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PANAMANIAN FOLK INFLUENCES IN ROQUE CORDERO'S MUSIC

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By

MOISES GUEVARA

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to the members of my committee for their valuable remarks and suggestions, which helped me to polish the present work and end up with a refined thesis. Thanks to Dr. Lee for dealing with me along the development of this project and for patiently reading and commenting on the drafts. Thanks to Dr. Enrico for his guidance and help on choosing a topic, and for the encouragement he has given me. Thanks to Dr. Stephenson for his thoroughness and perfectionist attitude, which motivated me to clarify certain issues.

I would like to express special thanks to my wife, Maria de Lourdes, for her loving support and patience during the writing process. I would not have made it without her. Also, I want to thank my daughters, Veronica and Pamela, whose cheerfulness animated my heart to move when I needed it.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv
PREFACE vi
CHAPTER I. Roque Cordero, a brief biography 1
CHAPTER II. Serialism and Panamanian Folk Influences in Cordero's Style 18
CHAPTER III. Some Compositions Featuring Panamanian Folk Influences 27
  Sonatina Rítmica 27
  Sonatina for Violin and Piano 31
  Quintet for Flute, Bb Clarinet, Violin, Violoncello and Piano 36
  Second Symphony 42
  String Quartet No.1 51
  Symphony No.4, "Panamanian" 53
CONCLUSIONS 58
BIBLIOGRAPHY 60
APENDIX 61

PREFACE

Roque Cordero (b.1917), the most prolific Panamanian composer to this day, started his musical career modestly as a local musician in Panama during the mid 1930s. Upon a mixture of sheer effort, great talent, and a bit of luck, he climbed the musical ladder to place himself as one of the most respected figures in Latin American music. His name may not sound very familiar to most audiences and musicians in the United States, yet some scholars and Latin American music lovers believe that his music combines a unique technique and taste comparable to any composer of the twentieth century.

Cordero has received commissions from the Elizabeth Coolidge Foundation, the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, Minneapolis Civic Orchestra, and the Illinois Arts Council among others. The list of his awards include the Koussevitzky International Recording Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship for musical creation, an Honorary Doctor's Degree from Hamline University, and the Grand Cross of Vasco Nuñez de Balboa, Panama. His compositions have been widely performed in Latin America and the United States and received a number of prestigious prizes.

In Latin America, Cordero enjoys a huge reputation both as composer and music educator. Generations of musicians have been trained with Cordero's textbook *Curso de Solfeo*, which still is an official textbook in many music schools of Latin America. His radical ideas of music education were revolutionary; they reshaped the organization and programs of study in Panama's National Institute of Music. Unfortunately, his attitude toward musical perfectionism and his strict discipline made Cordero face a large amount of opposition that eventually led him to leave his native country.

As a composer, Cordero grew up in the midst of a Latin American musical movement that consciously rejected the imitation of European models of composition and supported the use of autochthonous melodies and rhythms of their own countries into concert compositions.[1] Heitor Villalobos, Carlos Chávez, and, later, Alberto Ginastera were pioneers in this movement. Obviously, the principles of this musical movement exerted some influence on Cordero as he was developing his style.

Cordero studied composition with Ernst Krenek, a reputable teacher who mastered the twelve-tone technique and taught it to his Panamanian student. With this resource, Cordero developed a singular style that fused serialism with elements of Panamanian folk music creating a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

This study will attempt to flesh out the Panamanian folk content in Cordero's work taking into consideration a biographical scope. The main Panamanian dances that Cordero uses will be discussed as well as his singular approach to serialism and lyricism. Six pieces of Cordero from different periods have been taken as representative of the use of Panamanian dance rhythms in his compositions.

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[1] Priscilla Filós Gooch, *El Piano en la Obras de Roque Cordero*, (Costa Rica: Litografía e Imprenta LIL, S.A., 1985), 15. Translation by the author.

CHAPTER I

ROQUE CORDERO, A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

On August 16,1917, Roque Cordero; a composer, conductor, and music educator, was born to a humble family in Panama City, Republic of Panama. Occasionally on Sundays, his father, a shoemaker, would take his son at a young age to listen to the *Retreta Dominical* (a musical presentation performed by a local band in a popular park called *Parque Santa Ana*) where the boy had some of his first contacts with music.

Cordero's father wanted his child to study music, so he sent him at the age of five to Zepeda Quiñones, a music teacher from Guatemala who played for the Republican Band (the government's official protocol band) and was a composer of popular music. At the time, there was no conservatory in Panama. The conservatory that opened in January of 1911 had to close in 1918 because the government's financial support ceased. A private effort to continue to offer the conservatory's services had a short life, for in 1921, it definitively closed its doors. It was not until 1941[1] that the country had an official institution devoted to music teaching.[2]

Zepeda Quiñones lived in an upper floor of the apartment house where Cordero was born. When Cordero entered the teacher's apartment for the first time, he saw some music scores on a table, which looked excessively confusing, so he fled away without any intention of returning. He simply was not interested in music; it seemed too weird to him.

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[1] When the then president of the Republic, Arnulfo Arias Madrid, founded a new conservatory.

[2] Jaime Ingram, *Orientación Musical*, 3rd ed. (Panama: INAC, 1988), 120-26 passim.

> During those days, amateur musicians were in charge of music in Panama, some of which composed popular music similar to the actual folk music. Under this influence Cordero started to write popular music in his adolescence.[3]

Cordero's interest in music began in high school. At first, Cordero was reluctant to try playing an instrument until Máximo Arrates Boza, the high school's music teacher and band conductor (also the founder of the First Philharmonic Society of Panama[4]), announced that the school had just bought some string instruments and that they were searching for volunteers among the students who would be willing to play them. Cordero, trying to play a joke, raised his hand, but had no real intention of being part of the ensemble. Ironically, he was chosen; he had not noticed that Arrates was close enough to spot him. He entered the newly formed school orchestra playing the violin (he originally thought that the name of that instrument was clarinet). Some time later, Cordero switched to viola. Nobody in the ensemble wanted to play viola because they did not want to learn how to read the alto clef. So Cordero, who had learned to read all clefs by himself, offered to play viola and remained with it. He found the sound of the viola more like the human voice than the violin.[5]

During his high school years, Cordero made his first attempts in composition. He wrote a few dances and showed one (a tango for clarinet) to his teacher. Arrates drew Cordero's attention to some writing mistakes, which made him realize that he had a deficiency in his musical reading. This led Cordero to direct his attention to solfège, a very important aspect of Cordero's musical development, which he very carefully studied by himself and mastered in due time. After he learned solfège, Cordero wrote another unaccompanied dance with no particular instrument specified. Cordero asked Arrates to teach him to write a piano part for it. Arrates pointed out that the next step was learning harmony. This word was completely unknown to Cordero, so he went to the Municipal Library to research harmony. For a period of time, Cordero went every night to the library, took notes and completed exercises on harmony. He later bought some piano music by a local popular composer, studied it and absorbed whatever he could until he felt confident enough that he could write a piano part.

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[3] Priscilla Filós Gooch, *El Piano en las Obras de Roque Cordero*, (Costa Rica: Litografía e Imprenta LIL, S.A., 1985), 15. Translation by the author unless otherwise noted.

[4] Jaime Rico Salazar, *Las Canciones más Bellas de Panamá* (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Musical Latinoamericana S.A., 1981), 42.

[5] Most of the biographical anecdotes of this thesis are based on an interview with the composer that took place on August 12-13, 2000.

When Cordero finished the score of the dance, he showed it to Arrates, who was so amazed by the young man's work that he offered to make an arrangement of the piece for the Firemen Band, of which he was also the conductor. Arrates put the score on his desk and apparently forgot all about it (perhaps he was just too busy to begin working on it); so after a few days, Cordero withdrew his music from Arrates' desk and arranged it himself for the Firemen Band. By this time, Cordero was working for the band playing the clarinet and hand copying the parts of the arrangements of music written for it (Cordero had this job from 1933,when he was 16 years old until 1943, at age 26). He brought his arrangement to a rehearsal for the band to try it; after playing it, everybody was pleased with it. Even Arrates wanted to perform it the very next Sunday, but Cordero was not satisfied with the product, some things just did not sound right to him. He decided then to go and show it to the old teacher who had wanted to teach him when he was five, Zepeda Quiñones. At this time, Quiñones made a number of suggestions and explained the nature of some technical problems of the arrangement. Cordero then went home and fixed his arrangement according to Quiñones' instructions.

Cordero continued to write popular pieces for a while, then he decided to write a "serious" piece. The result was *Fantasía Crepúsculo* (Dusk Fantasy) of 1934. When Arrates saw this piece, he encouraged Cordero to send it to the conductor of the Republican Band, Alberto Galimany. Other pieces from this period include Panamanian Overture No.1 and the symphonic poem *Napoleon or The Dream of an Eagle,* which was inspired by a poem with the same name that Cordero learned during his high school years; unfortunately, the composer destroyed these pieces and others dating from this period.

Arrates also wanted the Republican Band to play *Napoleon* but by that time he and Galimany were not on good terms. Therefore, Arrates and Cordero went to the Minister of Education, who suggested that the work be dedicated to the French Ambassador in Panama, so that it could be sent to the Republican Band as a diplomatic issue. After the French Ambassador learned about the piece, he wanted a review of the work, so he asked the president of the University of Panama, Octavio Méndez Pereira, to recommend someone for this task. Méndez Pereira suggested Herbert De Castro, an orchestra conductor and composer who was a leading figure in promoting art music in Panama, particularly that of the French impressionistic composers.[6] De Castro was to be recognized as the first conductor of Panama's National Symphony in the future. On July 14, 1936 (Bastille Day), the Republican Band premiered *Napoleón*.

Cordero entered the school of music of the *Unión Musical de Panama* (Musical Alliance of Panama), which was founded in 1934 by the trumpet player Pedro Rebolledo. Rebolledo had returned to Panama in 1926 after finishing his studies in composition with the Mexican composer Julián Carrillo.[7] Cordero began to study harmony at this school but was soon unable to afford it, so Rebolledo accepted teaching him in exchange for having Cordero copy music for him[8]. Rebolledo was also the conductor of the Republican Band at this time. This agreement allowed Cordero the opportunity to get acquainted with scores by important European composers, including Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony* and some overtures by Wagner.

Because there was no orchestra in Panama in 1934, Rebolledo gathered some musicians to play a mass for the celebrations of St. Cecilia, the patron saint of musicians, to be played on November 22. Cordero played the viola in this event. Having witnessed the conformation of this orchestra and seeing great potential, Cordero felt the desire to have an organized orchestra on a permanent basis; unfortunately, Rebolledo did not share the same feeling. The same event was organized for the following year; on this occasion Cordero wrote *Prelude to St. Cecilia*. These annual concerts continued until 1937.

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[6] He studied in France under great teachers like Roussell, Honegger and Plé.

[7] Ingram, 124.

[8] During those days, it was extremely difficult to obtain printed music in Panama. Music schools and instrumental ensembles would usually own one original printed music score and then hire a copyist to write down from the score the individual parts for the different instruments.

In addition to his studies with Rebolledo, Cordero studied harmony with De Castro; by this time a friendship had developed between the two men. Rebolledo resented this, probably feeling that he was being betrayed by Cordero, and after six months of teaching Cordero, he told him that there was nothing more he needed to learn and never spoke a word to him again. De Castro introduced Cordero to twentieth-century music, Cordero was fascinated with the sounds he discovered in those pieces.

In January of 1938, a new board was established for the *Unión Musical de Panama*, with Avelino Muñoz, a popular musician and songwriter, as president. A disappointed Rebolledo quit the *Unión*. Muñoz called De Castro to conduct the St. Cecilia mass, but he was not willing to do it and recommended Cordero. Cordero accepted under the condition that the *Unión* committed itself to support the orchestra as a concert entity on a permanent basis. At this moment, the orchestra of the *Unión Musical* was born. It continued to function until the latter part of 1939, making Cordero at the age of 21 the first conductor of a professional orchestra in Panama.

The St. Cecilia mass of November 1939 was conducted by De Castro. A concert conducted by Cordero, held at the hall of the *Unión Musical*, followed the mass. Consequently, De Castro became the orchestra's conductor while Cordero remained as his assistant and played the viola.[9] Interestingly, this was the first time Cordero actually heard orchestral music from the standard repertoire. Through his tasks as copyist in preceding years and his personal studies, Cordero was already acquainted with the symphonic repertoire. He had heard, for example, Schubert's

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[9] This orchestra continued to function lacking any financial support until 1941, when it became Panama's National Symphony Orchestra.

*Unfinished S*ymphony and Beethoven's symphonies in his head; now he was able to physically listen to them.

The experience of listening to the works of great western composers performed by the orchestra motivated Cordero to compose *Capricho Interiorano*,[10] a work based on Panamanian popular tunes. Unfortunately, after Cordero's first rehearsal of his *Capricho Interiorano* with the orchestra, De Castro did not allow another rehearsal of the work until 1942, when it was finally performed by the orchestra, but Cordero had also arranged it for band and presented its premiere with the Firemen Band in 1939. Cordero, realizing that he needed to learn more about composition, stopped composing until 1943.

In 1941, Cordero quit the orchestra after having a disagreement with De Castro, causing the cancellation of a concert programmed for January of that year. Apparently, this also caused the orchestra to stop rehearsing for a while. This same year, Panama's president, Dr. Arnulfo Arias Madrid, supported the creation of a new conservatory of music, which was called *Conservatorio Nacional de Música y Declamación* (National Conservatory of Music and Declamation). Alfredo de Saint Malo, a very famous Panamanian violinist at the time, was appointed director of this conservatory. He proposed a list of Panamanian musicians who could hold teaching positions; Cordero was included as solfège and harmony teacher; but claiming that he was not prepared enough for such a task, he deleted his name from this list. Cordero voiced his opinion that some other names should also be taken away from the list. Ironically, all the others were appointed, except Cordero.

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[10] The first work listed in his catalog.

President Arias, interested in creating a State symphony orchestra, called De Castro to organize it; thus the existing orchestra was officially named *Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional* in 1941. For the first time in Panama's Republican life, musicians (specifically string players) could go for a salaried position in a professional orchestra supported by the government. Up to that moment, orchestra members managed to carry on with the income generated from each concert, which was distributed among them. Often such income was not even enough for the maintenance of their instruments. It is amazing to find out that during that time orchestra music survived out of pure love for music, a deep desire for performing, and the pleasure of bringing music to life. In order to make a decent living, musicians had to have other jobs. Cordero, for example, worked for the Firemen Band earning a meager salary and had some other income through the making of arrangements of popular music; some of which even won prizes in the festivities of Carnival. In fact, Cordero had begun to achieve a local reputation.

Considering the President's request, De Castro was not willing to take the orchestra's leadership unless Cordero returned, by then both men had already made up with each other. Hence, the Minister of Education called Cordero to offer him a post with the new orchestra, since the National Symphony was linked to Panama's Ministry of Education (as was the Conservatory). However, Cordero had begun teaching music in the Artes y Oficios School after the death of Arrates, and he could not just walk away from it to rejoin the orchestra. As a result, the Minister of Education made an agreement with him regarding his teaching schedule taking into consideration the orchestra's schedule; this agreement allowed Cordero to return to the orchestra.

By this time, Myron Schaeffer, an American composer, arrived in Panama to teach at the University of Panama; Cordero went to study with him. Also, Nicolas Slonimsky, a Russian-American conductor, composer, and writer on music, was touring Latin America collecting musical scores for the Fleisher Collection of the Free Library of Philadelphia. When Slonimsky arrived in Panama, he met with Herbert De Castro asking for some orchestral music written by Panamanian composers. After some hesitation, De Castro showed him Cordero's *Capricho Interiorano*. When Slonimsky saw the work, he was very enthusiastic about it and asked to meet its composer. He asked Cordero for a copy of the score so he could take it with him. Cordero had just one manuscript of it; still he gave it to Slonimsky. Afterwards, Cordero made another score by copying from the orchestral parts. Only then did De Castro become interested in performing the *Capricho*. During his stay in Panama, Schaeffer had composed an orchestral work, *La Bahía*, and had De Castro play its premiere along with Cordero's *Capricho* in August 9, 1942.

In December of 1942, Myron Schaeffer arranged a scholarship with the New York International Education Institute for Cordero to go to the United States and study music education for nine months. Cordero then faced a great challenge: he did not speak English. Schaeffer told Cordero that he had just three months to learn the new language. Cordero departed early in 1943 to study English. In March, he arrived at The University of Minnesota. Cordero arrived in the U.S. with two works, *Capricho Interiorano* and *Reina de Amor* (Love Queen); the latter is a march that had won a prize during carnival festivities. These were the only works that Cordero considered meritorious enough to be shown.

Cordero played the viola in the university's symphony from 1943 to 1947. Because Cordero was interested in composition, he was asked to conduct the band of the university upon his arrival to the university.

> On April 19, 1943 I was conducting the university band when the music critic [John K. Sherman, music critic of the Minneapolis Star Journal] who did not use to listen to the band decided to go and listen to it that day (several years later he told me that he didn't know why he went that day "it was my birthday") and saw me conducting. At the end he came to see me and offered to introduce me to Maestro Dimitri Mitropoulos, conductor of the symphony. He asked me if I've met him; I told him that I've seen him conducting but he's an important person, I can't just knock at his door.[11]

On October 11, 1943, Cordero received a call from Sherman informing him that he had an invitation to have dinner at Mitropoulos' house that night. Cordero showed Mitropoulos his *Capricho Interiorano* on that occasion. This encounter with Mitropoulos changed Cordero's life forever.

When the time of Cordero's scholarship was up, he was making plans to return to Panama. Mitropoulos encouraged him to stay in America and study composition, Cordero replied by saying that legally he could not work in the United States. Mitropoulos, thinking that the young Panamanian should remain in the country and the only way to make this happen was as a student, offered to pay Cordero's studies if Ernst Krenek accepted him as his student. For seven years, Mitropoulos paid for Cordero's musical education in the United States.

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[11] Roque Cordero, interview and trans. by author, 12 August 2000, tape recording, Normal, Illinois.

Cordero had a weekly one-hour lesson with Krenek. This was a period of hard work for Cordero. He was studying at two universities at the same time. He studied Music Education at the University of Minnesota and every day he traveled one hour to Hamline University to study composition with Krenek. Even the tram drivers knew him, and as he studied while traveling; the drivers would call him when it was his turn to get off the tram.[12]

Cordero also took some art courses during this time. He made at least two sculptures; one entitled “NO” which is a woman shouting “no!” while holding a baby in her arms. Just the head of the baby is shown. The woman symbolizes mother humanity and the baby, the world. This work was a reaction against the atomic era and it means that the responsibility of protecting the world from the threat of the atomic holocaust lies with humanity. Presently, this sculpture decorates the living room of Cordero’s home.

A preceding sculpture by Cordero had won second prize at the university. This work is called “Peace, 1946”. It is a woman with her hands tied, Cordero’s way to express that peace was tied up. The construction of the Berlin Wall was Cordero’s motivation for this work. This sculpture resides now in the home of one of Cordero’s sons in Seattle.

