginastera wrote:

“Musicians of the generation born before 1880, many of who studied in Europe, were influenced by composers of the second half of the past century, by the first splendors of French Impressionism and the Italian realism of Puccini.”\textsuperscript{39}


\textsuperscript{36} Chase, “Alberto Ginastera: Argentine Composer,” 443.

\textsuperscript{37} Hanley, “The Composition for Solo Piano,” 4.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.

In 1890, Alberto Williams (1862-1952), who studied with César Franck in Paris for seven years, returned to his native Argentina and initiated the national movement in Argentinian music. In the early stages of the Argentinian nationalistic musical movement, Williams and composers who were inspired by him incorporated folksong elements into pre-existing European musical styles, such as neo-Classicism. However, very few composers ventured into the twelve-tone idiom.40

Following World War II, Argentina’s musical scene grew with the support of private patrons such as the Rockefeller Foundation. This increased the number of music schools, orchestras, and music societies in Argentina. The finest musicians and orchestras performed frequently in Buenos Aires, the capital, and a new *avante-garde* trend took root among the young composers of Argentina. Alberto Ginastera described this phenomenon in his own words:

> The preoccupations which concerned the generation of the 80’s and 90’s (technical skills, the acquisition of a modern language, the depiction of a national style, et al) are not those which move younger composers. We have found a musical culture more solid and advanced, which has permitted our activities to be worked out in a medium more apt than was possible thirty years ago. The problem, seen from a purely musical point of view, is digging at basic elements, with projection towards a universal art.41


Alberto Evaristo Ginastera was born on April 11, 1916 in Buenos Aires, to parents of second generation Catalanian (paternal) and Italian (maternal) descent. Although neither of his parents were musicians, Alberto showed a great interest in music at an early age. He started taking private music lessons at the age of seven, and enrolled in the Williams Conservatory of Buenos Aires at age twelve, studying composition, music theory and piano, and graduating with a gold metal in composition in 1935. The following year, he entered the National Conservatory of Music, studying composition with José André, counterpoint with José Gil, and harmony with Anthos Palma. A former student of the Schola Cantorum in Paris, José André planted the seed of French style in Ginastera, which would come to shape his compositions. The French influence is greatly reflected in his early composition, Piezas infantiles (1934, withdrawn by composer), a set of eight short character pieces, each with an assigned title. From the similar harmonic language and characteristics of each piece, one can observe that this work is modeled after Debussy’s Children’s Corner. In no.6, Arrorró, traces of Danza de la moza donosa from Danzas argentinas, composed in 1937, can be found; coincidentally, in no.7, Chacarerita, one can hear the same malambo rhythmic pattern and the same chords in the right hand as are found in the Danza del viejo boyero.

Ginastera took full advantage of the cultural opportunities in Buenos Aires, going to concerts and operas frequently. In a letter to David Wallace, Ginastera stated:

Debussy’s *La Mer* impressed me by its imagination, its transcendent beauty and virtuosity of its orchestration. *Le Sacre du Printemps* was like a shock. Something new and unexpected. The primitivism of the music, its dynamic impulse and the novelty of its language impressed me as the work of a genius.\(^43\)

While at the Conservatory, Ginastera met Mercedes de Toro, a fellow student, whom he married in 1941. He graduated from the National Conservatory with a Professor’s Diploma in 1938 and returned three years later with an appointment as Professor of Composition.\(^44\) Even before graduating from the National Conservatory, Ginastera composed extensively and began to develop a unique compositional voice. Ginastera’s first success, and one which established his reputation as a significant Argentinian composer, came in 1937 with the first performance of the orchestral suite of his one-act ballet *Panambi* at the Teatro Colón, conducted by José Castro. This ballet was based on a supernatural legend of the Guarany Indians.\(^45\) That same year, he wrote the much-beloved piano suite *Tres Danzas Argentinas*. This set of three dances for solo piano has a foundation of Argentinian folk music. The first *Danza del viejo boyero* (Dance of the old ox-driver), and the last, *Danza del gaucho matrero* (Dance of the outlaw gaucho), are in fact *malambos*, competitive dances in a fast tempo that are associated with the *gauchos*. In these pieces, Ginastera employed *hemiola*, (see Example 3.1) a device often associated with the *malambo*, and the “guitar chord” notes of the open guitar strings, E-
A-D-G-B-E (see Example 3.2).\textsuperscript{46} The slow dance in the middle, titled \textit{Danza de la moza donosa}, (Dance of the graceful maiden), has a melancholy criollo melodic line supported by a zamba (a typical rural Argentine dance) rhythm (\textsuperscript{444x444}), in the left hand throughout the piece (see Example 3.3).

Example 3.1 Alberto Ginastera \textit{Danza del viejo boyero}, mm. 56-61, hemiola

Example 3.2. Alberto Ginastera \textit{Danza del viejo boyero} mm. 78-82, “guitar chord”

Example 3.3. Alberto Ginastera \textit{Danza de la moza donosa} mm. 1-5, zamba rhythm

\textsuperscript{46}Hanley, “The Compositions for Solo Piano by Alberto Ginastera,” 16-20.
The successful premiere of *Panambi* in 1940 resulted in the commission of Ginastera’s second ballet in 1941, *Estancia*, which is set around scenes of rural Argentine life, for the American Ballet Caravan, directed by Lincoln Kirsten. Ginastera depicted the rural *gaicho* life on Argentine ranches by combining original *gauchesco* poetry with characteristic *gaicho* music, including *malambo* dance rhythms and guitar imitations, forging a profound nationalist sentiment into the ballet. Ginastera solidified his preeminence in Argentinian national music through this ballet along with other compositions such as *Cinco canciones populares argentina* (Five argentine popular songs), *Las horas de una estancia* (The hours of a ranch), for voice and piano, and his orchestral overture, *Obertura para el ‘Fausto’ criollo* (Overture for the ‘Faust’ creole).

In 1942, Ginastera was awarded the prestigious Guggenheim Grant, but was not able to make use of it because of the outbreak of World War II. In 1945, the Perón regime took over the Argentine government, and Ginastera was dismissed as the Chair of the National Military Academy because he signed a petition defending civil rights. In December, he took advantage of the Guggenheim Grant and went to the United States with his family. During his fifteen-month stay in the United States, he visited prominent music schools such as Juilliard, Yale, Harvard, and Columbia, and attended performances of his music by the League of Composers in New York and the Pan American Union in Washington D.C. He also participated in Copland’s composition course at the Tanglewood summer festival, becoming a close friend of the composer.

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From 1948 to 1958, Ginastera, having returned to Argentina, now married with two children, was kept busy teaching, composing and traveling. In 1948, he founded the Argentinian section of the International Society for Contemporary Music, and was elected President of the division. He also became the director of the conservatory of music and theater arts at the National University of La Plata. In 1951, his first string quartet was selected for performance at the twenty-fifth International Society for Contemporary Music in Frankfurt, which brought him to Europe for the first time. At Copland’s suggestion, Ginastera began to compose film music to supplement his income, becoming a highly successful composer in this genre. He was awarded prizes by the Argentinian Academy of Cinema Arts in 1942, 1949, and 1954.\(^{49}\)

In 1952, the Perón government took control of the political, cultural, and educational activities of Bueno Aires. Due to political conflict, Ginastera was removed from his position at the Conservatory in La Plata. Despite the difficulties he had encountered with the Perón government during the years of this regime, his music career continued to flourish. His musical craftsmanship also gradually matured and developed. The creation of three superb works, *Piano Sonata No. 1* (1952), *Variaciones concertantes* (1953) for chamber orchestra, and *Pampeana No. 3* (1954) for orchestra, commissioned by the Louisville Symphony, earned him international recognition as well as marking the peak of his early style career.\(^{50}\)

In the popular four-movement *Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 22*, each movement has a specific musical form. The first movement is in Sonata-Allegro form with an exposition,  

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\(^{50}\) Ibid.
consisting of a first theme and a contrasting, lyrical second theme, a development and a recapitulation. The second movement, titled *misterioso*, is a *scherzo* in *malambo* rhythm. The third movement is a slow, expressive and lyrical movement, followed by a feverish, diatonic *malambo* dance for the fourth movement.

The *Variaciones concertantes* consists of a theme with eleven variations, each showcasing one or more solo instruments. Ginastera’s signature open-string guitar notes are played at the beginning by the harp (see Example 3.4). Similar to Haydn’s use of open fifth drones in his music, the use of this signature chord had sentimental associations for Ginastera, as if it was an umbilical cord connecting him to his country.

