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A PERFORMANCE-ORIENTED ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF ARGENTINIAN FOLK DANCES IN ALBERTO GINASTERA'S *SUITE DE DANZAS CRIOLLAS*, OP. 15

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Abstract

This contribution briefly illustrates my doctoral research on the reworking of Argentinian folk dances in the Suite de danzas criollas (“Suite of Creole dances”), op. 15 (1946) for piano by Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983) and its implications for the interpretation of the work. I adopt an approach that combines theoretical and analytical perspectives, along with technical aspects of piano performance practice, to show how practical knowledge of folk dances can orient choices in interpretation. First, by analysing the score, I will illustrate how rhythmic elements from three Argentinian folk dances (the zamba, the gato and the malambo) constitute a recurrent and integral part of the work. Then, I will describe how these rhythmic patterns are traditionally implemented in folk dance and percussion performances (focusing on the bombo legüero, one of the most common percussion instruments used to accompany these dances). Finally, I will show how knowledge of rhythmic patterns in folk dances and their implementation in dance and percussion dynamics can inform the interpretation of Ginastera’s Suite, specifically focusing on beat, accents and timbre.

Keywords: *Piano performance practice; Argentinian folk dances; Bombo legüero; Alberto Ginastera; Suite de danzas criollas.*

Introduction*

Alberto Ginastera is one of the most influential composers of twentieth-century Latin American music. Rooted in the Argentine musical nationalism of the beginning of the century¹, his output offers an outstanding example of synthesis between modernist aesthetics and traditional folk music. In this paper, I will focus particularly on Ginastera’s piano *Suite de danzas criollas*, op. 15 (1946²) where the reference to “Creole dances” directly hints at the traditional Argentinian dances being a “native” component of the composition.

* The aim of the present study is not to propose a reference article, but to describe the beginning of a research process. It illustrates an early stage of my doctoral thesis in Arts and arts sciences (ULB), which seeks to offer new paths for reflection in a performance-oriented analysis of the piano music of Alberto Ginastera and other twentieth-century Argentine composers.

I express my gratitude to Professors Valérie Dufour (FNRS-ULB) and Christopher Murray (ULB) for their valuable proof-reading and keen remarks on my research methodology; to Professor Eliane Reyes (CrB), for her artistry and guidance during my apprehension of the *Suite de danzas criollas*; to Minino Garay, Caterina Mora and Patricia van Cauwenbergh-Hernández for initiating me into the *bombo legüero* performance practice and Argentinian folk dances choreographies.

¹ “Argentine musical nationalism” is a musical movement that spread through Argentina in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Some of its stylistic features will be described herein. For a thorough analysis of its historical and socio-political background, as well as its specific musical aspects, see [1].

² Revised in 1956, the *Suite de danzas criollas* was first published by Barry.

The presence of elements derived from Argentinian musical folklore in Ginastera's output (such as dance rhythms, modal scales, melodic movements and textures) has long been recognised³. However, scholars have mostly approached the study of his work either from a purely theoretical-analytical perspective or have essentially focused on technical aspects of piano performance practice. In particular, the reference to Argentinian folk-music materials in the *Suite de danzas criollas* and some of its implications in the performance of the work are also studied in [5] and [6]. Nevertheless, although the authors often identify rhythmic patterns attributable to Argentinian folk dances in Ginastera's work, their considerations on interpretation do not strictly account for the impact of the folkloric content on the text. Li-Jung Lee, for example, describes passages in the *Suite* that are marked by the stylisation of Argentinian folk-music elements, particularly related to dances, but her analysis remains theoretical and makes no reference to the practical implications of these elements, nor does she propose a pianistic approach to showcase them⁴. Similarly, Minsil Choo's work identifies musical forms attributable to Argentinian folk dance rhythms in the *Suite* but does not connect these aspects to implications for performance, with indications for the interpretation of the work essentially concerning fingering, pedal use, and exercises for mastering passages of technical difficulty⁵. Although these studies offer valuable pedagogical and performance suggestions, and important observations on the presence and reworking of Argentinian folk dances in the *Suite de danzas criollas*, they do not offer insight into the interpretation of these elements. In what follows, I aim to combine a theoretical-analytical perspective and an investigation of performance practice to show how embodied knowledge of the rhythmic characteristics and performance practices of folk dances can inform piano interpretation.

