

Harpichord News

by Larry Palmer

A triptych for Rafael Memorial tributes by Betina Maag Santos, Jane Clark, and Larry Palmer

Homage to Rafael Puyana (October 14, 1931–March 1, 2013)

Rafael Antonio Lazaro Puyana Michelsen was born in Bogotá, Colombia. At age sixteen he entered the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston; later he studied at the Hartt School of Music in Hartford, Connecticut. His passion for early music and harpsichord led him to the great harpsichordist Wanda Landowska, with whom he studied during the last seven years of her life. During summer months he traveled to France to enroll in the harmony and composition courses of Nadia Boulanger in Fontainebleau and Paris.

Puyana's career as a harpsichordist began in 1957 with recitals at the Hotchkiss School, Jordan Hall in Boston, and Town Hall in New York City. He was immediately ranked as one of the most striking musical personalities of his generation. He gave numerous performances across several continents, performing with such musicians as Andrés Segovia, Leopold Stokowski, Yehudi Menuhin, David Oistrakh, John Williams, Maxence Larrieu, and James Galway. He was an inspiring teacher who gave masterclasses for many years at the Santiago de Compostela, Prades, and Dartington summer schools. Trevor Pinnock, Christopher Hogwood, and Genevieve Galvez were among the students who attended these classes.

He was also in charge of harpsichord instruction at the Curso Manuel de Falla, at the International Festival of Granada in Spain. He founded and was president of the International Harpsichord Forum of the Festival Estival de Paris, and was also a jury member for numerous harpsichord competitions.

A recognized authority in baroque music, Rafael Puyana also extended his repertoire to works for eighteenth-century fortepiano and to principal compositions composed for harpsichord in the twentieth century, including *Master Peter's Puppet Show* and the *Concerto by Manuel de Falla* as well as the *Concert Champêtre* by Francis Poulenc. His refined yet strong and vital playing inspired several contemporary composers to write works for him, among them Frederico Mompou, Alain Louvier, Julian Orbón, and Xavier Montsalvatge.

King Juan Carlos of Spain invested Puyana with the highest decoration of that nation: the Orden de Isabel la Católica, in recognition of the artist's merits in communicating his knowledge and appreciation of early and contemporary Spanish keyboard music. Puyana leaves behind an important discography, several recordings of which are deemed definitive.

Puyana had a longstanding relationship with SanCtuS Recordings, a collaboration that lasted over a period of fifteen years. During this time three new albums were released on this label: *Magica Sympathiae* and *The Musical Sun of Southern Europe* (I and II). For the past four years, I worked together intensively with the artist on previously unissued recordings, one of which is his magisterial recording of J. S. Bach's *Six Partitas*, played on his celebrated three-manual harpsichord built in 1740 by

Hieronymus Albrecht Hass. This album is currently being prepared for release. Others are to follow.

Rafael Puyana will be remembered by all those who recognize the greatness of his art for its exceptional beauty, intelligence, refinement, excitement, force, and vitality of his playing and, most importantly, his musical integrity. Those who had the privilege of knowing and collaborating with him will remember further qualities: the sharpness and brilliance of his unique mind, his incredibly vast knowledge and culture, his outstanding sensitivity and creativity, his aesthetic refinement, his sense of perfection, his impeccable memory, his force and intensity, his charm, his uncompromising nature and courage to stand by his beliefs, his loyalty, warmth, refined humor, and generosity.

The death of Rafael Puyana leaves those who admired and loved him as orphans. While Colombia lost one of its foremost internationally recognized cultural ambassadors, the world suffered an irreplaceable loss of one of the last artists from a golden era filled with larger-than-life musical personalities; Puyana was a direct link to the Landowska legacy as well as a player who possessed a striking individuality. His spirit and art will live on through the recorded legacy he has left behind, and in the hearts of those who loved and admired him.

—Betina Maag Santos

Rafael Puyana: an appreciation

'*Last of the harpsichord legends is buried in Colombia*' reads a headline on the *Arts Journal* website. Rafael Puyana, who lived for many years in Paris, suffered poor health during the last several, and was not allowed by doctors



Rafael Puyana next to his Hieronymus Albrecht Hass harpsichord of 1740 (SanCtuS Records, Puyana bequest)

to fly home to Bogotá, a fact that saddened him. It is, perhaps, an ultimate irony that only his death allowed him such a journey.

The other contemporary harpsichord legend, harpsichordist Gustav Leonhardt, three years his senior, died just more than a year ago, in January 2012. Comments on Puyana's playing, prompted by his death, show that comparisons between these two major players are inevitable. Puyana had a head start on Leonhardt: he was an international celebrity before the Dutchman had gained any reputation at all. Unlike Leonhardt, however, Puyana was temperamentally unsuited to coping with the demands made by the commercial world of a present-day recitalist, and, sadly, was somewhat eclipsed by the Dutch player.