He commented on this work:

> These variations have a subjective Argentine character. Instead of using folkloristic material, the composer achieves an Argentine atmosphere through the employment of original thematic and rhythmic elements.\(^{51}\)

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Example 3.4. Alberto Ginastera *Variaciones concertantes*

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The *Pampeana No. 3*, subtitled “Symphonic Pastoral in Three Movements,” is the pinnacle of the *gauchesco* tradition in Ginastera’s music.\(^{52}\) The title of the piece reveals that it is related to the Argentine *Pampa*, which is both economically and emotionally important to the Argentinian people. Ginastera described what the *Pampa* meant to him:

> Whenever I have crossed the pampa or have lived in it for a time, my spirit felt itself inundated by changing impressions, now joyful, now melancholy, some full of euphoria and others replete with a profound tranquility, produced by its limitless immensity and by the transformation that countryside undergoes in the course of the day.\(^{53}\)

Unlike in his earlier works, such as the *Danza del Viejo Boyero* from the three *Argentine Dances*, or the *Piano Sonata No. 1*, Ginastera uses the guitar chord indirectly, in a “hinted” manner in *Pampeana No. 3*. In the second movement, rather than writing out the chord in plain sight, he incorporates the guitar notes in a polytonal chord that is derived from an alteration of the guitar chord, and is followed by a *malambo* dance in 6/8.

What differentiated Ginastera from local national composers was that he was not only highly sensitive to his national cultural environment, he was also fully aware of the current international compositional trends, which most local composers neglected. Ginastera absorbed his country’s history, folklore, and literature, and then employed contemporary techniques such as twelve-tone serialism and polytonality to express his

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music in a symbolic language that is “concentrated and sublimated with the essence of Argentine character and landscape.”

In 1961, he traveled to Washington D.C. for the premiere of his *Piano Concerto No.1* and *Cantata para america magica*. Due to the increased exposure of his music and the reputation he had established as a brilliant composer, Ginastera was able to work exclusively on commissions, most of which came from the United States. In 1963, Ginastera became the director of the Latin American Centre for Advanced Musical Studies at the *Instituto Torcuato di Tella*. In the following eight years under his leadership, the institute promoted *avant-garde* techniques and fostered many young Latin American composers by offering them fellowships and opportunities to study with distinguished faculty such as Copland and Messiaen. Ginastera’s music also changed direction under the influence of the composers of the Second Viennese School, such as Alban Berg and Anton Webern. This marked the end of his early style period, and the beginning of his late style period: *Neo-Expressionism* (1958-1983). His grand operas *Don Rodrigo* (1964), and *Bomarzo* (1967), exemplify his mastery of serialism, structural symmetry and microtones. The overwhelming critical praise for these works affirmed Ginastera’s reputation as a major opera composer; however, due to the explicit sexuality in *Bomarzo*, the performance of this opera was banned in Argentina until 1972.

The separation that led to his divorce from his wife in 1969, distressed Ginastera greatly. He was unable to work, and therefore did not complete several commissions, including his third opera, *Beatrix Cenci*. However, his marriage to Argentine cellist

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Aurora Nátola in 1971, revived his creative power. Free from all full-time academic appointments, Ginastera settled in Geneva with Aurora and devoted himself entirely to composing. In the following decade, inspired by the love of his famous cellist wife, Ginastera wrote a cello sonata, two cello concertos and many lyrical pieces for the cello containing hidden amorous symbols. In 1981, thirty years after the great success of his Piano Sonata No. 1, Ginastera composed his second piano sonata, and began a third sonata the following year. However, Ginastera became ill while working on the third piano sonata and died on June 23, 1983, at age 67 in Geneva, Switzerland.\(^56\)

Ginastera’s *Sonata No. 1 for Piano, Op. 22*, was written in 1952, and was commissioned by the Carnegie Institute and the Pennsylvania College for Women for the 1952 International Contemporary Music Festival. This piece was then chosen to be performed at the twenty-seventh Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music in Oslo, in 1953. The composition is dedicated to Johana and Roy Harris. The premiere performance was given by Johana Harris at the Carnegie Music Hall of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on November 29, 1952.\(^\text{57}\) Ginastera described the elements of this piece in his own words:

The Sonata is written with polytonal and twelve-tone procedures. The composer does not employ any folkloric material, but instead introduces in the thematic texture rhythmic and melodic motives whose expressive tension has a pronounced Argentine accent.\(^\text{58}\)

The composer also revealed that this sonata “was inspired by the music of the Argentinean *Pampas*.”\(^\text{59}\) Along with his *Variaciones concertantes* and *Pampeana No. 3*, both written in 1953, Ginastera uses this piece to express his emotional ties to the Argentinean *Pampas*, a symbolic gesture which Gilbert Chase referred to as “subjective


sublimation.\textsuperscript{60} There are prominent Ibero-American influences throughout the sonata: the use of doubled thirds in the melody, which is derived from Iberian folk practice, the use of guitar chords, the \textit{malambo} dance rhythm of the \textit{gaúcho} tradition, and the contrasting “pastoral-lyric” and “pastoral-barbaric”\textsuperscript{61} characters.

Ginastera employs traditional large-scale forms such as sonata-allegro form and sonata-rondo form in this work. Although Ginastera stated that this work is “written with polytonal and twelve-tone procedures,” this author found that there is a strong tonal center maintained throughout all four movements. The extreme wide range of registers and dynamics, the extensive use of \textit{ostinato}, and the use of triadic and quartal harmonies exemplifies Ginastera’s signature piano writing.

Since its premiere, the first piano sonata has received the highest praises from music critics, and has obtained widespread popularity amongst pianists. The \textit{New York Times} once wrote: “Is there not another contemporary sonata that pianists could occasionally play other than Ginastera?”\textsuperscript{62}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{60} Chase, “Alberto Ginastera: Argentine Composer,” 457.
\item \textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 456
\item \textsuperscript{62} Pope, “The Composer-Publisher Relationship,” 104
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Movement I. Allegro marcato

The first movement is written in Sonata-Allegro form. In spite of the numerous accidentals, the cadences are always in A, thus the general pitch center is set in the Aeolian mode. The first theme group of the exposition (measure 1-22) is based on an energetic two-bar motive consisting of parallel thirds with counter motives in the bass (see Example 4.1).


This motive is then developed in the twenty-two bars of the first theme group before being transposed up a major second, transitioning to the second theme group. The contrasting second theme first appears as a lyrical, linear melodic line in the exposition (see Example 4.2), with the marking of dolce e pastorale by the composer. In the development section (measures 80-137), the second theme material also appears in a
lyrical form with beautiful alternations of tonality, voicing, texture, and melodic ornamentation (see Example 4.3).

Example 4.2 Ginastera Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 22, Movement I. mm. 50-55.


In the recapitulation (measures 138-191), the second theme returns with a contrasting character, harmonized in a chordal style with the dynamic marking $ff$ gaio$^{63}$ (see Example 4.4). Ginastera described the second theme as “cantando, intimate, lyrical, and suave, as opposed to the energetic first theme.”$^{64}$ The five-octaves range, the use of

$^{63}$ Italian, meaning “light-hearted,” or “frisky.”

$^{64}$ Hanley, “The Compositions for Solo Piano by Alberto Ginastera,” 54
quartal/quintal harmonies, and “planing procedure” (harmonic parallelism) as well as the constant shifting of meters in the first movement are typical features of Ginastera’s piano writing.


In terms of tempo and rhythmic articulation, Ginastera gives these instructions:

The movement is to begin in tempo; because of the shifting meters it is important to establish a steady eighth-note pulse and to maintain it throughout the movement except in the few places where rhythmic nuances are indicated in the score.\(^65\)

The composer also indicates that he wants a slight ritardando in the measure preceding the recapitulation, and adds that performers should play non-legato when there are no

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slurs marked in the score. He goes on to say: “in the loudest passages which are not slurred, this non-legato should take on the character of a martellato touch.”

As Ginastera suggests, the performer should choose a tempo which he/she can maintain comfortably throughout the entire movement. Although the composer’s metronome marking is 144 for the quarter note, it maybe very difficult for one to maintain that speed throughout the entire movement, thus the overall tempo should be determined by the performer’s comfort with the most challenging passages of the movement.