My theoretical-analytical approach of the work is supported by the scientific literature on the use of Argentinian folk music in Ginastera's output⁶ (particularly in the *Suite de danzas criollas*⁷) as well as ethnomusicological studies on Argentinian musical folklore⁸. In addition, an initiation into the choreographies of Argentinian folk dances *zamba*, *gato* and *malambo*, as well as their rhythmic patterns on the *bombo legüero* offered me access to the subtleties of these dances, opening up a deeper understanding of their impact on the musical text and providing interpretive insights into the work. My discovery of the basic dance steps and rhythms of *zamba*, *gato* and *malambo* has helped me find pianistic effects capable of showcasing Ginastera's reworking of elements attributable to these folk dances in my performances of the *Suite*.

Before focusing on the analysis of selected excerpts from the *Suite de danzas criollas*, it is useful to briefly consider Ginastera's musical background. For the composer, reworking Argentinian folklore had its roots in an effort, shared by most Argentinian composers active between the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, to find a musical language capable of expressing a national identity. In their pursuit, these composers

³ There is no evidence indicating that Ginastera conducted field research on Argentinian musical folklore. Rather, his reworking of Argentinian folk music materials seems mostly based on ethnomusicologist Carlos Vega's studies and classifications of Argentinian folk music. See [2, pp. 25 and 30] and [3, pp. 31, 102 and 198]. The presence of elements derived from Argentinian musical folklore in Ginastera's output is therefore essentially related to textual analogies with transcriptions made in the context of ethnomusicological research.

Vega's impact on Ginastera's knowledge of Argentinian folk music is a potentially rich field for future research. According to Deborah Schwartz-Kates, Vega's influence on Ginastera's music "... has never been fully examined" [3, p. 102].

⁴ See [4, pp. 46-70].

⁵ See [5, pp. 34-51].

⁶ Among the most relevant studies, see [2], [6], [7] and [8]. In particular, Francis Davis Pittman concentrates his investigation on the presence of Argentinian folk-music elements in Ginastera's solo piano works.

⁷ See [4], [5] and [9].

⁸ Vega's essays, as well as those of Isabel Aretz, who continued and further elaborated his research, are often referred to by scholars as the main references for the study of Argentinian musical folklore. See [10] and [11]. As mentioned before, Vega's research seems to be among the most important sources testifying to Ginastera's use of Argentinian folk dances [2, p. 30].

started mixing elements borrowed from Europe's post-romantic and impressionistic music of the time with stylised aspects of popular Argentinian dances and songs (such as rhythms, melodies, harmonies, forms of accompaniment and folk instrument performance techniques)⁹. These processes are basically what constitutes Argentine musical nationalism, of which Alberto Williams¹⁰ (1862-1952) and Julián Aguirre¹¹ (1868-1924) are often considered to be the founders. Ginastera himself refers to the close relationship between his style and those of Argentinian composers of previous generations, indicating that his use of rhythms, melodies and scales present in Argentinian musical folklore is one of the central forces behind the structural and thematic elements of his works¹².

Alberto Ginastera's musical output is traditionally divided into three distinct periods: "objective nationalism" (1937-1947), "subjective nationalism" (1947-1957), and "neo-expressionism" (1958-1983). In the first period, the composer's style is characterised by his references to or reworking of Argentinian folk-music elements, dances and songs that are recognisable within a rather tonal language. In the second period, the allusion to folk-inspired material becomes increasingly indirect, symbolic and subjective. The third period is marked by a clear break from tonality through the use of dodecaphonic techniques and a more limited presence of the folk element¹³. During his first creative phase, Alberto Ginastera specifically finds his inspiration in Argentinian musical folklore; the musical language he adopts frequently reworks the basic forms, genres and rhythms of this *repertoire*¹⁴. Gilbert Chase, one of the first scholars to

⁹ In addition to [1], several studies have dealt with the specific stylistic features of Argentine musical nationalism. In this regard, articles by Melanie Plesch relate these elements to the success of the *topos* of the guitar in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Argentinian cultural imagery. See [12] and [13].

¹⁰ Williams's *El rancho abandonado*, fourth piece of the series *En la sierra*, op. 32 for piano (1890), is often referred to as the inaugural composition of Argentine musical nationalism. *El rancho abandonado* is emblematic of the encounter between European post-romantic styles and Argentinian folk-music elements. It is characterised by an impressionistic writing, which includes use of natural minor scales, fragmentation of the musical discourse and mode (even if aspects related to functional harmony are also identifiable) [14, p. 200], except for a sequence of nine bars that, suddenly in the central section of the piece, evokes the guitar playing technique and the typical harmonic progression of the *huella* folk dance. In Williams's time, the *huella* was hugely popular thanks to the work of numerous theatres that showcased folk-music and dance performances in Buenos Aires and other cities across Argentina. Its form of guitar accompaniment soon became a powerful distinguishing feature, evocative of an "authentic" Argentinian identity: "Inseparably linked to the idea of guitar strumming, it soon became a favorite marker among art-music composers and would be easily recognised by audiences as a signifier of Argentineness" [12, p. 265]. Besides [1], the symbolic role of this work in Argentinian art music is studied in [14] and [15].

