



CAMARGO GUARNIERI (1907 - 1993)

Camargo Guarnieri, Brazilian composer. This title certainly pleased Guarnieri more than the many complementary epithets attributed to him over his career, because in his urge to give voice to Brazil in his music, Guarnieri was first and foremost a tireless worker, drawing on his inner resources to attain the supreme expression of his emotions. Endowed with unshakable integrity, he expressed the very depths of his internal world, where both the joy and the anguish of creating contributed to an essentially Brazilian musical palette.

Born in 1907 in the state of São Paulo of a Sicilian father and a São Paulo-born mother, at age 15 he moved with his family to the capital city, Rio de Janeiro, without suspecting that at that very moment it was witnessing the country's biggest ever aesthetic revolution. Through the "anthropophagy manifesto", artists and intellectuals set the groundwork for a new aesthetic that liberated Brazilian art once and for all from European canons, so long and deeply entrenched there, allowing it to express itself in all its breadth and singularity. Villa-Lobos, Oswald de Andrade, Tarsila do Amaral, and Mário de Andrade, leading lights of the Brazilian modernist movement, spearheaded this Brazilian adventure into its very heart. Camargo Guarnieri became one of its most important exponents a few years later.

By the age of 16, Guarnieri was already professionally active, working as a pianist in cinemas, music shops and cabarets. He studied piano with Ernani Braga and Sá Pereira and subsequently had lessons in composition and conducting with Lamberto Baldi, an Italian who was instrumental in shaping his musical output. One of his compositions from this period was *Dança Brasileira*, which Mário de Andrade first heard in 1928, envisaging in it the whole potential to make music a vehicle for the ambitious modernist project. Andrade proved a fine tutor, giving the young composer a solid humanistic grounding as he introduced him to literature, philosophy, sociology, history and aesthetics. "With him," Guarnieri once said, "I learnt a love of books, respect for those who really know things, honesty with myself, candour and loyalty. This has been the precept of my life, and the best example I had was Mário de Andrade."

Besides being a close friend and influential interlocutor, Andrade went on to become one of his most forthright critics, sparking his intellect and creativity and pushing him to reach for ever greater heights.

In 1936, on the suggestion of Baldi, the French pianist Alfred Cortot sought out Camargo Guarnieri in São Paulo. Struck by the vibrancy of that music with its Brazilian identity, Cortot encouraged him to spend some time in Europe, which eventually happened in 1938. In Paris, Guarnieri studied harmony with Charles Koechlin and conducting with François Ruhlmann,

principal conductor of the Paris Opera. He met Darius Milhaud and Nadia Boulanger, had his works played by the Paris Symphony Orchestra, and saw first-hand the growing bewilderment of the French people as the outbreak of war loomed ever closer.

“Everyone awaited the events with fear in their eyes,” he wrote in a letter to his family. “Almost all the gardens have been turned into reinforced cement trenches. (...) Five days ago the atmosphere in Paris became intolerable. Everyone fleeing. All you see is cars full of suitcases, others full of children. Our street has become unbearable because of the noise, and to top all the precautionary measures, the government has decreed a blackout in all the streets of Paris.”

Overwrought by the breakout of war, Guarnieri returned to Brazil in November 1939. He then composed his first violin concerto, which won him an international composition competition in the United States in 1942, of which Serge Koussevitzky was one of the jury members. This marked the beginning of a steady flow of international recognition, with Guarnieri’s works being performed by Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, Leopold Stokowski, Arthur Rubinstein and orchestras of the calibre of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic, etc.

From that moment on, Camargo Guarnieri built up a substantial body of symphonic work, the ultimate expression of his artistic maturity and synthesis of a multifaceted culture.

His entire oeuvre includes some 700 compositions, including seven symphonies, concertos for different instruments, works for solo piano, chamber music, cantatas, operas and over 200 songs with libretti in either Portuguese or Afro-Brazilian or Amerindian languages.

Camargo Guarnieri lived almost 86 years of intense humanity. He died in São Paulo in 1993.