When playing the first theme, it is important to think ahead to give the piece a sense of direction. For example, the opening measure goes toward the second measure in 2/4, similarly, the direction goal in the theme goes to measure four, and measure nine. The low octaves in the left hand, as well as the other counter-motive octaves in the bass, are very easy to miss, as they are distant from the previous thirds, so the author suggests moving the torso along with both hands as soon as the previous thirds are sounded, in order to give yourself more time to make the leaps accurately. The author suggests that pianists should shift their bodies first, and then their hands should follow the direction of their body to the left side of the keyboard in order to diminish the distance from the keyboard. When moving both hands, pianists should be aware not to lift their hands far away from the keyboard, but to glide directly above the keys, and stay close to the keyboard to shorten the time and distance required for the move. The best way to master this technique is to practice moving the hands and body without actually hitting the notes, until one is very confident with the distance. In terms of fingering, it is best to use the

66 Ibid.
strongest fingers to play the thirds. The best choice would be thumbs and middle fingers for the E and C in both hands, as this fingering is not only strong, it also enables one to connect to the next set of parallel thirds (index finger and fifth finger in the right hand, index finger and fourth finger in the left hand) without lifting the hands. For the octaves in the left hand, the author suggests using thumb and fifth finger for one or two consecutive octaves, and then alternating between the thumb and fifth finger and the thumb and fourth finger (if one’s hands can comfortably stretch an octave from thumb to ring finger). In terms of pedaling, pianists should make sure that the damper pedal catches the low octaves in the left hand, so that those octaves are carried over with the parallel thirds on top; however, pianists should be aware that these octaves are written in a very low register, thus one should use his/her own judgment so that the harmonies are clear and not muddy. The transition before the second theme (measures 30-51) should maintain the same energetic and agitated spirit as indicated.

The second theme is a four-bar lyrical, pastoral phrase that contrasts with the energetic first theme. Pianists should be aware of the dynamic and character changes here. This theme should be played legato with the exception of the powerful ff ascending octaves in measures 72, 73, 79, and 80. These measures should be played with a contrasting non-legato touch and with crescendo, and a subito p in the following measures. The sixteenth-note grace notes (see Example 4.2, measures 50-55) should sound like the tinkling of a bell, and be played with clear articulation and synchronization between the hands.

The development section consists of two contrasting motives. The first motive is derived from the octaves found in the transition following the first theme (see Example
4.5), and the second motive comes from the pastoral second theme, as mentioned earlier (see Example 4.2 and Example 4.3).

Example 4.5 Ginastera Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 22, movement I. mm. 30-36.

Ginastera Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 22, Movement I, development, mm. 92-96.

The octaves and repeated notes in the first motive should be played percussively, emulating the sound of a drum. In measures 102, 104, 106, and 108, (see Example 4.6), the ascending sixteenth notes in the left hand should be played *legato*, driving towards the next measure, while the right hand remains percussive and *non-legato*. The author suggests starting the sixteenth notes in the left hand softly, building a *crescendo* to the
downbeat of the next measure. In this particular passage (measures 101-109), single half
damper pedal should be applied for each entire measure in the sixteenth-note passages;
measures without sixteenth notes should be played *staccato* with short damper pedals on
each beat in order to create contrasting sonority. The second motive of the development
should be lyrical and *legato*, as in the second theme.

Example 4.6 Ginastera *Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 22*, Movement I, mm. 102-104.

In the recapitulation, (measures 138-191) Ginastera reinforces the first theme by
adding notes to the parallel thirds, providing a fuller sonority. The dynamics of the first
theme group should be stronger than they were in the exposition as indicated (in the
exposition, it is marked *f*, and in the recapitulation, it is marked *ff* which maintains the re-
emphasis of the recapitulation. In the author’s opinion, pianists may take a little more
time here, especially for the bass octaves, to give a broader feeling to this section. The
second theme is shortened to an eight-bar phrase, with chordal harmonization, and
marked *ff gaio*. Although Ginastera marked the passage *ff*, pianists should also consider
the “*gaio*” indication (see footnote 62). This section should have a different color than the
first theme, although both sections have the same dynamic markings. The author suggests
treating this passage less violently, playing it non-percussively, and more *legato*. The
*coda* consists of three measures of descending chordal scales in mirrored octaves
beginning on A, followed by three ascending octaves. The author recommends making a
*decrescendo* as the music descends and then building again as it ascends, adding
*stringendo* for even more emphasis.

**Movement II. Presto misterioso**

The second movement, marked *Presto misterioso*, is written in ABACABA Sonata-Rondo form and has a scherzo-like character. In Mary Ann Hanley’s dissertation, “The Compositions for Solo Piano by Alberto Ginastera, (1916-),” Ms. Hanley refers to this movement as Sonata-Rondo form. In Claudia Knafo’s dissertation, “Tradition and Innovation: Balances within the Piano Sonatas of Alberto Ginastera,” Ms. Knafo provides further explanations in support of the Sonata-Rondo form by pointing out the harmonic relationships among sections. Ms. Knafo states that the classical Sonata-Rondo form has a built-in harmonic expectation of tonic-dominant-foreign keys-tonic relationship. She goes on to say that the tonic key, D minor, is applied to the primary major section (ABA); the second major section, the C section, has a cadence that “foreshadows” the harmonic area of the next section; the last major section (ABA), appears first in the sub-dominant key of G, then goes to the dominant and ends in the tonic key. Although the perception of functional tonality within this repertoire is highly subjective, the author shares Ms. Hanley and Ms. Knafo’s view.

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69 For further insight and studies on the topic of tonality, please refer to *Tonality and Transformation* by Steven Rights. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
The movement opens with a twelve-pitch “tone row.” (see Example 4.7) Ginastera stated that he employed “twelve-tone procedure” in this sonata; it can be observed however, that he did not follow Schoenberg’s twelve-tone technique strictly. In Schonberg’s “Style and Idea,” the composer wrote about the principles of his twelve-tone compositions:

The construction of a basic set of twelve tones derives from the intention to postpone the repetition of every tone as long as possible....It seems in the first stages immensely important to avoid a similarity with tonality.... The other function is the unifying effect of the set. Through the necessity of using besides the basic set, its retrograde, its inversion, and its retrograde inversion....Such features will appear in every motif, in every theme, in every melody... 

Ginastera only used the twelve-pitch row in the A sections in this movement. The row does not undergo transformational process, yet it is later transposed by IC5 (a perfect fourth up) on measures 117 to 129 (see Example 4.8).

Example 4.7 Ginastera Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 22, Movement II, mm. 1-2, “Tone Row”.

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Example 4.8 Ginastera *Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 22*, movement II, mm. 119-120.

The guitar chord is presented in various places throughout the movement. First, the end of the primary A theme consists of a strummed guitar chord imitation (see Example 4.9); second, in the C section, the right hand plays a two-bar ostinato throughout while the left hand strums guitar chords with altered pitches (see Example 4.10); third, in measures 109, 110, 113, and 114, the open-string guitar chords are presented particularly clearly (see Example 4.11); and finally, at the return of the A section with skips, followed by a repetitive two-bar ostinato in the right hand accompanied by the open strings of the guitar in the left hand (see Example 4.12). When playing these passages, pianists should pay attention to the articulation in order to best imitate the guitar tuning effect. The strumming figures and the broken-chord notes should not be brushed through or hurried, but rather, they should be played with space between the notes to mimic the frets plucking the strings on a guitar. The damper pedal should catch all the notes in the guitar chord, so the pitches blend in to better enhance the harmonies.


Starting this movement with the right tempo and maintaining it throughout the movement is extremely important. The tempo should be decided by finding the maximum speed the pianist can comfortably play the most technically challenging phrases, which certainly are the two bars of chromatically ascending sixths in measures 36 and 37, as well as the four bars of ascending chromatic thirds in measures 163 to 166. When playing this movement, one should take care to keep the A section as soft as possible, to create a mysterious, “creepy” feeling throughout. This section should sound like a mere wash of color, and should be played as *legato* as possible. In order to achieve this effect, the
pianist’s fingers must stay very close to the keyboard and finger movement should be kept to a minimum. One important observation the author makes while playing this movement is that both arms should move before the fingers. The pianist’s arms and wrists should move like snakes, in and out, left and right, on the keyboard. When moving from white keys to black keys, the wrists, forearms and elbows should move inward first, then the fingers follow; when playing ascending notes, arms should move naturally from left to right and vice versa. The pedaling in the A section is essential to help achieve the mysterious, haze-like effect. The author recommends using the una corda and a half damper pedal that must be changed every measure.

In the transition to the B section (measures 36 and 37), the chromatic sixths in the right hand should be played with proper fingerings. My fingering recommendation is the following:


The outer fingers should make a “finger legato,” while the inner fingers (thumb and second finger) must move quickly. At a glance, these are not the most “convenient” fingerings most pianists would choose. Some pianists will most likely prefer using the thumb for all the lower notes, and it does make this passage easier to play at first in a
slower tempo as well as when playing the passage alone. However, after trying out the all-thumb fingerings, the author found that as the speed increased, the thumb became “confused,” by the repetitive up-and-down motion, and this confusion caused mistakes in articulations and accuracy. By switching to the second finger occasionally, the labor that causes confusion for the thumb is alleviated; furthermore, the vertical motion of the thumb is lessened, since the movement from the thumb to the index finger is more horizontal, which aligns with the outer fingers.