From 1943 to 1947, Cordero studied composition with Krenek. Around that time (from 1944 to 1946), he also studied conducting with Mitropoulos. On April 5, 1946, Mitropoulos premiered Cordero’s *Obertura Panameña* (Panamanian Overture) with the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra. In this same year, Cordero received a grant from the Koussevitzky Foundation to study conducting with Stanley Chapple at the Berkshire Music Center in Tanglewood.

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[12] Ibid.

In 1947, Cordero graduated *magna cum laude* from Hamline University and his First Symphony (1945) received honorable mention at the Reichol Music Contest in Detroit. Finally, from 1947 to 1949, Cordero studied conducting with Leon Barzin in New York, and in 1949, he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, becoming the first Panamanian to receive such an award. When he received the news, he could hardly believe it.

> Someone in Panama sent me an add saying that for the first time the Guggenheim Fellowship was going to be offered in Panama. Then I wrote New York… letters of recommendation needed to be sent. After that, they asked for music so I sent them [some of my] scores. I remember I was carrying my newborn baby on my way in when I saw a letter and saw that it said Guggenheim… they were awarding with me the fellowship.[13]

In 1950, Cordero returned to Panama with the idea of celebrating the 50th anniversary of the country's independence with a cantata, which was going to take place on November 3, 1953. When Cordero arrived in Panama, he found that De Castro had left the country to pursue studies in New York; the new conductor of the orchestra was the Panamanian cellist Walter Myers. Unfortunately, Cordero found the orchestra's musical ability low and he did not find a chorus capable enough to perform his cantata. His dream was turned into ashes.

Cordero decided to dedicate himself to teach at the conservatory. Upon Cordero's arrival in Panama, Rebolledo resigned his teaching position at the conservatory. So, Cordero was then given the position of teacher of harmony with a monthly salary of $50.00. Even by the standards of Panama in1950, it was extremely difficult for anybody to make ends meet with such a salary. Fortunately, Cecilia Pinel de Remón, director of the National School of Dance, offered Cordero an allowance in exchange for making arrangements of ballet music for the National Symphony to be used by the School of Dance. Eventually, he got a raise in his salary, which was possible only after the change of government. Finally, he accepted the position of assistant director of the conservatory, a position that did not represent any kind of income to Cordero, for he had to accept it without salary. His situation was basically more work for the same money. He held this position from 1950 to 1953.

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[13] Ibid.

While teaching at the conservatory, Cordero realized that its academic standard was of a very low musical level. With this in mind, he began to write a series of solfège lessons for his students, which in the long run became his *Curso de Solfeo*, a solfège book based on the principle of learning solfège through the intervals. Still to this day, this book is used in every major music school in Latin America. The book also features a series of rhythmic lessons and lessons on different clefs. Cordero dedicated the book to his composition students with the hope that in the future they would teach it to subsequent generations of music students.

In 1953, the government decided to reorganize the two extant musical institutions of the country, the *Conservatorio Nacional de Música y Declamación* (National Conservatory of Music and Declamation) and the National Symphony.[14] The conservatory emerged with a new name, *Instituto Nacional de Musical* (National Institute of Music), and a new administration with Roque Cordero as its executive director.

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[14] Ingram, 128.

> Cordero made reforms to the obsolete programs of the National Institute of Music, introduced a new solfège method, encouraged and helped several students to continue their musical careers and raised the level of musical performances through his guidance and constructive critics.[15]

Among the innovations he brought to the conservatory was the incorporation of Music Education courses hiring specialists in the field; he also brought teachers of different instruments from abroad and established new program of studies. In order to reorganize the institution, he even suspended graduations until January 1957. Even then, only four students were able to graduate in that year, two in Composition and two in Music Education. Cordero's composition students were José Luis Cajar, Sr. and Marina Saiz. Afterwards, Cordero sent Cajar with a scholarship to Mexico for several months to study conducting with maestro Celividache, and got Saiz a scholarship to study in Hamline University where Cordero himself graduated.

The same year he became the director of the *Instituto Nacional de Música*, Cordero wrote *Rapsodia Campesina*. This piece won the Ricardo Miró prize of Panama that year. This local prize is awarded to outstanding works of renowned figures in any field of the arts. In 1956, while still in Panama, Cordero received news from the Panamanian Embassy in Washington, D.C. of a composition contest to be held in Caracas, Venezuela for the Inter-American Music Festival. Cordero decided to write a symphony, his second one, for this event. He started work on July 5, 1956 and finished it 55 days later.

> It had to be finished on time because it had to be sent to the contest, which I learned about thanks to the Panamanian Embassy in Washington that sent me a newspaper add announcing the contest. Works had to

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[15] Filós, 16.

> be in Caracas by September 30 so I needed to finish it by mid-August in order to copy a clean manuscript and send it. I worked on it during nights. After finishing teaching I went to a Café, ate something and returned to composing until 11:00 p.m. so I could catch the last bus to take me home because I didn't have a car; I couldn't afford such luxury (It wasn't until I won the prize that I could buy a car; I was forty then)…I worked intensely. I even spent my birthday in my office composing because I had to finish the work. I only saw my family in the mornings during breakfast.[16]

On August 30 of the same year, Cordero's Second Symphony was completed. This superb composition was created at a very fast pace in order to meet the deadline for submitting works. The festival took place early in 1957, and Cordero's Second Symphony was awarded the *Caro de Boesi* prize.

News that Dimitri Mitropoulos had passed away reached Cordero in 1960. The composer, moved by the sad news about his mentor, decided to write a composition in homage of the past master. *Mensaje Fúnebre (in memoriam Dimitri Mitropoulos)*, a piece for clarinet and string orchestra where the clarinet represents Mitropoulos, was finished in 1961. This same year saw the performance of his String Quartet No.1 (written in 1960); this piece was commissioned by the Coolidge Foundation, at the Second Inter-American Music Festival held in Washington.

In 1964, De Castro resigned as the orchestra's conductor so the Minister of Education asked Cordero to fill De Castro's position. It must have been a difficult decision for Cordero because about the same time UNESCO had offered him a scholarship to work with the French composer Pierre Boulez. Cordero turned down the scholarship to become the new conductor of the National Symphony, a position held until 1966; in doing so he had to quit from being the director of the conservatory.[17]

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[16] Cordero, interview.

Cordero was committed to raise the musical level of the orchestra. He sent petitions to hire more musicians for the orchestra and began a series of concerts with international soloists. Cordero even sent an open letter to the President and the Minister of Education explaining the importance of supporting the orchestra in that moment so it could be ready for the celebration of the bicentenary of the birth of Beethoven (1970). The president sent for Cordero; he explained the hard economic situation of the country, but he was still willing to help the orchestra somehow. Cordero ended up with less than 10% of what he had requested. Nevertheless, Cordero continued with the orchestra, and he was able to raise the salary of the musicians from $50.00 to $125.00 a month. Ironically, Cordero did not receive a salary raise at the time. Some time later, he received such a raise.

Cordero's Violin Concerto (1962), commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation, is one of his most important compositions. According to the composer, this piece is very significant for it reflects his thoughts on handling form. The Violin Concerto received its premier in 1965 at the Third Inter-American Music Festival.

In 1966, Cordero received a letter from Indiana University offering him a three-year contract to teach composition. Cordero arrived again in the United States in July of that year. When Cordero left Panama, he asked for a leave of absence for three years because he wanted to return to the orchestra. He thought that all the effort of the conservatory was worthless if Panama did not have a professional orchestra where new professional musicians would play. Without this opportunity for employment, there was no point in training new musicians.

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[17] According to Panama's law, it is illegal to receive more than one salary from the government.

After Cordero arrived in the United States, he received notice from the Minister of Education in Panama telling him that his request for the leave of absence was denied. If Cordero did not return to Panama, he would lose his job. Cordero did not even bother to answer. He has remained in the United States ever since. Hamline University conferred him an honorary doctorate in 1966. During his years in Indiana, Cordero was professor of composition at Indiana University and was appointed assistant director of the Latin-American Music Center.

When the three-year period ended, Cordero's publisher, Peer International Corporation and Southern Music Publishing Co. Inc. (Peer-Southern), contacted him to appoint him as music consultant for the company. He accepted and headed toward New York for his new job at Peer-Southern. His duties consisted basically of evaluating the submitted works for publication in order to recommend their acceptance or rejection.[18] He worked for Peer-Southern from 1969 to 1972.

In 1972, Cordero joined the Illinois State University faculty, being the first composition faculty at that institution, where he remained until his retirement in 1987 as Distinguished Emeritus Professor of Music. In 1974, Cordero won the Koussevitzky International Recording Award for his Violin Concerto, and in 1982, Panama granted him the Vasco Nuñez de Balboa Grand Cross. After his retirement, Cordero continued teaching part time at Illinois State. He taught composition courses twice a week until 1999, when he definitely retired from teaching. Nevertheless, he is still active as a composer.

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[18] Filós, 17.

CHAPTER II

SERIALISM AND PANAMANIAN FOLK MUSIC INFLUENCE IN CORDERO'S STYLE

Cordero's originality lies in that he has successfully combined a compositional technique of high artistic level with folkloric elements of his native country, creating a unique style that makes him stand out in the musical community. Roque Cordero has been the only Panamanian composer able to achieve a great reputation outside his country and, in doing so, has helped to place Panama in a respected position within Latin America and the world.

Writers on Cordero's music have been interested in providing some perspective to his style. A few of them have attempted to divide his style into different periods,[1] which apparently seems very logical, but often these divisions are too rigid for Cordero's music because they leave out important aspects of his development that have remained a part of his style. For example, stating a nationalist period for Cordero's music and limiting it to just early in his career discards so many compositions with national influences that were written at times that do not fall in the designated period.

Another important aspect of Cordero's style is his use of serialism. Some confusion exists as to when Cordero started using the technique that he calls "free serialism" in his compositions. Free serialism is Cordero's personal way to handle the twelve-tone technique in such a way that lyricism, i.e. some kind of prominent melodic contour, is always present. Also, he does not restrict himself to the rules of serialism. For example, he would not use a whole row if he does not want to, or he would repeat tones when he feels it is necessary. The fact is that he has been employing this technique or at least its principle since his early years in the United States and even before. When he began composing in Panama, he showed interest in sonorities other than the traditional.

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[1] For further information of Cordero's periods see Priscilla Filós Gooch, *El Piano en las Obras de Roque Cordero*, (Costa Rica: Litografía e Imprenta LIL, S.A., 1985), 13.

While studying with Krenek, Cordero found that his teacher had written a book on serialism. After spending some time studying the book, Cordero asked Krenek to teach him the technique. Krenek did not think it was a good idea. He told Cordero that serialism was a technique linked with central-European aesthetics and since he knew that Cordero wanted to be acknowledged as a Latin-American composer and more specifically, a Panamanian one, serialism would not help him towards that goal.

Cordero replied to Krenek that he did not want other people's aesthetics; his interest in the serial technique was for his own aesthetic. He wanted to have a point of departure on which to base his future style, a technique that would help him to expand tonality. Serialism seemed to be the most appropriate path since it was in fashion during those days, and Cordero was anxious to experiment with it (and incorporate his own ideas). Krenek, seeing Cordero's passion, agreed to work on serialism with him.

Originally, Cordero went to study counterpoint with Krenek. This was due to Mitropoulos' suggestion, for after he saw Cordero's *Capricho Tipico*, he told the young composer that he had an evident skill for orchestral writing; surely he had previously composed several pieces for orchestra, Mitropoulos exclaimed. Cordero replied by saying "Maestro, this is my first composition for orchestra." Then Mitropoulos asked about Cordero's composition teachers to which he answered: "I learned by studying Beethoven, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Wagner." Mitropoulos said: "Ah, the best teachers anyone can get."[2] But then Mitropoulos suggested that Cordero should learn counterpoint. After a series of exercises, practices, and little pieces experimenting with serialism, Cordero composed *Ocho Miniaturas* in 1948. Here Cordero employed a technique somewhat different from Viennese serialism.

After *Ocho Miniaturas*, Cordero wrote the Sonatina for Violin and Piano. Upon finishing the latter, Krenek told Cordero that he had achieved what he did not think could be achieved, a Latin-American serial piece. This dual characteristic in the Sonatina was also acknowledged by Varèse who once complained to Cordero about the lack of nuance and passion in composers using serialism who, according to Varèse, limited themselves to the mathematic principles of the technique leaving musicality aside.[3] When Cordero played for him a recording of the sonatina and showed him the score, Varèse exclaimed the great musical quality of the work. He even asked Cordero for a copy of the recording so he could use it in his lectures. Igor Stravinsky and Walter Piston were also impressed by this piece. Samuel Dushkin, who premiered Stravinsky's violin concerto, showed Stravinsky, and later Piston, Cordero's Sonatina for Violin stating that he had found a Latin-American composition using the twelve-tone technique. Both composers, who thought that such thing was impossible to accomplish, congratulated Cordero on his achievement.

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[2] Roque Cordero, interview and trans. by author, 13 August 2000, tape recording, Normal, Illinois.
[3] Ibid.

With the exception of the Argentinean composer, Juan Carlos Paz, Latin-American composers were reluctant to employ the twelve-tone technique in their compositions at the time. After the triumph of Cordero's Second Symphony in Caracas (1957), other Latin-American composers began to accept and use the technique. This can be appreciated, for example, in the stylistic differences between Alberto Ginastera's String Quartets #1 (1948) and #2 (1958). Later, the Argentinean composer expanded to integral serialism, a technique Cordero never employed. Another Latin-American composer who was influenced by Cordero's Second Symphony was the Cuban Aurelio de la Vega. He employed the twelve-tone technique in his *Symphony in Four Parts* (1960) and in his String Quartet *In Memoriam Alban Berg* (1957), which is comprised of music that came from three previous discarded quartets.

> His [Cordero's] objective is to write music that does not sound European, but characteristically Panamanian, which he achieves with the use of melodic figures related to his folk music and characteristic rhythms of native dances, without imitating directly or quoting verbatim.[4]

Even though Cordero's works display a consistent use of serialism, a tonal sense can be perceived in his themes. Since Panamanian folk music is tonal, tonality is unavoidable in pieces that contain Panamanian folk ingredients. Serialism provides, then, the harmonic language through which Panamanian folkloric musical aspects are presented in Cordero's pieces. Cordero also employs traditional forms, such as sonata and rondo, as well as through-composed forms.

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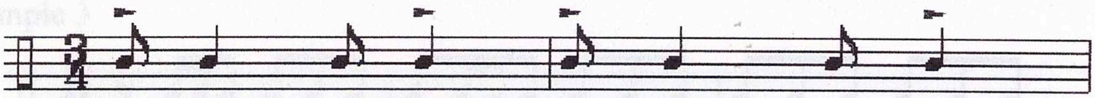
[4] Priscilla Filós Gooch, *El Piano en las Obras de Roque Cordero*, (Costa Rica: Litografía e Imprenta LIL, S.A., 1985), 18. Translation by the author unless otherwise noted.

> Even when I'm writing a series, I'm looking for tonal elements within that series. However, very few times do I make a series when I'm writing a work. The motive emerges and it brings the series. Then I fill out with the pitches that are left over to complete it, always looking for an element that permits me [to work in a lyric style].[5]

Often this fusion between serialism and folk ingredients blend so well that if the listener is not aware of the composer's intention, he might overlook it, but once someone is familiarized with Panamanian folk rhythms (and, perhaps, instruments), they are impossible to miss. The following chapter will provide examples of specific places in pieces where Cordero masterfully amalgamates his free serialism with Panamanian musical elements.

Basically, Cordero employs melodic and rhythmic patterns of three Panamanian dances: *mejorana, punto*, and *tamborito*. Cordero also uses rhythms of the *pasillo*, a popular type of song common in Latin America (including Panama, which has a number of celebrated *pasillos*). The *pasillo* derived from the European waltz and was primarily cultivated in South America and then spread to the rest of Latin America. This triple meter dance has the following basic rhythm:

Example 1



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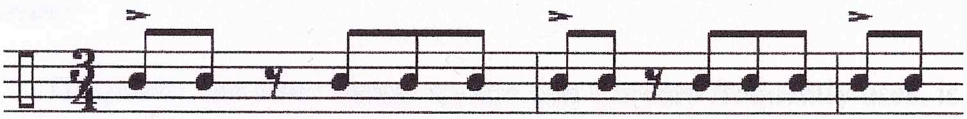
[5] Cordero, interview.

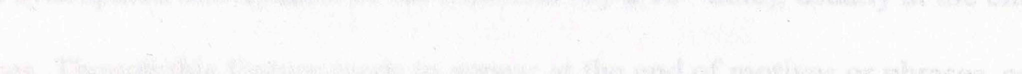
The next example illustrates a very common variant of the *pasillo* rhythm

Example 2



The *mejorana* is a Panamanian song/dance genre, which musical feature is a rhythmic combination of a 6/8 meter with a 3/4 meter constantly in the accompaniment while the melody switches back and forth from 6/8 to 2/4. There are several kinds of *mejoranas* each with its own attributes. For example, the common instrumental *mejorana* is the one described above but there is another type of instrumental *mejorana* called *mejorana poncho*, which employs a 3/2 meter in moderate tempo. Sung mejoranas are called *socavón*; their main feature is that the singer improvises constantly. There are also different types of *socavón*: *Zapatero* (fast tempo, in major mode; starts and ends on the tonic or its harmony), *mesano* (moderate tempo, major mode; starts and ends on the dominant or its harmony), and *gallino* (relatively slow tempo and in minor mode). Other characteristics of the *mejorana* deal with the literary form and the folk instruments that participate. Example 3 shows the distinctive rhythm of the *mejorana.*

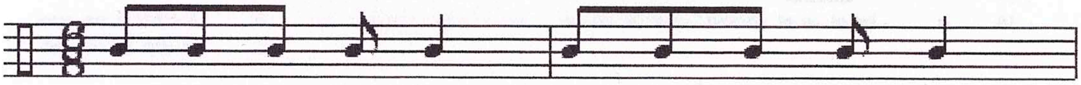
Example 3



After the third measure, the rhythm of the 16th notes may appear anytime, in a non-fixed pattern. It is not unusual to insert a 9/8 measure at different points of the *mejorana*.

The *punto*, the other dance rhythm that Cordero frequently uses, is a slower type of dance. It also features a combination of 6/8 and 3/4 meter; however, occasionally the melody displays duplets but unlike the *mejorana*, not a change to 2/4 meter. This is the basic rhythm of the *punto*.

