

intangible classics



AISHA SYED CASTRO HERITAGE

Martin Labazevitch
piano



HERITAGE

1	West Side Story: America (Bernstein)	4:27
2	Una Primavera para el Mundo (Solano)	3:46
3	Oblivion (Piazzolla)	3:43
4	Gayaneh Ballet Suite: Aisha's Dance (Khachaturian)	3:04
5	Por Una Cabeza (Gardel; arr. Williams)	3:57
	Suite for Violin and Piano (Still)	14:11
6	I. African Dancer	5:20
7	II. Mother and Child	6:33
8	III. Gamin	2:16
9	Spanish Dance No. 5 (Granados; arr. Kreisler)	3:22
10	Scheherazade: Danse Orientale (Rimsky-Korsakov; arr. Kreisler)	3:58
11	West Side Story: Somewhere (Bernstein)	3:43
12	España, Op. 165 – No. 2 Tango (Albéniz; arr. Kreisler)	2:41
13	West Side Story: I Feel Pretty (Bernstein)	3:02
14	Deep River, Op. 59 No. 10 (Coleridge-Taylor)	4:19
15	Aisha's Prayer (arr. Labazevitch)	3:38
	Total playing time	57:54

AISHA SYED CASTRO violin
MARTIN LABAZEVTCH piano

THE MUSIC

The music on this recording demands no detailed or technical exegesis or essay: each piece speaks for itself and is not so much representative of the work of each composer (though that is true in some cases), as of the 'Heritage' announced by the album's title: the Heritage of Latino culture throughout South and Central America and the Caribbean, and its original source: Spain.

That heritage, which has also colored much of the popular music of the United States, brings us music which is brightly textured, lively, and exotic, filled with dances – especially the tango, born in the bars of Buenos Aires from Spanish and Cuban forebears. As native of the Caribbean, Aisha Syed Castro is totally at home in this music, and also has included here pieces that have special personal meaning for her.

Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990) is perhaps the prime example after Gershwin whose genius stretched across popular and 'art-music' genres equally. In particular *West Side Story* is either a Broadway musical or an opera in popular style but also full of dance. Three numbers have been chosen for this collection, which reflect the exploration in this work of the blend (and clash) of Latin-American and English-American cultures, a story of love and division between New Yorkers and Puerto Ricans.

Like the violinist, composer Rafael Solano (or Rafael Solano Sánchez, b. 1931), is Dominican. He was formerly Dominican ambassador to UNESCO and is active as a pianist, songwriter, composer and author; he has composed over 100 songs in various genres. His most famous song, *Por Amor*, has been recorded by artists such as operatic tenor Plácido Domingo. For this album maestro Solano has created a special arrangement of his masterpiece *Un Primavera para el Mundo*, a song he created in a partnership with René del Risco who composed the words.

Argentinian composer Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992) is given credit for dragging the sensual and rather unwholesome tango from the city bars and morphing it into a genuine distinctive form of art-music – often referred to as 'nuevo tango'. He composed *Oblivion* in 1982 and it was featured in the 1984 Italian movie 'Enrico IV' Like many of Piazzolla's pieces, the song, which is, beneath its dance rhythms, haunting and atmospheric, has been arranged for many different instruments and suits the violin, in this superb performance by Aisha, perfectly.

One piece here stands out as *not* being from a Spanish or Latin source, but is from the ballet *Gayaneh* by Armenian composer Aram Khachaturian (1903-1978). *Aisha's Dance* naturally has special meaning for the violinist, who was named after her grandmother and who first performed the piece at the age of 15.

Aisha's Dance is followed in this recital by the thoroughly Latin song *Por Una Cabeza* in a superb arrangement for violin and piano by John Williams. This piece also has family ties for Aisha – growing up with her other grandmother in the Dominican Republic exposed her to the many songs of the French-born Argentinian composer Carlos Gardel (1890-1935), which were favorites of grandmother!

The prolific composer William Grant Still (1895-1978) was experienced in just about every aspect of music in American life, and his talents were such that he became a trailblazer in all of them. He was the first black composer to have a symphony performed by a major orchestra, the first to conduct a major symphony orchestra, the first African-American to have an opera produced by a major opera company, and the first to conduct a white radio studio orchestra.

Still worked in both “popular” and “classical” styles. Whilst often celebrating his African roots, he also was partly Hispanic, and especially after settling in California he composed works that were based on the typical rhythms and melodies of the Spanish-speaking countries of the New World and thus finds a natural home in this album.

The Suite for Violin and Piano was composed for violinist Louis Kaufman and his pianist wife Annette in May 1943. Each of the three movements is inspired by a sculpture by a contemporary African-American artist. The first movement aims to capture the gestures of Richmond Barthé's 1933 statue *African Dancer* with an assertive, driving figure in the main section and a bluesy middle section. The second movement is a sweet, gentle response to *Mother and Child* by Sargent Johnson, a Boston-born artist who spent most of his life in California. The final movement is filled with humorous vitality, depicting the best-known sculpture of Augusta Savage, *Gamin* – a bust created in 1930 of a street-smart young man.