The following measures consist of repeated two-bar percussive, *staccato* phrases that range across three octaves. In order to play them confidently, the author suggests hand redistributions. Rather than playing as written, the lower E and lower B should be added to the left hand, so the right hand only plays A and E (comfortably), then E and B, while the left hand plays A-D-E and E-A-B (Example 4.14).


![Example 4.14](image)

The pedaling in this phrase should be short to make the *staccatos* very sharp. In the B section (measures 48-61), Ginastera infuses the movement with Argentine dance rhythms and folk tunes. This dance-like character, which contrasts with the mysterious A section, is harmonized with parallel triads in the right hand. Although Ginastera marked *cantando* in this ten-measure passage, there are in fact two different characters from
within. The first is the singing folk tune which appears from measure 48 to the first half of measure 51, and the second is a dancing rhythm which occurs from the second half of measure 51 until measure 57 (see Example 4.15). The melodious folk-like melody should be played *legato* and *cantando* as indicated, with two long pedals for each measure. The dance rhythm, on the other hand, should be played with percussive, *non-legato* articulation. The damper pedal should be used sparingly to create better contrast with the folk tune.


Before the final return of the A section, there is a four-bar passage with chromatic thirds. This is the second most difficult passage to execute technically in the movement.
It is important for pianists to keep this passage light, without digging into the keys too much. The author’s fingering suggestion is as follows:

Example 4.16 Ginastera Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 22, Movement II, mm. 162-166.

In the last return of the A section, the left hand plays the original tone row while the right hand plays the tone row with skipping notes, with the left hand playing legato, and the right hand playing staccato. It is difficult to memorize the right hand melodic line, as the skipping notes are random, without any sequential order. It is advisable to isolate the right hand pattern, and practice it alone, with emphasis on the rests and the rhythmic pattern.

Movement III. Adagio molto appassionato

The third movement, Adagio molto appassionato, is an extension of the second movement. As in the second movement, non-functional tone rows are used in this movement for coloration purposes, as there is a strong sense of a pitch center of B throughout the movement. For example, the six-note tone row that starts with B is repeated five times at the beginning to establish a sense of tonal center in B. The twelve-
pitch “tone row” is a refracted version of the guitar chord used by Ginastera to create an abstract ambiance in this movement. The movement exhibits improvisatory writing. The texture is linear with very little chordal writing, and a great deal of rhythmic and tempo freedom. It is written in binary form, in which the A section (measures 1-22) and the abbreviated A’ section (measures 57-70) frame the contrasting B section (measures 23-56). The arpeggiated opening statement consists of altered guitar-chord pitches, which also form the first six notes of a non-functional tone row, B-F#-C-Eb-A-D (see Example 4.17). The complete twelve-pitch row is presented only once at the very end of the movement.


When playing the opening statement (measures 1-5, see Example 4.17), it is important to create the proper atmosphere with the soft guitar-strumming feature. The author recommends creating “space” between the notes to make each note resonant. “Space” does not necessarily refer to the time and duration between each note, as the tempo marking of the movement is already quite slow, but rather it refers to the touch and actual contact time with the keyboard. It is recommended to slowly press each key with focus, and as soon as the sound is heard, the finger should leave the key to allow the strings to vibrate. In this way, the sound of each note will not be muffled, or suppressed.
To better execute this particular sound, the author recommends that pianists plucking the strings of these notes inside the piano (with the damper pedal held over these notes). Plucking strings inside the piano is a technique that many contemporary composers utilize in their compositions to achieve specific sound effects. However, in Ginastera’s piano works, this technique is never featured. This reflects the conservative side of the composer in comparison with his contemporaries. While playing this movement, the author experimented with this technique in this particular section of the movement, and found it to be quite suitable. The sound that is created by plucking of the strings is similar to the sound made by a guitar. By performing this experiment, pianists will gain a better imaginative understanding of this “string” sound, which can later be transferred to the keyboard.

The first section of this movement is not technically challenging for most pianists; however, the careful use of pedaling is very important here. In the opening statement, when the partial first tone row is repeated, the author suggests holding down the una corda and damper pedal for the first four measures, as the composer indicated pp for the first appearance of the tone row, and p for the second. Pianists should maintain the same dynamic touch for both statements, letting the pedal increase the volume for the second statement. After measure 7, pianists should flutter the damper pedal to clear out the dissonance of the quick thirty-second notes before proceeding to the third statement of the tone row. From measure 8 to measure 12, the author suggests using one single damper pedal to create a special sonority, which the lower notes of the tone rows blend in with the thirty-second-note passage in the high register (see Example 4.18).

The B section consists of two contrasting characters, *lyrico* and *agitato con passione*. Two lyrical sections (measures 23-29 and measures 40-56) are contrasted with the *agitato* section (measures 30-39). In the author’s opinion, the first lyrical phrase should display a lack of emotion. It should be very calm and still, and played without any fluctuation in the dynamics or tempo, to achieve the effect of the calmness before a storm (see Example 4.19).

The lyrical phrase gradually intensifies from measure 30, reaching a climax from measure 34 to 39. The use of repeated octaves and chords in both hands as well as extreme dynamics and a wide range of registers all contribute to make these measures climactic, contrasting with the lyrical sections of the movement (see Example 4.20). When playing the octaves, the author recommends that pianists should try to create more tension within the measure by prolonging the contact time with the keyboard for each octave/chord. In another words, try to stay on the keyboard as long as possible before moving on to the next chord. The sixteenth note passages in measures 36 and 39 should be played in one stroke with intentionality and direction. The use of a single damper pedal throughout the entire measure is recommended (see Example 4.21).

Example 4.20 Ginastera Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 22, Movement III, m. 34.

Example 4.21 Ginastera Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 22, Movement III, m. 36.
The tension gradually lessens around measure 40, and the second lyrical phrase begins, echoing the first phrase with the melodic line played by the right hand. This section releases the built-up tension and prepares for the return of the opening statement. In the coda, the complete tone row with all twelve pitches is presented in its original form at last (see Example 4.22). The damper pedal should be held for the last three measures to blend all the tone colors. Pianists should wait until the sound dies out completely before continuing with the next movement.

Example 4.22 Ginastera Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 22, Movement III, m. 68.

Movement IV. *Ruvido ed ostinato*

The last movement of the first sonata is written in a modified ABCABAB Rondo form. This movement is the perfect example of what Gilbert Chase referred to as “pastoral-barbaric.” The entire movement is constructed with a malambo dance rhythm,

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71 Chase, “Alberto Ginastera: Argentine Composer,” 456
derived from the competitive dance of the *gauchos*. It is extremely rhythmic, and has a frenetic, rough character.

This movement is technically challenging due to the rapid alternating chordal writing, the fast-paced dance rhythms, octaves, leaps, and the extremely wide range of registers. The most common mistake pianists make in this movement is starting too fast: this forces them to slow down later in the sections that have an abundance of leaps and octaves. To best determine the right tempo for the entire movement, the pianist should look for the most challenging passages, such as the C theme (measures 60-69) in the middle section, the canonic B theme (measures 94-99) or the last page of the movement, when the right hand plays the second theme in octaves and the left hand plays *ostinato* chords. The tempo at which one can play these passages comfortably should be the tempo for the opening.

Ginastera employs *hemiola* throughout the entire movement to enhance the characteristics of the dance. This technique can be seen clearly during the opening (see Example 4.23).

Example. 4.23 Ginastera *Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 22*, Movement IV, mm. 1-4.

The recurring A theme emulates the vigorous dance steps of the *malambo*. In the B theme, the rhythm switches between the hands; now the right hand plays the syncopated
beats, accompanied by repeated sixteenth-note quartal chords in the left hand (see Example 4.24).

Example 4.24 Ginastera Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 22, Movement IV, mm. 27-30

When playing the opening theme, pianists must pay particular attention to the articulation (non-legato) as well as the rhythmic groupings (the use of hemiola). The rhythmic drive is essential; one must emphasize the meter shifts between duple and triple, which occur frequently throughout the movement, in order to accurately portray the characteristics of the malambo. When playing this theme, it is also important to have a sense of direction in order to create a constant rhythmic drive that moves the music ahead. The author suggests using stronger fingers (thumbs, second fingers and middle fingers) as often as possible for the opening theme. Pedaling in this section should be short and frequent.

From measure 40 to 59, when both hands are playing ostinato with a chromatic scalar melody above, the pianist should make the upper melody the anchor, putting more weight on the outer fingers, and rotating inward to play repeated notes. This not only makes the passage physically easier to play, but it also makes the most musical sense to emphasize the chromatic scales (see Example 4.24).