¹¹ The influence of the formal and harmonic structures of Argentinian folk dances on Aguirre's piano output is studied in [16]. According to Schwartz-Kates, "The *Huella* for piano (which premiered in 1917) stands as Aguirre's most celebrated composition and provides an excellent example of his nationalist representation" [8, p. 256].

¹² See [3, pp. 102 and 198] and [17].

¹³ For a more detailed description of this tripartition, see [2], [3], [8], [18], [19] and [20]. This tripartition was defined by Ginastera himself in 1967, in an interview with the musicologist Pola Suárez Urtubey, author of one of his first biographies, published in the same year [21]. The interview is included in [21]. However, in [2], [18] and [22], Antonietta Sottile, Michelle Tabor and Schwartz-Kates question the monolithic character of his last period: Sottile subdivides it in two different phases (1958-1973 and 1973-1983); Tabor identifies three different compositional tendencies between 1958 and 1983 (a first, between 1958 and 1973, while the second and third coexist between 1973 and 1983); Schwartz-Kates proposes a fourth, final period (1976-1983). At the same time, other influent scholars refuse this traditional tripartition: in [23, p. 8], Malena Kuss asserts that "It is more accurate to view the fifty-four opus-numbered works that represent his total oeuvre (1937-1983) as an uninterrupted search for synthesis between the sounds that carry the stamp of his culture and the twentieth-century techniques he learned to master with consummate virtuosity". In [24], Guillermo Scarabino proposes a division of Ginastera's output in two periods, by distinguishing them on the basis of a neo-tonal language (1935-1954) or rather atonal (1958-1983) [2, p. 19].

Finally, in 1981, in an interview with Lilian Tan [25, p. 7], Ginastera himself refers to a bipartition of his work, defining the first period as "tonal and polytonal" and the second as "atonal". However, as pointed out by Sottile and Schwartz-Kates in [2, pp. 16-17] and [8, pp. 279-280] this periodisation has not generally been used by scholars who have studied Ginastera's output.

¹⁴ For a deeper analysis of these stylistic elements that are specific to Ginastera's first period, see [2], [3], [6], [7], [8] and [19]. In particular, a thorough study on the composer's language during his "objective nationalism" is conducted by Sottile in [2, pp. 27-72].

study Ginastera's works, highlights the composer's recurrent use of Argentinian dance patterns (such as *zamba* and *malambo*¹⁵). Chase also emphasises the symbolic value of using sounds that recall the open strings of a guitar (E-A-d-g-b-e¹)¹⁶, one of the preferred instruments in Argentinian folk music. According to Chase, this succession of sounds constitutes a "symbolic chord" in Ginastera's music and testifies to the influence of the *gauchesco* tradition on his musical style¹⁷. All these aspects are, to different extents, also identifiable in the *Suite de danzas criollas*, which Ginastera composed in 1946, at the end of his first creative period¹⁸.

The *Suite de danzas criollas* comprises five *danzas* that each have a specific tempo and character: I. *Adagietto pianissimo*, II. *Allegro rustico*, III. *Allegretto cantabile*, IV. *Calmo e poetico*, V. *Scherzando – Coda: Presto ed energico*. In the present contribution, I will focus on excerpts of the first, second and fourth movements¹⁹ as they appear to be strongly evocative of the Argentinian folk dances *zamba*, *gato* and *malambo*. As such, I believe they represent an object for potential exploration in regard to the pianistic interpretation of the work. In the first section of this paper, I will compare the first and fourth *danzas* of the *Suite*, as they both present issues of accentuation related to the *zamba*. In the second section, I will concentrate on the second movement, which is characterized by a metrical ambiguity derived from the reworking of rhythmic aspects of the *gato* and *malambo*.

I. Issues of accentuation in I. *Adagietto pianissimo* and IV. *Calmo e poetico*

With its slow tempo (♩ = 46), *Adagietto pianissimo* brings to mind the world of the *zamba*. According to the classification of Argentinian folk dances and songs by ethnomusicologist Isabel Aretz²⁰, the *zamba* comes from the *norteña* region, the northern part of Argentina. It is also

¹⁵ However, Chase's position regarding Ginastera's use of *malambo* patterns has recently been studied by Plesch, which re-examines the discourse of the scholarly literature on the *malambo* as a musical topic in the composer's output [26]. See footnote 33.