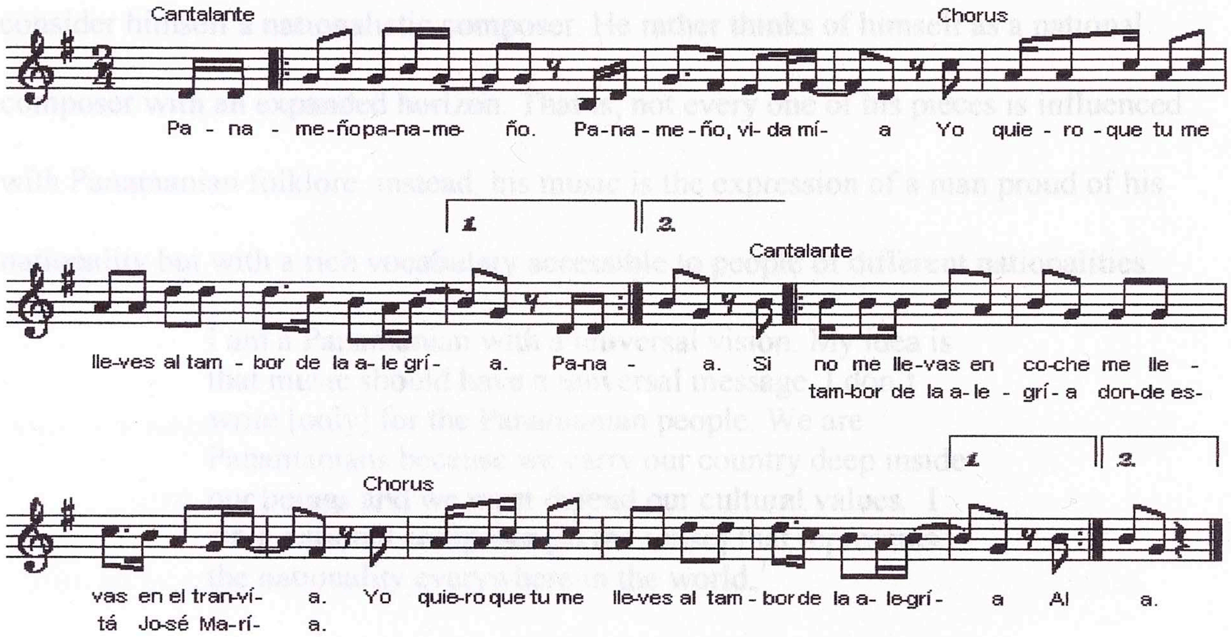
Example 4



Probably the most influential Panamanian folk dance in Cordero's music is the *tamborito*. The cheerful *tamborito* is considered Panama's national dance. However, different regions of Panama flavor the *tamborito* with their own regional characteristics. These regional differences can alter almost every aspect of the dance and music. Nevertheless, there are certain common characteristics in all *tamboritos*. The main instruments that participate in a folkloric setting of this dance are the three Panamanian drums: *caja*, *repicador*, and *pujador*. The melody of the *tamborito*, called *tonada*, is provided by the lead female singer (*cantalante*) and a chorus of women in an antiphonal manner. The *tonada* is usually in a moderate 2/4 meter and features frequent syncopations. An important rhythmic characteristic of the *tamborito* is the syncopated anticipation of the first beat (by a 16th note), usually at the end of phrases. Though this feature tends to appear at the end of motives or phrases, some tunes have it in every bar.

Example 5

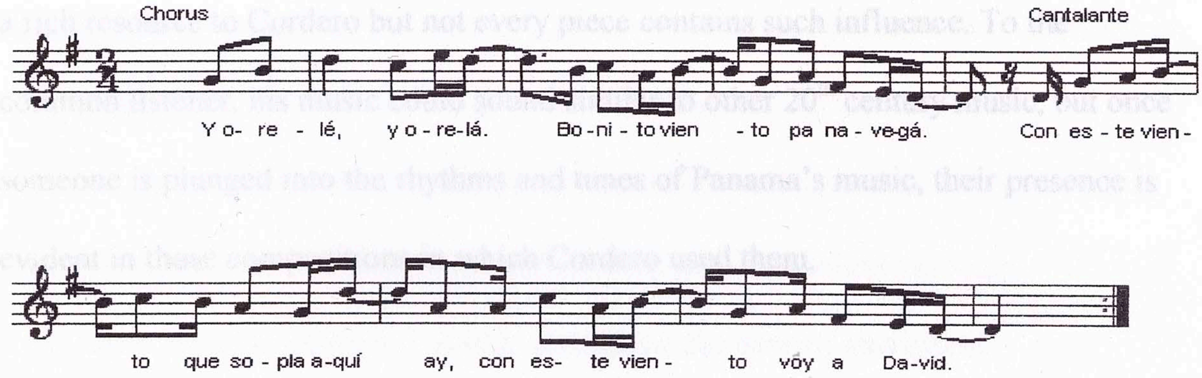
EL TAMBOR DE LA ALEGRIA


Cantalante
Chorus
Pa - na - me-ñopa-na-me- ño. Pa-na - me - ño, vi- da mí- a Yo quie - ro - que tu me
1
2
Cantalante
lle-ves al tam - bor de la a- le grí - a. Pa-na - a. Si no me lle-vas en co-che me lle -
tam-bor de la a- le - grí - a don-de es-
Chorus
1
2
vas en el tran-ví- a. Yo quie-ro que tu me lle-ves al tam - bor de la a- le-grí - a Al a.
tá Jo-sé Ma-rí- a.

Panamanian, Panamanian. Panamanian, my dear.
I want you to take me to the joyous *tambor* (*ito*) dance.
If you won't take me by car, take me by train.
I want you to take me to the joyous *tambor* dance.
To the joyous *tambor* where José María is.
I want you to take me to the joyous *tambor*.

Example 6

Y ORELE


Chorus
Cantalante
Y o- re - lé, y o - re-lá. Bo-ni - to vien - to pa na - ve-gá. Con es - te vien -
to que so - pla a-quí ay, con es- te vien - to vóy a Da-vid.

Y orelé, y orelá.[6] This is a good wind to sail.
With the wind that's blowing here
Ah, with this wind I can get to David.

---

[6] Salomas: type of Panamanian peasant's merry shouts that frequently are used in folk songs. Salomas are not real words in Spanish; therefore, they lack any meaning.

In spite of his frequent use of folk material of his country, Cordero does not consider himself a nationalistic composer. He rather thinks of himself as a national composer with an expanded horizon. That is, not every one of his pieces is influenced with Panamanian folklore, instead, his music is the expression of a man proud of his nationality but with a rich vocabulary accessible to people of different nationalities.

> I am a Panamanian with a universal vision. My idea is that music should have a universal message. I don't write [only] for the Panamanian people. We are Panamanians because we carry our country deep inside our beings and we must defend our cultural values. I am a national composer [in the sense] that represents the nationality everywhere in the world.[7]

> My music is not nationalistic in the sense of being a deliberate exploitation of the folklore of my country; but this music of mine, if I am to be sincere to myself, must be the expression of something that belongs to my people and that would not permit it to sound like French, German, or Italian music. I try to express that "something" through melodic figures related to our folklore and through exploiting the rhythmic vitality of our dances, such as the *mejorana* and the *tamborito*.[8]

It is important to remember, then, that Panamanian folk musical elements are a rich resource to Cordero but not every piece contains such influence. To the common listener, his music could sound similar to other 20th century music, but once someone is plunged into the rhythms and tunes of Panama's music, their presence is evident in those compositions in which Cordero used them.

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[7] Cordero, interview.

[8] Gilbert Chase, "Composed by Cordero," *Americas* 10 (1958): 9, quoted in Ronald R. Sider, "Roque Cordero, The Composer and his Style seen in three representative Works," *Inter-American Music Bulletin* 61(1967): 2.

CHAPTER III

SOME COMPOSITIONS FEATURING PANAMANIAN FOLK INFLUENCES

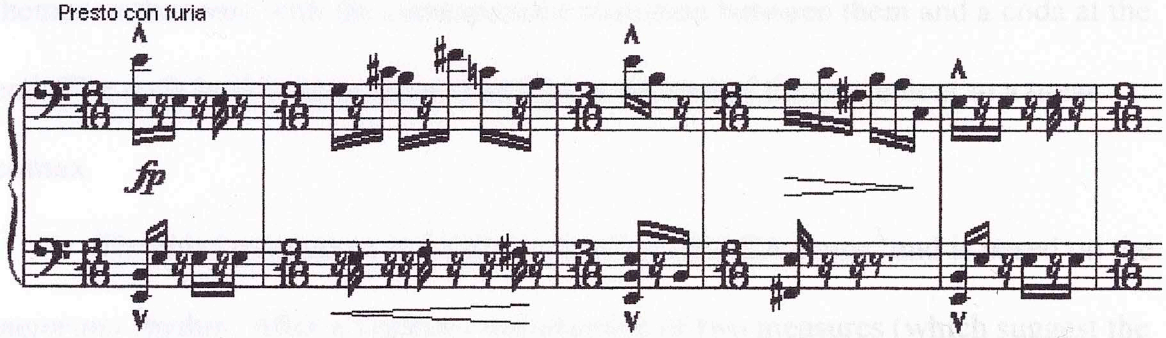
Sonatina Rítmica (Rhythmic Sonatina)

Cordero's *Sonatina Rítmica* of 1943 is the first work composed after the *Capricho Interiorano*. It was written when the composer was studying with Krenek and, according to Cordero himself, it represents the union between Panama and the United States: four years of silence were broken with this piece; here Cordero retakes the compositional conversation that he started in his younger years.

Being a relatively early piece, the *Sonatina Rítmica* is basically tonal and unfolds in three movements displaying thick harmonies and brisk rhythms in the outer movements, which create its vital character. The first and third movements are essentially in e minor and the second, in g major. The Panamanian folk influences can be appreciated in the first and third movements. The second movement is characterized by its emphasis upon melodic contours and smoothness. The melodies appear over a constant ostinato that provides the accompaniment throughout the movement. Harmonies change slowly throughout the second movement.

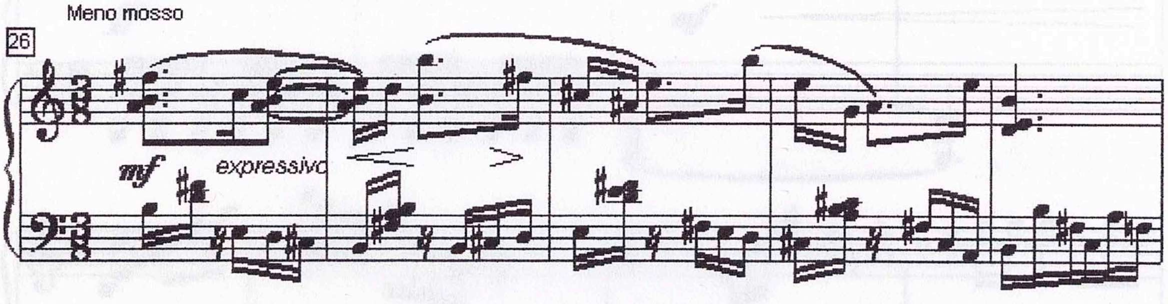
The first movement is in sonata form. The presentation of different types of compound meters dominates the whole movement. The opening measures (theme I) exhibit constant meter change at a strikingly fast tempo. The distribution of the pitches combined with the changing meter creates an asymmetrical accentuation pattern.

Example 7



Theme II discloses the *pasillo* rhythm in the accompaniment. As one might expect, theme II is in the dominant key and has a more tranquil character. Nevertheless, the interest of the passage is preserved by the combination of the bold harmonization of the melody with the *pasillo* rhythm. This combination provides the listener an interesting variety of material within the theme and in relation with the preceding material.

Example 8



Pricilla Filós points out that there are three parts in the development section.[1] The first part is based on theme I, using its rhythm and expanding the melodic contour. The second part reworks theme II in a similar fashion. The third part combines the rhythmic elements of both themes and elaborates the melodic content.

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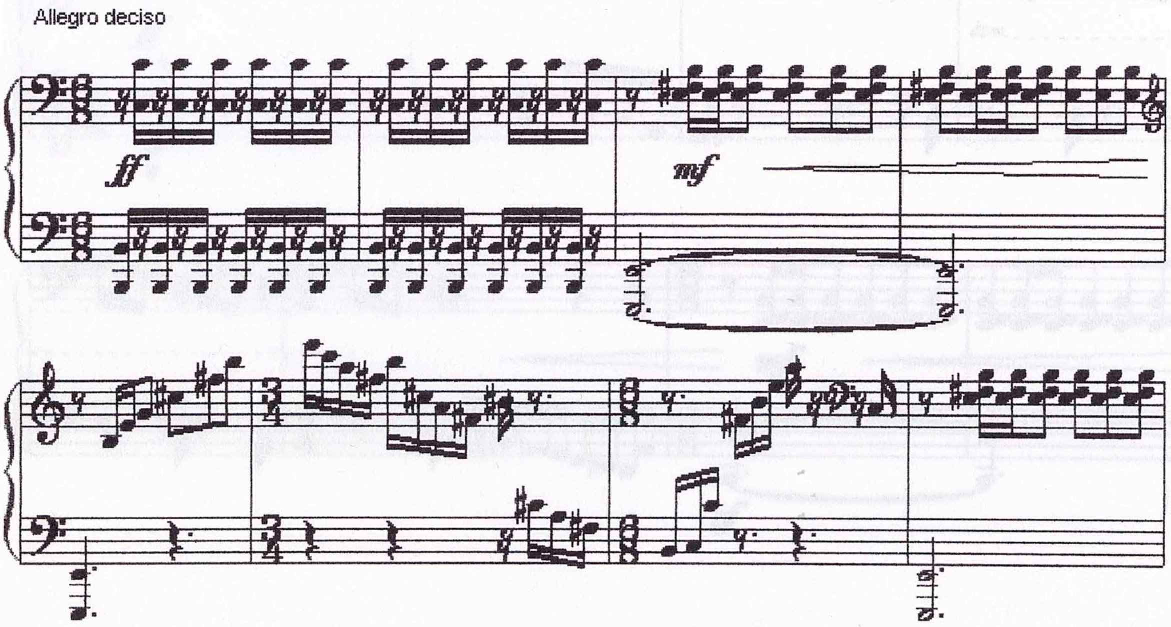
[1] Priscilla Filós Gooch, *El Piano en las Obras de Roque Cordero*, (Costa Rica: Litografía e Imprenta LIL, S.A., 1985), 47.

The recapitulation works in the conventional way of sonata form with both themes in the tonic with the corresponded transition between them and a coda at the end. The coda builds upon theme I and takes the end of the movement to a great climax.

The third movement is a fast rondo of an ABACA shape[2] and is based on the *mejorana* rhythm. After a vigorous introduction of two measures (which suggest the *repicador*[3] calling the dancers to the hall)[4], part A, featuring the *mejorana* rhythm, enters. The change of meter from 6/8 to 3/4 is another aspect that shows the influence of the *mejorana*, although in the Panamanian *mejorana* both meters run along at the same time.

Example 9



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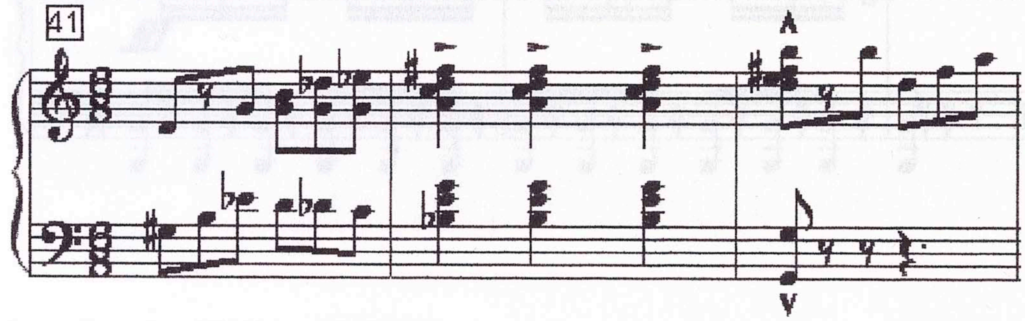
[2] Idem.
[3] A Panamanian drum
[4] Filós, 22.

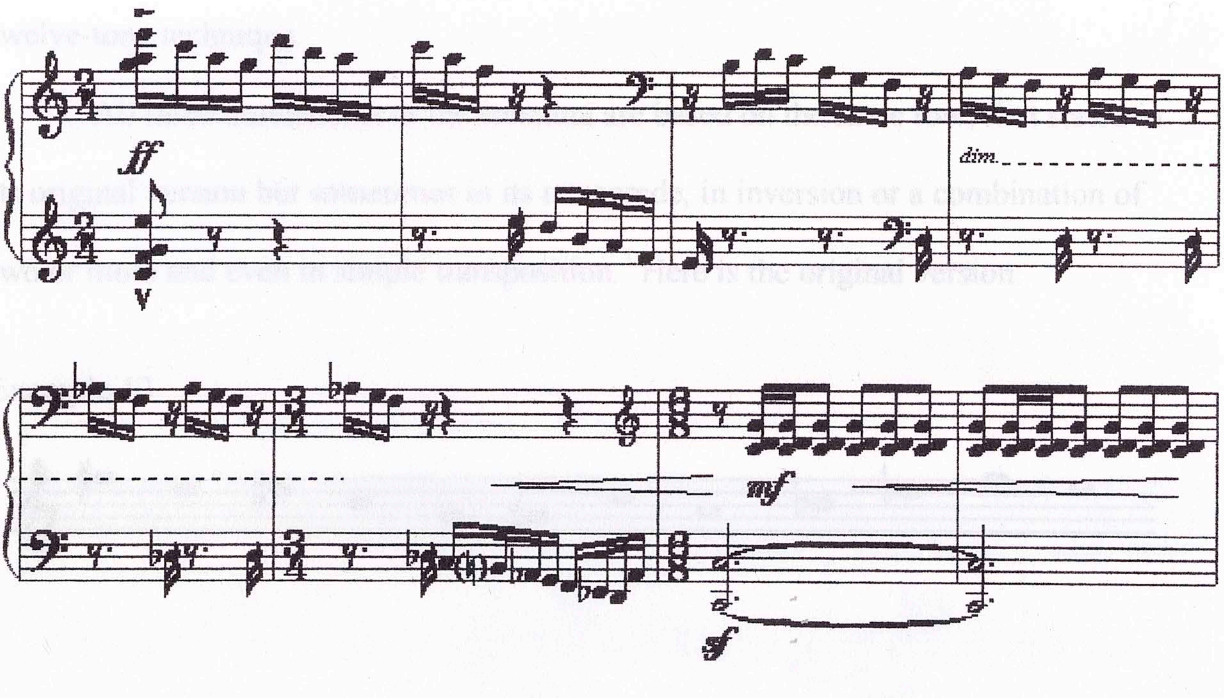
Measure 42 does show the presence of 3/4 in a 6/8 meter.

Example 10



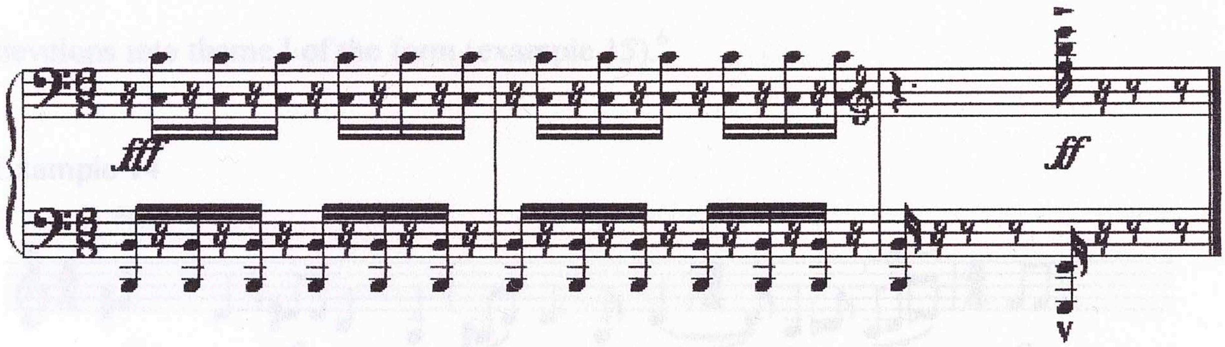
The presence of a 2/4 meter in mm. 56-60 also supports the idea of the influence of the *mejorana*, for at times this dance features a 2/4 meter in the melody.

