

## MARCELA MÉNDEZ - HARPIST

Marcela Méndez has developed a multifaceted career that places her as one of the most prominent Argentine harpists of her generation.

In Latin America, North America and Europe she has performed in recitals, concerts, festivals and masterclasses, taught on courses and many conferences; she has been a part of numerous artistic projects in her country and abroad.

As a soloist with a significant Argentinian repertoire for pedal harp she has recorded four albums; is the author of several research projects about the harp in Argentina and other subjects related to music history; and is an arranger of music for the harp. Prior to this volume, her publications include transcriptions of the *Goldberg Variations* for two harps and the *Concerto for Two Harps* BWV 1060 in C Minor by J.S. Bach.

Since 2014 she has pursued a specialization in Baroque performance of the Italian “arpa doppia”, working privately with Chiara Granata; in 2015 and 2016 she attended Maria Galassi's summer course in Chiari (Italy).

Marcela speaks fluent English and Italian and in 1991 graduated as a French teacher; in 2013 she obtained a degree in Educational Management from the Universidad Catolica Argentina.

She enjoys giving of her wide experience to future generations: in 2019 she founded the association “Amigos del Arpa” and the International Harp Academy of Argentina.

She is a member of the board of directors of the World Harp Congress.

Marcela Méndez is Principal Harp with the Symphony Orchestras of Entre Ríos and Santa Fe and teaches at the Universidad Autónoma de Entre Ríos. In 2004 she founded the harp class at the “Escuela de Niños 9901” of Santa Fe.

She is part of the 2020 Cohort of the Global Leaders Program, Music for Social Change/Harvard University.

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# Preface

I am glad to present to the harp community a collection of music written by Argentine composers.

The selection in this book includes music written by the Italian harpist Félix Lebano and three arrangements by Augusto Sebastiani - both decided to leave their country and move to Argentina. During their time there they composed and arranged music, and worked for the development of the harp in my country.

The other pieces selected are the lovely *Sonatina* by Luis Gianneo, the *Vidalita* by Alberto Williams and *Manojito de Amancay* by Remo Pignoni.

I want to thank the descendants of Luis Gianneo, Alberto Williams, Augusto Sebastiani and Remo Pignoni for their kindness and permissions to make this edition possible.

I hope the harp community will enjoy this journey discovering and playing this music coming from the South of America.

Marcela Méndez

# The Composers and Works

## Luis Gianneo (1897 - 1968)

Born in Buenos Aires, Luis Gianneo was a piano student of Ernesto Drangosch and Luigi Romaniello. He gained his initial compositional training from Eduardo Fornarini and Constantino Gaito. He continued thereafter to be self-taught. His symphonic poems *Turay Turay* (1928) and *El tarco en flor* (1930) gave an early indication of the scope of his talent. Between 1923 and 1942 he lived in San Miguel de Tucumán, where besides conducting the orchestra of the Symphony Association he taught extensively as director of the Tucumán Musical Institute, together with Enrique Mario Casella. Years later, his educational activity would take him to the position of director of the National Music Conservatory in Buenos Aires. Being a member of the "Grupo Renovación", he also conducted major Argentinian orchestras. In 1945 Gianneo established the Argentine Youth Symphony Orchestra, and in 1954 Radio Nacional commissioned him to create and conduct the radio's first Youth Orchestra. The folklore of Argentina's north-eastern region and Incaic music influenced some of his works, such as his *Concierto Aymará para violín y orquesta*, while urban influence can be seen in his *Variaciones sobre un tema de tango*. His output included four quartets for strings, sonatas for piano, violin and cello, three trios, sonatinas for flute and harp, works for winds, songs, symphonies and symphonic poems, a ballet, cantatas and concertos for violin and for piano.

### Sonatina for Harp

This piece was dedicated to and premiered by Spanish harpist Nicanor Zabaleta, on July 22, 1947 at the Colon Theater of Buenos Aires. In three movements, the first, 'Dulce y Sonriente' is similar to a toccata, although it maintains the traditional structure of the sonata. This movement is followed by an "Andantino" in the manner of an arietta and a closing 'Presto'.