¹⁶ See [6] and [27].

¹⁷ See [6, pp. 445-447 and 450]. *Gauchosco* is a literary genre particularly widespread in Argentina between the nineteenth century and the twentieth century. It is based on an idealised vision of the *gaucho*, the herdsman of the vast plains of the Argentinian Pampa, who is often represented with his guitar.

¹⁸ Scholars have identified in the *Suite de danzas criollas* elements that testify a change in Ginastera's style. According to Suárez Urtubey, in the *Suite de danzas criollas* the composer heads towards "... a stage of major personal creativity ..." [19, p. 39]. Pittman notes the occurrence of certain aspects which mark the evolution of the composer's language towards his second period, in particular in the third *danza* of the *Suite*, *Allegretto cantabile*: "Though speculative on this author's part, there are indications evident in the score of this movement to suggest that Ginastera possibly began to consider incorporating his resultant *subjective nationalistic* compositional aesthetic philosophy into his work" [7, p. 84]. Choo asserts that the *Suite de danzas criollas* represents the inaugural work of Ginastera's "subjective nationalism": "*Suite de Danzas Criollas* demonstrates his new evolved style. Even though he continued to use aspects such as rhythm and melody of Argentinian folk music, it was less like the original materials" [5, p. 14]. Finally, Mary Ann Hanley, who interviewed Ginastera and attended composer's lectures at Dartmouth College in 1968, considers that "Ginastera regards the *Suite* as marking the beginning of his second style period in piano music, a period characterized by subjective nationalism" [9, p. 6]; quoting Ginastera's own words: "... all the melodies and rhythms in the *Suite* are Argentine; however, this material is used in a new, personal and imaginative way, as if inspired by a folklore dream" [9, p. 6].

[9] is quoted by Lee and Choo in [4, p.7] and [5, p. 34].

¹⁹ For my analysis, I refer to the 2006 edition of the *Suite de danzas criollas*, included with other piano works by the composer in [28].

²⁰ Julio Ogas mentions Aretz's classification of Argentinian folk dances and songs according to geographical criteria, with the aim of describing the distribution and forms of Argentinian musical folklore throughout the different regions of the country [29, p. 36]. Aretz identifies four main areas: *andina norteña* (corresponding to the provinces in the North-West of Argentina), *norteña* (the provinces in the Centre and North of the country), *cuyana* (the provinces in the Centre and in the East), *mediterránea* (the provinces in the Centre and in the West, including the Pampa plains). See [11, appendix].

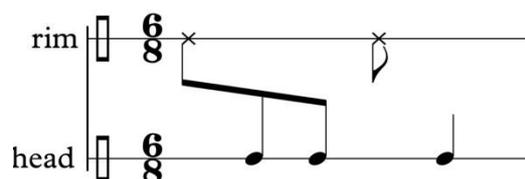
accompanied by syllabic verses. The choreography of this generally slow dance for couples symbolises a game of seduction. As the dancers move in a spiral-like turning motion around each other they twirl a handkerchief in the air. While the man's movements perpetually bring him closer to his partner, the woman sidesteps and slips away, teasing him in a game of courtship²¹. Several studies consider the rhythmic pattern (6/8 ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩) specific to the *zamba*²². The reworking of this pattern in the *Adagietto pianissimo* has already been observed in the studies of Choo and Pittman²³, with both identifying an allusion to the rhythmic traits of the dance. As part of my investigation on the impact of the *zamba* on the interpretation of the *Adagietto pianissimo*, I studied the basic dance moves of this folk dance, which correspond to a ternary division of a duple meter: in the *zamba*, the individual movements of the dance step corresponds either to each quaver (in this case, the first and fourth quavers are more sharply marked) or to each dotted crotchet per bar in 6/8. During my practical experience of the dance, the stability of each first beat in relation to the pulse represented a fundamental tempo marker, which I stress and imitate in my piano interpretation of the *Adagietto* as a way of emphasising the strong underlying dimension of dance. However, this choice could prove to be arbitrary if it is not complemented with an awareness of the distinctive character of the rhythm of the *zamba* as played by one of the most common percussion instruments of traditional Argentinian music: the *bombo legüero*.

A directly-struck membranophone (most commonly played either with drumsticks or with a drumstick and a mallet), the *bombo legüero* plays a fundamental rhythmic role in Argentinian folk music²⁴: it often constitutes the basis for the accompaniment of folk dances, including the *zamba*²⁵.



Fig. 1. The *bombo legüero*.

