Alberto Ginastera's Twelve American Preludes: descriptive analysis and performer's guide

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Abstract

This monograph presents a detailed descriptive analysis and performer’s guide for Alberto Ginastera’s Twelve American Preludes Op.12. The author emphasizes the study of specific compositional and pianistic techniques for the performer who wishes to develop a deeper understanding of this remarkable twentieth century work. Equally important is the attempt to develop a greater appreciation of the importance and contributions of one Argentina’s greatest composers.
Introduction

The author’s experience as a pianist studying and performing her fellow countryman Alberto Ginastera’s *Twelve American Preludes* has led to an enthusiastic study of his compositional style and a greater interest in his life and overall output. The purpose of this monograph is to provide both a detailed descriptive analysis and performer’s guide, discussing in particular specific compositional and pianistic techniques that are important for the performer who wishes to develop a deeper understanding of this important twentieth century work.

Chapter One provides general background on the composer’s life and career, and also specific background on the *Twelve American Preludes*. It also provides relevant background about Ginastera’s friendship with the great American composer Aaron Copland, whose influence can be heard in this piece. Chapter Two presents descriptive analyses of each individual prelude. Chapter Three presents a performer’s guide cataloguing specific compositional techniques that are particularly important, while also addressing specific pianistic issues for the performer. Chapter Four provides a brief summary and conclusions.
Chapter One
Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983)

Argentinian composer Alberto Ginastera is widely regarded as one of the most important South American musical figures of the twentieth century. He composed music for films, ten orchestral concert works including the suite Estancia, six solo concertos, three operas, fifteen pieces for piano including piano sonata number 1, five ballets, organ pieces, popular songs, and cantatas.¹ In addition to being one of his country’s most important musical figures, he was a great advocate for the arts. He organized the Conservatory of Arts in La Plata University, and later directed the Latin-American Center of High School Musical Studies at the Institute Torcuato Di Tella in Buenos Aires.² His goal in helping to create these institutions was to help improve musical education and to make the arts accessible to all students.

From early in his career, Ginastera’s compositions enjoyed international acclaim. His music often combines Argentine folk rhythms with modern compositional techniques. In an interview with Suarez Urtubey in 1967, the composer presents a brief description of his musical approach. He explains:

I recognize three fundamental constants. . . In the first place, the primacy of lyricism, present in some songs, for instance the Triste, Pas de Deux of Estancia, and then, in a more sublimated way, in Canto de Amor of the Cantata para América Mágica. The second constant is related to rhythm, strong rhythms, masculine dances. They appear in Danza de los Guerreros in Panambi… The third constant element is the expressionism, almost magic, already present in Claro de Luna en el Paraná in Panambi.³

³ Suarez Urtubey, 70.
In addition to the previous comments, the composer also mentions the first of his three periods of aesthetic evolution:

In the first objective period, I felt the necessity to express myself in terms of the Argentinian man and, at the same time, the man of the Pampas. The contemplation of the Argentinian countryside and the intellectual stimulus that I received from some pictures of Figari and books from Guiraldes encourage me in that way.  

Between 1941 and 1952, prior to the premiere of his popular orchestral piece Estancia, Ginastera researched the historical evolution of the musical arts in his country. In his article “Notas Sobre La Música Moderna Argentina” (Notes About Modern Music in Argentina) published in 1948, Ginastera offers a historical perspective on Argentinian music and musicians, and expresses his thoughts about the present and the future of national music after World War II. He believed that modern Argentine music could be traced back to composers born in the 1890’s. Ginastera organizes the most prominent composers in Argentinian history into four different periods:

1. Precursors (up to 1860)
2. First Professionals Composers born between 1860 and 1880, (e.g. Julian Aguirre 1869).
3. The Generation of the 80’s and 90’s (e.g. Lopez Buchardo 1881)
4. The New Generation (starting in 1900)  

Composers such us Stravinsky, Bartok, Milhaud, Hindemith, and De Falla were an inspiration for the new generation of Argentinian musicians that included Ginastera. The use of folk materials, technical refinement, and the adoption of modern techniques were a

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few of the ideas favored by this new generation as part of the evolution of Argentinian
music. New musical currents were evident, but the composers were concerned that in their
attempt to differentiate their work from European music their movement lacked unity. In
the same article, Ginastera mentioned composers like Juan Jose Castro (1895-1968),
Roberto García Morillo (1911-2003), Jose María Castro (1892-1964), Luis Gianneo (1897-
1968), Juan Carlos Paz (1901-1972), and Carlos Suffern (1905-1991), describing their
musical tendencies and styles. He believed that familiarity with the work of these
composers was essential to understanding Argentinian musical evolution at the beginning
of the twentieth century. Ginastera became well versed in national trends past and present,
while at the same time recognizing younger composers who would contribute to future
developments. He taught Rodolfo Arizaga, Tirso de Olazábal and Astor Piazzolla, who
went on to become leaders in Argentinian music.

The scholar Deborah Schwartz-Kates, in her article about Ginastera and the
Gauchesco tradition, explains how Ginastera started his career establishing a connection
with traditions and the cultural past: “a brief overview of Ginastera’s first period (1937–
47) reveals the composer’s deep immersion in the criollo-based legacy of the past.” Many
of his earliest works are short pieces in conventional formal structures that display folk
influences and the work of such composers as Lopez Buchardo (1881-1948), who was a

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6 Ginastera, 22.
7 Ibid, 28.
prominent musician in the first part of twentieth century.\textsuperscript{9} As will be noted in the following chapter, folk elements figure prominently in the \textit{Twelve American Preludes}.