Example 11



The movement ends with the calling of the *repicador* and two loud chords.

Example 12

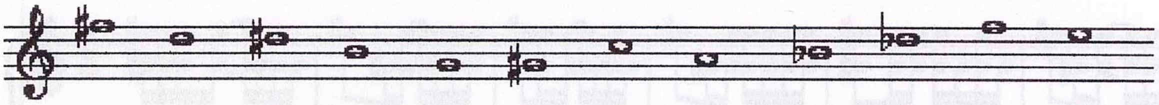


Sonatina for Violin and Piano

The Sonatina for Violin and Piano of 1946 is the breakthrough piece in which Cordero starts combining serialism with Latin-American (and Panamanian) material. Without quoting a particular tune, rhythmic and melodic elements of Panama and Latin America can be clearly perceived in this piece as well as the mastery of the twelve-tone technique.

All three movements of the sonatina are based on the same row, first stated in its original version but sometimes in its retrograde, in inversion or a combination of two or more and even in simple transposition.[5] Here is the original version:

Example 13



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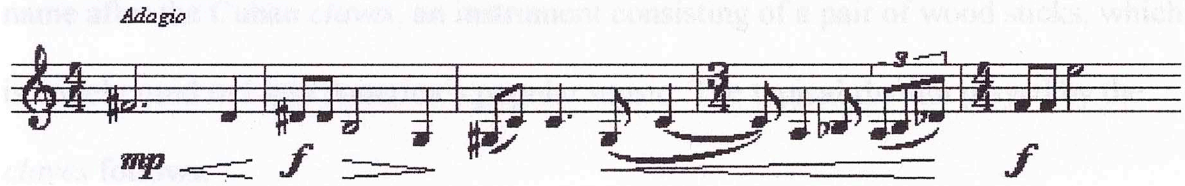
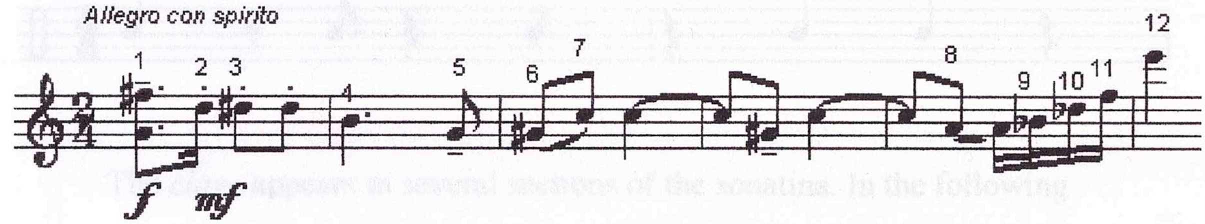
[5] Ronald R. Sider, "Roque Cordero, The Composer and his Style seen in three representative Works," *Inter-American Music Bulletin* 61 (1967): 4-7 passim.

The first movement is in sonata form, which is preceded by an introduction. The introduction of the first movement (example 14) presents the original row. It later develops into theme I of the form (example 15).[6]

Example 14

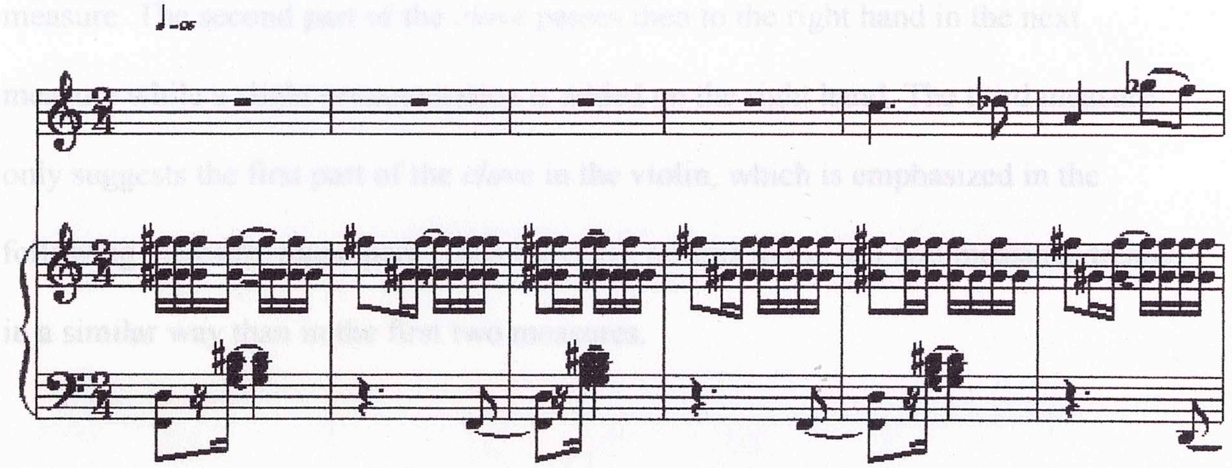

Adagio
mp
f
9
f

Example 15


Allegro con spirito
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
f
mf

The first Latin American rhythm enters in the piano part in measure 49, which precedes and eventually accompanies theme II.

Example 16



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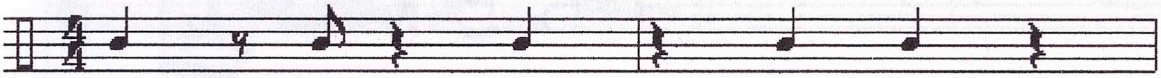
[6] Pricilla Filós Gooch, *El Piano en las Obras de Roque Codero*, (Costa Rica: Litografia e Imprenta LIL, S.A., 1985), 28.

As can be seen, the syncopated anticipation of strong beats in the previous passage does not correspond to the ones used in the *tamborito*. Here the rhythm has a more generic Latin American sound, rather than a specifically Panamanian one.

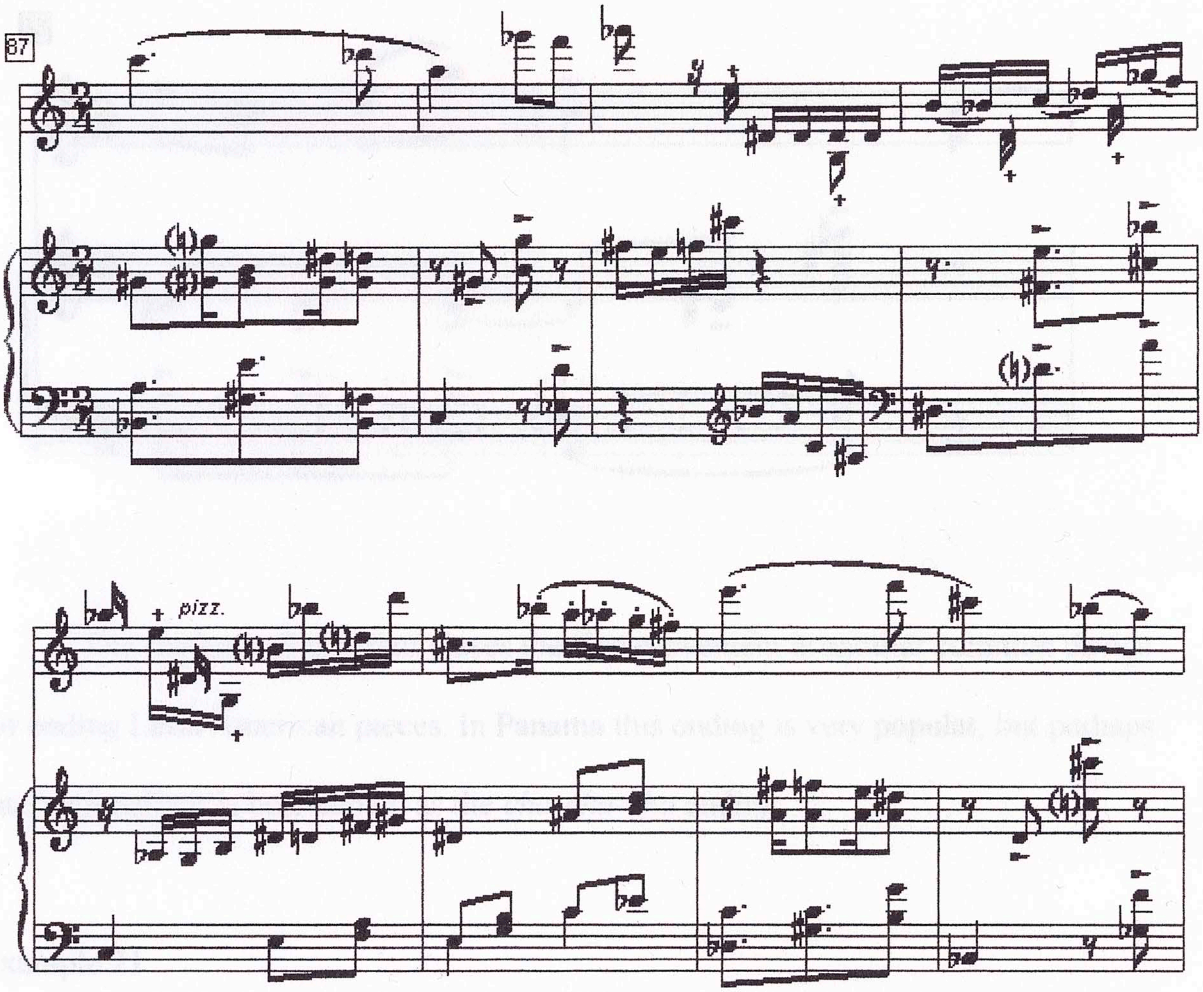
A very distinctly Latin American rhythm is the *clave*. This rhythm takes its name after the Cuban *claves*, an instrument consisting of a pair of wood sticks, which is widely used in Latin America's popular music. The typical rhythm played by the *claves* follows.

Example 17



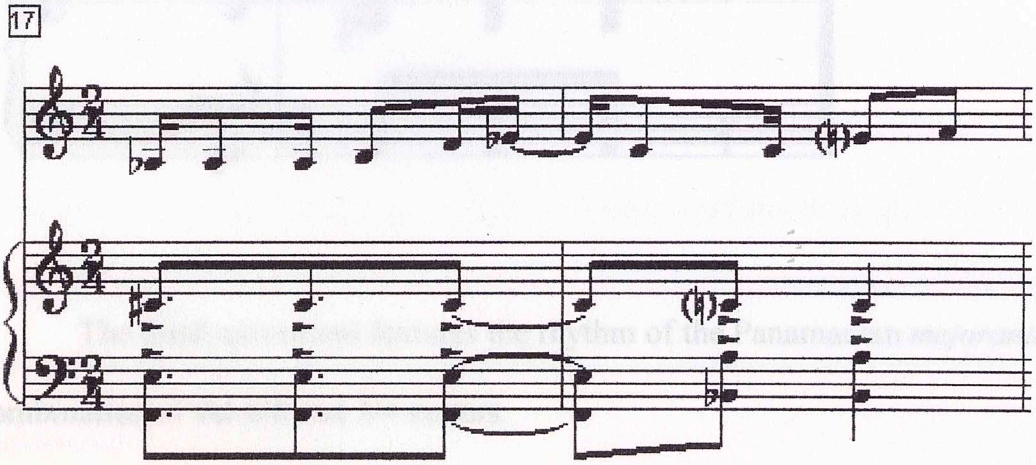
The *clave* appears in several sections of the sonatina. In the following example, taken from the first movement, the *clave* is in the piano part (in a more compressed tempo than in the preceding example). The left hand leads with the *clave's* first part while the right hand adds some rhythmic ornamentation in the first measure. The second part of the *clave* passes then to the right hand in the next measure while a slight ornamentation is added on the right hand. The third measure only suggests the first part of the *clave* in the violin, which is emphasized in the following measure, piano part. Then the *clave* returns in the last two measures treated in a similar way than in the first two measures.

Example 18

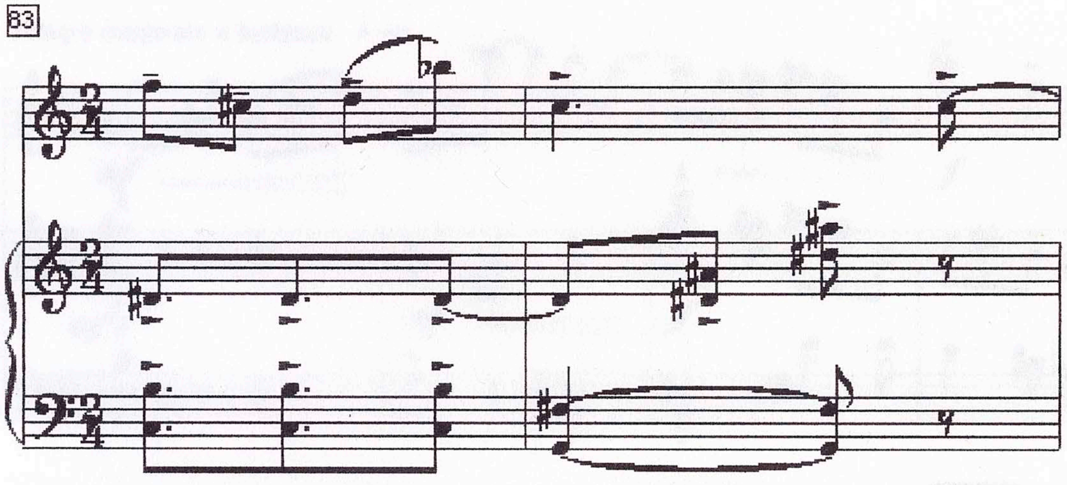


Examples 19 and 20 feature the *clave* as it appears in measures 17 and 83 of the third movement.

Example 19

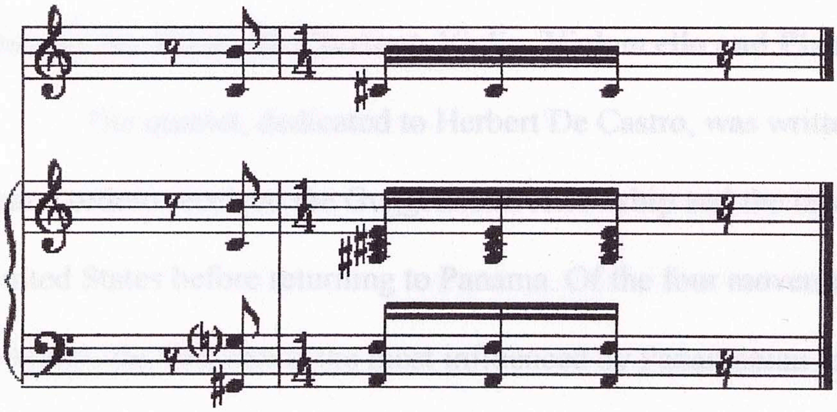


Example 20



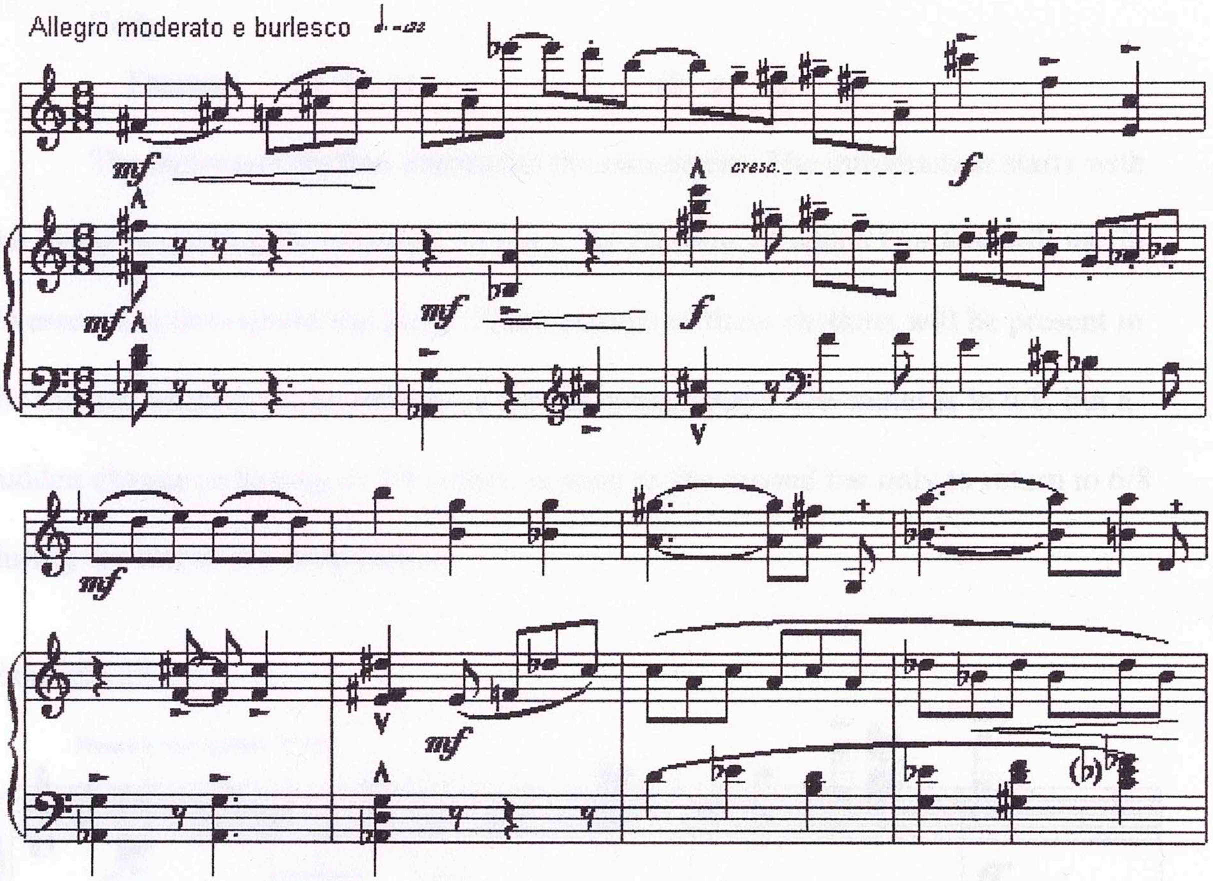
The rhythmic figure that closes the first movement is another common device for ending Latin American pieces. In Panama this ending is very popular, but perhaps internationally it is best known as the *cha-cha-cha* ending.

Example 21



The third movement features the rhythm of the Panamanian *mejorana* with the combination of the 6/8 and 3/4 meters.