For this reason, by learning the accompaniment techniques of the *zamba* on the *bombo legüero*, I also came to know standard dance step and learned to feel its specific accentuation.



²¹ See [30, p. 399].

²² See [2, p. 37 and 42], [6, p. 447], [7, p. 25], [31, p. 189].

²³ See [5, p. 35] and [7, p. 78].

²⁴ In the following excerpt [32, p. 141], Vega poetically evokes the essential function of this instrument in traditional folk orchestras, as well as its sonic power which marks the dance moves: "... el bombo ... interviene con gran frecuencia en las orquestas folklóricas. ... El bombo comunica a la orquesta y a la fiesta una animación indescriptible. A gran distancia se oye el repiqueteo intenso y cálido de estos membranófonos. La danza tiende con él su línea avanzada de puntos en la noche". "... the *bombo* ... is frequently used in folk orchestras ... The *bombo* gives the orchestra and the fiesta an indescribable liveness. The intense, warm, beating of these membranophones can be heard at great distances. Thanks to it, the dance spreads through the night." The translation is mine.

²⁵ See [2, pp. 41-42] and [11, p. 54].

Fig. 2. The *zamba* standard accompaniment pattern²⁶ as played by the *bombo legüero*²⁷.

Here, the first and fourth quavers, which correspond to the two beats of a 6/8 measure, are played on the wooden rim (*aro* in Spanish) of the instrument – the part of the *bombo legüero* where the sound produced is shorter and sharper. However, the second, third and fifth quavers are played on the drumhead (*parche* in Spanish) which adds resonance, length and depth to the sounds at the end of the bar²⁸.

Just as Choo and Pittman, I also consider that frequent allusions to the rhythmic traits of the *zamba* can be found in the *Adagietto*. This can be seen as early as bars 1-4: characterised by the reference to the dance pattern in its original or reworked form, they show a similar concentration of sound weight on the weak beats.

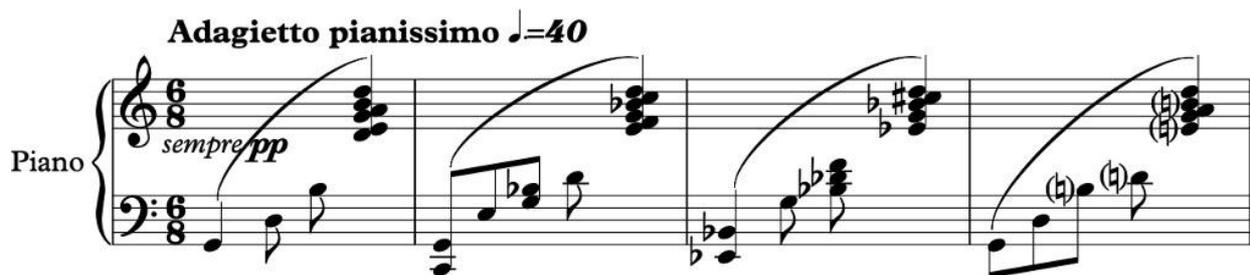


Fig. 3. I. *Adagietto pianissimo*: bars 1-4²⁹.

The sonorous weight of the chord set on the fifth quaver is always more consequential than that of the single notes that precede it. Although its position at the end of the slur suggests a sort of *diminuendo* (since traditionally slur markings without other indications might end with a decrease in loudness), this may be difficult to achieve in piano playing, given that the sheer mass of the chord spontaneously imposes itself on the rest of the bar. Moreover, the fifth beats are the moment that the extensions and enrichments of the harmonies hit at their maximum in intensity and thickness: the direction of the gesture and the density of the final chord therefore suggest an accentuation of the chord falling on the fifth beat.

In an interpretation of this passage from the *Adagietto* that takes into account the *zamba* accompaniment on the *bombo legüero*, the chord, although set on the weak beat, calls for a clear and resonant articulation, an increase in intensity and even an accent on the fifth quaver.

The impact of stylised rhythmic elements from the *zamba* is also noticeable in *Calmo e poetico*, the fourth movement of the *Suite*. Firstly, the metronomic indication $\text{♩} = 40$, implies a rather slow beat in a 6/8 tempo and is very similar to the pulse in the *Adagietto pianissimo* ($\text{♩} = 46$). More specifically, bar 4 of the *Calmo*, which is cyclically repeated with slight variations throughout the movement, recalls the *zamba* pattern and its accent as they are also observed in the first movement

²⁶ The author of the transcription is Aretz [11, p. 54], quoted in [2, p. 42]. In another variant of the dance rhythm, the first crotchet is dotted and followed by a semiquaver. In this regard, see [33, p. 45]. Besides the *bombo*, the *zamba* is traditionally accompanied by the guitar, which plays chords that follow the same pattern.