**Friendship with Aaron Copland**

Ginastera was for a brief time a student of the great American composer Aaron Copland. They developed a friendship and professional relationship, each inspiring the other in their creative endeavors. They met for the first time in Buenos Aires in 1942, when Copland traveled to South America. Ginastera was encouraged by Copland to apply for a Guggenheim scholarship, which allowed him to travel to the United States in 1945 after World War II, in order to continue his education. The composers met again at a Summer Music Festival in Tanglewood,\textsuperscript{10} where Ginastera was a student in Copland’s seminar, and also met well-known composers from other countries. He also traveled to other cities in order to conduct research on American music education, visiting important music schools such as Juilliard, Columbia, Yale, Harvard, and Eastman.\textsuperscript{11} The Guggenheim award made it possible for Ginastera to travel and meet new composers, and to have access to new music. He was also interested in composing for radio and cinema, and created his first film score in 1942, inspired in part by Copland’s lecture on the subject.\textsuperscript{12}

Copland was inspired by his first trip to South America, and he returned to the U.S. with a favorable impression of Argentinian composers, Ginastera in particular. In this regard he said, “in general, Argentinian composers are more cultivated and well prepared professionally, more than in any other Latin American country.”\textsuperscript{13} He also mentioned the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10} Schwartz-Kates, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{11} Schwartz-Kates, 7.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 5.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Aaron Copland, \textit{Copland on Music}, (New York: The Norton Library, 1963), 207.
\end{itemize}
two most important musical societies in Buenos Aires at that time: *La Nueva Musica* (Juan Carlos Paz), and the *Grupo Renovación* (Jacobo Fisher, Honorio Siccardi, Luis Gianneo, Jose Maria Castro), comparing them with the League of Composers in the U.S. Copland established connections with musicians from several South-American countries, many of whom would join him later in Tanglewood. In 1946 Copland’s led efforts in the creation of the group “1946 Latin Americanists” from Central and South America, including composers such as Roque Cordero, Julian Orbón, Hector Tosar, and Juan Orrego-Salas.\(^{14}\) Ginastera was part of this group, which helped him to be more connected with the music of North and South America. The group advocated a multicultural approach to the arts, melding the traditions and sounds of many countries from the continent.

In the aforementioned interview, Deborah Schwartz-Kates explains the characteristics of this group and how Ginastera’s music changed during his Guggenheim years in U.S.A.:

> There was never a formally organized group. The Tanglewood students were all close friends. The closest relationship existed between Ginastera and Orrego-Salas. Juan Orrego-Salas is still alive, and you would benefit from trying to speak with him. Ginastera’s music changed dramatically during his Guggenheim Years. Did his US experience change him? Or was he changing already, before he got to the United States? These are complex questions. But if you listen to Ginastera’s op. 13-15 and compare these pieces to his op. 8-10, you will notice huge stylistic differences.\(^{15}\)

\(^{14}\) Ibid, 6.

\(^{15}\) Deborah Schwartz-Kates, Interview by Alejandra Saez,15 May, 2013, Transcript available from interviewer, School of Music, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.
Twelve American Preludes op.12

This composition is considered part of his Nationalistic period, along with Danzas Argentinas, Op.2 (1937), and Creole Faust Overture (1944). The set includes musical evocations of, and tributes to, composers hailing from both North and South America.

In his description of this work, the Musicologist Jeremy Grimshaw defines the set as follows:

The works in the series are all miniatures ranging in length from 30 seconds to two minutes -- hardly constituting individual forms or developments at all, while instead conveying concise but vivid emotional evocations. Some of these are suggested only vaguely by the individual pieces' titles.\(^{16}\)

The following chapter provides a descriptive analysis of each individual prelude.

Chapter Two
Descriptive Analysis of Twelve American Preludes

This set of short pieces was published in two volumes in 1944. According to Mary Ann Hanley, “Ginastera called them an ‘experimental work’ in which he was searching for new musical idioms.” In four of the preludes, the composer supplies titles that refer to a technical or harmonic feature on which the individual piece is based: No. 1 (“Accents”), No. 7 (“Octaves”), No. 5 (“In the First Pentatonic Minor Mode”) and No. 12 (“In the First Pentatonic Major Mode”). Four preludes are tributes to well-known composers, such as Aaron Copland. Ginastera’s letter to Copland, on September 2, 1944, reveals the admiration he felt for the great American composer:

I have been working hard and my last composition is a series of Preludios americanos for pianoforte, among which there is one dedicated to you. They are brief sketches, each one referring to someone special as you can see by the program I sent you. I hope you will forgive me for this little homage, which represents only a minimum of all the respect and admiration I feel towards you.

In addition to Prelude No. 9 dedicated to Copland, the composer dedicated Prelude No. 6 to Roberto Garcia Morillo, No. 8 to Juan Jose Castro, and No. 11 to the Brazilian

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composer Heitor Villa-Lobos. The other four preludes in the set constitute a third category. Respectively titled “Triste,” “Danza Criolla,” “Vidala,” and “Pastoral,” these pieces make a more specific effort to evoke folk influences, a prominent feature in Ginastera’s earlier works. Below commentary and descriptive analysis for each of the twelve preludes in order of their appearance in the set.

Acentos (Accents)

This brief 34-measure piece is to be performed at a lively Vivace tempo, and is characterized by a steady stream of eighth notes set in 6/8 meter, but with displaced accents that disguise the pulse for all but a few measures (see example 2.1). The prevailing pianistic feature for much of the piece is contrary motion between the hands.

Example 2.1: Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, No. 1, mm 1-3

Beginning in m.13, the hands move in parallel motion, exploring the upper registers of the keyboard while intensifying the displaced accent effect. Note that the three-note groupings, which before were articulated simultaneously between the hands, are now arranged in a more contrapuntal fashion (see Ex. 2a below).

From m. 21 to the end, the motion alternates between parallel and contrary motion, but with a return to the simultaneous pattern of accents between the hands, (see Ex. 2b below).
Example 2.2a: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 1, mm 13-14

Example 2.2b: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 1, mm 21-22

Such displaced accents pervade the entire piece, although the hemiola effect heard in mm. 9-12 does provide a clear reference to the downbeats in the left hand (see example 2.3).

