

## Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983): Streichquartett No. 1, Op. 20

Alberto Ginastera was one of the most important composers to emerge from South America over the last century. Born in Argentina, his music displays all the powerful rhythmical energy and melodic language of his Hungarian counterpart, Bela Bartok.

The first movement of his String Quartet No. 1, marked violent and agitated, is just that. It opens with unison strings playing relentless rhythmical patterns of varying bar lengths and accentuations against long angular melodic lines given to the first violin and cello.

The second movement is a fast and mercurial scherzo movement which uses nearly every "special effect" a stringed instrument is capable of: Plucking the strings, strumming the strings like a guitar, sliding up and down the fingerboard, playing on the bridge, using harmonics, using the wood on the bow instead of the hair, etc. In other words, Ginastera pushes his musicians to the extremes of what is technically possible on their instruments. (All of these techniques were in fact incidentally also used by Bartok in his six string quartets, which are considered major masterpieces of the genre.)

The third movement, marked calm and poetic, is a plaintive lament for the composer's homeland (Ginastera was living in self-imposed exile in the USA as political, economical and social instability took hold of Argentina). The piece ends with a rustic and exuberant Allegro full of rhythmic vitality and joyous folk melody.

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