There are two challenging techniques required from two measures before the C theme (measure 60) through the end of the movement: *ostinato* figures and octaves. The first technically challenging feature involves jumping, wide-ranging octaves. For example, in measure 60 (see Example 4.26), both hands are jumping outward, and one of the left-hand jumps encompasses three octaves. The author’s practice suggestion is first to practice hands separately in a slow tempo. The focus of this exercise is to make your hands “calculate” and “remember” the distances and positions of each chord. When putting both hands together and playing at an increased speed, knowing where to look and how to feel are the crucial tasks. It is recommended that one look at the center of the keyboard for the first jump, so one can see both hands, and then find the next octaves before hitting the keys. For the second jump, since the left hand has a three-octave distance to move from the previous chord, as the right hand stays in the same octave range, one should look at the left hand as well as preparing the left hand earlier than the right hand. This also applies to the last jump. Although there is no indication of *ritardando* in the score at this measure, in the author’s opinion, it is better to play accurately than to play in tempo while sacrificing accuracy. In addition, it makes musical sense to take time in this spot to exaggerate the *ff violento.*
Another technically challenging passage with octaves appears in the developed, expanded B theme, found from measures 94 to 128. It begins with a canonic conversation between the hands, in which the subdivisions of two and three overlap simultaneously (see Example 4.27). It then moves to C-sharp octaves in both hands with an *ostinato* figure in the middle. The theme continues in octaves in both hands, alternating with the *ostinato* figures (see Example 4.28). When dealing with these octaves, the author’s suggestion is to elevate the wrists, form a firm grip, and using the thumb as an anchor (since it is much stronger than the fifth finger), turn the hand slightly outward so that the thumb and the fifth finger form a forty-five degree angle from the wrist. The author had a lesson with pianist and pedagogue, George Kern a few years ago, and remembers that he described this particular hand position as the same movement as “when you are swimming.” What Kern referred to was the arm movement of the breaststroke. When we do the breaststroke, our hands push out to the sides, and both hands have to turn outward to form a forty-five degree angle. The theory behind this particular hand position is to make up the difference between the thumb and the fifth finger in length. Try examining your hands, and you will find that the thumbs are located much lower than the fifth finger, and you cannot draw a horizontal line that touches both the thumb and the fifth
finger. However, if you turn your hand outward and form a forty-five degree angle from your wrist, your thumb and your fifth finger can reach the same horizontal line. When we play octaves, it is better to have both the thumb and the fifth finger playing at the same horizontal line to balance the hand; furthermore, by moving the hands outward, your fifth fingers stretch out more than when your hands are perpendicular to the keyboard.

Example 4.27 Ginastera Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 22, Movement IV, mm. 95-99.


When dealing with ostinato chords, for example from measure 162 to measure 177, (see Example 4.29) pianists have to form a firm grip to insure that their hands do not lift up too far from the keyboard. Rather than moving the wrists up and down to strike the keys, pianists should elevate and lock their wrists, making sure they are not moving and that they are raised higher than the hands, and then push down the keys with the force of the arms. It should feel like the hand is “glued” to the keyboard.

When the enhanced chordal A theme returns for the last time (measures 138-155), the right hand and the left hand are overlapping (see Example 4.30). To make this practical, pianists must keep the right hand as low and close to the keyboard as possible, while keeping the left hand elevated with a high wrist. The outer notes of these chords should be voiced so that the melodic line of the first theme is more pronounced. The hammering chords in the left hand and the melody of the B theme in octaves in the right hand push the *malambo* dance to a violent climax in the final page of the movement.

Ginastera’s extreme use of *ostinato* chords in combination with jumping octaves makes this section the most technically challenging (see Example 4.29). The author recommends practicing the right hand octaves alone slowly, especially for the wide, distant jumps, before adding the *ostinato* in the left hand, and then gradually play it up to tempo.

Example 4.30 Ginastera *Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 22*, Movement IV, mm. 139-143.
Sonata No. 2 for Piano, Op. 53, was written in the summer and autumn of 1981, when Ginastera was in Formentor (in Mallorca) and Geneva. Ginastera continued to revise the work until shortly before his death in June, 1983.\textsuperscript{72} The composer dedicated this sonata to his friends Dorothy and Mario di Bonaventura, who had commissioned the work many years before. Anthony di Bonaventura premiered the work on Jan. 29, 1982, at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.\textsuperscript{73} Santiago Rodriguez played the New York premiere at Alice Tully Hall on December 7, 1982.

There was a thirty-year gap between the great success of Ginastera’s first piano sonata and the completion of his second piano sonata. In his 1981 interview with Lillian Tan, Ginastera admitted that he suffered from “creative block” only once in his entire career, which was caused by “the success of his first piano sonata.”\textsuperscript{74} His friend and publisher, Stuart Pope, stated that Ginastera accepted the commission for the second piano sonata with “apprehension,” as he was worried about “what he could do to top the popularity of that earlier work.”\textsuperscript{75} Pope said that the second piano sonata was not a work that Ginastera had had in mind for years, but this was contradicted by what Ginastera himself stated in the Tan interview:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Tan, “An interview,” 7.
\item Pope, “The Composer-Publisher Relationship,” 103.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
I always have an idea. For example, I’ve completed my second sonata for piano. I’ve had the idea in my head for thirty years, ever since my first sonata.\footnote{76}{Tan, “An Interview,” 7.}

There are, in fact, quite a number of similarities between the first and the second piano sonatas. For example, both sonatas employ double thirds in the opening theme (see Example 5.1), the extensive use of \textit{ostinato}, and continual meter-shifts. The second sonata features a much more abstract sonority in comparison to the first sonata, and is so technically difficult that only a handful of pianists include this work in their repertoire. Santiago Rodriguez describes his experience performing this piece as “twelve minutes of hell.”\footnote{77}{Private conversation with the author in Jan. 2013.} Ginastera described the inspiration for this sonata:

\begin{quote}
…..the second sonata, which suggests the music of the northern part of my country, of Aymara and Kechua origin with its pentatonic scales, its melodies or its joyful rhythms, its \textit{khenas}\footnote{78}{Same as \textit{Kenas} and \textit{Quenas}} and Indian drums, as well as its melismatic microtonal ornaments.\footnote{79}{Ginastera, \textit{Alberto Ginastera Sonata No. 2 for Piano, Op. 52}, Preface.}
\end{quote}
Example 5.1 Alberto Ginastera Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 22, first movement, mm. 1-4.


**Movement I. Allegramente**

The first movement is written in ABA ternary form. In the A section, the opening theme is modified and repeated twice. The middle section also contains three episodes that exhibit different songs and dances, which is followed by the return of a shortened A section. Ginastera explained the form of the first movement as follows:

The first, *Allegramente*, has a main subject, a quasi introduction and conclusion, framing developments based on different dances and songs, among them the Argentinean “*Pala-pala.*”

As Ginastera stated, this movement is inspired by the pre-Columbian cultures of the northern part of Argentina, which can be heard through his use of pentatonic scales and

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his imitation of pre-Columbian instruments such as the Indian drums and the *kenas*. The *Kena* is a vertically-notched flute-type instrument played by the Aymara Indians in festivals and celebrations in the southern Andes.\(^{81}\) The Ibero-American influence is also present in this piece, and can be heard in the extensive use of double thirds. Although the harmonic language in this movement is a mix of atonality and bi-tonality, the first and the last section’s pitch center is E (see example 5.2). Double thirds and seconds, as well as tone clusters, are used throughout.

The second piano sonata is technically much more difficult, and abstract in sonority, than the first sonata. In the first movement, the most challenging technical issues are unexpected jumps in a fast tempo, minor ninth melodic line, the obsessive *ostinato* with chromatic scales, as well as the tone clusters. In the opening theme, the drum-rolling figures in both hands (see Example 5.2) should be well articulated; a single pedal should connect those figures. The author recommends using the index finger for the low A in the left hand in the first measure, and the thumb and index finger for the low E and F in the second measure. When playing the double thirds, pianists should be aware not to lift their hands too high over the keyboard; rather, pianists’ hands should be as close to the keyboard as possible in order to make quick changes.

Example 5.2 Ginastera *Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 53*, Movement I, m.1.

From measures 29 to 39, both hands play an *ostinato* minor second interval in the outer voices, and chromatic intervals in the inner voices. Ginastera used four staves in order to emphasize the inner, chromatic melodic lines in both hands, rather than writing out the chords on a single grand staff. The author recommends using the third and fourth fingers for the *ostinato* seconds in both hands, while the thumbs and second fingers play the chromatic intervals. This open-score writing style might be confusing to some pianists, particularly when the second soprano line overlaps with the first soprano line. The following example shows the author’s reconfiguration of measure 51 for an alternative view:

Example 5.3 Ginastera *Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 53*, Movement I, mm. 49-51 and reconfiguration.