Example 2.3: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 1, mm 9-12

The tonal center of this piece is F, but with chromatic inflections suggested by the arpeggiated patterns that often outline harmonic structures built in fourths and fifths (see Ex.2.2a and 2.2b), and which extend beyond simple tonal or modal progressions.
In the final measures of the piece the arpeggiated patterns reveal a clear bitonal approach, the right hand outlining F minor triads while the left hand outlines A minor triads in mm. 28-30, followed by a shift to an F major/A major juxtaposition to close the piece (see example 2.4a, and 2.4b).

Example 2.4a: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 1, mm 28-30

![Example 2.4a](image)

Example 2.4b: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 1, mm 31-34

![Example 2.4b](image)

**Triste (Sadness)**

This prelude is the shortest of the twelve, comprising only thirteen measures. The piece clearly establishes the Aeolian, or natural minor mode, in C, which is expanded to include an e-natural (a major third relationship to the tonic), first as a passing tone in m. 11, and finally in combination with e-flat (natural minor third in the Aeolian mode) in the final, tonally ambiguous chord (see example 2.5a, 2.5b).
Example 2.5a: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 2, mm 1-3

![Example 2.5a](image)

Example 2.5b: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 2, mm 11-13

![Example 2.5b](image)

Ginastera sets the piece in a contrapuntal, non-imitative two-voice texture. In addition to the slow *lento* tempo and the prevailing minor key tonality, the preponderance of simple two-note melodic gestures accentuate the sad mood of the piece (see examples 2.6 a, 2.6 b, 2.6c below), as does the aforementioned juxtaposition of the major and minor thirds in the final chord.

Example 2.6 a: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 2, mm 6

![Example 2.6 a](image)
Example 2.6b: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 2, mm 8.

Example 2.6c: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 2, mm 10.

**Danza Criolla (Creole Dance)**

This prelude evokes the *Malambo*, an Argentinian dance for men in which they demonstrate their physical abilities in a contest. It is the longest prelude in the set at 89 measures, and one of the most aggressive and virtuosic.

Set in 6/8 meter, hemiola effects are frequent (as in mm. 3-4 and similar passages), as are the clear poly-metric combinations heard, for example, in mm. 25-32, in the which the right hand suggests the prevailing 6/8 meter, while the left hand suggest 3 / 4 meter (see example 2.7a, 2.7b).
Bitonal elements are prominent throughout, and serve to accentuate the *violento* nature of the piece. In the opening measures, the effect is direct and simply conceived, with the right hand playing triads on the white keys while the left hand concentrates on non-tertian sonorities on the black keys. In mm. 9-16 (see example 2.8a), the technique involves the juxtaposition of triads – A flat major against F major or B flat major against C major – that is also very direct and uncomplicated. In the *cantando* section that begins in mm. 49 (see example 2.8b), the white note/black note juxtaposition recurs with new melodic material played on the white keys against a dissonant ostinato pattern played on the black keys.
In the final measures, Ginastera juxtaposes F major triads in the right hand against G flat major triads in the left while maintaining vigorous rhythmic patterns and the overall \textit{violento} character (see example 2.9a, 2.9b).
Example 2.9 a: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 3, mm 77-79

Example 2.9 b: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 3, mm 86-89

Vidala

This piece displays characteristics of the *vidala*, a type of Argentinian folk song that is typically slow and mournful. One of the features of the *vidala* style is a melody harmonized in thirds, a technique Ginastera employs in m. 1 and a few other places (see example 2.10).

Example 2.10: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 4, mm1-4
This short 17-measure piece recalls the mood and character of Prelude No. 2, “Triste.” The tonality is predominantly g minor, with the upper voice based primarily on the melodic minor scale, while the interior voices inject occasional chromatic inflections.

The bass line presents what is in effect a countermelody largely based on the natural minor scale, but with significant chromatic inflections. An example of this can be found in a descending line C-Bb-A-Ab-G, in mm 9-12 (see example 2.11).

Example 2.11: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 4, mm. 9-12

The bass line in particular accentuates the return of a “sad” mood to the set. Its frequent descending motion contributes a lament-like quality, particularly in mm. 9-12 where it moves slowly downward in whole and half-steps. In fact, the example uses the so-called Lament bass—a descending minor tetrachord—in the tradition of 17th and 18th century laments by Purcell, J.S. Bach, and others21 (see example 2.11 above).

**En el Primer modo pentáfono menor (In the first Pentatonic Minor Mode)**

This prelude is a two-part canon at the octave. The opening indication *sempre piano e dolce* defines the charming and graceful character that must be maintained throughout.

All melodic material is based on a simple A minor pentatonic scale (A-C-D-E-G), lending a distinctly folk-like aspect to this prelude (see example 2.12).

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Example 2.12: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 5, mm 1-6

Homenaje a Roberto Garcia Morillo (Tribute to Roberto Garcia Morillo)

Dedicated to the noted Argentinian composer and musicologist Roberto Garcia Morillo, this prelude features persistent sixteenth-note rhythms, initially executed by the hands in rapid alteration – the left hand in octaves, and the right hand in single notes (see example 2.13). As with “Accents” and “Creole Dance,” this prelude features clear bitonal juxtapositions with “C” as the prevailing tonal center.

Example 2.13: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 6, mm 1-5

The bitonal texture is interrupted by a brief passage that features virtuosic arpeggios on quartal sonorities in the right hand (C-F-Bb) against a pounding octave theme in the left hand (see example 2.14).
Example 2.14: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 6, mm 7-9

In m. 27, the bitonal juxtaposition is transposed to a “G” tonal center in the left hand, but the right hand continues to play only the black notes of the keyboard as it did at the beginning of the piece (see example 2.15).