## Julián Aguirre (1868 - 1924)

Born in Buenos Aires, Julián Aguirre travelled to Spain as a child to continue his education at the Royal Conservatory of Madrid, where he graduated in 1886 with the first prize in piano, harmony and counterpoint. One of his teachers was Emilio Arrieta.

Returning to Buenos Aires he became a professor at the National Conservatory, the Alberto Williams Conservatory and the Argentine School of Music (which he created in 1916). Interested in popular music, he realized that the peasant melodies of the Pampas region could be transcribed to the environment of 'classical' music without modifying them in such a way as to distort their origin. This may be the reason he abandoned classical forms to concentrate on the original beauty of local rural folklore in his music.

The corpus of his work includes pieces for piano, violin and piano, songs for piano, art songs, choral works and transcriptions for numerous instruments of his *Aires Nacionales* and *Aires Criollos*, as well as the orchestration of *Huella y Gato* by the Swiss conductor, Ernest Ansermet.

### **Aires Nacionales Argentinos - Aires Criollos**

Parts of the Aguirre pieces that form this repertoire were transcribed by the Italian harpist and pedagogue Augusto Sebastiani (1889–1971), who lived in Argentina. He was a great disseminator of the harp, transcribing many works by Argentine composers for the instrument.

Marcela Méndez made the transcription of two of the Aires Criollos to complete the version for harp. *Aires Criollos* contains

*"the first, in F flat major, with its insinuation of a tango-like habanera and at times bimodal melody, evoking the typically rural Argentine female beauty; the second belongs to the most beautiful type of sandunguera milonga, where the mixed breed and rural characteristics come together in a rhythmic dance in a climate of mischievous and piquant courtesy; the third is an evocation of a Porteño (by Buenos Aires) period with the air of festive chatter in an environment of open-air parties under a canopy of flowers that prevails throughout the piece, making it particularly delicious."*  
(Francisco Giacobbe).

From *Aires Nacionales Argentinos*, Sebastiani has selected N° 4 Córdoba and N° 5 Córdoba. Aguirre displays in these pieces, via the depths of his Argentine sensitivity, episodes of great lyrical beauty and rural emotion.

### **Alberto Williams (1862 - 1952)**

Born in Buenos Aires into a family of music aficionados, Alberto Williams gave his first public performance at the age of seven in a concert organized by his teacher, Luis Bernasconi. Shortly afterwards his first printed composition was published and later he received a scholarship from the Argentine Government to study in the Paris Conservatory, under the tutorship of major teachers: Georges Mathias in piano, Auguste Durand, Benjamin Godard and Charles de Bériot in composition, besides taking classes with César Franck.

Back in Argentina in 1889, he began to study the forms, melodies and rhythms of Argentine folk music in depth. In 1893 he founded the Buenos Aires Music Conservatory, which he directed until 1941. There he had many students who gained recognition as major performers and composers.

Williams wrote several works on piano teaching and was a composer of chiefly symphonic, instrumental chamber music and works for piano. In his output he used folk motifs with great sophistication, being one of the first composers to value

Argentinian folk music, and presenting it in concert halls. He was a member of the National Fine Arts Academy and Vice President of the National Culture Commission.

His catalog comprises 136 works, including nine symphonies, and may be divided into three periods: up to 1890, where his work was mainly influenced by European models; from 1890 to 1910, with the emergence of the Argentine musical language, a period that includes most of his chamber music; and from his second symphony in 1910 onwards, where the American elements are subjectively immersed in an international language. *Vidalita* is a well-known work in its original version for piano and voice. This transcription for harp was made by Federico Lombardi, a harp professor in Tucumán during the first half of the 20th Century. It preserves all its original beauty, added to the harp's timbre which Lombardi skilfully exploited by using harmonics and arpeggios. The manuscript of this transcription belongs to the daughter of E. M. Casella, harpist Viviana Casella.

### **Remo Pignoni (1915 – 1988)**

Born in Rafaela, Santa Fe, where Pignoni received a solid piano education with Luis Ricci, a local Italian maestro. As a composer he had no formal training and his work is almost exclusively dedicated to piano and songs. He utilises the formal schemes of Argentine folk music, to which he adds refined harmonies, surprising rhythm and a special subtlety.