Reconfiguration of measure 51:
Another technical issue is with the random jumps which occur throughout the A section. For example, in measure 38, both hands are jumping in and out on every eighth-note beat (Example 5.4). This particular passage requires acrobatic skills from pianists. The author’s recommendation is to turn both hands outward when playing the octaves; following the inside notes of B-A#-B in the right hand, and the thumb in the left hand. It is also recommended to divide the measure into three three-beat groups, and practice the single group “in-out-in” motion for each group repeatedly, before playing all three groups together. The following fingering is recommended:


The first section of the movement has very few dynamic indications, except a $f$ marked in the first measure, and a $sf$ marked above the distant, jumpy notes. Thus it is logical to keep this section at the dynamic level of $f$ at all times, in contrast with the middle section, which is mostly marked $pp$ and $ppp$, except in the Pala-pala dance.
section. In the middle section, certain types of figurations are assigned to imitate specific sounds: chords in the low bass are imitating the aboriginal\textsuperscript{82} drum, in keeping with the rhythm of the songs; ornamented single-line melodies are marked cantando, imitating a human singing voice or a stringed instrument; bi-tonal, quartal harmonies are imitating the kena flutes. The drumming chords should be played softly but rhythmically, and the singing melodies and the lyrical kena tunes should be played legato. The eighth-note minor ninth melodies in the right hand beginning at measure 103, can be reconfigured to fit the alto in the left hand. In the same manner, in measure 136 (Pala-pala dance), the first two lowest notes in the right hand, F and D, should be played by the left hand (see Example 5.5):

Example 5.5 Ginastera Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 53, Movement I, m. 136.

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{piano_example.png}
\end{center}

The Pala-pala dance is similar to the zamba, (see page 17) and is usually written in 6/8\textsuperscript{83} (see Figure 5.1). When playing this dance passage, pianists should voice the top notes of the right hand to bring out the joyous melody (see Example 5.6). The Pala-pala

\textsuperscript{82} On the score, the composer wrote, “come una cassa india,” but to better differentiate the drums of India from the drums of the Amerindians, I chose to the word “aboriginal.”

dance erupts into eleven bars of chromatic chords that mark the climax of the movement, leading to the return of the A theme.

Figure 5.1 Pala-pala transcribed by Isabel Aretz.84


Movement II. Adagio – Sereno – Scorrevole Ripresa dell’Adagio

This movement is a sound description of nocturnal life that Ginastera remembered from his childhood. In the interview with Tan, he stated:

From my childhood, I remember the night sounds: the cricket, the birds and frogs. There was the atmosphere of the great plains of the Pampas and the huge expanse of night sky full of stars. I remember certain light effects – moonlight on the banana trees or on the Parana River and the fireflies – they become a part of one’s soul, and they all reappear in my compositions.85

Below is a statement made by Ginastera himself, concerning the second movement of this sonata:

The second movement, *Adagio-Sereno-Scorrevole-Ripresa dell’Adagio*, has a nocturnal character. The first part is a *harawi*, a melancholy love song, of pentatonic pre-Columbian origin from Cuzco, with the characteristic vocal inflections of primitive civilizations. The *Scorrevole*, like a scherzo, evokes the murmurs of the night in the lonely Andean punas. The *Ripresa dell’Adagio* finishes this part which, reduced and in dissolution, gets lost in the silence.86

The similarities immediately apparent between this movement and the third movement of Ginastera’s first piano sonata are no coincidence. The improvisatory writing and the highly ornamented D in the opening two measures recall the opening of the third movement of the first sonata, as does the twelve-tone row, starting with C-sharp, which is presented fully at the end of the first measure (see Example 5.7). This descriptive writing reminds one of Ginastera’s images of the moonlight on the Parana River. The ornamentations sound like moonlight shining on the river, with its moving reflections. This opening section also reflects Bela Bartók’s profound musical influence on Ginastera. Many authors, such as Mr. Los Cobos, Ms. Campbell and Ms. Knafo, already pointed out the detectable similarities that exist between this movement and Bartok’s “Night Music” from his *Out of Doors* suite (see Example 5.8)

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Example 5.7 Ginastera *Piano Sonata No. 1*, Op. 22, Movement III, mm.1-6.

Ginastera Piano Sonata No. 2, Movement II, m1.


The heavily-ornamented *harawi* song enters in the third measure, and is harmonized with a line that is one half-step higher in the right hand. The *harawi* is one of the oldest surviving songs from the Andean community, dating from the Incan period. In the first book, *Arte, y Vocabulario en la Lengua General del Peru Llamada Quichua* (Art and
vocabulary in the general language in Peru called Quichua) of Lima, that was issued by
Antonio Ricardo in 1586, “harawi” was defined in the Incan language as a “lament
song.”87 The harawi is performed as a love song or as sung poetry during harvest seasons
and at Incan festivals, and is sung by female singers with wide vocal ranges in a cappella
style. The most distinctive characteristics of the song include slight variations on each
repetition, and long glissandos at the end of phrases.88 In Ginastera’s treatment, the
ornamentations and the half-step harmonies make the song extremely dissonant;
however, the skeleton of the song is in D natural minor, and has three clear phrases (see
Example 5.9):


\[ \text{Example 5.9 Ginastera Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 53, Movement II, skeleton of mm. 3, 5, 7.} \]

The middle section has the same mysterious character, with fleeting eighth notes
that recall the second movement of the first sonata. Both movements are marked
legatissimo, pp, with similar tempo markings (see Example 5.10):


This middle section evokes what Ginastera referred to as “the atmosphere of the great plains of the Pampas.” Ginastera indicated Scorrevole, (gliding, flowing) for this section. The music is intended to mimic the sound of the wind gliding through the hills of the Pampas, as if the ancient spirits are hovering above the plains. The bi-tonality and white-key/black-key juxtaposition technique that Ginastera often employs in his piano compositions can be seen here. The movement ends with a shortened return of the Adagio section. This particular section also reminds me of the enigmatic last movement of Chopin’s second piano sonata, also written with fleeting eighth notes, with the markings of Presto, sotto voce e legato, which Russian pianist and composer Anton Rubinstein described as “the wind sweeping the leaves on the graves” (see Example 5.11).
Example 5.11 Chopin *Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 35*, Movement IV, mm. 1-3.

![Sheet music](image)

The highly-ornamented *Adagio* section is tricky to perform. In the author’s opinion, all of the ornamentations should be played with a swift and light touch, so that one can still hear the repetitive D at the beginning, and the skeleton of the *harawi* song. Ginastera wrote *veloce le fioriture e lasciar vibrare col Ped* (with velocity and let it ring with pedal) for the opening measure, hence, one should use a single pedal for the entire measure, allowing the sound of all the notes in the tone row to be blended, resounding together. Also, soft pedal should be used throughout the entire section. The middle section should be played as *legato* and softly as possible, as indicated. In order to achieve this particular sound effect, the pianists’ fingers should lay flat on the keyboard; performers should feel that their fingers are “glued” to the keyboard. Both hands should play in synchronization to emphasize the constant half-step dissonance. Pianists should also be aware not to add any accents in this particular passage so as not to disturb the atmospheric mood, even though it is easier to line up both hands with accents. The dynamic should stay the same, with the natural dynamic increases and decreases according to the added and subtracted notes as the piece progresses. This section is a sheer wash of color, and the sound should disappear into thin air without any delay at the end of the section. Again, a single half pedal with added soft pedal can be applied to the entire section.
Movement III. *Ostinato Aymará*

Ginastera explained the last movement of his second piano sonata thusly:

The third movement, *Ostinato aymará*, takes the form of a toccata whose fundamental rhythm comes from a dance called “karnavalito.” This part is solid and impetuous, as is characteristic of South American music.\(^\text{89}\)

The last movement of this sonata corresponds to the fourth movement of his *Piano Sonata No. 1*. However, while the last movement of the *Piano Sonata No. 1* is a *malambo* dance, associated with the *gauchos* of the Ibero-American folk tradition, in the last movement of the second sonata, Ginastera pays tribute to the Amerindian tradition by constructing this movement using the Aymará *karnavalito*\(^\text{90}\) dance rhythm (see Example 5.12).