Example 2.15: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 6, mm 27-29

In the last 11 measures of the piece, the composer adds one note at the time to a bitonal harmony. While the left hand plays a repeated open fifth sonority (C-G-C), the right hand texture unfolds to eventually contain a pentatonic cluster played entirely on the black keys (see example 2.16). The conclusion recalls the *violento* quality that was so prominent in Prelude No. 3.
Example 2.16: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 6, mm 50-55

Octavas (Octaves)

This virtuoso piece poses considerable technical challenges. Difficulties are compounded by the wide interval leaps that require absolute control of wrist and forearm (see example 2.17). The *sempre ff e marcato* character is maintained throughout. The C Aeolian mode is suggested by the leaping figures in the first two measures, which are repeated in mm. 5-6, 15-16, 19-20, and 26-27, and which help affirm the prevailing tonality of the piece.

Example 2.17: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 7, mm 1-3
Other passages are quite chromatic and occasionally bitonal. In Example 2.18, the motion is more stepwise, making it somewhat easier for the performer, although the hands are no longer playing in unison.

Example 2.18: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 7, mm 7-14

The last descending scale, in mm 21-26, could be described as a descending stepwise pattern, (C-Bb, Ab-G-F#, E-Eb-D), built out of a succession of three-note cells (see example 2.19). Considering the start of each beat, the augmented triad C-A flat-E arpeggiates through several octaves, until we reach the final measures.

Example 2.19: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 7, mm. 21-26
The prelude ends with a challenging passage in contrary motion that concludes with a difficult four-octave leap in the right hand (see example 2.20).

Example 2.20: Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, No. 7, mm 26-28

Homenaje a Juan Jose Castro (Tribute to Juan Jose Castro)

This prelude, only sixteen measures in length and divided into four-measure phrases, is set in a slow tempo di tango. The melanconico mood that the composer indicates at the beginning is enhanced by the melodic gestures of the melody and the descending chromatic line in the tenor voice (see example 2.21). Note that the tempo of this and other slow pieces in the set are similar. Each of these slow preludes follows a big virtuosic one, providing the necessary balance of energy for the set.

Example 2.21: Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, No. 8, mm 1-4
The simple right hand melody consists almost entirely of two descending gestures (f-e and e-d), supported by a descending chromatic countermelody in the tenor voice, and a pedal point in the bass that establishes and reinforces the d minor tonality.

The second phrase presents the melody and pedal point an octave higher with the chromatic middle voice now on different pitches (see example 2.22).

Example 2.22: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 8, mm 5-8

The third phrase retains the melodic material but is now harmonized with a chain of four unrelated seventh chords, the first three dominant sevenths and the final one (at the fermata) a minor seventh (see example 2.23).

Example 2.23: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 8, mm 9-12

In the final phrase the melody undergoes considerable elaboration while the other voices retain their original character. At the final cadence, Ginastera writes an ascending arpeggio spanning three octaves that outlines a D minor triad with chromatic inflections (C# and G#) (see example 2.24).
Example 2.24: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 8, mm 13-16

This lively prelude, inspired by the American composer, begins with a five-measure introduction that spans from the highest to the lowest regions of the keyboard (see example 2.25).

Example 2.25: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 9, mm1-5

This energetic opening passage effectively evokes the Copland style. The unharmonized octaves set in syncopated rhythms and ornamented by lower neighbor grace notes suggest the spirit and character of such orchestral works as *El Salon Mexico* and *Rodeo*.

The body of the piece is set in a simple ABA structure as follows: A – mm. 6-32; B – mm. 33-47; A’ – mm. 48-61. Note that the return of the A section is condensed considerably.
As in previous preludes in the set, this piece explores bitonal relationships in a black key-against-white key manner. For example, in mm. 6-9, while the right hand outlines arpeggiated quartal patterns, the left hand plays a simpler figure concentrated on the black keys (see example 2.26).

Example 2.26: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 9, mm 6-11

The bitonal combinations are more subtle beginning in m. 12, where Ginastera presents an ascending chromatic line in octaves played by the left hand, while the right hand outlines two different quartal patterns (G-D-A and B-F#-C#) in descending motion (see example 2.27).

Example 2.27: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 9, mm12-13

In m. 20, Ginastera once again displays the white key/black key bitonal combination that, as has been observed earlier in the set, takes advantage of the geography of the keyboard in a natural, idiomatic technical setting for the pianist (see example 2.28).
Example 2.28: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 9, mm 20

This passage also seems to display the rather direct influence of Copland’s solo piano piece “The Cat and the Mouse,” composed in 1920 (see example 2.29). Although Copland’s piece didn’t employ a strict white key/black key juxtaposition, there is a textural and rhythmic similarity.

Example 2.29: Copland, *The Cat and The Mouse*, mm 5-8

The passage that begins in m. 21 of Prelude No. 9 restates the left hand rhythm first heard in mm. 12-13. Now the pattern is a series of descending major triads set against arpeggiation in the right hand that are unrelated to the block chords in the left (see example 2.30).
Example 2.30: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 9, mm 21-22

The left hand rhythmic pattern is expanded in mm. 27-30, the chromatic movement now adding more major triads on its way. The right hand is simpler, doubling the left hand rhythm but moving in contrary motion in octaves, outlining E minor triads linked by stepwise passing tones (see example 2.31).

Example 2.31: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 9, mm 27-30

**Pastoral (Pastorale)**

As is typical of this set, Ginastera places a slow, expressive prelude immediately following a vigorous, fast number. In the “Pastoral,” the simple melody moves primarily in half notes and is occasionally harmonized in thirds.

The rhythmic ostinato pattern (G-A-G-G-A shown in example 2.32a, 2.32b) is repeated throughout the piece, conveying a quiet, static effect. This rhythmic element, the
slow-moving melody, and soft dynamics of the piece enhance the “pastoral” quality suggested by the title.