This was understandable: many listeners felt Leonhardt to be more

► page 12

Custom Made
NOT factory built

LEWTAK
pipe organ builders

New Organ Dedicatory Gala
June 9, 2013
Østerhåb Kirke
Horsens, Denmark
Prof. Ulrik Spang-Hanssen
Royal Danish Academy of Music

www.LEWTAK.com

► page 11

'informed' and 'expressive'. But like his teacher Landowska, Puyana was as well acquainted with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writings as anyone. If he did not always act upon them, it was not because he was ignorant of these sources. His disadvantage was that he started life with a Pleyel harpsichord. Many listeners now accustomed to the sound of more classical instruments are unable to get past the *sound* of the Pleyel to hear the *music* being played on it. Interestingly, Puyana's interpretations recorded on his magnificent three-manual Hass harpsichord, though unchanged, are often admired by those who rejected his earlier recordings.

His playing had an old-world Hispanic dignity ideally suited to Hispanic music. This musical character was so strong that it invaded all the music he played. He excelled in works that owed a lot to the influence of Spain, those of the English Virginalists and the French and Italian seventeenth-century dance music influenced by Spaniards who were employed by Louis XIV's Spanish queen, or affected by the Spanish domination of Naples.

He was a loyal and entertaining friend. He once asked, when he was practicing a piece by my husband, Stephen Dodgson: "Jane, has your husband got a metronome?" "Yes," I replied, "why?" "Well, it is not the same as mine," came the answer. On another occasion when he was going to rehearse the *Sonata for Guitar and Harpsichord* by Manuel Ponce with John Williams: "Jane, will you come and turn my pages?" I was meant to be doing something else, so I asked: "Is it long?" "All bad music is long," was the dismissive reply.

It is sad that Rafael Puyana is not here to see his many recordings now appearing on the Internet as well as the many appreciative comments about him. Since he had stopped playing in public some years ago, he might be happily surprised to find that he was by no means forgotten.

—Jane Clark

Memories of Rafael

In the years following those life-changing first harpsichord lessons at the Salzburg Mozarteum, I continued my interest in that fascinating instrument, which, sadly, was not one for which instruction was offered at the Eastman School of Music in the 1960s. I also continued my practice of writing letters to my parents. In addition to many *Letters from Salzburg* (now published as a memoir with that title), my mother saved *all* of my letters. Thus I was able to substantiate dates and some details of the beginning of my acquaintance with Rafael Puyana.



Rafael Puyana

Rochester, New York
16 February 1961

Dear Mom and Dad,

... Tuesday afternoon [14 February] Rafael Puyana, harpsichordist, gave a lecture-recital in Kilbourn Hall. In the evening he played on the chamber music series there. This was such a treat—we were all very excited. [David] Craighead was so delighted that he dragged me off to his studio during intermission to talk about the playing. Puyana, a Colombian, studied for seven years with Landowska. After the concert a few of us were going out to celebrate Mardi Gras [which fell that year on Valentine's Day!], and I invited him to go along. He had another date, but joined us about midnight. He's friendly and very interesting. I'll hope to hear him again.

Yesterday, Ash Wednesday, was a full and most tiring day... [indeed it was, after such a late night of celebrations!]

As it turned out, that was the only time I heard Puyana in live performance. I remember the exhilaration and energy of his playing; his announcement to the audience that, although he usually played from memory, he had experienced a pre-concert night of fitful sleep, including the premonition of a memory failure in the Bach *F-sharp minor Toccata*, so he asked to be forgiven for placing the score on the music desk of his Pleyel harpsichord, "just in case." And, as a foretaste of my subsequent repertoire interests, I remember how beguiling I found his playing of Catalan composer Frederico Mompou's *Canción y Danza XI* (11), a new piano piece dedicated to him, which Rafael had transcribed for harpsichord. Equally memorable (and somewhat to be envied) was the relative ease of Puyana's concert touring with such a large and heavy instrument, facilitated by his large Buick station wagon *and* a personally employed driver. As his fellow Landowska student Paul Wolfe reminded me recently, Rafael was the son of a wealthy family. Paul continued, "Of all WL's students, he sounded most like her. [Also] like her, he had small hands... and he was extremely well educated."

For the next forty years, Rafael remained on my musical radar screen through his masterful recordings. His first recording of Falla's *Concerto* (Philips LP6505001) became my favorite interpretation of that iconic work. But even more exciting on that disc was a work



Rafael Puyana: *The Golden Age of Harpsichord Music* (Mercury LP cover photo)

totally new to all of us when the record was issued in 1970: Julián Orbón's *Tres Cantigas del Rey*, sung with haunting intensity by soprano Heather Harper, supported by the London symphony String Quartet and Puyana, all conducted by Antal Dorati. A second, digital recording of these same pieces (Dorian 90214) dates from 1994, with soprano Julianne Baird, conductor Eduardo Mata, and Puyana performing on a 1993 Hass-copy instrument by Robert Goble.