Written in ABA ternary form, the frantic two-bar *Karnavalito* dance rhythm is the thematic material for this movement. Ginastera’s signature piano writing techniques, such as the black key/white key juxtapositions, the constant meter shifts, and the use of


\(^{90}\) Also spells “Carnavalito,” means little Carnival.
extreme registers, are fully exhibited in this movement. His use of whole-tone scales in combination with chromatic and pentatonic scales, distributed between both hands to create tone clusters, create the dissonant and abstract sonorities of this movement. The technical requirements for this movement are unparalleled in any other of Ginastera’s piano music, except his second piano concerto. Pianists must have an advanced technique in order to accurately play tone clusters and poly-chords in a fast tempo, as well as to be able to accurately shift registers without delays and play rapid glissandos and non-glissando scales on black keys. The following are some practical suggestions regarding these technical challenges:

For the non-glissando ascending scales in the primary theme, the left hand plays pentatonic scales on all black keys, while the right hand plays on all white keys (see Example 5.13). The right hand must play slightly faster than the left hand, as there are more white notes than black. It is suggested that the left hand begins with the fifth finger and play up to the thumb, repeating the same fingering until reaching the top note. When playing all black keys, pianists should use the pads of their fingers, instead of the tips of their fingers. When practicing jumps, the author suggests moving the hands as quickly and as accurately as possible to reach the keys without actually playing them. Repeat this procedure many times until the muscles remember the distance. There are many chords with intervals of a second written in both outer and inner part voices the chords; pianists should be aware that the thumbs must lay flat at all times in order to grab two notes. When playing the ascending black key glissandos with the left hand in the return of the A section, the author recommends holding the thumb and second finger together, and then form a forty-five degree angle above the keyboard in order to glide over the keys.
Example 5.13 Ginastera *Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 53*, Movement III, m.5:

![Example 5.13](image)

In the A section (measures 1-42), there are several measures (12, 22, 30, 34, 35, 36, 39 and 42) that function as transitional or connective material that binds various musical and pianistic ideas together. As they are independent and are out of sequence, it is very difficult for pianists to execute these figures well. The author suggests practicing these measures individually at a slow tempo, then adding the previous measure and the following measure. For example: practice measure 12 in a slow tempo, then add measures 11 and 13 to insure that the *karnavalito* rhythm in measure 11 is making a smooth transition to the *non-glissando* scale in measure 13 via the connective measure 12. Proper fingerings are vital to the success of performing these difficult measures. The author’s fingering suggestions for these transitional measures are as follows (see Figures 5.2):
Figure 5.2 Fingering suggestions for mm. 12, 20, 30, 34, 36, 42.

Measure 12:

Measure 20:

Measure 30:
In order to capture the primitive dance character of this movement, the *karnavalito* dance rhythms should be played in a percussive, rhythmic manner, and the author suggests playing an accent on each down beat. The pedaling of the *karnavalito* dance
rhythm should be short in order to imitate ferocious drumming. Short sustain pedals should be applied on the down beat of each eighth note in each measure at the beginning of the movement. Pedal should also be used in passages with other reoccurring *Karnavalito* rhythms throughout the movement. A single pedal should be applied to each measure of the ascending non-*glissando* and *glissando* bi-tonal passages, as well as in the closing theme material, for example, at measure 27 and measures 31 to 33 (see Example 5.14).

Example 5.14 Ginastera *Piano Sonata No. 2*, Op. 53, Movement III, mm. 30-33.

![Example 5.14](image)

The first four measures of this section are reminiscent of the opening of the second movement of the first piano sonata (see Example 5.15).


In the return of the A section, the primary dance rhythm comes back with pedal-point chords framing the internal rhythmic figures. This same technique was also used in both the last movement of his *Piano Sonata No.1* and the first movement of this sonata (see Example 5.16). This figuration is repeated and developed a number of times in this section.

The *kena* flute melodies (see page 54), appear from measure 68 to 70. The use of parallel fourths, pentatonic scales and poly-tonality recall the *kena* flute melodies from the first movement (see Example 5.17). The *coda* consists of a perpetual dance rhythm, and the movement ends with a final violent bang in the lowest register of the instrument.

CHAPTER 6

PIANO SONATA NO. 3, OP. 54

The *Sonata No. 3 for Piano, Op. 54*, was written during the summer of 1982, when Ginastera was living in Mallorca and Geneva.\(^91\) It was commissioned by the University of Michigan for Barbara Nissman’s New York debut at Lincoln Center on November 17, 1982. The sonata has only one movement and is dedicated to Ms. Nissman. The work was originally given the opus number 55, but because the work for mezzo-soprano and orchestra previously commissioned by the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra had not been started at the time of Ginastera’s death, the opus number of this sonata was later changed to Op. 54, as the final work of the composer.\(^92\)

Regarded as the most authoritative interpreter of Ginastera’s piano music, Barbara Nissman recorded the complete piano works of Alberto Ginastera in 1989. Ms. Nissman was invited by Ginastera to perform his first piano concerto at the composer’s sixtieth birthday celebration. In her article, “Remembering Alberto Ginastera,”\(^93\) Barbara Nissman wrote about her decade-long relationship with Ginastera, as well as the circumstances surrounding this composition. Ms. Nissman recalls that she met the composer while she was still a student at the University of Michigan, when Ginastera was a featured composer at the University’s Contemporary Festival. She states that Ginastera

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\(^{91}\) Alberto Ginastera, *Sonata No. 3 for Piano, Op. 54*, (Farmingdale, NY: Boosey & Hawkes, 1982), Program Note.

\(^{92}\) Pope, “The Composer-Publisher,” 107.

originally wanted to write a piano concerto with percussion for her after hearing her play his first piano concerto with the Michigan Symphony Orchestra. Due to his other commissions and his slow writing speed, the concerto for Barbara was never written; rather, he wrote this sonata for her New York debut. Ms. Nissman also wrote that Ginastera was very ill at the time; he composed the work in a hospital bed and mailed the manuscript to her “a few pages at a time.” According to Ms. Nissman, Ginastera wanted to write an *Adagio* introduction to the work, but he died “before it could be realized.”

Ginastera’s publisher and friend, Stuart Pope, corroborates this in his article, “The Composer-Publisher Relationship: Chronicle of a Friendship,” stating that “Had Alberto lived a longer life, he would, we know, have added another movement to the *Third Sonata.*” In his program notes, Ginastera states:

> In contrast to my Sonatas No. 1 and 2 for piano, both written in three separate movements, Sonata No. 3, Op. 55 is composed of a single movement, utilizing a binary form that consists of two main sections and a coda. The initial tempo indication, “Impetuosamente,” sets the pace of the entire work, whose rhythmic mixtures are based on American Indian and colonial dancers of Latin America.

In Ms. Nissman’s article, she recalls her conversation with Ginastera regarding the form and structure of this sonata, and Ginastera told her that this sonata is “like Prokofiev’s Third sonata, but similar in form to the earlier keyboard sonatas of Scarlatti – in two parts…with constant toccata-like rhythm…reminiscent of Schumann’s Toccata.”

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95 Pope “The Composer-Publisher,” 104.
97 Nissman, “Remembering Alberto Ginastera,” 4-5.
This single-movement sonata is much more organic than the previous two sonatas. The entire work is based on two motives which are stated in the A section (measures 1-40). The first theme is built on a series of rising minor sixths, followed by octaves in both hands (see Example 6.1).


The second theme appears in at measure 12, immediately following the final statement of the first theme, without any transition (see example 6.2).

Example 6.2 Ginastera *Piano Sonata No. 3, Op. 54*, mm. 12-16.
It is the author’s viewpoint that the third piano sonata is actually an extension of the last movement of the second piano sonata. Much like that movement, the toccata-like rhythm in this sonata sets a perpetual rhythmic pace. The obsessiveness of the ostinato and the percussive hammering is brought to the utmost degree here. In comparison with his abstract and difficult second piano sonata, the third sonata is more conservative. Ginastera takes a step back in terms of form and harmonic language, although there are many familiar features of Ginastera’s innovative piano writing seen here, including the use of quartal harmonies, tone clusters, black key/white key juxtapositions, the wide range of registers, extreme dynamics, and a constant shift of meters. In this sonata, the composer focuses more on developing existing material and exploring co-relationships among the thematic material, rather than on creating new material. The binary form of this movement, which was the most popular form for Baroque sonatas, reveals Ginastera’s Neo-Classical tendencies, although he still employs a modern harmonic language and technique in this work. Ginastera’s third sonata contains both Amerindian and Colonial cultural influences, which are evident in the use of pentatonic scales and quartal harmonies for the former, and the use of guitar chord notes and 6/8 malambo dance rhythms for the latter.

Although Ginastera did not employ any new pianistic devices in this work, there is an increased use of various glissandi: in octaves, thirds, and fourths, ascending, descending, on black keys and on white keys. This becomes an important feature of the work. Ginastera also had written difficult glissandi in parallel sixths originally, but Ms. Nissman suggested changing them to octaves for easier execution.\(^98\) When playing an

\(^98\) Nissman, “Remembering Alberto Ginastera,” 5.
ascending glissando in thirds, the author recommends turning the hand outward, almost sideways, so the fingernails of the outer fingers form a 45-degree angle to the keyboard. The outer fingers will act as the anchor, gliding from the middle of the fingernails, rather than on the sides of the fingernails. In this way, the outer fingers will have a broader and stronger contact area with the keyboard, thus enabling a more reliable execution.