Example 22



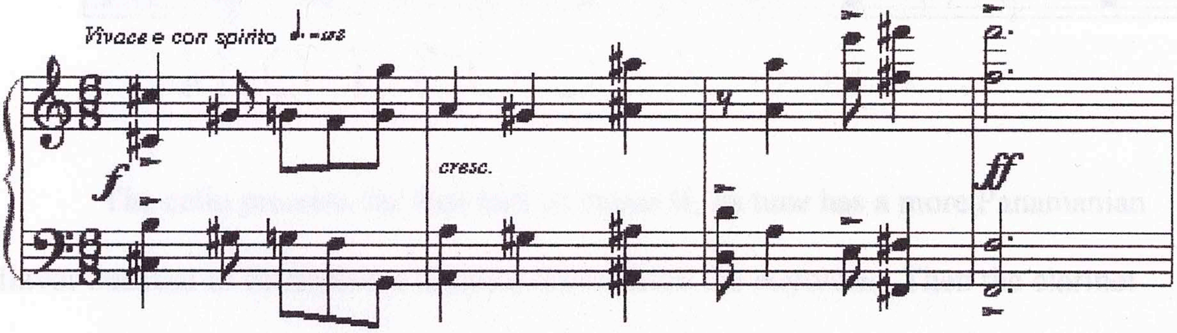
Quintet for Flute, Bb Clarinet, Violin, Violoncello and Piano

The quintet, dedicated to Herbert De Castro, was written in 1949, the same year Cordero received the Guggenheim fellowship and the last year of his stay in the United States before returning to Panama. Of the four movements that the piece contains, the first one is the most influenced by Panamanian folk elements. This movement was written in sonatina form with three noticeable themes. The recapitulation starts with theme II, returns to theme I and then presents theme II again. A coda emerges after the recapitulation, rounding out the form of the movement.

Introduction Exposition = A Recapitulation = B
Coda
Themes: (a b c) (b a b c)

The *mejorana* rhythm dominates the movement. The introduction starts with the piano presenting the essential motives, the rhythms of which Cordero will use in diverse ways throughout the piece. Some aspects of these rhythms will be present in the themes whether in the melody or the accompaniment. The meter is in 6/8, but a sudden change in feeling to 3/4 comes as soon as the second bar only to return to 6/8 during the rest of the introduction.

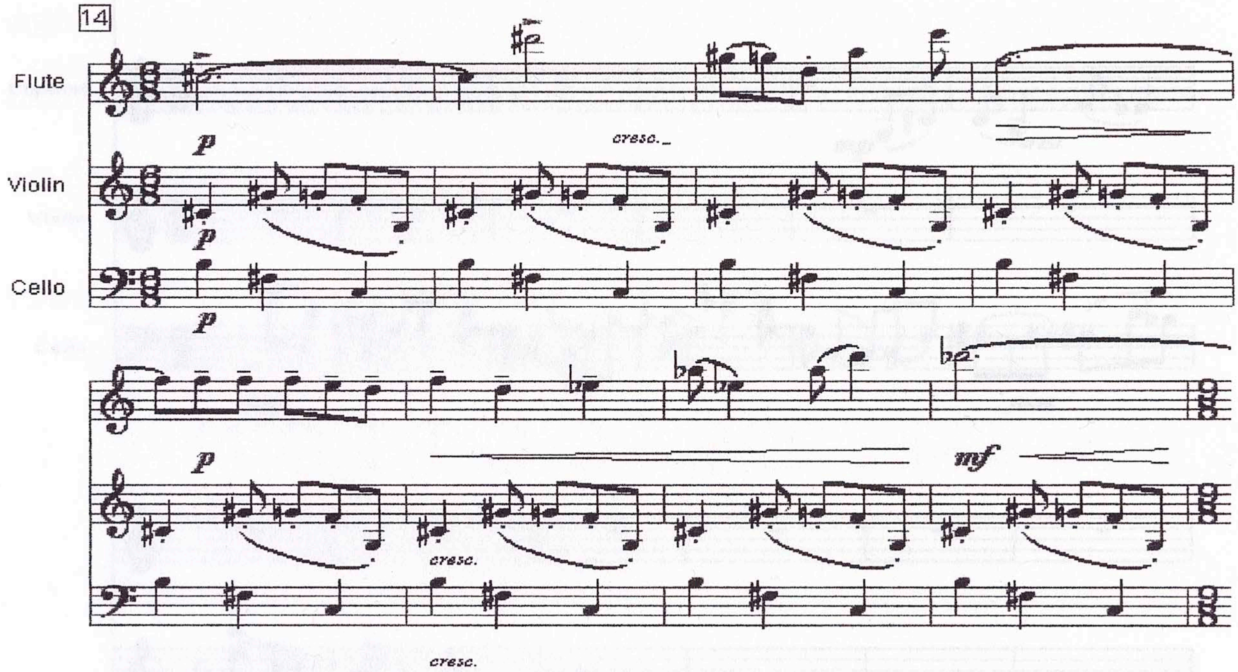
Example 23



Once the piano has played the opening bars, the violin and cello come in completing the statement, which sets the mood for the movement.

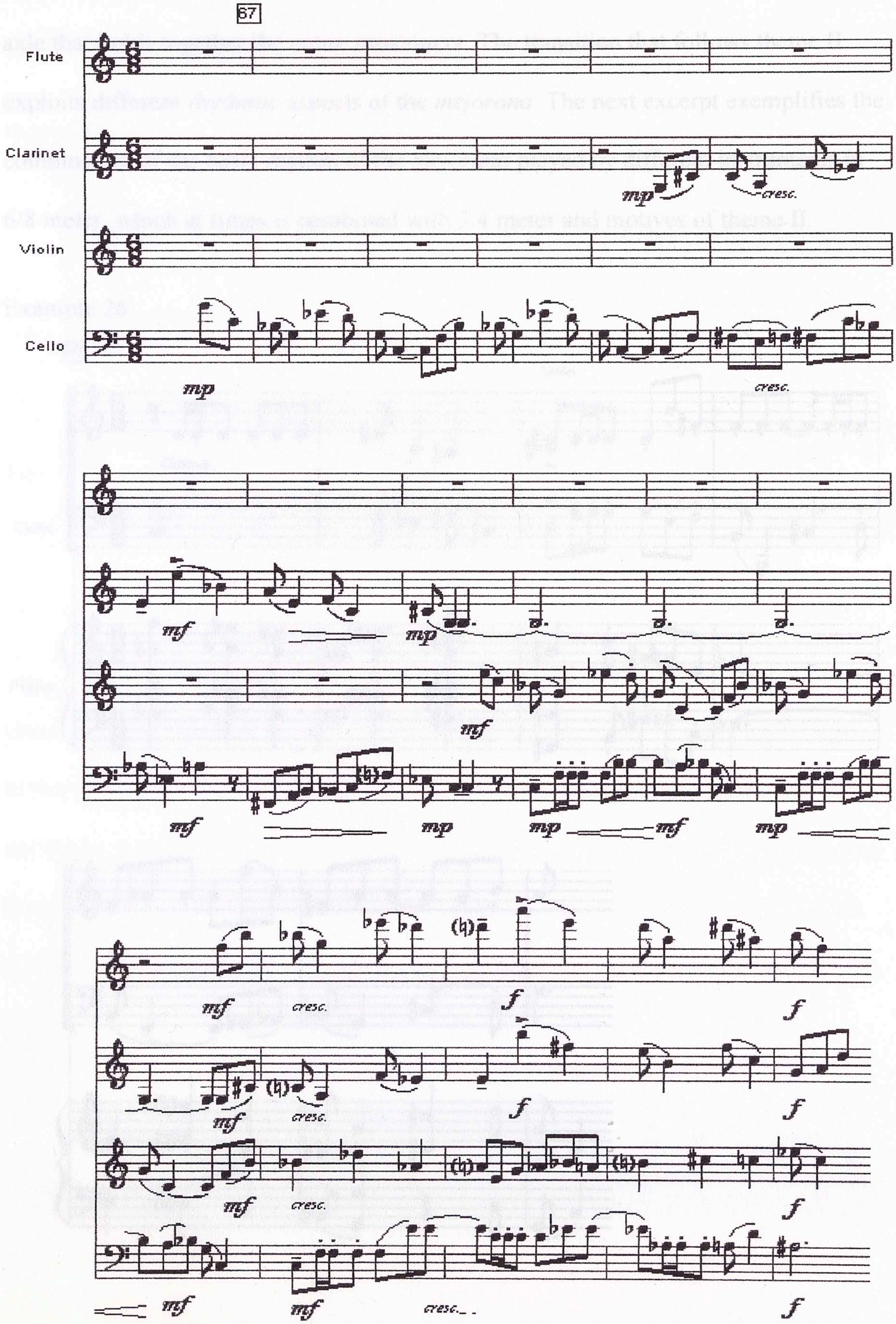
After the introduction, theme I (played by the flute) appears in a 6/8 meter with occasional shifts to 3/4. Meanwhile, the accompaniment consists of an ostinato that is derived from the opening of the piano and combines 6/8 and 3/4 meter (this ostinato is introduced three measure prior to the appearance of theme I).

Example 24



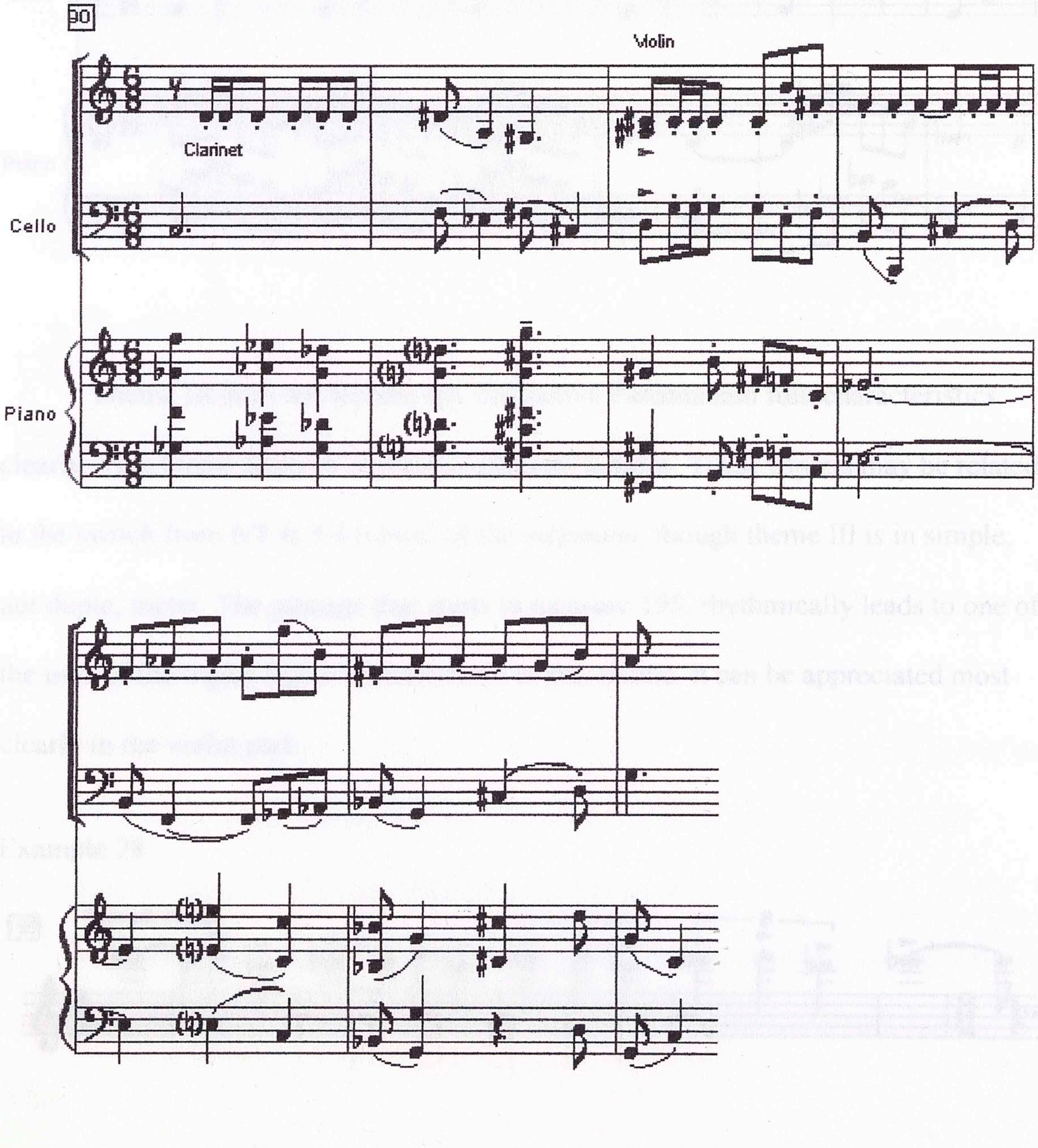
The cello presents the first half of theme II; its tune has a more Panamanian flavor because of its rhythmic contour drawn from the *mejorana*. Then the clarinet plays the second part of the theme, which contains a 3/4 meter halfway through it. When the theme is repeated, its first half is played by the violin while the characteristic rhythm of the *mejorana* is at times in the cello; the flute finishes the theme. In the meantime, the violin and clarinet simultaneously play different motives drawn from the theme in counterpoint while the cello still is playing the *mejorana* rhythm.

Example 25


67
Flute
Clarinet
Violin
Cello
mp
cresc.
mp
cresc.
mf
mp
mf
mf
mp
mp
mf
mp
mf
cresc.
f
f
mf
cresc.
f
f
mf
cresc.
f
f
mf
mf
cresc._ _
f

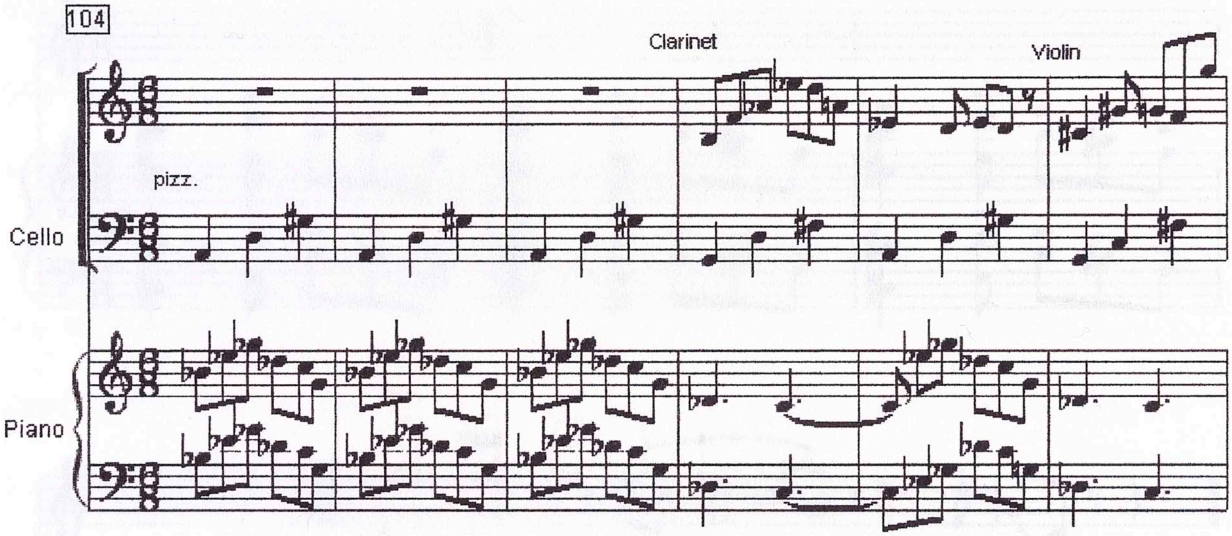
Theme II plays a very important role in this piece; ultimately, it becomes the axle that holds together the entire movement. The transition that follows theme II exploits different rhythmic aspects of the *mejorana*. The next excerpt exemplifies the combination of the basic rhythm of the *mejorana* played by different instruments in 6/8 meter, which at times is combined with 3/4 meter and motives of theme II.

Example 26



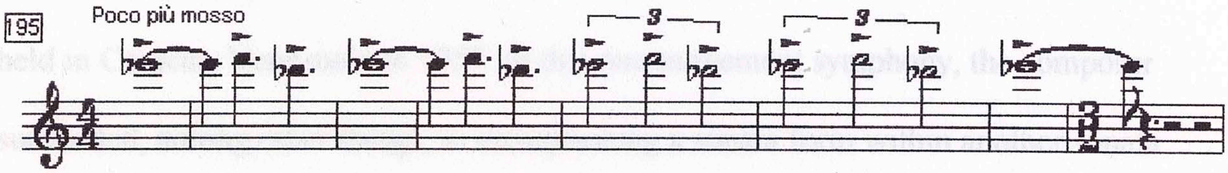
There is an interesting passage beginning on bar 104 that features the combination of 6/8 and 3/4 in the cello and piano, and later, flute and clarinet.

Example 27



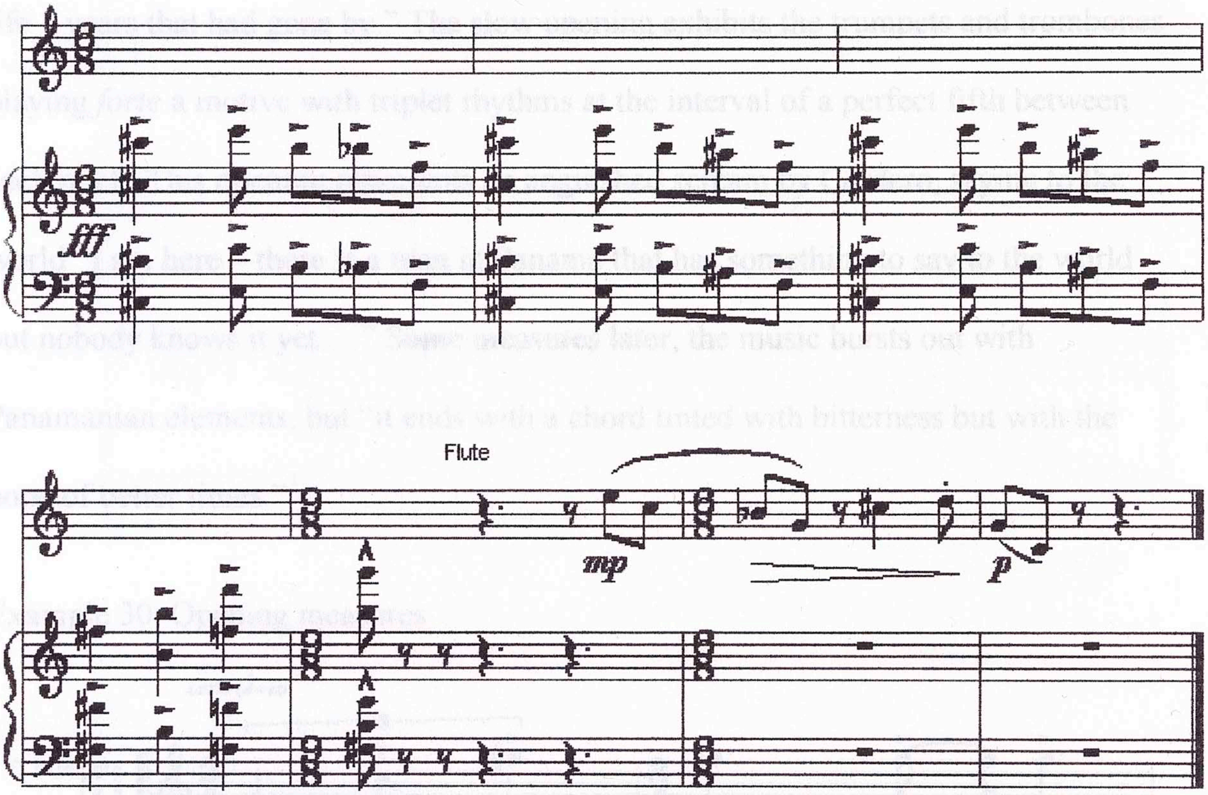
Theme III does not feature any distinctive Panamanian folk characteristics clearly. This theme features triplets in different tempos. These triplets may be related to the switch from 6/8 to 3/4 typical of the *mejorana*, though theme III is in simple, not duple, meter. The passage that starts in measure 195, rhythmically leads to one of the uses of the triplet figure characteristic of this theme. It can be appreciated most clearly in the violin part.