²⁷ Although this rhythm is written in the same 6/8 measure of the basic dance moves, a strict correspondence between the drum pattern and the individual movement of the footwork is not detectable.

²⁸ Despite the *zamba*'s rhythmic pattern relying on a 6/8 time signature, in *bombo* accompaniment the sound intensity of the third and fifth quavers is such that they could also be perceived as the second and third beats of a 3/4 measure.

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of the *Suite*. The presence of the *zamba* rhythm in the *Calmo e poetico* has also been studied by Lee, Choo and Pittman in their doctoral dissertations³⁰.



Fig. 4. IV. *Calmo e poetico*: bar 4³¹.

A performance of the *zamba* pattern present in bar 4 of the *Calmo e poetico* would require adopting the same choice for the excerpt from the *Adagietto pianissimo* mentioned above: accenting the fifth-quaver chord at the end of each grouping.



Fig. 5. I. *Adagietto pianissimo*: bar 4. IV. *Calmo e poetico*: bar 4³². They both present a chord on the fifth quaver, whose sound mass is preponderant on the rest of the bar.

The content of the bar also has a double emblematic value, due to the superimposition of the rhythmic pattern of the *zamba* on the reference of sounds corresponding to the open strings of the guitar, which, based on Chase's above-mentioned definition, constitutes a "symbolic chord". In interpretation, the evocation of the guitar's plucked strings can be achieved by rapidly hitting the keys with the fingertips in order to produce a *pizzicato* effect.

³⁰ In [4, p. 58], Lee quotes Roy Wylie: in his doctoral thesis, "... he felt, based on the rhythmic pattern and the repetitive phrase structure, that this movement is a *zamba*". See [34, p. 107]. Choo insists on the "use" of the *zamba* rhythm throughout the movement [5, pp. 44-45].

Besides stating "The *zamba* rhythmic trait of (6/8 ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩) is pervasive throughout the movement", Pittman asserts that, in the *Calmo e poetico*, "... Ginastera imitates almost the exact melodic contour and intervallic pattern of a *zamba* that Carlos Vega includes as an example of the *zamacueca*" [7, pp. 87-89]. Indeed, according to the author, the musical traits of the *zamba* "... emanated from a former dance known as the *zamacueca*" [7, p. 24]. Pittman also quotes Gerard Béhague, who, in [31, p. 189], describes the origins of the *zamba* and relates its musical characteristics to the *cueca*, a folk dance mostly popular in Chile and Bolivia: in Béhague's opinion, both dances "emerged" from the *zamacueca*, which he considers an "... old colonial Peruvian dance...".

Vega's inclusion of a *zamba* as an example of the *zamacueca* [35, p. 143] is quoted in [7, p. 89]; however, in this case Pittman alludes to the melodic gesture of bars 1-3, which are not studied in the present contribution.

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The frequent use of references to the *zamba* pattern gives the movement a dancing feel. Moreover, the strong formal balance provided by the constant repetition of bar 4 (every four measures, in the first seventeen out of twenty-eight) acts as a cyclical element that helps to delineate the sections of the composition and recalls the recurring patterns typical of popular dances, helping the dancers to quickly become familiar with their structure.

II. Metrical ambiguity between 6/8 and 3/4 in II. *Allegro rustico*

The second movement of the *Suite, Allegro rustico*, includes rhythmic elements that can be attributed both to the stylisation of the *malambo* and *gato* folk dances. The reworking of the *malambo* can be identified throughout the movement in the frequent repetition of six quavers in 6/8 measure (6/8 ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩), a pattern defined by Chase as an “ideal” form of *malambo*, frequently employed (and varied) by Ginastera³³. The reference to the syncopated pattern typical of the *gato* (6/8 ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩)³⁴ can be observed in bars 7, 9, and 11 of the *Allegro*³⁵. However, these bars are not included in the present article as they appear less relevant to the topic of the section (that is, the metrical ambiguity between 6/8 and 3/4) than bars 31-34, which will be studied below; I refer to them essentially to illustrate the presence of the *gato*'s rhythmic traits which instill the *Allegro rustico* with the spirit of this folk dance.