Little need be said about the two Spanish tangos presented here, which have both become immensely popular especially in the arrangements for violin and piano by Fritz Kreisler. The Spanish Dance by Enrique Granados (1867-1916) is the fifth of his *12 Danzas españolas* of 1890, and probably his most widely-known work. His Spanish compatriot Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909) is best known for his sparkling works based on Spanish folk idioms. Originally written for guitar or piano (the composer's own instrument), quite a number have also found more popularity in the Kreisler arrangements, including the Tango from *España*, Op. 165.

Between those two Spanish pieces in this program is another Kreisler arrangement, but one with a very different atmosphere and source. The symphonic suite *Scheherazade*, Op. 35, was composed in 1888 by Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) in which the title character is represented by a solo violin playing a haunting middle-eastern leitmotif.

The work also has personal connections to the family of Aisha Syed Castro whose grandparents on the non-Dominican side were from India. *Danse Orientale* is Kreisler's arrangement of the fourth section of the original score, *Festival at Baghdad*.

The final two works in our program reflect spirituality and religious faith with their traditional American melodies. *Deep River* is one of the most universally-loved of the spirituals to come from the African-American communities, songs which in times of slavery and almost total deprivation, gave these communities hope in a better future, whether in this life or beyond. The arrangement of this beloved song is a keystone of the *24 Negro Spirituals*, Op. 59, written in 1904 by the English composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912). Of mixed race (English mother and father from Sierra Leone, who was descended from former slaves who had been freed by the British and evacuated from the USA around 1790) he was among the first Anglo-African composer to achieve fame in Britain (being strongly championed by Elgar), also being referred to as 'the black Mahler'. He used his musical talent to assist the ongoing struggle against race inequality and prejudice in both the UK and USA and was rewarded with an invitation to The White House in 1904 from President Theodore Roosevelt – an extraordinary privilege in those days.

Our program ends with a special arrangement by pianist Martin Labazevitch of a medley of traditional hymns, in which the universally adopted 'Amazing Grace' takes center stage. For the violinist Aisha Syed Castro as a Christian herself, these songs of praise bring sure hope of the heritage that goes beyond all musical, racial or social aspects: the salvation of souls.

It is a great privilege for us at Divine Art to welcome Aisha to our family of artists and we hope that this album will bring much joy.

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THE MUSICIANS

AISHA SYED (Violin)

"Maintained an air of unflappable poise" - *Strings Magazine*

"Syed's great strength is grace under pressure, an aura of mastery, and the ability to present in many different styles and cultural attitudes with sincerity and skill."

New York Classical Review (Sold-out concert at Carnegie Hall)

Described by the press in three continents as a "virtuoso" (Lietuvos Rytas in Lithuania, New York Classical Review, Frankfurter Neue Presse in Germany, Time Out Magazine and The National in the UAE, Correio Braziliense in Brasil), and a "deeply gifted artist" (Ft. Lauderdale Connex in Florida). She has performed at BBC Radio 3 and her live performance of N. Paganini's La Campanella on their radio programme In Tune was chosen as a Performing Miracle on their prestigious broadcast of the best live interpretations on Radio 3.

Aged eleven, Aisha made her debut performing the Bruch Violin Concerto in G minor with the Dominican Symphony Orchestra becoming the youngest ever Dominican to have performed with the orchestra. She became the first latina to have been accepted at the child prodigy Yehudi Menuhin School in England where she also studied at the Royal College of Music with a full scholarship by the Soirée d'Or committee. She was also offered a full scholarship at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London.



Besides becoming a household name in South America, she has performed all around the world as a soloist with orchestras and in recitals in places such as the Carnegie Hall in New York (certified sold-out at Zankel Hall by Carnegie Hall), Palau de les Arts in Spain, National Philharmonic Hall in Vilnius, Wigmore Hall in London, Mumbai Opera House in India, the Broward Center for the Performing Arts in Florida, the headquarters of the Organization of American States in Washington DC, the Clairmont Hall in Tel-Aviv, the Yehudi Menuhin Forum in Bern, Teatro Mayo in Colombia, Casa de la Música in Ecuador, Reales Alcázares in Sevilla, Spain, National Auditorium in Uruguay, CCK in Buenos Aires, National Theater of Nicaragua and National Theater of the Dominican Republic among many other halls.

She has also performed as a soloist in many festivals including at the Yehudi Menuhin International Music Festival in Gstaad where she premiered two works as soloist by prominent Israeli composers Noam Sherriff and Menachem Wiesenberg, the Banstead Arts Festival, the Abu Dhabi Music Festival, the Leamington Hastings Festival, the Santo Domingo Music Festival, the Gaida Contemporary Music Festival (where she gave the world premiere of the Alguirdas Martinaitis violin concerto, dedicated to her, at the National Philharmonic Hall with the Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra in Vilnius) amongst others.