Example 28



The final measures of the coda present the initial motive of the piano followed by the head motive of theme II in the flute.

Example 29

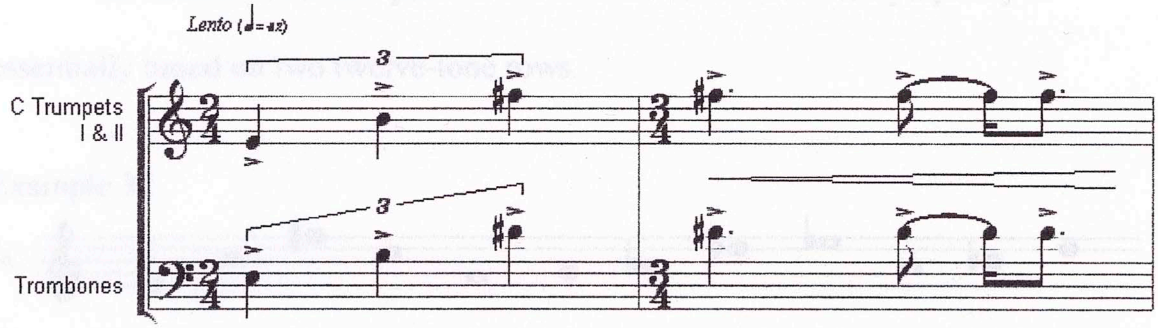


Second Symphony

Cordero's Second Symphony is one of the most important compositions in his output. With this composition, written in Panama, Cordero gained international renown by winning the *Caro de Boesi* prize at the Second Latin-American Festival held in Caracas, Venezuela in 1957. In this one-movement symphony, the composer succeeded, among other things, in incorporating a sonata form within another sonata form.

The importance of Cordero's Second Symphony lies not only in the prize it won and the reputation it gave the composer, but also in what it meant to him at the time of its creation; in a sense, it is a personal work. "The Second Symphony is my life—years that had gone by." The slow opening exhibits the trumpets and trombones playing *forte* a motive with triplet rhythms at the interval of a perfect fifth between each pitch. This opening represents an anguished scream by Cordero, saying to the world "I am here—there is a man in Panama that has something to say to the world but nobody knows it yet…." Some measures later, the music bursts out with Panamanian elements, but "it ends with a chord tinted with bitterness but with the hope of better times."[7]

Example 30: Opening measures



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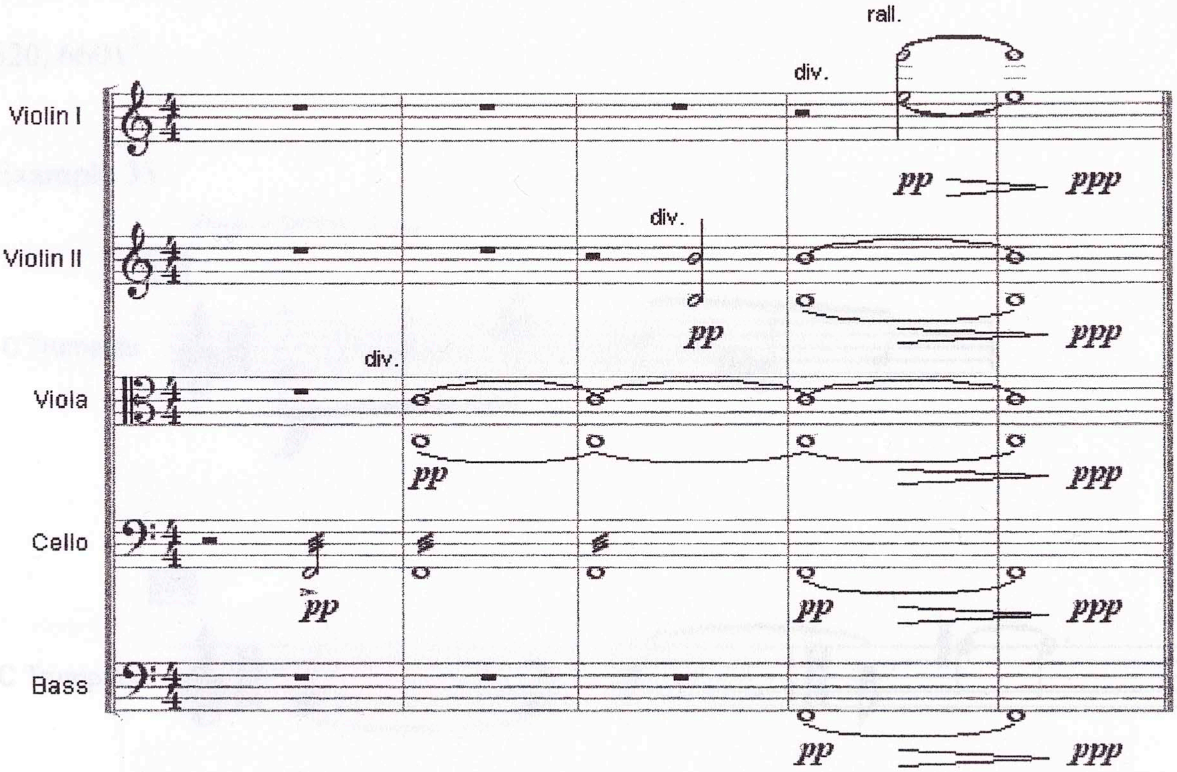
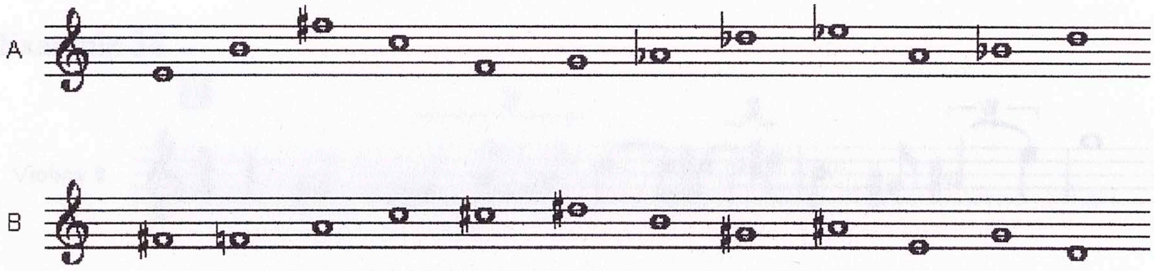
[7] Roque Cordero, interview and trans. by author, 13 August 2000, tape recording, Normal, Illinois.

Example 31: Final measure


rall.
div.
Violin I
pp
ppp
div.
Violin II
pp
ppp
div.
Viola
pp
ppp
Cello
pp
pp
ppp
Bass
pp
ppp

Dr. Ronald Sider has pointed out that Cordero's Second Symphony is essentially based on two twelve-tone rows.

Example 32



[8]

As can be seen, the symphony begins with row A, which is very important in the progress of the piece. This row also produces theme two of the exposition. Sider also points out that this row becomes a "recognizable theme, binding the entire form together" for "it recurs throughout the work in the original, untransposed form." The trumpets emphasize the recurrence of this theme at key moments (mm. 1, 101, 509, 620, 660).[9]

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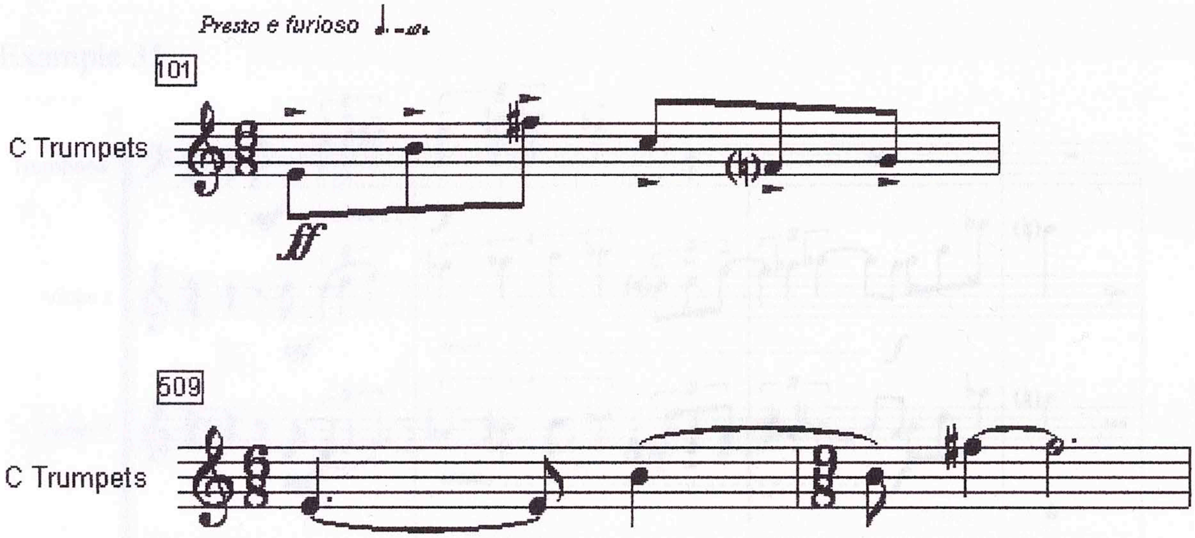
[8] Ronald R. Sider, "Roque Cordero, The Composer and his Style seen in three representative Works," *Inter-American Music Bulletin* 61(1967): 11.

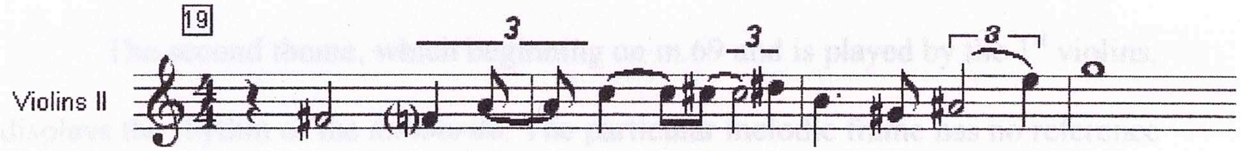
Example 33



> At these points, the three opening notes form a motive which is frequently repeated immediately; at the Coda this motive is stated three times.[10]

Theme I emerges from Row B. This row receives a more varied treatment.

Example 34



> The rows are used with some freedom, particularly in the Development. There is repetition within the rows, of notes and groups of notes. Imitation is also common, with motives quoted exactly from rows, passing from one instrument to another.[11]

---

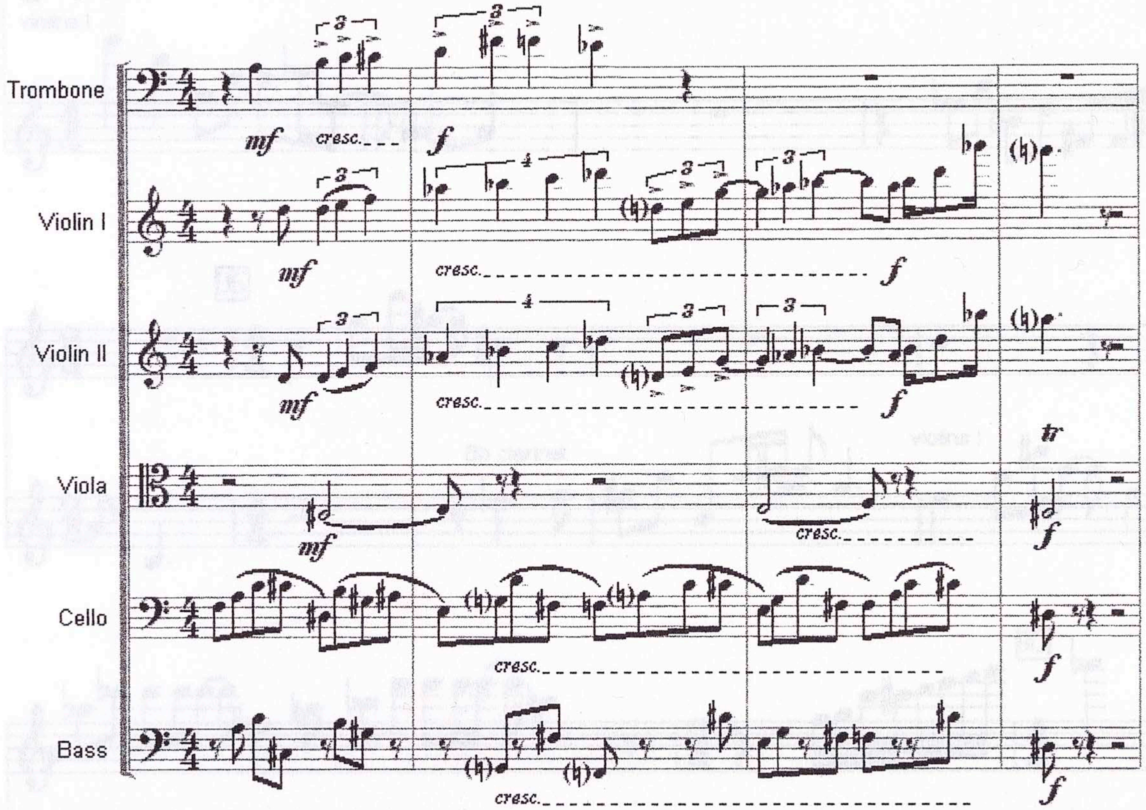
[9] Idem.

[10] Idem.

[11] Idem, 14.

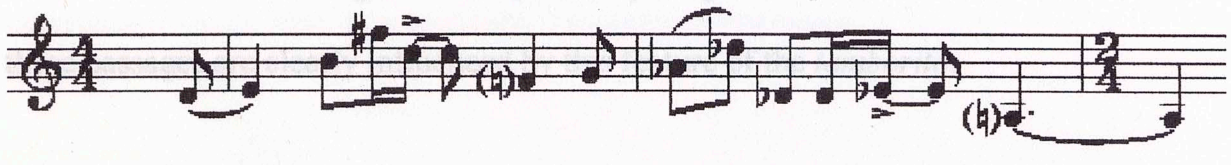
A sample of the rhythmic complexity of the work can be appreciated in mm. 32-34 which is polyrhythmic. Four main rhythms are present in the basses, cellos, violins, and trombones.

Example 35


Trombone
Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Cello
Bass
mf
cresc.
f

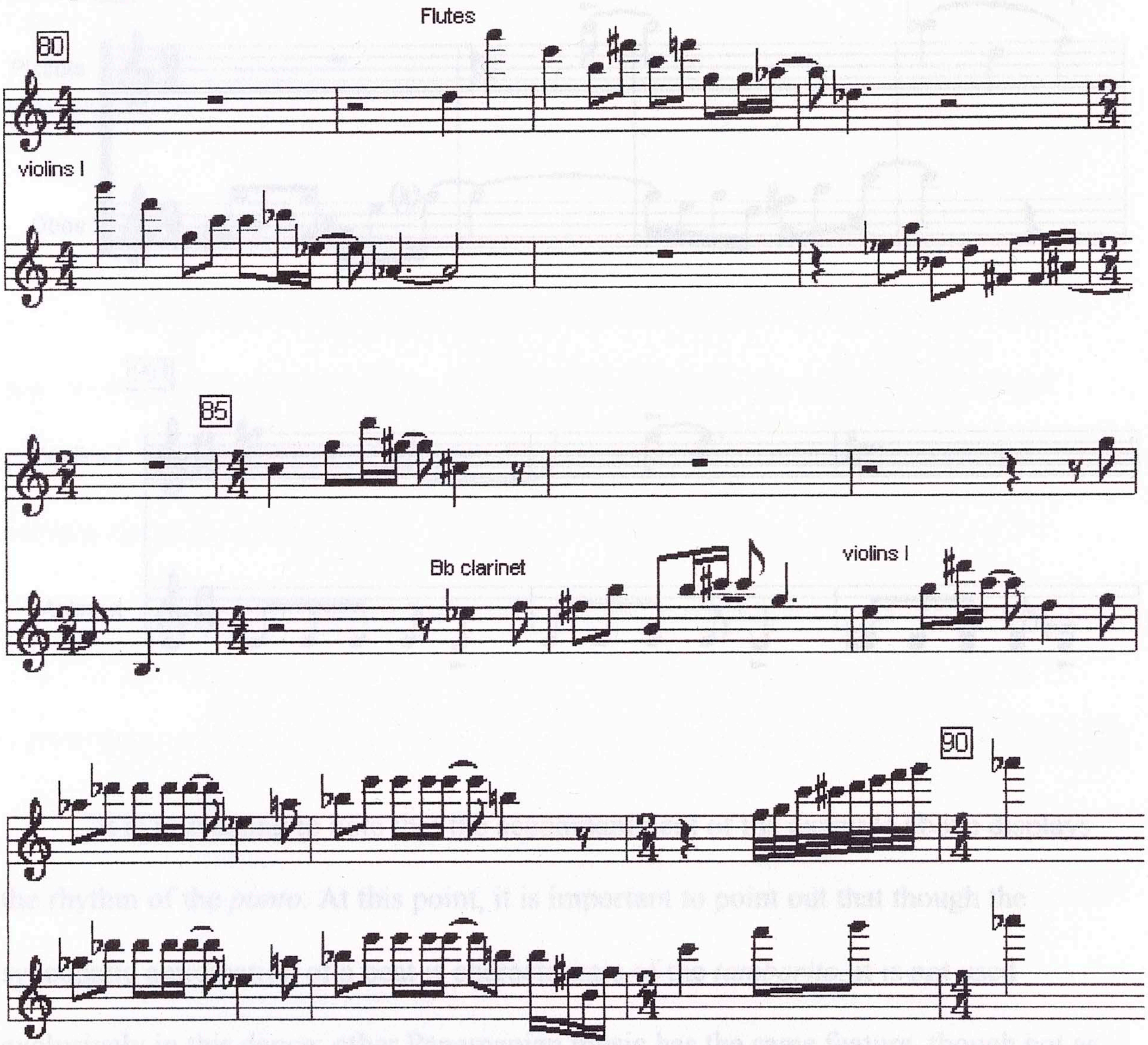
The second theme, which beginning on m.69 and is played by the 1st violins, displays the rhythm of the *tamborito*. The particular melodic frame has no reference to any Panamanian folk aspect; it is Cordero's use of free serialism.