Originating in the centre of the country, the *mediterránea* region according to Aretz's classification³⁶, the *malambo* is essentially an instrumental dance symbolising strength and virility. Danced either individually or by two men who challenge each other in a duel of dexterity and resistance, the *malambo* is characterised by its rather tricky *zapateos*³⁷ that demand considerable physical endurance and an impressive technical virtuosity on the part of the dancer³⁸. In the moves, called *mudanzas*, that punctuate the dance, the feet hit and graze the floor to the rhythm of the accompanying instrument³⁹ (traditionally the guitar) until the dancers are exhausted. The accompaniment of the *malambo* shows the frequent coexistence of 6/8 and 3/4 in the same measure⁴⁰. The *gato* comes from the north of Argentina, the *norteña* region according to Aretz. It is one of the most popular and widespread rural dances in the country. Along with the rhythmic accompaniment of the *bombo legüero*, the *gato* also features syllabically sung text that is harmonically supported by the guitar⁴¹. In this animated and lively dance, characterised by a variety of metric accents⁴², the man performs a *zapateo* while the woman performs a *zarandeo*⁴³, lifting her skirt just enough to show her mastery of the dance moves⁴⁴. Just as the *malambo*, the rhythmic accompaniment of the *gato* is marked by a coexistence between 6/8 and 3/4 in the same bar⁴⁵.

³³ See [6, p. 455] and [27, p. 12]. Plesch also asserts in a recent article that Chase's standpoint does not refer to an “authentic” pattern of the folk dance, but rather to “... recurring rhythms found in Ginastera's works, which he interpreted as stylizations of the *malambo*” [26, p. 164].

³⁴ See [7, p. 16] and [31, pp. 212-213]

³⁵ In their analyses of the *Allegro rustico*, Lee and Choo consider the syncopated pattern present in bars 7, 9 and 11 as a stylisation of the *gato* rhythm. See [4, pp. 51-52], [5, p. 38]. In [9, p. 7], Hanley describes the movement as “... an idealized version of the *gato* ...”.

³⁶ See footnote 20.

³⁷ These consist in the rhythmic action of foot stamping and can be performed in different figures during the dance. In addition to being a defining aspect of the *malambo*, *zapateos* are also performed in other folk dances, including the *gato*.

³⁸ See [2, p. 39] and [27, p. 14].

³⁹ See [36, p. 63-64].

⁴⁰ See [33, p. 61] and [7, p. 15]. In [33], Jorge Cardoso distinguishes between the *malambo norteño* and the *malambo sureño*. The *malambo* considered in my study is the former.

⁴¹ See [31, p. 107].

⁴² See [7, p. 13].

⁴³ In [30, p. 399], Ercilla Moreno Chá describes the *gato* as “... a fast couple dance in which the male and female do not hold each other but exhibit a type of dancing duel”.

⁴⁴ In the *zarandeo*, the woman holds her skirt with both hands and makes one or two small turns, always facing the man.

⁴⁵ See [2, p. 39], [7, p. 15], [11, p. 54], [29, p. 101], [31, p. 212].

The metronomic indication ($\text{♩} = 126$) of the *Allegro* indicates the movement's speed and demands considerable technical capacity from the performer. In the *Allegro rustico*, issues of accents are noticeable and particularly in bars 31-34. Characterised by the constant repetition of six quavers in a 6/8 measure⁴⁶, they close off the dance and demonstrate the same simultaneity of binary and ternary subdivisions typical of the *malambo* and *gato*⁴⁷.



Fig. 6. II. *Allegro rustico*: bars 31-34⁴⁸.

In discovering these dances, I experimented with their specific polyrhythm through an initiation to the basic steps of the *zapateo*, a trait that is common to the *malambo* and *gato*. I also explored and performed the rhythmic pattern of a basic *zapateo* in its accompaniment version on the *bombo legüero*:

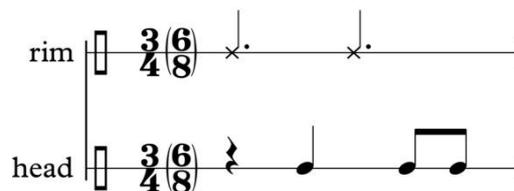


Fig. 7. Rhythmic pattern of a basic *zapateo* as played on the *bombo legüero*.

In Figure 7, a binary foot and a ternary foot coexist within the same bar: the first crotchet and the fourth quaver are played on the rim of the instrument while the third and fifth are played on the drumhead, resulting in the coexistence of 6/8 and 3/4 measures.