Example 2.32a: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 10, mm1-3

![Example 2.32a](image)

Example 2.32b: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 10, mm 9-11

![Example 2.32b](image)

From measures 22 to 25 the harmonic support becomes more chromatic, accompanied by an ostinato, played by both hands (see example 2.33).

Example 2.33: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 10, mm 22-24

![Example 2.33](image)

The piece is centered on an F tonality. The harmonic structures of the piece imply bitonal and even polytonal structures. But unlike previous preludes when the establishment of more than one key was apparent (especially the white key/black key juxtapositions), in
“Pastoral” the vertical structures are the results of three, sometimes four, independent lines. The poly-tonal effect is particularly striking in mm. 13-16 (see example 2.34). Thus, the vertical structures that result, primarily on downbeats, are perhaps not planned “chord progressions” as such but rather the result of converging independent elements.

Example 2.34: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 10, mm 13-14

The last 9 measures of this prelude are considerably less chromatic. There is a harmonic alternation between F and Eb that finally ends in F, resolving the previous tension (see example 2.35). The melody maintains F while the rest of the voices oscillate between both harmonies.

Example 2.35: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 10, mm 28-34
Homenaje a Hector Villa-Lobos (Tribute to Heitor Villa-Lobos)

The introduction is indicated violento in a Forte dynamic mark, in a fast vivace tempo. This opening reminds us the beginning of prelude No. 9, in which we can hear a brief introduction, independent from the melodic material of the rest of the piece. The first measure presents an ornament emulating an inverted mordent, played with both hands (see example 2.36). This first call-like gesture is followed by a repetition one octave higher.

Example 2.36: Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, No. 11, mm 1-4

In mm 11-26, a guitar-strumming pattern can be heard, punctuated by vigorously strummed chords (see example 2.37). The melodic structures outline a series of triads and quartal sonorities, played by both hands in parallel motion.

Example 2.37: Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, No. 11, mm 13-16

The chords are repeated in each measure while the arpeggios change constantly, producing different sonorities each bar. The chords themselves suggest bitonal combinations (E minor against E flat, then F# minor against F). The performance markings...
and overall language of the piece recall the aggressive primitivism of Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* and Bartok’s *Allegro Barbaro* and similar twentieth century landmarks. Ginastera seems to be channeling a larger world of music in this prelude, but here with a characteristic South American accent.

This virtuosic piece, perhaps the most challenging prelude for the performer, was dedicated to the Brazilian composer Villa-Lobos. The piece effectively evokes the spirit of the composer’s style. Single lines alternating with vigorous, dissonant chords suggest the influence of the guitar, a prominent feature of both composers’ early works (see example 2.38a, 2.38b). The perpetual motion figuration recalls some of the famous twentieth-century toccatas by such composers as Prokofiev and Ravel.

Example 2.38a: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 11, mm 6-8

Example 2.38b: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 11, mm 11-12
En el Primer modo pentáfono mayor (In the First Pentatonic Major Mode)

The final prelude is a counterpart to No. 5 (“In the First Pentatonic Minor Mode”). Note that this one is homophonic, as opposed to the canonic No. 5. The texture features thick chordal structures over a C pedal point that is retained throughout.

The piece is divided into two sections, A (mm. 1-14) and B (15-24). Section A is based entirely on a C major pentatonic scale, from which all melodic and harmonic material is derived. The quasi-orchestral conception requires three staves in Section A, and four in Section B.

Example 2.39: Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, No. 12, mm 1-5

In Section B, Ginastera expands the texture to include a “black key” melodic fragment combined with a parallel “white key” a minor ninth above – all of which is notated on a newly added top stave. This added chromaticism provides one final bitonal effect that again (as in Preludes 6 and 9, for example) relies on the simple juxtaposition of white keys against black keys. Note that the piece begins with melodic content in the lower registers, gradually climbing throughout Section A until the “black key” motive is introduced in the upper register in Section B (see example 2.40).
Example 2.40: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 12, mm 16-17

A significant rhythmic element is added in Section B, notated here on the third stave, a repeated note motive (D-D-D) that is restated once or twice per measure until the final cadence in measures 23-24. Meter changes are frequent in this piece, but are not particularly noticeable to the listener due the slow tempo. Some similarities can be observed between this prelude and Debussy’s famous prelude, “Le cathedrale engloutie.” Both pieces feature chordal textures often derived from pentatonic scales set in a slow tempo (see example 2.41).

Example 2.41: Debussy, *Preludes* (Book 1), No. 10, mm1-3
Chapter Three  
Performer’s Guide

When viewing the set as a whole, we observe that Ginastera’s piano writing is always idiomatic. The music tends to fit the hands well; awkward passagework and extreme physical challenges are kept to a minimum. We note also that the composer is concerned with exploring a specific twentieth century technique or stylistic tendency in each prelude. Consequently, the piece is valuable for the performer who wishes to explore various aspects of Ginastera’s compositional style and writing for the piano, and as such provides an ideal introduction to the virtuosic manner displayed in his later works.

In this chapter, specific compositional techniques discussed in chapter two are catalogued along with occasional suggestions for performers regarding technical issues. Four broad categories are explored: Rhythmic Vocabulary, Harmonic and Tonal Practices, Folk Influences, and Piano Writing.

Rhythmic Vocabulary

Syncopation and Hemiola

Throughout the set, Ginastera’s rhythmic vocabulary features effective and rather straightforward usage of such devices as hemiola and basic syncopation. In Prelude No. 1, the use of hemiola is simple and direct in mm. 9-12 where a \( \frac{3}{4} \) meter is implied within the overall 6/8 meter of the piece (see example 3.1).
Example 3.1: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No.1, mm 9-12

As noted in Chapter two the syncopated nature of Prelude No. 1 is caused in large part by the displaced accents that disguise the downbeat (see example 3.2).