Example 36



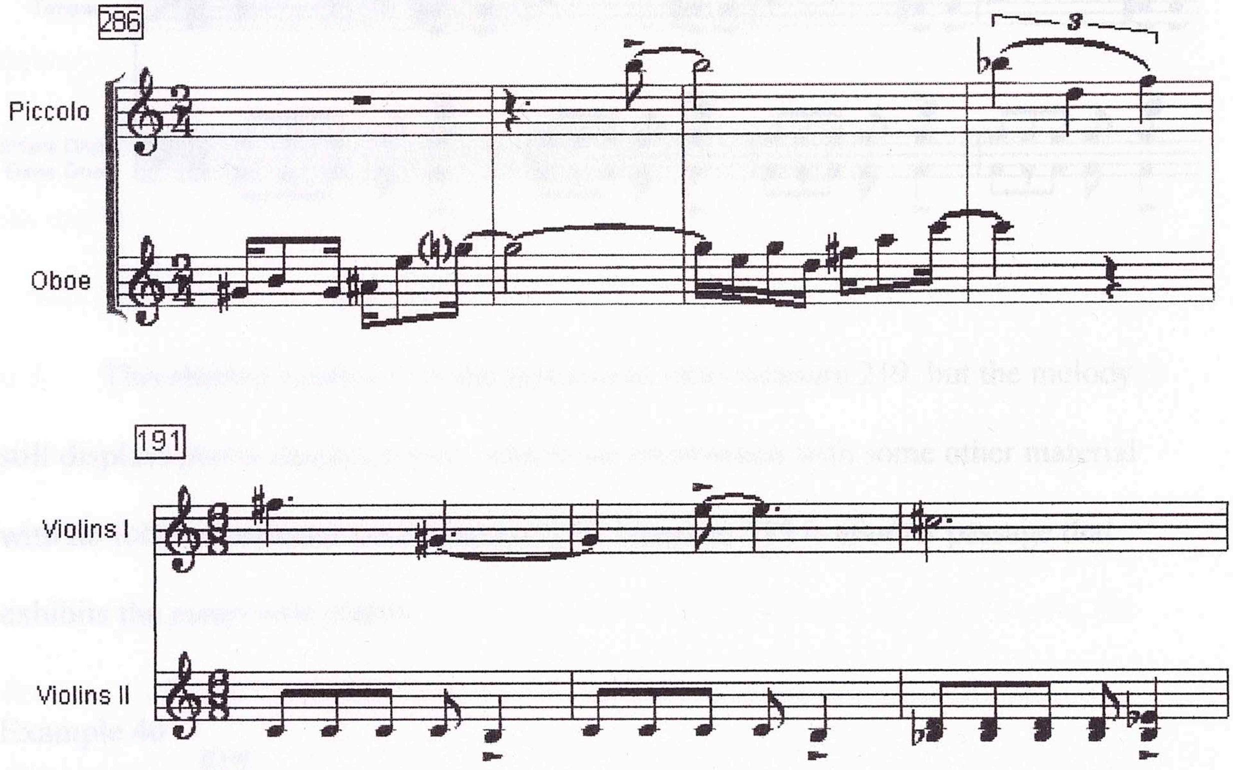
The *tamborito* rhythm persists for a while. For example, in mm. 80-89

Example 37


Flutes
80
violins I
85
Bb clarinet
violins I
90

The *tamborito's* characteristic rhythmic motive of the syncopatic anticipation of a beat is frequently used as a rhythmic effect that gives a special Panamanian flavor to the music. Though not always anticipating the first beat with a 16th note, these passages are clearly influenced by this feature of the *tamborito*.

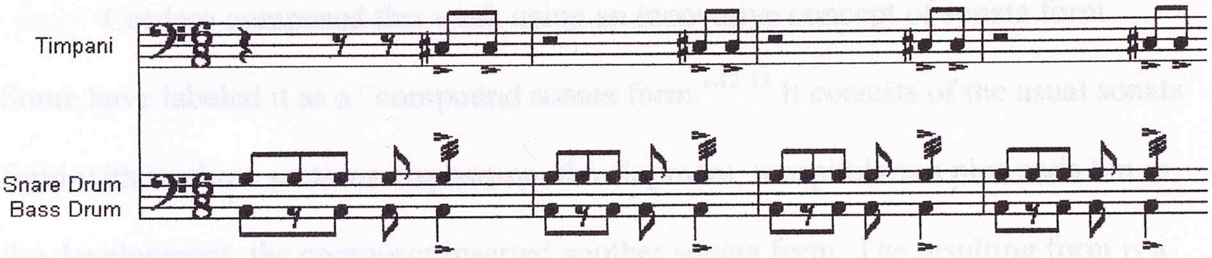
Example 38



It is interesting to note that the accompaniment of the example above displays the rhythm of the *punto*. At this point, it is important to point out that though the syncopatic anticipation of a beat is characteristic of the *tamborito*, it is not used exclusively in this dance; other Panamanian music has the same feature, though not as frequently.

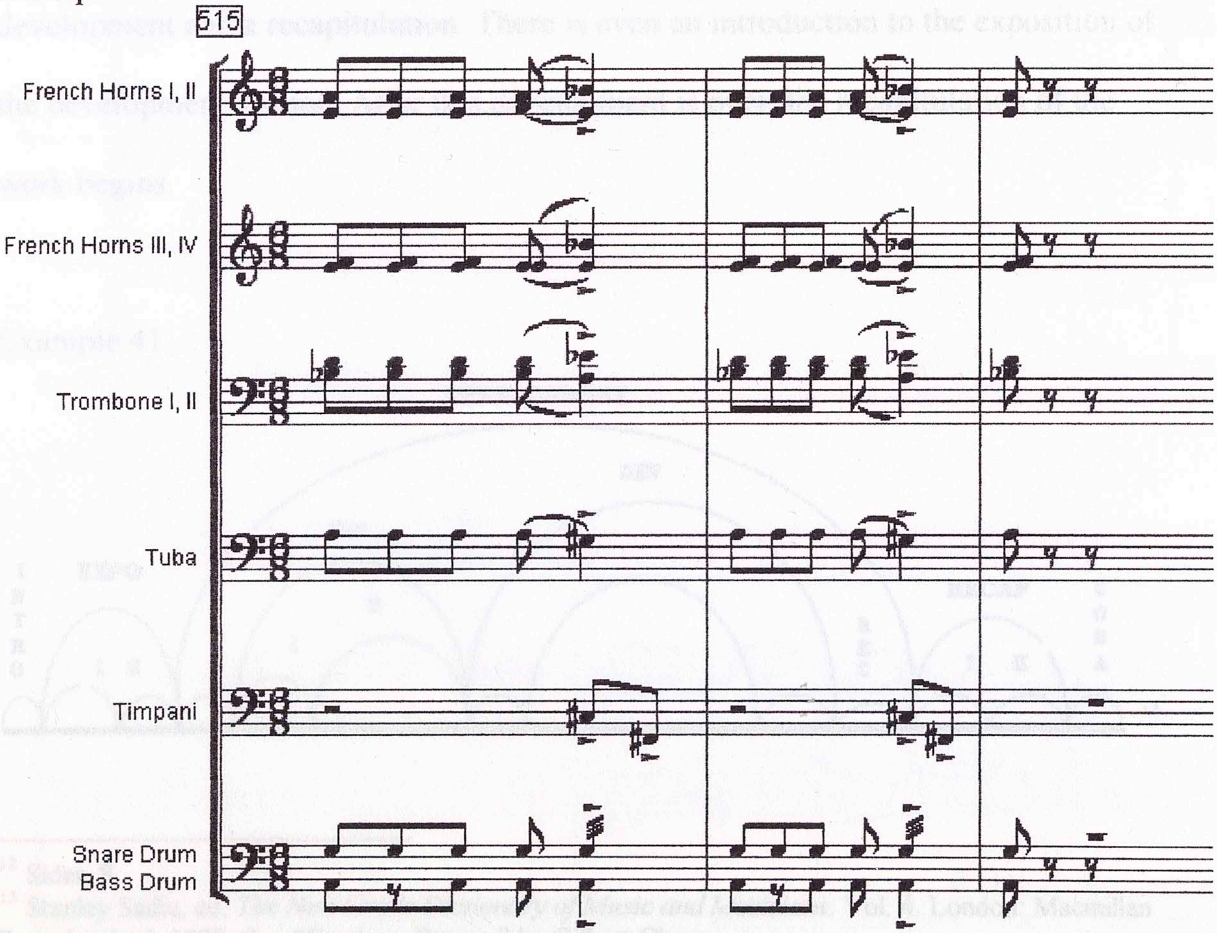
In measure 177, the rhythm of the *punto* appears for the first time in the symphony. Important here are the two accents, which characterize this dance, otherwise it would lose its specifically Panamanian character.

Example 39


Timpani
Snare Drum
Bass Drum

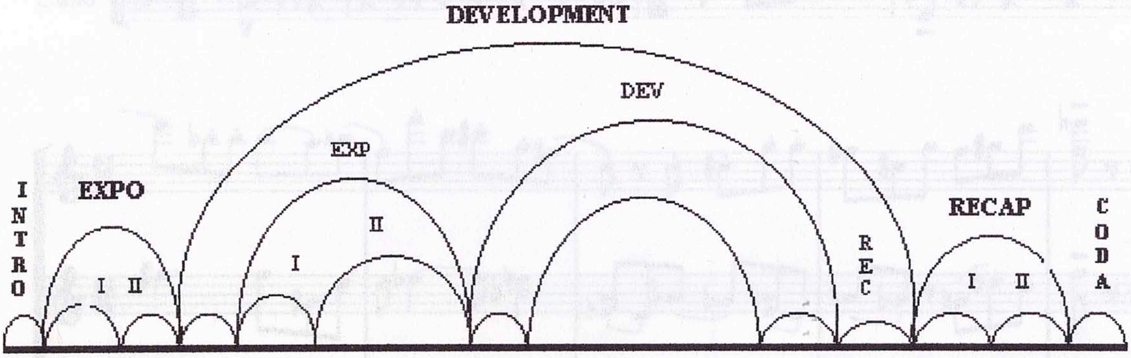
This rhythm continues in the percussion until measure 219, but the melody still displays *punto* characteristics, which are intertwined with some other material with no folkloric content until measure 275. Measure 515 is another passage that exhibits the *punto* with clarity.

Example 40


515
French Horns I, II
French Horns III, IV
Trombone I, II
Tuba
Timpani
Snare Drum
Bass Drum

Cordero composed this work using an innovative concept of sonata form. Some have labeled it as a "compound sonata form."[12] [13] It consists of the usual sonata form with its three sections: exposition, development, recapitulation plus coda but in the development, the composer inserted another sonata form. The resulting form is a sonata form within a sonata form. The symphony has an introduction of 16 measures before the exposition, which has the typical two themes of conventional sonata form. The exposition and recapitulation sections work very much in what could be considered standard practice. The development section consists of three subsections that feature the characteristics of the sections of a sonata form. In other words, the development consists of an exposition (with variants of the two main themes), a development and a recapitulation. There is even an introduction to the exposition of the development section. After this development is over, the recapitulation of the work begins.

Example 41



[14]

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[12] Sider, 8.

[13] Stanley Sadie, ed. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Vol. 4. London: Macmillan Press Limited, 1980. S.v. "Cordero, Roque," by Gilbert Chase.

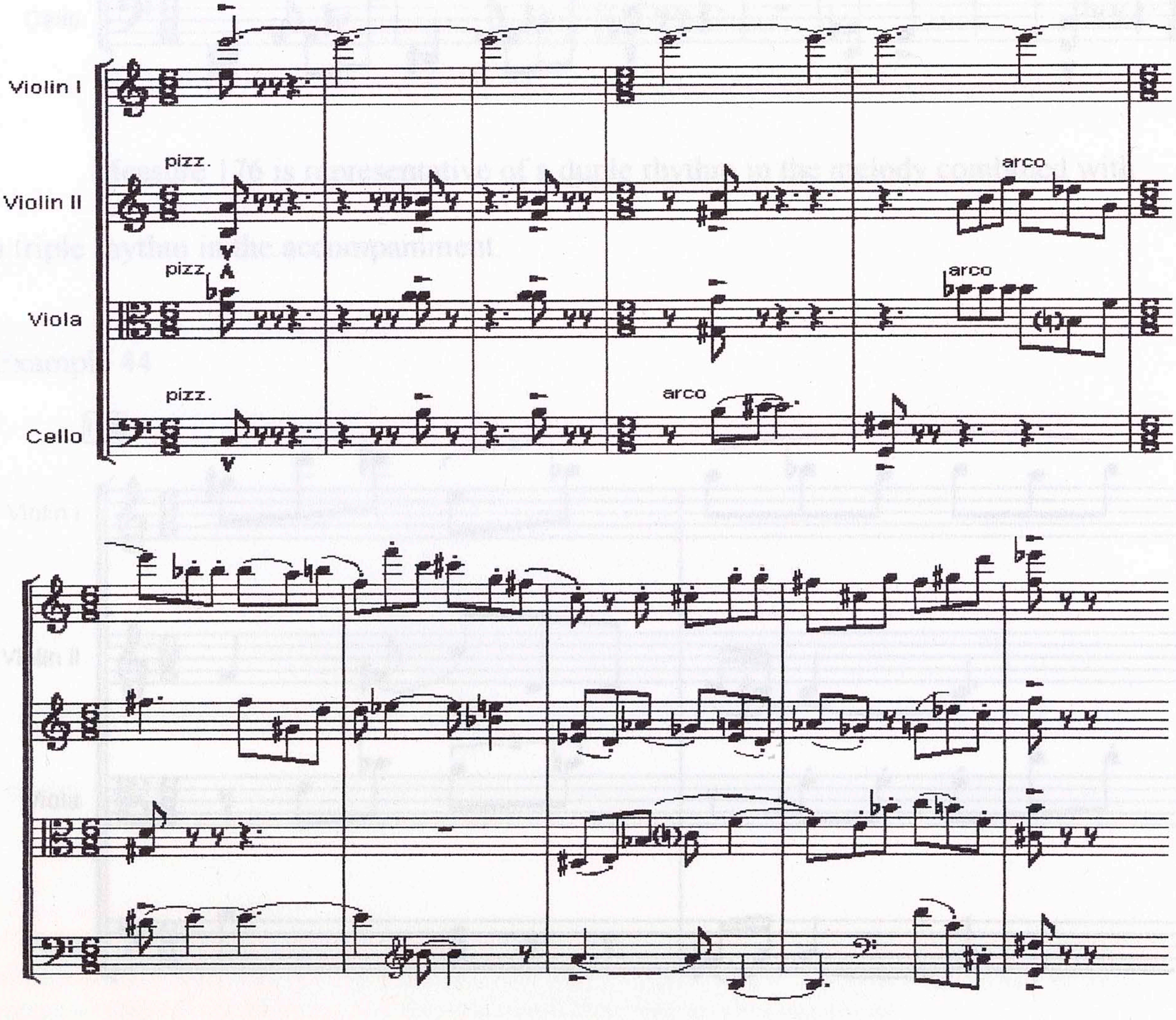
[14] Extract from Sider, 8.

String Quartet No. 1

Cordero's String Quartet No.1 was commissioned by The Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation in 1960. Panamanian folk influences are slightly less evident in this piece but unmistakably present. The first movement contains elements of the *mejorana* and the *tamborito*.

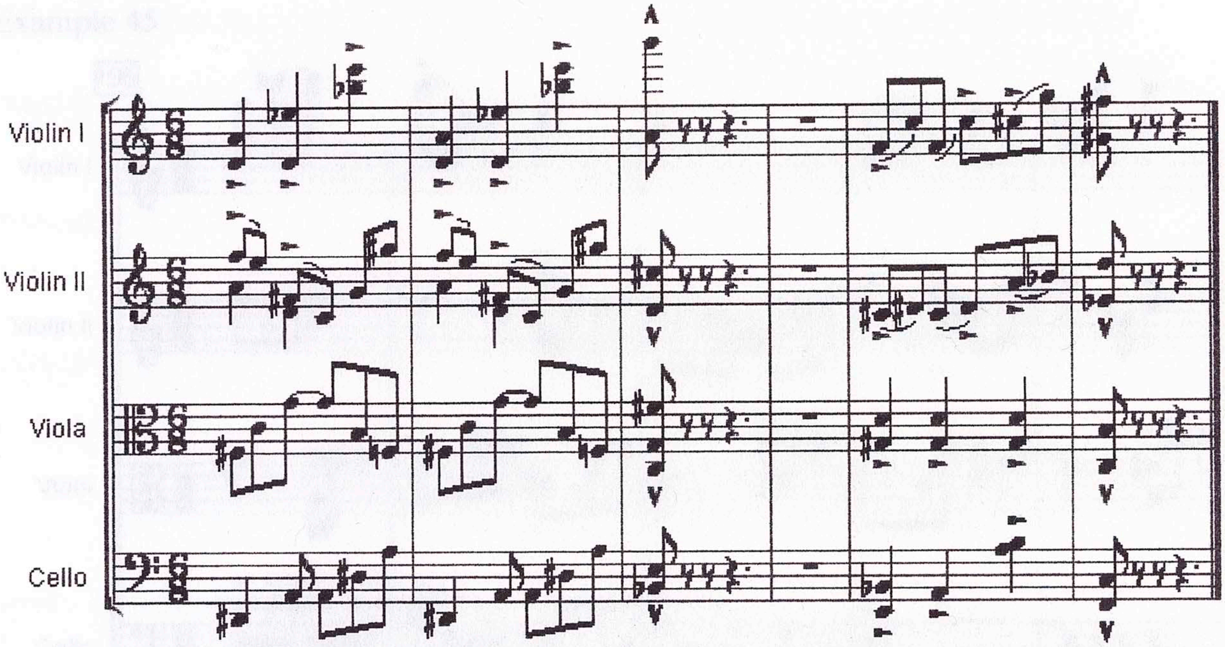
The *mejorana* can be perceived right from the beginning of the movement with the dual meters of 6/8 and 9/8. The change of pulse from two beats per bar (6/8) to three beats per bar (9/8) is in principle representative of the characteristic rhythmic switch from 6/8 to 3/4 in the *mejorana*.