Throughout my initiation to the *zapateo*, I perceived this polyrhythm as a major ambiguity because it can be challenging, especially for classically trained musicians who learn to superimpose binary and ternary feet through practice and exercise, to focus exclusively on either the former or the latter: when the *zapateo* is performed, the two subdivisions are spontaneously perceived as

Moreover, in [11, p. 208], Aretz compares the rhythmic accompaniment of the *gato* to another similar Argentinian folk dance, the *bailecito*: "... el instrumento marca sobre el parche un segundo y tercer tiempo de un supuesto compás en tres tiempos; y los golpes restantes se dan sobre el aro del borde, con escaso efecto sonoro. Esta percusión produce al oído la misma biritmia que hemos destacado al hablar del Gato ...". "... the instrument marks on the drumhead a second and third beat of a supposed three-beat measure; and the remaining beats are given on the wooden rim ring, with little sound effect. This percussion produces the same bi-rhythm to the ear that we emphasised when speaking of the *gato* ...". The translation is mine.

⁴⁶ Moreover, as mentioned by Schwartz-Kates in [3] regarding the composer's frequent stylised allusion to the *zapateo* in his output (especially in his early works), "Ginastera evokes the image of the zapateo dance steps with a rapid 6/8 meter and continuous eight-note motion". See [3, p. 25].

⁴⁷ Although this simultaneity is quite widespread in other Argentinian folk dances, I relate the metrical ambiguity of these bars to the coexistence of 6/8 and 3/4 typical of the *malambo* and *gato* because of the frequent reference to their stylised dance patterns during the movement.

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simultaneous in the bar. In my view, this simultaneity also characterises bars 31-34 of *Allegro rustico*: although they are marked by the repetition of a sequence of six quavers arranged systematically in two groups of three in 6/8, their writing in broken seventh chords distributed between left and right hand also allows them to be structured in three groups of two, thus constituting an interpolation of a 3/4 rhythm in a 6/8 measure. In the piano performance, I opt for an interpretation that relates this metrical ambiguity to the polyrhythm that I experienced during my practice of the basic *zapateo*; I consequently accent the first, third and fifth quavers, corresponding to the three crotchets of a 3/4 measure, in order to evoke the same spontaneous simultaneity between 6/8 and 3/4⁴⁹.

Although my remarks on the coexistence of 6/8 and 3/4 in bars 31-34 of *Allegro rustico* may not be based on incontrovertible evidence, I assume that the metrical ambiguity typical of the *gato* and *malambo* folk dances could indeed have been filtered in a subtle manner, consistent with the reworking of Argentinian folk element in Ginastera's art music language and the groove felt naturally in the context of the popular dance. This compositional process does not constitute a literal quotation from folklore; rather, it reflects an allusion to this tradition.

Conclusions

The aim of this contribution is to show how knowledge of the traditional Argentinian dances can inform the interpretation of the movements that refer to those dances in the *Suite de danzas criollas*. In this respect, an initiation into *zamba*, *gato*, and *malambo* choreographies and assorted rhythms is a relevant approach to better appreciate the folk musical culture which the composer draws his inspiration from, and thus have a deeper understanding of the richness of the text. My performance-oriented analysis constitutes one of many possible ways of apprehending the *Suite*, and the importance of folk dances in this composition is but one of several possible lines of investigation: while the *Suite de danzas criollas* may include aspects derived from traditional Argentinian dances (such as *zamba*, *gato* and *malambo* rhythmic patterns and metrical characteristics) they are nonetheless filtered, stylised and reworked in line with piano performance practice. For this reason, it must be stressed that the purpose of the present contribution is not to impose an interpretation of the *Suite* based solely on the impact that Argentinian folk dances have on the work. Rather, it seeks one strategy for making a reasoned interpretation in which the folk dimension of the *Suite* is emphasised.

This investigation of accent patterns experienced through dance and *bombo legüero* performances is part of a larger research which seeks to define how practical knowledge of Argentinian folk dances can have an impact on the interpretation of the piano works of Alberto Ginastera and other twentieth-century Argentinian composers. Nevertheless, other possible approaches of this repertoire might be based on the study of its Modernist stylistic elements (which have not been addressed here) and its implications for piano interpretation, also through comparison with traditions of piano performance practice of the music of Modernist composers.

I wish therefore to underline that my investigation does not aim to "prescribe" interpretative paths for the *Suite*, since research in Arts and art sciences raises questions that do not necessarily expect a univocal solution. My reflections on the performance of the *Suite de danzas criollas* are neither exclusive nor decisive; on the contrary, they aspire to open up a range of interpretative possibilities.

⁴⁹ Since the interpretation of this excerpt is informed by my practice of the *zapateo* and its accent patterns, I bring out accents that are not explicitly marked in the score, but which I feel should be understood as emanating from the performance of the rhythmic pattern of a basic *zapateo*.

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