Example 3.2: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No.1, mm 1-3

In Prelude No. 3, the hemiola technique is employed from the very beginning of the piece, and is maintained throughout. In order to maintain the *marcato* quality and rhythmic precision of this prelude, it is important that the performer not overwhelm the sonorities with too much damper pedal. The top note should be voiced well in order to achieve good tonal balance (see example 3.3).
Example 3.3: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No.3 mm 1-4.

Prelude No. 9 is heavily syncopated throughout as it endeavors to suggest the style of Aaron Copland. The grace notes and syncopated rhythm of the opening measures emulate the American composer’s style, recalling many of his popular orchestral pieces (see example 3.4).

Example 3.4: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No.9, mm1-5

The remainder of the piece is syncopated in character as well. A particularly striking rhythmic pattern, jazz-like in character and heard in mm. 12-13 (see example 3.5), is played in octaves by the left hand while the right hand plays rapid arpeggiated patterns in groupings that correspond to the syncopated left hand pattern.
Example 3.5: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 9, mm 12-14

Later in the piece, the pattern is slightly varied and played by both hands (see example 3.6). To ensure clarity of the rhythm, the performer should change the damper pedal on each bass note.

Example 3.6: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 9, mm 27-30

In Prelude No. 10 (*Pastoral*), the syncopated ostinato pattern in the middle voice is rather simple and helps convey a static, almost motionless sensation. It is more subtle and gentle as compared to the aggressive nature of Prelude No. 9. In *Pastoral*, the pulse is not disguised or displaced as a result of the syncopated rhythms, also in contrast to the previous prelude (see example 3.7).
Example 3.7: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No.10, mm 1-3

Mixed Meters:

Somewhat surprisingly, Ginastera employs mixed meters only in the final prelude. In this case, rather than a complex syncopated setting as one might expect, the piece is slow-moving and the pulse very regular and direct (see example 3.8).

Example 3.8: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No.12, mm1-5

Poly-meter

In Prelude No. 3, the composer writes a brief episode that features a polymetric effect, in this case the implied combination of 6/8 meter in the right hand and ¾ in the left (see Example 3.9). To ensure clarity in this passage, the performer should adjust the balance in order to emphasize the left hand. By changing the damper pedal on each quarter note the texture can be further clarified.
Example 3.9: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No.3, mm 25-29

**Tonal Language**

**Poly-tonality**

A technique often used by twentieth century composers, polytonality can be described as the simultaneous occurrence of two or more different tonalities of key areas. Such well-known composers as Prokofiev, Bartok, Copland and Stravinsky, to name a few, employed this device in their music. In particular, the black key/white key bi-tonal combination that is so notable in Stravinsky’s 1911 ballet score *Petroushka* is a favored device of Ginastera.

In mm. 12-14 of Prelude No. 1, Ginastera combines a straightforward arpeggiated pattern in G-flat major, played by the left hand, with a dissonant pattern in the right hand that is tonally unrelated (see example 3.10).

Example 3.10: Ginastera *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 1, mm 12-14
In mm. 41-60 of Prelude No. 3, note the striking “black key/white key” bi-tonal combination (see example 3.11).

Example 3.11: Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, No. 3, mm 41-50

This black key/white key combination is heard again in Prelude No. 6 in the thunderous conclusion (see example 3.12).

Example 3.12: Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, No. 6, mm 48-57
In both Prelude 3 and 6, it is important that the performer voice the top line in these bi-tonal passages in order to clarify melodic direction. Open pedaling is effective, but should be modified by flutter pedal technique to ensure that the texture doesn’t become too thick and noisy.

**Non-functional harmonic motion**

In certain instances, Ginastera employs harmonic progressions featuring chords that do not operate within a traditional functional framework. For example, Prelude No. 8 features a short progression typical of this approach (see example 3.13). Note the succession of seventh chords that move in parallel motion, not unlike the planning techniques used by Debussy.

Example 3.13: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 8, mm 9-12

![Example 3.13: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No. 8, mm 9-12](image)

**Use of Folk music**

In four of the preludes in this set – No. 2 (“Triste”), No. 3 (“Danza Criolla”), No. 4 (“Vidala”) and No. 8 (“Homenage a Juan Jose Castro”) – Ginastera emphasizes folk elements in a rather direct fashion. With the exception of the virtuosic No. 3, these preludes are slow and lyrical and should be approached simply and directly in performance, avoiding excess romanticizing.
Prelude No. 2 is based on the folk tune “Triste,” which originated in Peru and the northeastern region of Argentina. It is characterized by duple meter, slow tempo and a minor mode. In Ginastera’s setting virtually no pedal is required, and the performer should maintain a quiet, intimate character through. The two-note melodic gestures should also serve to emphasize the lament-like quality of the piece (see example 3.14).

Example 3.14: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No.2, mm 1-3

Prelude No. 4 is based on the folk tune “Vidala,” popular in the Argentinian northwest, Bolivia and Peru. As with No. 2, the overall effect is quiet and somewhat sad. Note the frequent use of parallel thirds, which is a characteristic of the “vidala” (see example 3.15).

Example 3.15: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No.4, mm 1-4

Prelude No. 8 is set in a gentle tango style. The melodic gestures in the right and the descending chromatic line in the tenor voice enhance the *melanconico* effect suggested by the composer. The non-functional harmonic progression cited in Example 3.16, set against
a repeated, unchanging melodic line, suggests the traditional *Vidala* and *Huaino*, traditional Argentinian folk forms influenced by indigenous music from the north of the country.

Example 3.16: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No.8, mm1-4

![Tempo di Tango](image)

Although Prelude No. 5 does not employ folk-like elements so overtly, its simple pentatonic melody does lend a distinctive folk-like quality (see example 3.17).