The Golden Age of Harpsichord Music, recorded in New York by Mercury Records during the springs of 1962 and 1964, showcased Rafael playing Landowska favorites, such as Bach's transcription of Alessandro Marcello's *D-minor Concerto*, Antoine Francisque's *Branle de Montirandé*, works by Chambonnières and Rameau, together with some of Puyana's beloved early English keyboard works by Bull, Peerson, Byrd, and Peter Philips, all played on a Pleyel harpsichord. This particular release was widely known as well for the strangely evocative photograph gracing the record jacket, portraying the young keyboardist in full white tie and tails, playing his harpsichord outside in a garden! Unfortunately, when this program was reissued on compact disc in 1995, someone turned the negative upside down, so the harpsichord lid appears attached to the right side of the instrument rather than the left (Mercury CD 434 364-2).

Occasionally other mentions of Rafael and his musical pursuits came from our mutual friend Jane Clark. At her urging I sent Rafael a copy of my book *Harpsichord in America*. What a delight to receive a handwritten communication from him, and thus reestablish personal contact after so many decades!

Paris, November 7, 2004

Dear Larry,

... Jane had mentioned your book about harpsichord life in the USA several times and I am now delighted to have some interesting reading for my hospital stay, after my operation on November 15th. Jane, in fact, suggested that I send you my latest recording effort, an album containing many splendid English pieces that have given me such a joyful time over the years. Two more records are in preparation (already recorded) and will eventually be released: Spanish and Portuguese music on original harpsichords and fortepianos. Our musical passion, I am glad to admit, is endless!



Three-manual Hass harpsichord (SanCtuS Records, Puyana Bequest)

The accompanying disc was the beautifully recorded and packaged *Magica Sympathiae: Tudor and Jacobean masterpieces for keyboard*, played by Puyana on an Italian harpsichord from the 16th-century maker Domenico da Pesaro [Domenicus Pisaurensis] and a 1998 copy by Willard Martin of a Flemish muselar virginal built by Jean Couchet in 1650. This elegant album from SanCtuS (SCS015) was recorded in France in 2000 and produced by Betina Maag Santos.

Unfortunately, I never had the opportunity to accept Rafael's generous invitation to visit him in Paris. Work does, indeed, interfere with one's social life!

Quite often I turn to Louis Couperin's F-major remembrance for a departed friend, the sublimely moving *Tombeau de Mr. de Blancrocher*, as a memorial tribute for someone I have known and loved. For Rafael, a more fitting postlude might be his own recording of Thomas Tomkins' autobiographical *A sad pavan for these distracted tymes*—track 18 of *Magica Sympathiae*. Tomkins dated this work on the 14th of February 1649: indeed a sad time for the elderly organist of Worcester Cathedral, who, at age 78, endured the destruction of both political and musical worlds at the hands of the English Cromwellians. In a strangely apt concurrence, Tomkins' composition, written just two weeks following the beheading of King Charles I, bears a date exactly 312 years before my first meeting with Rafael Puyana.

—Larry Palmer

Betina Maag Santos, Puyana's musical producer and friend, is managing director of SanCtuS Recordings.

Jane Clark is a leading authority on the keyboard works of Domenico Scarlatti and François Couperin. Her most recent book, with Derek Canon, is *The Mirror of Human Life: Reflections on François Couperin's Pièces de Clavecin*, published by Keyword Press in 2011.

Larry Palmer, professor of harpsichord and organ in the Meadows School of the Arts, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, has been harpsichord editor of *THE DIAPASON* since 1969.

A. E. Schriever Pipe Organ Co.

A. E. Schriever Pipe Organ Company is pleased to announce the contract to build a new 47-rank pipe organ for Iglesia ni Cristo, Central Temple, in Quezon City, Philippines. The resources of this instrument will be controllable from a 14-manual drawknob console. Several divisions of the organ will have chamber openings into side chapels which can be closed off from the main Temple to allow the organ to also be playable as two separate two-manual instruments.

P. O. Box 438, Lithonia Ga. 30058 | 404-936-2726 | www.pipe-organ.com

THE GUILD OF CARILLONNEURS IN NORTH AMERICA
GCNA.ORG

LAUCK PIPE ORGAN CO.
92 - 24th Street
Osego, Michigan 49078
Ph: 269/694-4500
l.reed.com.krr@att.net

M. P. Hatcher, Inc.
Pipe Organ Builders
P.O. Box 507
Springfield, Illinois 62765 U.S.A.
Tel: 217-929-8816 Fax: 217-929-4294
www.mphatcherinc.com

Visit The Diapason website:
www.TheDiapason.com