Example 42



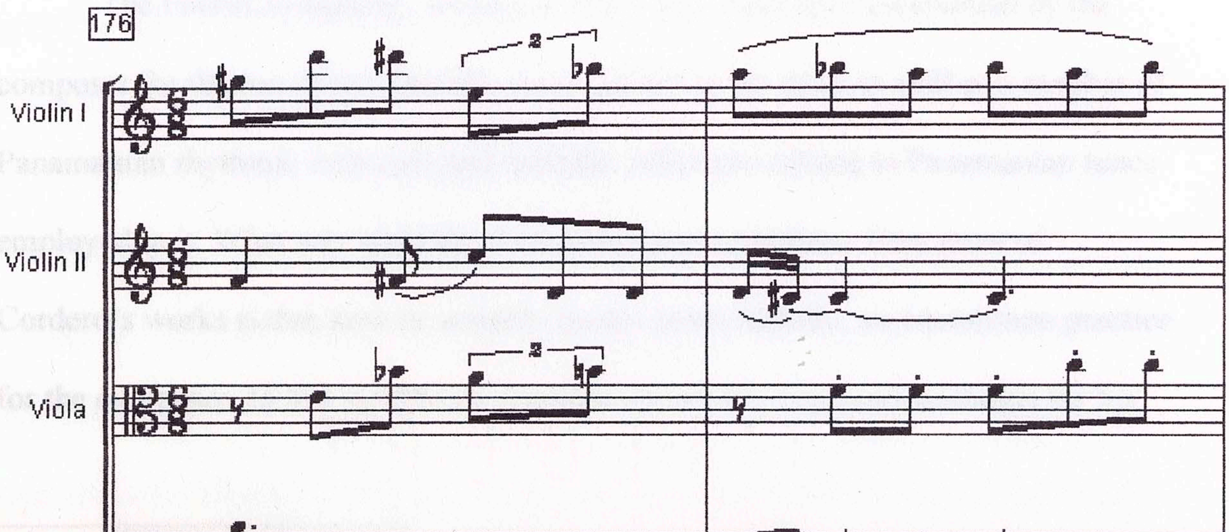
Several passages show the combination of 6/8 and 3/4, especially towards the end of the movement.

Example 43


Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Cello

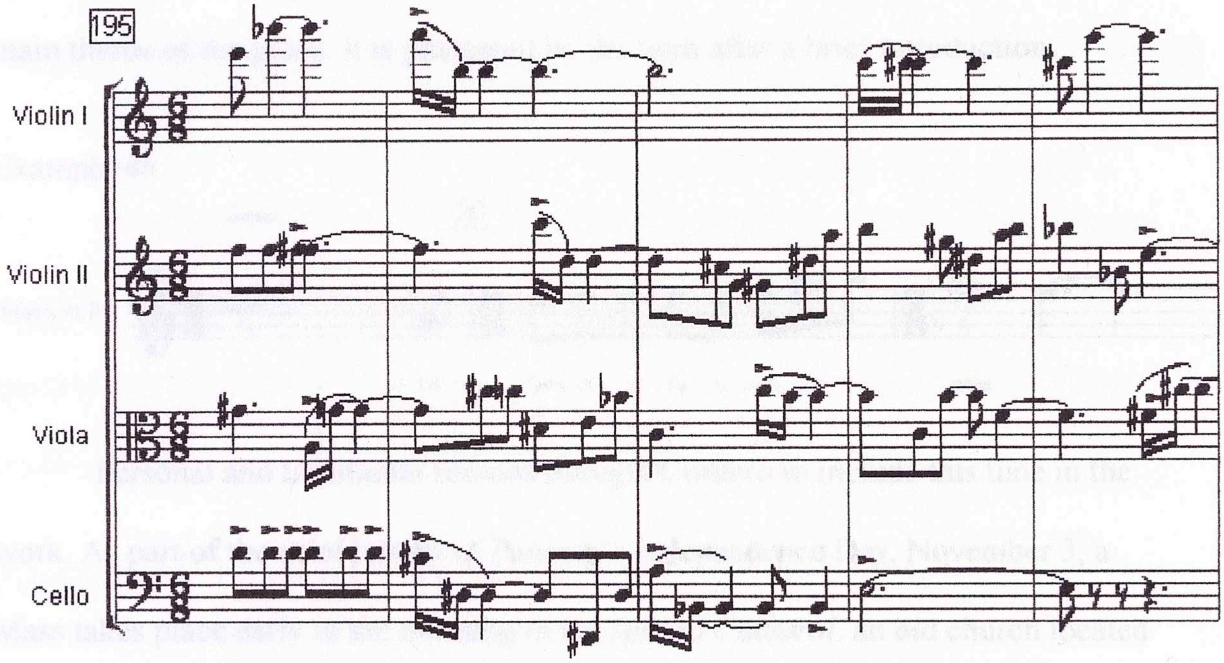
Measure 176 is representative of a duple rhythm in the melody combined with a triple rhythm in the accompaniment.

Example 44


176
Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Cello

In measure 195, Cordero contrapuntally presents a motive based on the syncopated anticipation of strong beats by 16th notes, characteristic of the *tamborito*.

Example 45



Symphony No.4, "Panamanian"[15]

The Fourth Symphony, written in 1986, was subtitled *Panamanian* by the composer for the use of two specific tunes quoted in the work as well as a number of Panamanian rhythmic materials and melodic inflexions related to Panamanian tunes employed in it. What sets apart this four-movement symphony from most of Cordero's works is that here he actually quotes tunes literally, an uncommon practice for the composer. In this symphony, Cordero apparently expresses nostalgia for his country, as the tunes are first presented in a kind of lament, but eventually the mood changes transmitting the joyous rhythms of folkloric dances.

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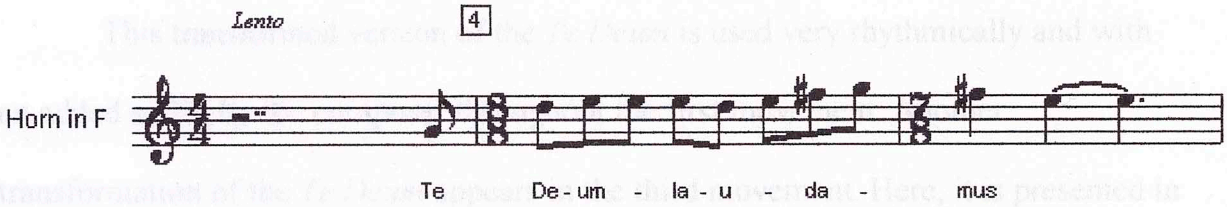
[15] At the time of the preparation of the present thesis, this work was not published. All the information submitted here was drawn from an interview with the composer. Only those musical examples that the composer allowed are used here and they were extracted from his own manuscript.

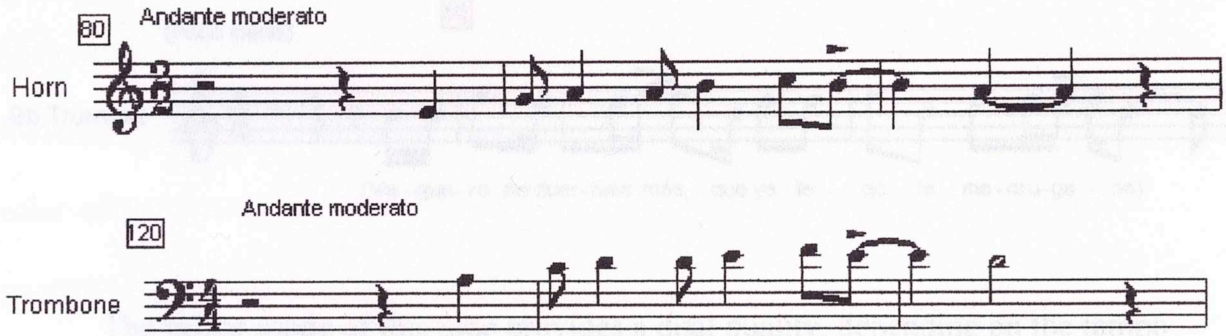
Curiously, the symphony does not begin with a Panamanian tune; rather Cordero quoted the opening phrase of the *Te Deum*, which ultimately becomes the main theme of the piece. It is presented by the horn after a brief introduction.

Example 46



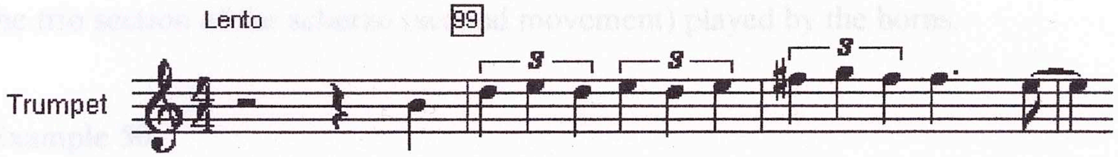
Personal and traditional reasons brought Cordero to include this tune in the work. As part of the celebrations of Panama's Independence Day, November 3, a Mass takes place early in the morning in the *Iglesia Catedral*, an old church located in the neighborhood near the *Palacio Presidencial* (the president's quarters). This Mass, as an important component of the major events of the Independence Day's ceremonies, occurs right after the president hoists the flag and before the typical grand parade. Traditionally, the National Symphony of Panama along with the Polyphonic Choir perform the *Te Deum* as part of the Mass. Cordero used to conduct this performance during his tenure as conductor of the Symphony. This tune has remained in the memory of the composer as a reminiscence of his Panama years and has become the main reason to name this Symphony *Panamanian*. As the first movement unfolds, Cordero transforms this sacred-related theme into a Panamanian-type dance by altering the rhythm. Notice the syncopated anticipation of the last bar's first beats.

Example 47



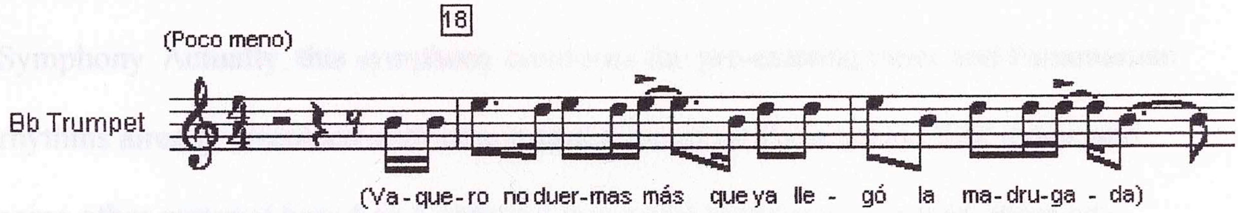
This transformed version of the *Te Deum* is used very rhythmically and with an added suffix by the composer throughout the first movement. Another transformation of the *Te Deum* appears in the third movement. Here, it is presented in triplets, evoking the rhythmic quality of the *mejorana*.

Example 48



The other tune used in this symphony is a real *tamborito* tune. The tune in question, *Vaquero no duermas más que ya llegó la madrugada* (Cowboy, sleep no more for dawn has come), is one of the most popular *tamboritos* in Panama and appears verbatim in a couple of places and with different transformations or motivic fragmentations in some other places in the symphony. Its first appearance occurs in measure 18 played by the trumpet in a painful cry; the oboe replies a fifth above.

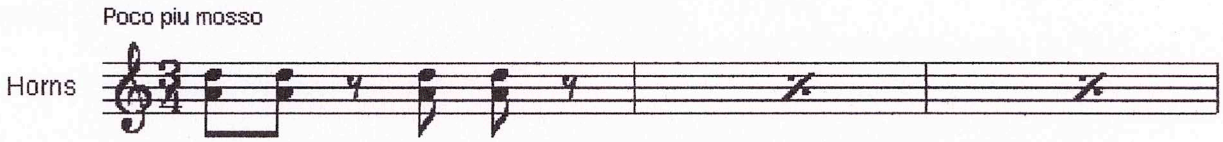
Example 49


18
(Poco meno)
Bb Trumpet
(Va-que-ro no duer-mas más que ya lle - gó la ma-dru-ga - da)

The minor mode of this tune provides a dual quality, depending on the tempo in which it is played. In a slow tempo, it has a moaning sound but because of the syncopation, in a fast tempo, it has a Panamanian dancing character. Cordero's transformed version of the *Te Deum* with a Panamanian dance character offers a perfect blending with the tune *Vaquero* for the first movement of the piece.

No other tune is quoted in this symphony, but the flavor of Panamanian music is represented with different rhythms. The *pasillo* rhythm, for example, emerges in the trio section of the scherzo (second movement) played by the horns.

Example 50



When Cordero wrote this symphony, he had long decided that he was not going to return to Panama, regrettably, there was no room there for him anymore. With this symphony, Cordero wanted to send a message to his people: "I am still a Panamanian, even if I don't return."[16]

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[16] Roque Cordero, interview and trans. by author, 13 August 2000, tape recording, Normal, Illinois.

Panamanian folk elements are not the only characteristics of Cordero's Fourth Symphony. Actually, this symphony combines the pre-existing tunes and Panamanian rhythms already discussed with new material based on Panamanian folk music and some other material based on Cordero's free serial technique.[17] Indeed, there are passages in this work that do not sound Panamanian at all, rather they reconcile specifically Panamanian musical idiosyncrasies with Cordero's universal vision of his style.

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[17] There are hundreds of other details of both Panamanian rhythmic and melodic features, and of Cordeo's technique that were not available at the time of writing this thesis.

CONCLUSIONS

Generally speaking, Panamanian folk elements are well rooted in Cordero's music. His concept of free serialism mixed with these folkloric elements creates a distinguishable sound proper to Cordero. In order to notice the Panamanian dance rhythms in a piece by Cordero, it is important to be acquainted with Panamanian folk music. For this reason, it is rather easy for Panamanians to recognize them since folklore is constantly in the environment all across the country. No matter how thick the harmonization of a passage could be, the folkloric element will always be perceived. This thesis has attempted to familiarize non-Panamanians with these elements and provide some guidance in this important aspect of Cordero's output. Hopefully, it will promote Cordero's music and help the listener to identify at least some of the Panamanian folk elements.

Cordero is a composer for the world. His music is partially communicative of Panamanian folklore in a contemporary musical language and communicative of himself. He has achieved his goal, telling the world that there is a Panamanian composer who has something to say; he has earned the right to say so by accomplishing what was thought impossible, a personal folk-influenced style using the twelve-tone technique. Artistically, he has connected Panama with the European mainstream.

Ironically, Cordero's music has not been heard often in his own country. In spite of the past neglectful attitude towards his music in Panama, he continues calling himself a Panamanian composer. This position reveals a lot of the man: a man whose patriotism stands above everything, even at the expense of unfair criticism; a man who lives by principles, not by circumstances.

The future seems more favorable for Cordero and his music in Panama as attitudes have been changing lately. Recently, he was invited to conduct his music with the National Symphony Orchestra of Panama. Hopefully, more events like this will take place. Interestingly, Cordero is presently working on a new composition, a piano concerto, in which he quotes a celebrated folk tune.

Cordero is the Panamanian bastion that had succeeded in earning respect for him as a composer and for the music of his country. For years, Panama had been famous only for the Canal and probably if it were not for it, nobody would have even heard about this small country. Thanks to Cordero, the name of Panama has a different connotation, an artistic one. Fortunately, Panama does have the Canal and has Cordero.

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APENDIX

CATALOGUE OF CORDERO'S WORKS BY GENRE

Orchestra

Capricho Interiorano (1939)
Panamanian Overture No.2 (1944)
First Symphony, in E flat (1945)
Movimiento Sinfónico (string orchestra, 1946)
Introducción y Allegro Burlesco (1950)
Rapsodia Campesina (1953)
Adagio Trágico (string orchestra, 1955)
Second Symphony (1956)
Danza en Forma de Fuga (string orchestra, 1958)
Cinco Mensajes Breves para Orquesta (1959)
Symphony with One Theme and Five Variations, No.3 (1965)
Momentum Júbilo (Fanfare for orchestra, 1973)
Elegy (string orchestra, 1973)
Six Mobiles for Orchestra (1975)
Obertura Salutación (1980)
Fourth Symphony, *Panamanian* (1986)
Tributo Sinfónico a un Centenario (1997)

Piano

Preludio para la Cuna Vacía (1943)
Nostalgia (1943)
Sonatina Rítmica (1943)
Five Miniatures (1944)
Variations for the Second Miniature (1944)
Nine Preludes (1947)
Sonata Breve (1966)
Tres Piecesillas para Alina (1978)
Five New Preludes (1983)
Sonata for Piano (1985)
Tres Meditaciones Poéticas (1995)

Chamber Music

Danza en Forma de Fuga (string quartet, 1943)
Ocho Miniaturas (small orchestra, 1948)
Quinteto (flute, clarinet, violin, violoncello, and piano; 1949)
Mensaje Breve (Flute, oboe, clarinet, and bassoon; 1957)
String Quartet No.1 (1960)
Circunvoluciones y Móviles (chamber group, 1967)
Permutaciones 7 (clarinet, trumpet, timpani, piano, violin, viola, and bass; 1967)
String Quartet No.2 (1968)
Música Veinte (chamber ensemble with voices, 1970)
String Quartet No.3 (1973)
Variations and Theme for Five (woodwind quintet, 1975)
Music for Five Brass (1980)
Poetic Nocturne of the Min River (chamber ensemble, 1981)
String Quartet No.4 (1983)
Three Permutations 3 (violin, violoncello, and string bass; 1984)
Serenatas (flute, clarinet, viola, and harp; 1987)
Dodecaconcerto (chamber ensemble, 1990)
Fanfarria Jubilosa (brass, woodwind, and percussion; 1994)

Choral

Psalm 113 (mixed choir, 1944)
Patria (reciter and mixed choir, 1944)
Two Short Choral Pieces (mixed choir, 1966)
Cantata para la Paz (baritone solo, mixed choir and orchestra, 1979)

Solo Instrument and Orchestra

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in E minor (1944)
Mensaje Fúnebre, *In Memoriam Dimitri Mitropoulos* (clarinet and string orchestra, 1961)
Concerto for Violin and Orchestra (1962)
Concertino for Viola and String Orchestra (1968)
Piano Concerto No.2 (begun in 2000, in progress)

Solo Instrument and Piano

Two Short Pieces for violin and piano (1945)
Sonatina for Violin and Piano (1946)
Sonata for Violoncello and Piano (1963)
Three Short Messages (viola and piano, 1966)
Doble Concierto sin Orquesta (violin and piano, 1978)
Four Messages for Flutes and Piano (1992)

Miscellaneous

Rhapsody for Two Pianos (1945)
Dúo 1954 (two pianos)
Mensaje Breve (clarinet, and bassoon; 1958)
Canon No.1 (three voices, 1961)
Aleluya (three voice canon, 1961)
Paz, Paix, Peace (Harp and four trios, 1969)
An Mar Tule (music for a film, chamber ensemble, 1971)
Soliloquios No.1 (solo flute, 1975)
Soliloquios No.2 (solo alto sax, 1976)
Soliloquios No.3 (solo clarinet, 1976)
Soliloquios No.4 (percussion, 1981)
Soliloquios No.5 (string bass, 1981)
Petite Mobiles (bassoon and trios, 1983)
Cinco Mensajes para Cuatro Amigos (guitar, 1983)
Three Miniatures for Ernst (flute and clarinet, 1985)
Rapsodia Campesina (solo violin, 1988)
Three Preludes for Guitar (1988)
Soliloquios No.6 (violoncello, 1992)
Dúo para Oboe y Fagot (oboe and bassoon, 1996)
Tres Veces 13 (harp, 1997)

Ballet

Setetule (1956)
Sensemayá (dancer, mixed choir, and drum, 1950)

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