Example 3.17: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No.5, mm1-6

![Andante](image)

**Piano Writing**

As mentioned earlier, the piano writing in this set is idiomatic and rarely awkward. Passages lie well under the hands. Despite the many technical challenges for the performer, the music is never uncomfortable to play. It is to a large extent true that, in this set, the virtuosic preludes require a marcato, non-legato approach and therefore a concentration on
the use of large muscles as in Preludes No.1, 3, 5, 7, and 11. In contrast, the slow, lyrical pieces require a legato approach with an emphasis on producing a singing tone, as in Preludes No.2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12. Also, though the composer offers no instructions for the use of pedals, it is understood that the damper pedal must be employed carefully with attention to the articulations, and non-legato touch employed in the more virtuosic preludes. In the two preludes cited below, a few of the most challenging passages are discussed.

As noted in Chapter 2, Prelude No. 7 is an octave study, and is the most challenging such application of the technique in the set. With its frequent use of wide interval skips, the performer should work for efficient use of wrist and fingertips, with maximum relaxation of forearm and shoulder muscles. Smooth, horizontal arm motions are essential as well (see example 3.18).

Example 3.18: Ginastera, *Twelve American Preludes*, No.7, mm 1-3

![Example 3.18](image)

Prelude No. 11 is the most technically challenging of the Twelve American Preludes. Set in a toccata-like, perpetual motion texture at a fast tempo, it features a constant stream of sixteenth notes played by both hands doubled at the octave, punctuated by dissonant, guitar-like chords. In order to convey the *violento* and *marcato* character the performer should adopt a quasi non-legato touch. The difficulty is compounded when the octave doubling must be carried out by the right hand alone, as in mm. 27-34. Even so, the
strain on the right hand is lessened by the insertion of single notes that allow the performer to shift positions on the keyboard more smoothly (see example 3.19).

Example 3.19: Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, No.11, mm 11-12

Example 3.20: Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, No.11, mm 27-34
Chapter Four
Summary and Conclusions

Alberto Ginastera’s *Twelve American Preludes* display a variety of compositional techniques in an idiomatic setting for the pianist. The foregoing analysis and performance guide are offered in support of the performer who seeks a more effective interpretation of this important work, which conveys a rich mixture of melodic and rhythmic features from both American continents, from primitive pentatonic melodies to more complex contemporary musical ideas.

Ginastera proved capable of the effective use of advanced contemporary techniques while also employing folk and traditional musical elements both from his own culture as well as those from other countries. In these respects, his approach is similar to many other major composers of this era. The list below of specific musical elements found in his preludes illuminates this point.

1. Rhythmic Vocabulary:
   - Irregular meter
   - Hemiola technique
   - Syncopation
   - Displaced accents
   - Poly-meter
   - Jazz-Like Rhythms
   - Rhythmic Ostinatos

2. Tonal Language:
   - Bi-tonal harmonies
   - Non-functional harmonic motion
-Poly-tonality

3. Use of folk music

-Pentatonic melodies

-Use of folk tune types

Therefore, the various musical characteristics displayed in the *Twelve American Preludes* are influenced both by modern techniques and aesthetics as well the desire to use elements from the vernacular music of the South American continent, where folk music and native cultures frequently interchange. Ginastera was able to acknowledge his own cultural background in his music. He was known for his open mind and generous spirit, and willing to share his insights and ideas freely with fellow musicians.

The purpose of this study has been to provide a thorough analysis of Ginastera’s Twelve American Preludes op.12, focusing on a descriptive perspective, while also targeting certain specific technical issues for the performer. The aim has not been to insist on a particular interpretation, but rather to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding about the music and the possibilities for performance. Equally important has been the attempt to develop a greater appreciation for the importance and contributions of one of Argentina’s greatest composers.
Bibliography


Schwartz-Kates, Deborah, interview by Alejandra Saez. 15 May, 2013. Transcript available from interviewer. School of Music, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.


Appendix

December 18, 2013

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Schedule A

Twelve American Preludes, No. 1, mm 1-3, mm 13, mm 21-22, mm 29-30, mm 31-34

Example 2.5a: Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, No. 2, mm 1-3, mm 11-13, mm 6, 8, 10

Example 2.7a: Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, No. 3, mm 1-4, mm 25-29, 9-16, 49-60, 77-79, 86-89

Example 2.10: Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, No. 4, mm 1-4, 9-12

Example 2.12: Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, No. 5, mm 1-6

Example 2.13: Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, No. 6, mm 1-5 and 50-54, 7-9, 27-29, 50-59

Example 2.17: Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, No. 7, mm 1-3, 7-14, 21-26, 26-28

Example 2.21: Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, No. 8, mm 1-4, 5-8, 9-12, 13-16

Example 2.25: Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, No. 9, mm 1-5, 6-11, 12-13, 20, 21-22, 27-30

Example 2.32a: Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, No. 10, mm 1-3, 9-11, 22-24, 23-14, 28-34

Example 2.36: Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, No. 11, mm 1-4, 13-16, 6-8, 11-12,

Example 2.39: Ginastera, Twelve American Preludes, No. 12, mm 1-5, 16-17

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Interview with Deborah Swartz-Kates

-In different articles, as well as in your book *Alberto Ginastera A Research Guide*, you mentioned the mutual influence of both composers can be seen in ballet *Estancia* and *Rodeo*, and in their film music. Have you done research about their piano repertoire in this regard? In that case, what pieces you’ll recommend studying?

A good place to start with Ginastera would be his op. 12 (composed in 1944, a few years after he met Copland) and his op. 15 (which he wrote in 1946 in the United States). I also know that Ginastera greatly admired Copland’s *Piano Variations*. In an interview with Barbara Nissman, Ginastera called it a “masterpiece.” You might also want to check Copland’s piece, *The Cat and Mouse*. According to Nissman (Keynote interview, p. 13), Ginastera based his op. 12, no. 9 on this work.