Despite these innovative instrumental devices, Ginastera’s piano writing has always been well-crafted and pianistic. Even in the diabolical last movement of his second piano sonata, the author cannot find a passage or a chord that is impossible to play, even for a pianist with small hands that cannot stretch beyond a ninth. However, the author was surprised to have found a few places in the third piano sonata that are physically impossible to play, as well as a passage with the same notes between the hands that a brilliant composer like Ginastera would ordinarily be able to notice and correct right away. This also raises the question as to why Ms. Nissman did not point out these issues to Ginastera when she suggested that he change the parallel sixth glissandi. Ginastera was very ill when he was composing this work. The author’s speculation is that Ginastera had no access to a piano in the hospital, and thus was not able to try out the work. These passages appear in the B section and in the coda, from measures 49 to 52, 77, 78, and measures 88 to 90. Examples are shown below:
Example 6.3 Ginastera *Piano Sonata No. 3, Op. 54*, m. 49 and reconfiguration.

Reconfiguration:

In the original score, the low A and B-flat of the right hand are doubled by the left hand in the same register; the G-flat and F in the left hand cross over the right hand. This is very awkward to play, although the musical outline is clearer. The author rearranged this measure by omitting the doubled notes in the right hand, and reassigning the crossed notes in the right hand to the left hand.

In measures 50, 51, and 52, the second chord in the right hand, an octave of F-sharp and G, is impossible to reach as it requires the pianist to stretch a major seventh interval from the second finger to the fourth finger. After examining the passage carefully, the author speculates that either the composer mis-notated this or that it is a misprint by the publisher. The F-sharps in the second chord are meant to be F naturals. It is clear that the outline of this passage is chromatically ascending from F-sharp to B, and if the F-sharp is altered to F natural in the second chord, not only would the chromatic line be maintained, but the chord becomes playable by placing the thumb flat to grab both the low F and G. The second chord in the left hand, an octave of B and C-sharp, suffers from the same
problem, although this appears to be a technical error made by the composer rather than a notation error. The author’s solution is to drop the lower B, as this will not change the original musical idea or the outline of the chord (see Example 6.4).

Example 6.4 Ginastera *Piano Sonata No. 3, Op. 54*, mm. 50-51.

Reconfiguration:

In measure 5, the left hand plays the chord D-flat, E-flat and a G-flat that is an eleventh above the D-flat (see Example 6.5). Again, for the vast majority of pianists, it is physically impossible to stretch an eleventh. This chord appears again in measures 59 and 75. The author suggests playing the D-flat and E-flat first, and then quickly jumping to the G-flat, and the damper pedal should be applied to help blend the three notes together. Immediately preceding the coda, in measures 77 and 78, as well as in measures 88 to 90 in the coda, similar problems occur in the right hand. The author recommends the same solution as discussed previously (see Example 6.6).
Ginastera’s previous two piano sonatas exhibit contrasting characters within movements and among movements. The third sonata, however, has no distinct contrasting characters. The “toccata like” characteristic is present throughout the work. The only glimpse of slight lyricism is the four measures of guitar chord writing immediately before the coda, marked *un poco lirico*, which also appears again in the coda (see Example 6.7). The dynamic markings in this movement are also minimal. There is a *ff* given at the beginning of section A, section B, and the Coda, a *mp* for the last three measures of the A section, and occasional accent. In order to better execute *impetuosamente* (indication), the author recommends that pianists play this work with no tempo fluctuations, except in the coda, where various tempo changes are indicated. *Legato* articulations should be applied to suit the work’s *martellato* character, with the
exception of the guitar chord measures. These measures should be played with softer
dynamics, and with a more lyrical and *legato* touch.

Example 6.7 Ginastera *Piano Sonata No. 3, Op. 54*, mm. 75-77, guitar chord measure.

![Ginastera Piano Sonata No. 3, Op. 54, mm. 75-77](image)

The coda begins with a cadenza-like sixteenth-note passage marked *senza tempo* and
*con fuoco*, the author suggests starting slowly and gradually accelerating back to *a tempo*
in the next measure. Following the return of the four guitar chord measures, a joyous
pentatonic melody appears, harmonized in thirds and fourths, and accompanied by
hammered tone clusters (see Example 6.8). Pianists should play these passages with the
intention of bringing out the melodic character of the song in the right hand, but with a
contrasting percussive touch for the tone clusters in the left hand. For the dramatic finale,
the pianist’s hands finish at opposite ends of the keyboard (see Example 6.9).

Example 6.8 Ginastera *Piano Sonata No. 3, Op. 54*, mm. 92-94.

![Ginastera Piano Sonata No. 3, Op. 54, mm. 92-94](image)
Example 6.9 Ginastera *Piano Sonata No. 3*, *Op. 54*, mm. 112-113.
CONCLUSION

By examining the three piano sonatas of Ginastera, one can trace the compositional processes of the composer and identify those characteristics that define his unique voice. His rhythmic preference is rooted in Argentinian folk dance rhythm, such as the *zamba* and *malambo*; his melodic choices are based on folk melodies of the Ibero-American culture as well as the Amerindian traditional music practice. Although the three sonatas are different in form and sonority, similar techniques and devices are employed throughout all three works: constant shifts of meter; use of extreme dynamics and registers; prevalence of *ostinato*; frequent use of dance rhythms and a percussive, drum-like character; bi-tonality and black key/white key juxtapositions; asymmetrical rhythms between the hands, and the combined use of twelve-tone, pentatonic and chromatic scales.

The influence of the Second Vienna School contributed the adaptation of dodecaphony in his late style period; nevertheless, his music remains with a strong Argentinian accent. These changes are fully exhibited in the three piano sonatas. While the First Piano Sonata is a work with a clear tonal center, written in a traditional four-movement setting consisting of sonata allegro and rondo forms with prominent Ibero-American influences, the Second Piano Sonata is a three-movement, abstract, atonal work which contains elements of songs and dances of the Amerindian culture. In his final work, the Third Piano Sonata, Ginastera abandoned his often-used ABA form and chose rather to pay tribute to the Baroque keyboard sonata by setting the work in binary form with a virtuosic coda. Rather than reflecting only one dominating cultural influence in
this work, as he did with his previous piano sonatas, Ginastera combined both Amerindian and Colonial dances in his final sonata, acknowledging the importance of both cultures equally.

Despite the uniqueness of each of these piano sonatas, the Ibero-American and Amerindian cultures are at the heart of these works. These cultures contain two prominent, contrasting characters: the “pastoral barbaric” and “pastoral lyric.” Ginastera assigns the former with dances, the latter with songs. Very much like the guitar chord notes, the malambo dance, which Ginastera incorporates into many of his works, represents the outlaw gauchos, and is a perfect representation of the “pastoral barbaric” character of the Ibero-American culture. Set in the versatile, compound 6/8 meter, this competitive dance has a driving rhythm that is magically enhanced with the use of hemiola in the last movement of the First Piano Sonata. In comparison with the drumming of the Amerindian karnavalito dance rhythm in the last movement of the Second Piano Sonata, the foot stomping in the malambo dance seems a bit less “barbaric” and more “civilized.” The perpetual pounding and the wild tone clusters in the Third Piano Sonata are constant features from beginning to end.

Ginastera stated that his First Piano Sonata was “inspired by the music of the Argentinian Pampas.” The lyrical, pastoral second theme, which was written in the Argentinian Pala-pala song rhythm in the first movement, evokes the open, hopeful and broad feelings of the Pampas. Contrasting with this characteristic, the melismatic harawi songs in the second movement of the Second Piano Sonata are steeped in a melancholic, intimate, and eerie nocturnal mood.
It is the third sonata that raises many questions. As it was the last work written by Ginastera, this piece is full of contradicting elements: conservative and simple in form, but adventurous and bold in harmony and devices, perpetual in rhythm, but short in length, mixing both Ibero-American and Amerindian influences. It is as if Ginastera was trying to unite and to acknowledge the different worlds of tradition and innovation, aboriginal and foreign.

The three piano sonatas of Ginastera reflect the changes and development of his musical language. Through examining these sonatas in depth, harmonically, musically and technically, pianists will benefit from a better understanding of these aspects of the composer’s piano works. The pianistic devices that Ginastera employs in these three sonatas are technically demanding, and they gradually increased in complexity from the First Piano Sonata to the Third Piano Sonata. These works require great virtuosity. In addition to pianistic difficulties, they also require a great variety of dynamics, specific tone colors as well as quick and dramatic alteration of tempi.

The purpose of this study is to assist fellow pianists in clarifying their interpretations of Ginastera’s piano music by developing a performance guide. By reading this performance guide, the author hopes that pianists will gain useful insights into performing Ginastera’s piano sonatas.


