

4th IberoAmerican Guitar Festival 2010



By JULIA CROWE

THE 4th Iberoamerican Guitar Festival opened on a hot, humid evening this past June at the Embassy of Mexico in Washington, DC under the guidance of Artistic Director Berta Rojas and the President of the Iberoamerican Cultural Attachés Association, Patricia Abdelnour. The three-day long festival honoured Mexican composer Manuel Ponce (1882-1948) with two dozen guitar concerts held at the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian by artists representing Spain, Mexico, Brazil, Peru, Colombia, France, Chile, Portugal, Guatemala, Ecuador, El Salvador, Uruguay, the Dominican Republic, Paraguay and Argentina.

The opening concert featured Spain's Margarita Escarpa, who performed a programme of Brouwer's *Paisaje cubano con campanas*, followed by a comparison of Manuel de Falla's *Le Tombeau de Claude Debussy* and Claude Debussy's *La Soirée dans Grenade* and *La Sérénade interrompue*. Escarpa explained that this set illustrated the analogy of reciprocal influences the composers had upon one another, as De Falla had been inspired by Debussy's piano pieces and Debussy's music had been informed by flamenco (Aside from Manuel Ponce and Federico Torroba, De Falla had been the third non-guitar playing composer to write works for the guitar during the early 20th century). Escarpa's playing had been effortless, fluid, clean and thoughtful with an impressive dynamic range and colour, all conveying subtlety, dimension and clarity to the voicings in each piece. Much enjoyed had been her lyrical and nuanced transcription of Albéniz's *Granada*, *Córdoba* and *Cataluña*.

The Manuel M. Ponce Quartet, comprised of guitarists Gerardo Díaz de Leon, Víctor Gardoqui, Arturo Hernández and Raúl Zambrano, performed a programme that reflected Ponce's musical influences, starting with M. Bernal Jiménez' spirited, *ponticello*-coloured *Vice Royal Quartet*, which had been dedicated to Ponce by the composer. The quartet performed Ponce's music entitled, 'In the 18th Century, Baroque to Classical,' starting with his sonorous and languid *Prelude in E*, *Balletto*, *Allegro* from *Sonata Clasica: Homage to Fernando Sor* in addition to Ponce's *Sonata Romantica: Homage to Schubert*. The quartet distinguished themselves as fine players with scholarly thoroughness to their programme, which included pieces Ponce had written during the 20th Century Mexican nationalist movement, closing with a transcription of a later contrapuntal version of his *Prelude in E*.

Segovia had said Ponce must be considered the fundamental non-guitar playing composer in the history of the instrument. Ponce, who was born in 1882 in Zacatecas, Mexico, learned piano and pursued his musical education in Mexico City, Bologna and Berlin before eventually moving to Paris in the 1920s to study with the French composer Paul Dukas (who wrote *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, made famous by Disney's animated film, *Fantasia*.) In Paris, Ponce delved



Carlos Barbosa-Lima.

into exploring the impressionistic style with his compositions before returning to inspiration derived from the music of his homeland, where he continued his career as a composer and a music journalist. His collaborations with Segovia produced pieces that have become a staple in the guitar repertoire, such as the renowned guitar concerto, *Concierto del Sur*.

Segovia, who was also friends with violinist Fritz Kreisler, had learned of Kreisler's gag of writing virtuosic small pieces for the violin and attributing them to long dead master composers as a way of diversifying the appearance of his programme. (Irresistible aside: the author of this article had been college room-mates with Kreisler's grandson, who plays bass guitar.) Possibly, due to the lack of Baroque transcriptions, Segovia's desire to perform rather than research, and his need to establish the guitar as the natural descendant of the aristocratic lute and vihuela, Segovia asked the composer to write him several Baroque style works for the guitar and attribute them to Sylvius Leopold Weiss. The sad part to this story is that Ponce had not been credited as the