She has performed as a soloist with the Orquesta de la Comunidad Valenciana in Spain, Symphony of the Americas in Florida, the Kristóforo Orchestra, the Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra, the National Symphony Orchestra of Colombia, the Entre Ríos Symphony Orchestra in Argentina (winner of the Konex Award in Argentina as best orchestra of the decade) and many others. Aisha Syed has won numerous awards including five Premio soberano Awards in 2013, 2014, 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2021 as Best Classical Artist Abroad, the Latin Pride National Award in Boston MA, USA, the Game Changer Award by the Keep Walking worldwide campaign in 2014 and many others.

She was made Honorary Cultural Goodwill Ambassador by the Dominican Republic Government. In 2014 she was made the youngest ever Honorary Professor of the Arts Faculty at the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo, founded in 1538. In May 2015 she became, along with conductor Gustavo Dudamel and other Latin-American artists, an Ambassador for LEALA, an organization founded to promote the Spanish language and Latin American culture in Los Angeles. In 2010 she co-founded in the Dominican Republic the Music for Life Foundation, which seeks to bring classical music to those whom for social, economic, or health reasons cannot access it through music programmes such as the Music with a Purpose Festival and the Musical Clinics for violinists.

The violins she performs on are an extraordinary 1687 Stradivarius and an Antonius Pelizon violin, both kindly provided by Florian Leonhard Fine Violins of London and New York. Most recently, Aisha has been performing in Europe, Latin America, the United States and the Middle East. Future engagements include a recital at the Kennedy Center, her debut with the National Symphony Orchestra of Uruguay and the National Symphony Orchestra of Ecuador, a recital at the Teatro Mayor in Colombia, and recitals in Seoul, Vienna, Bern and Rome. Aisha is a devout Christian and dedicates all her performances to God.

MARTIN LABAZEVITCH (piano)

Praised by critics in Europe and the United States for his lyricism, virtuosity and an intensity of performance, pianist Martin Labazevitch appeared in many concert halls and festivals in Europe, Israel, Asian and across the United States. He is a recipient of many awards and recognitions in the U.S., Spain and Japan as well as recipient of the Harold Bauer Award for the most promising pianist at the Manhattan School of Music.

Born in Poland, Mr. Labazevitch studied at the Odessa Conservatory in Ukraine, with Anatoly Kardashev, before immigrating to the United States, and obtaining scholarship to study at the Manhattan School of Music with Mme Nina Svetlanova and later with Cuban-American virtuoso Horacio Gutierrez. Recently he received his Doctoral Degree, studying with Jose Ramos Santana. He has worked with many renowned artists as Dmitri Bashkirov, Lazar Berman, Isidore Cohen, Bella Davidovich, Philippe Entremont, Stephen Hough, Ruth Laredo and Earl Wild.

His performances have been broadcast on radio stations throughout the U.S. such as WQXR, WWFM, and WFMT in New York, WFMT in Chicago as well as classical radio stations in Poland and Lithuania. Mr. Labazevitch has been a soloist with leading orchestras in Spain, Poland, Lithuania, Japan, and the United States. As a chamber musician, he is a founding member of the Paderewski Trio, an all-Polish ensemble, which for the entirety of its existence had been coached by the late Isidore Cohen - member of the Juilliard String Quartet and the Beaux Arts Trio. Paderewski Trio's debut recital at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall was praised by *The Strad* magazine as "...exuberant, multi-faceted, ... gripping from first note to last."

Highlights of the most recent seasons include performances with the Beethoven Academy Orchestra, Lutoslawski Chamber Orchestra and Church of St.Louis Orchestra, performances with Vilnius String Quartet and Spokane String Quartet, recital tour in Spain with Polish cellist Rafal Jezierski, performances with Dominican violinist Aisha Syed Castro in Weill Recital Hall in New York, Methuen Hall in Boston and in London UK, performance at the Tedmed conference at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC, as well as solo recitals at the Weill Recital Hall in New York as the winner of the La Gesse Foundation auditions, and recital at the Dame Myra Hess series in Chicago.

The highlights of the 2019/20 season include performances with Dominican violinist Aisha Syed Castro at Carnegie Hall's Zankel Hall, in Chicago and Lima, Peru, recitals in Spain with Polish cellist Rafal Jezierski as well as solo recitals in Philadelphia, Miami, Washington D.C. and New York City.



In 2015, Mr. Labazevitch released his first commercial recording on the Delos label, to very enthusiastic reviews in Poland, France, Germany and the United States. *Fanfare Magazine* wrote: "His way with Chopin is fluid and convincing. He plays with a superb control of rubato and has the most beautiful way of melting a phrase." *American Record Guide* wrote: "Pianist Labazevitch injects more fire into the two concerto works, rushing the tempos in some passagework to build excitement; orchestra and conductor gamely, calmly follow his lead. Labazevitch is excellent." *ConcertoNet* wrote, "...he pleasantly refrains from overtaxing Chopin's conclusive Allegro vivace with shimmering grandeur and eloquent precision that could even rival that of Arthur Rubinstein."

Since 2012 Mr Labazevitch has been sharing his passion for teaching with students at the Levine School of Music in Washington D.C. He is the Artistic Director of the Kosciuszko Foundation Chopin Piano Competition, founder of the Chopin Piano Academy in Washington D.C. and Co-Artistic Director of the Puerto Rico International Piano Festival in San Juan.



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