

**CULTURAL COUNTERPOINTS:
Examining the Musical Interactions between the U.S. and Latin America**



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**“Olin Downes and the Reception of Latin American Composers in the United
States”**

Abstract:

Olin Downes, influential music critic of the New York Times from 1924 until his death in 1955, was an indefatigable supporter of contemporary music and his interest extended to Latin American composers such as Carlos Chávez, Alberto Ginastera, Camargo Guarnieri, and Heitor Villa-Lobos. Downes’s reviews and newspaper pieces in relation to the New York World’s Fair from 1939 were especially instrumental in consolidating the reputation of Villa-Lobos in the United States. Downes thought highly of Chávez not only as a composer but also as a conductor, whom he compared in favorable terms to Arturo Toscanini’s tenure with the New York Philharmonic. Downes established a particularly enthusiastic relationship with Villa-Lobos and his music, about which he wrote more often than that of any other composer from Latin America. The Brazilian composer reciprocated in kind by dedicating to Downes his Symphony No. 8 from 1950.

This paper examines Downes’s music criticism in the New York Times, especially his reviews of Latin American music performances, as well as his papers and unpublished correspondence, which mostly survive at the University of Georgia in Athens. Although it is clear that Olin Downes’s support of Latin American music was indefatigable and genuine, this paper reveals that he was not entirely disinterested and that the renowned critic also worked in tandem with the State Department in Washington, D.C., and its Good Neighbor Policy for the arts.

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Editorial Disclaimer:

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