*Manojito de amancay* is a southern song dedicated by Pignoni to the influential guitarist, Pomponio-Martínez Zárate. The plant amancay (*Alstroemeria aurantiaca*) is native of Argentine Patagonia. There are some 50 varieties, mostly from the Andean-Patagonian forests and mountains: the most widely found flowers are an intense yellow with red speckles.

### **Félix Lezano (Palermo 1857– Buenos Aires 1919)**

Without his parents having any connection with music, Félix Lezano's brother was a pianist, and a sister was also a harpist. He underwent studies at the Pietro a Majella Conservatory, Naples, with Filippo Scotti, where his performance was so outstanding that the celebrated head of the institution, Giuseppe Saverio Mercadante (1795-1870), prophesied a brilliant future for him as a performer. He was soon given a teaching post at the institution. His travels included England, France, Italy, Portugal and Spain, and in Madrid he took part in a musical contest with two noted harp players (one of which was Félix Godefroid) in which Lezano came out the winner. His performances in England created a deep impression. He also made concert tours in Brazil, the United States, and other American countries until, in May 1885, he arrived in Buenos Aires, giving his first concert on the 3rd of July at the Academia Alemana de Canto (The German Singing Academy, one of the many top-level musical societies that then existed, replacing the musical sessions that had previously taken place in Buenos Aires salons).

He settled in Buenos Aires in 1890, where Lebano's teaching activity was extremely important in the country, teaching society girls and young ladies the harp. One of his many students was Flora de Urquiza, a daughter of President Justo José de Urquiza (1801-1870). Lebano made quite a mark as a composer, writing a considerable number of pieces for the harp both in Europe and Argentina, though the latter were never performed in Europe. After his death, the Naples magazine *L'Arte Pianistica* wrote, "... in Buenos Aires, thanks to his virtues and pleasant disposition, he was able to win the sympathy of the great local world. He was the favorite teacher of close to a thousand young ladies, and from 1890 on he organized end-of-year 'Concerts of the Angels' in which seventy or eighty young ladies participated, a Pleiad of select young women, who performed in the main halls of the Coliseo or Colón theatres. It was a real spectacle to see all those young people accompanied by Lebano at the end of the row of golden harps".

### **Andalusian Serenade**

*Sérénade andalouisiennne* is one of the pieces the composer played most often in his recitals, a descriptive fantasy with such melodic inflections as to send the imagination flying to Spain, its melodies contrasted, gliding from virtuosic to cantabile. It was composed in Europe and published and printed in Milan. Most likely, Lebano's inspiration for Spanish music came from his tours in that country and his contact with its music. Articles appeared in musical magazines and periodicals praising his artistic talent. In an issue of the *Morning Post* (London, end of the 19th century) we can read a review of a concert he gave in that city which, in reference to his renditions (including the *Sérénade andalouisiennne*) stated:

*"...If David soothed Saul's rages, Lebano calmed pretty Londoners' nerves with his harp, awakening in the bottom of the soul the most infinite and graduated emotions".*

### **Prière du soir [Tristesse!!] (Evening Prayer - Romance without words)**

This romance without words was dedicated to "mademoiselle Lucila Alemán". Strangely, the same piece had previously been published in Italy with the title 'Tristesse!!' by the F. Lucca publishing house, whose dedication said, "Hommage à mademoiselle Henriette Leavington". It is the same piece, an andante religioso of a meditative nature suggesting spiritual repose. Lebano begins by stating the theme with a simple chordal accompaniment, later giving it more complexity by means of arpeggios and harmonics. In the central section another theme of a more cantabile character serves as a transition to the first theme, now grandiose.

### **Colombine minuet (d' après de la Haye)**

A fresh and graceful pièce de salon, it was dedicated to "mademoiselle Josefina Anchorena". It possesses the character of a slow, ceremonious dance, as is the minuet, and invokes the figure of the Columbine in the "Commedia dell' arte", who wears a frayed costume and no mask, for which reason she puts on thick eye makeup.

# HARP MUSIC FROM ARGENTINA

Compiled, arranged and edited by

Marcela Méndez

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