



# The Polyphonic Personality of Domingo Santa Cruz

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IT IS MOST ATTRACTIVE TO REALIZE up to what an extent Domingo Santa Cruz's contributions to Chile's musical life, and to that of Latin America in general respond to an inner force of an almost biological character, which is tantamount to his personality as a whole. The thread of his life, today octogenarian, has unfolded through a stream so vast in its interests, through such a variety of paths, through such contrasting styles, that it could easily have led to total chaos and dispersion, to a jungle of superficiality and dilettantism. Yet due to that medullar force that has always risen from a truly romantic passion for all things in life, Santa Cruz has been able to eschew the dangers of dislocation. An order has prevailed in his restless process of search and achievement which has contributed to pull into a single riverbed the diversity of streams through which his life has navigated. If only one considers his work as a promoter and administrator, the conclusion is easily reached that his success as such has depended sometimes on a knowledge acquired far beyond the sphere of music itself, that has converged into the stream of his leading interests as a result of that inner unifying force mentioned before. The degree as a lawyer that he received at age 22, in spite of the fact that he never used it in a professional career situation, was always essential to his administrative style, and furnished him with a wealth of knowledge upon which much of his success at this level depended. His brief attachment to the diplomatic service in Europe also left personality traits that were to help him considerably in his dealings with so many artists and other professionals from all over the world during his years as Dean, Vice Rector of the Universidad de Chile and later as head of the International Music Council of the UNESCO, or of the International Society for Music Education. In the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Chile, of which he was the Dean from 1937 to 1948, Santa Cruz extended his task as an academic and administrative leader to the spheres of painting, sculpture, art history and the arts and crafts, thus bringing into his life concerns other than those of a composer which he, by the power of his broad culture and natural ability to carry on simultaneous and sometimes unrelated duties, was able to tie together and also develop independently when necessary.

A simultaneity and diversity similar to that evidenced by Domingo Santa Cruz in carrying his administrative and academic duties along his many years of activity is also reflected in his music. The constant flow of a polyphonic stream which seems to link stylistically most of his works, somehow parallels what in his daily life has represented the proliferation of activities that sometimes either crossed through

stages of turmoil and extreme tension or through periods of relaxation and brilliant achievements.

In reading the poems he wrote for his magnificent opus 19, *Cantata de los Ríos de Chile*, for mixed chorus and orchestra, one is confronted with poetic images that fit so well some of the stages of his rich and full life as well as the course of his luxurious contrapuntal style. In both, one senses the presence at times of what his own verse describes as "The grieving soul of the torrent" (*Gime el alma del torrente*) or the "Wide and silent loom" (*Ancho telar silencioso*) when the riverbed widens and waters start flowing calmly and deep into the ocean.

His copious and rich personality and the polyphonic torrent of his music emerge from a single impulse, from that vital personality that elevated him to a unique position in the music of Latin America.

"Complex" is a word that many times has been used to describe his contrapuntal fabric. Yet this is a complexity far from being the result of an uncontrolled flow of capricious lines. In his music there is a clearly definable form of higher order and a dramatic sense to which the composer appears always deeply committed. Through both he conveys a sense of organization which is characteristic of his works.

This is reflected in one way or another by his three string quartets, his four symphonies, his Variations in three movements for piano and orchestra, by his works for chorus and orchestra and by his numerous "a cappella" compositions.

It is possible that to many ears the towering effect of his contrapuntal texture is still difficult to understand. The first polyphonic works in history encountered a similar resistance on the part of ears used to the singularity of line of the plainchant. Seasoned by the expressive values of functional harmony and consonance, many listeners are still fighting their way through the already long-standing empire of dissonance, panchromaticism, and non-tonal harmonic writing.

The magnitude of Domingo Santa Cruz's administrative output, his achievements as a leader and missionary in the world of music, his brilliant performance in the highest spheres of education, may have prevented a deeper and better acquaintance with his music. Yet, this is to come. How soon? We know not. But surely as the atmosphere of our century clears from the gimmickries that have been used and abused by so many to conquer the minds of listeners in search of superficial excitement, his music will emerge as that of an artist, deeply committed to his ideas and feelings, and of a craftsman in total control of his technique.