-*Four Piano Blues* has a strong jazzy influence, but it also has some “Ginasterian” elements in it. During my research, I’ve found that the last piece of the set (written in 1926) presents the rhythm ¾ against 6/8, so common in Argentinian Folklore (Chacarera Dance), often used by Ginastera in his compositions. My question is: haven’t they met yet (in fact Ginastera’s first composition was in 1936), is this a mere coincidence? Can we find this rhythm in American Folklore? Can we say Argentinian and American folklore share common elements?

Yes, this rhythm can be found in many vernacular musics throughout the Americas. Another important point is that Copland and Carlos Chávez were close friends. This relationship pre-dated the Ginastera-Copland connection. (Chávez and Copland were almost the same age. Ginastera was a generation younger. And Copland had already been to Mexico during the early 1930s.) So I would be careful about ascribing an exclusively Argentine musical origin to this idea.

--In your article: *The correspondence of Alberto Ginastera at the Library of Congress*, you affirmed: “The underlying theme that emerges from this and other correspondence is the mutual admiration that came to characterize the Copland-Ginastera relationship”. Could you mention/cited passages or acts (other than the dedication of "I've Heard an Organ Talk Sometimes"), to illustrate Copland’s admiration to Ginastera?

I have gleaned Copland’s testimony from reading a lot of correspondence (and sometimes reading between the lines of it!). It is difficult to find a single statement that encapsulates his admiration for Ginastera. However, it is clear that this sense of mutual respect characterized their relationship. The two composers were pursuing parallel paths to enhance the contemporary musical lives of their respective nations. And they both created powerful music that evoked a sense of place. They each discuss these ideas and activities in the correspondence. Clearly, they shared a common vision, with each composer contributing in his own way.

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In terms of parallel musical passages, I recognize the Ginastera op. 12, no. 12 in the Dickinson song (“I’ve Heard an Organ Talk Sometimes”). I also hear the last movement of Ginastera’s Estancia (“Danza Final”) in Copland’s Rodeo (“Hoedown”). I think you could find quite a bit of musical parallelism if you look (and listen) closely.

- “In Tanglewood Ginastera forged a lifelong connection with a circle of Latin American composers that included Juan Orrego-Salas (b. 1919), Julian Orbón (1925-1991), Roque Cordero (1917-2008), and Hector Tosar (1923-2002). For the young Ginastera, that summer at Tangle-wood was transformational.” This group influenced both, Copland and Ginastera. Could you say this influence changes their music, or the transformation was in their ideas and concepts instead? Did they write a statement when the group was created?

There was never a formally organized group. The Tanglewood students were all close friends. The closest relationship existed between Ginastera and Orrego-Salas. Juan Orrego-Salas is still alive, and you would benefit from trying to speak with him.

Ginastera’s music changed dramatically during his Guggenheim Years. Did his US experience change him? Or was he changing already, before he got to the United States?. These are complex questions. But if you listen to Ginastera’s op. 13-15 and compare these pieces to his op. 8-10, you will notice huge stylistic differences. For example, the term “pastoral” first appears in op. 12 and recurs regularly after that. Did Ginastera get that notion from Copland’s construction of a pastoral trope in his film and ballet music? (If you are interested in pursuing this notion further, Neil Lerner has an excellent article on Copland’s film music that addresses the pastoral theme.)

- “Yet, Ginastera also turned to Copland in times of despair. He struggled with oppressive conditions during the 1946-55 government of Juan D. and Eva Peron”. Copland suffered a similar situation in the McCarthy’s government. Do you know if they share opinions about each other situation? Did they the identified with the same political views?

I have not ever seen this point referenced in any written source, but I suspect that they shared some of the same ideas. However, it is a difficult issue because, when Ginastera came to the United States, he did not speak perfect English. His wife and friends translated constantly for him. So, if he had difficulty absorbing the nuances of the language, I wonder how nuanced his understanding of the US political situation would have been. This is an important point to consider. One book you should absolutely look at when it comes out is: Representing the Good Neighbor: Music, Difference, and the Pan American Dream (Currents in Latin American and Iberian Music) by Carol Hess. I would also check out the few recent doctoral dissertations (by Ansari, Campbell, etc.) that I cite in my Notes article.
The Vita

Alejandra Saez, Argentinian Pianist, has maintained an active performance schedule through Argentina since 2002. As a solo performer she has played in the most important Concert Halls in Argentina, (Mendoza Theatre, Independence Theatre, Roma Theatre, Casa de la Cultura de Rio Negro Auditorium, Quintanilla Auditorium, Bustelo Auditorium, Modern Arts Museum of Mendoza, among others).

She has won the contest “Youngest Talents” in 2002 in Mendoza City and she performed with the Symphonic Orchestra as soloist. Also, on 2005 she was selected by “Colon Theatre Foundation” to take part in the course “Romanticism” with a final presentation in “The Golden Hall” at the Colon Theatre.

As part of her studies Alejandra took classes with international pianists like Stefano Mancuso (Italy), Ricardo Zanon (Argentina), Roberto Urbay (Cuba), Dario Ntaca (Argentina), Hamy Schmid Wyss (Swiss), and Alejandro Geberovich (Vienna). In US, she took classes with Dr. Young Hi Moon (Peabody Conservatory USA), Dai Uk Lee (Hanyang University, Seoul, South Corea), Dr. Robert Kevin Orr (University of Florida), Christopher O’Riley, and Dr. Willis Delony (Louisiana State University), among others.

In 2003 she started to work at “Patagonic Institute of Arts” as piano teacher and piano accompanist, where she worked until 2008. She became Assistant Professor of the piano department in 2007.

Ms. Saez received her Bachelor Degree in Music at National University of Cuyo in piano performance. She did her Master in Music, Piano Performance at University of Florida; and at this point she is Doctoral Candidate also in Piano Performance at the Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA.