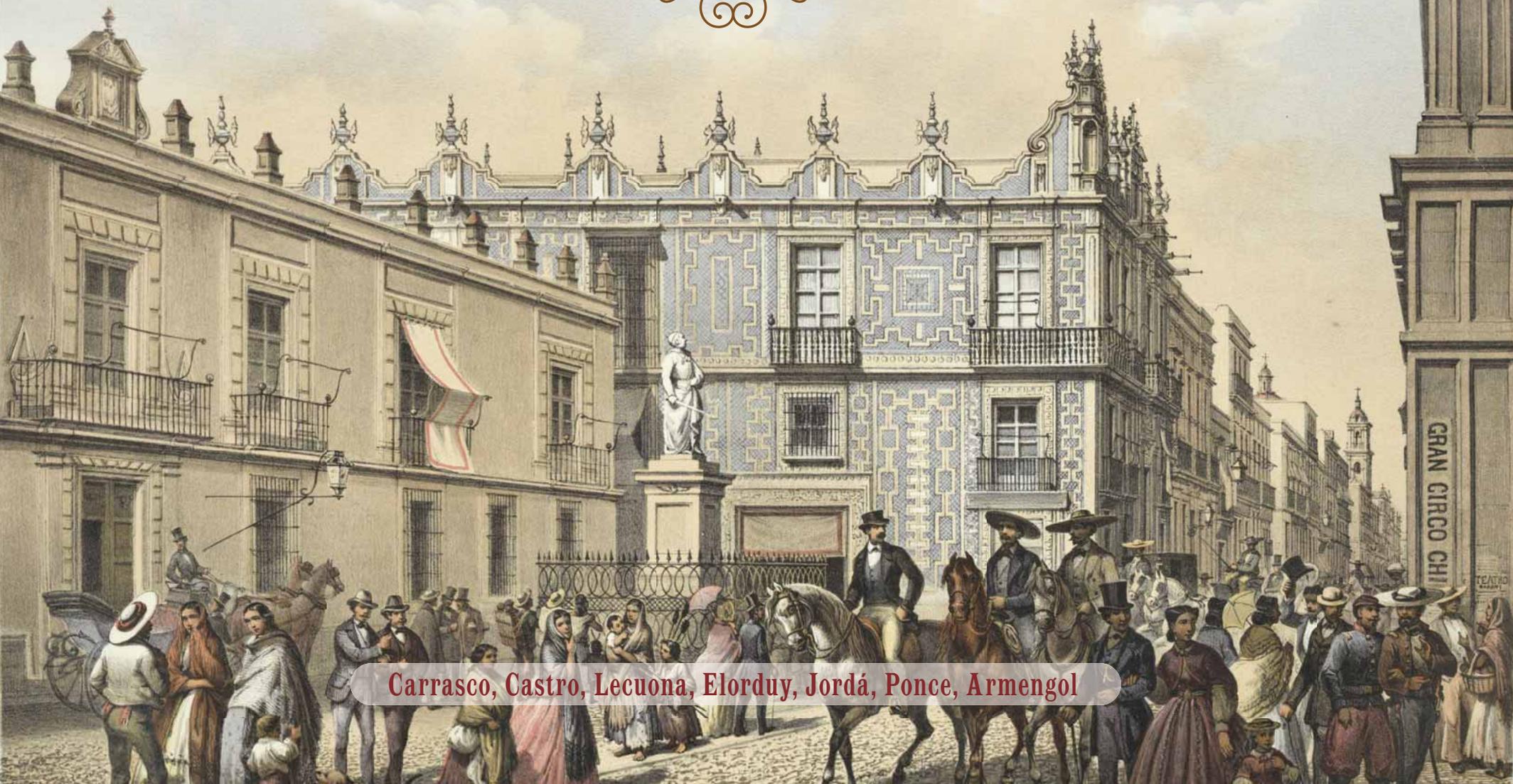


# LATIN AMERICAN PIANO MUSIC

move

Alejandro Alberto Téllez Vargas, piano



Carrasco, Castro, Lecuona, Elorduy, Jordá, Ponce, Armengol

*Le dedico esta grabación a mis queridos padres,  
muchas gracias por mis clases de piano y por todo el  
apoyo durante mis estudios y conciertos. También  
quiero agradecer a mis queridos hermanos por toda su  
paciencia durante esas largas tardes cuando me  
sentaba a practicar en la sala.*



**Alejandro Alberto Téllez Vargas**

- |     |   |                                    |
|-----|---|------------------------------------|
| 1   | <b>Adiós in A Major</b> (“Farewell”)  | Alfredo Carrasco<br>(1875–1945)    |
| 2   | <b>Prelude in A Minor, op. 15, no. 2</b> (“Barcarolle”)   | Ricardo Castro<br>(1864–1907)      |
| 3   | <b>A la Antigua in D-flat Major</b> (“Old-Fashioned”)   | Ernesto Lecuona<br>(1896–1963)     |
| 4–6 | <b>Danzas Tropicales</b> (“Tropical Dances”)<br><i>Vivo</i><br><i>Vivo — Languido, Lento</i><br><i>Lento</i>            | Ernesto Elorduy<br>(1853–1913)     |
| 7   | <b>Danzas Nocturnas</b> (“Nocturne Dances”)<br><i>Moderato</i><br><i>Con tristezza</i> (“With sadness”)<br><i>Mesto</i> | Luis G. Jordá<br>(1869–1951)       |
| 8   | <b>Polonaise in G-sharp Minor, op. 11</b>   | Ricardo Castro<br>(1864–1907)      |
| 9   | <b>Ante el Escorial in E-flat Minor</b><br>(“In Front of the Escorial Monastery”)                                       | Ernesto Lecuona<br>(1896–1963)     |
| 10  | <b>Scherzino Mexicano in D Major</b>  | Manuel M. Ponce<br>(1882–1948)     |
| 11  | <b>La Comparsa in F-sharp Major</b><br>(“Carnival Procession”)  | Ernesto Lecuona<br>(1896–1963)     |
| 12  | <b>Intermezzo in E Minor</b>  | Manuel M. Ponce<br>(1882–1948)     |
| 13  | <b>Prelude for piano or harp in E Major</b>   | Mario Ruiz Armengol<br>(1911–2002) |
| 14  | <b>Gitanerías in D Minor</b> (“Gipsy Trickeries”)   | Ernesto Lecuona<br>(1896–1963)     |
| 15  | <b>Caprice-Valse in E Major, op. 1</b>  | Ricardo Castro<br>(1864–1907)      |

## LATIN AMERICAN PIANO MUSIC

**T**here is a considerable amount of Latin American piano music written in a traditional, late-nineteenth-century style that is often overlooked in English-speaking countries. When some of the pieces selected for this recording—mainly Mexican and Cuban piano works—were originally performed in Latin America, they were often played alongside the premiere of works written by European composers such as Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827), Robert Schumann (1810–1856), Franz Liszt (1811–1886), Anton Rubinstein (1829–1894), and Claude Debussy (1862–1918). Present-day English-speaking audiences, however, rarely have the opportunity to experience these pieces in their concert halls. Even though contemporary pianists, such as Cyprien Katsaris (b. 1951) and Lang Lang (b. 1982), have slowly introduced some of these works into their repertoire, most of these pieces remain unknown outside of their countries of origin.

The listener will undoubtedly recognise the influence of European salon music in these works. This is for two reasons: Mexico and Cuba were European colonies until the nineteenth century; and most of these composers travelled to Europe to study composition, as touring performers or, in some instances, to escape armed conflicts in their home countries. In Mexico, for instance, with the second French intervention and the

appointment of Maximilian von Habsburg (1832–1867) as Emperor of the country, French influences crept into Mexican culture throughout the 1860s. French literature, paintings, drawings, toys, and fashion—including the use of hoop skirts, Eugénie hats, and the scandalous décolletage (a low neckline on a dress)—made their appearance, predominantly in Mexico City. The French invasion brought with it music, opera, well-known performers, and an increasing number of imported pianos, which eventually established the foundations for a prolific musical environment in late-nineteenth-century Mexico.

Throughout the period known as the “Porfiriato”—the term given to the years when General Porfirio Díaz ruled Mexico—and before the Mexican Revolution, character pieces such as nocturnes, preludes, ballades, rondos, impromptus, barcarolles, waltzes, mazurkas, and polonaises were extremely popular. While the term “Mexican polonaise” may sound like an oxymoron to modern audiences, it is not difficult to understand the influence that dance genres had on Mexican music, particularly when considering that dancing was one of the few sanctioned forms of social interaction for young Mexicans. Yet, from a transcultural perspective, the most interesting aspect of these works is not the way in which they resemble European music, but how they uniquely alter European models to become Latin American pieces.

One of the features these compositions share is that they began at the keyboard. They were improvised and evolved in performance, before being codified in the music score. Before recordings standardised the performing style of twentieth-century musicians, pianists did not take music notation at face value. Taking liberties with the written text was accepted, and even encouraged, among performers. The difference between what was written

on the page and what pianists actually played was the most significant aspect of their performances, often providing a unique example of their individuality. Recordings made by some of the composers selected for this recording—in many instances, playing their own music—provide invaluable evidence regarding the use of nineteenth-century performance practices, such as improvisation, dislocation, arpeggiation, metrical rubato, various forms of rhythmic alteration, and unwritten tempo modification, all of them essential in piano playing around the turn of the century.

In the world of classical music, discriminatory social practices continue to perpetuate a pervasive lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Because the fundamental values of a culture are expressed in its music, it comes as no surprise that the world of classical music does not always reflect the diverse society in which it inhabits. Research exploring the harassment experienced by women and racial minorities in European orchestras offers a compelling case in point. Comparably to the barriers to participation experienced by minorities in Eurocentric musical culture, Latin American classical music often excludes the participation of certain bodies and identities. I am aware that the choice of composers in this recording could better reflect the role of women, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, and many Latinxs who have made significant contributions to the history of Latin American music. While it is not my intention to perpetuate a cycle of exclusion, I acknowledge that the selected repertoire is reflective of the socio-musical organisation in which I grew up—one that has fortunately begun to change as a result of a conversation about diversity that will hopefully have a meaningful impact on Latin American countries—and of my own development as a Mexican pianist (each piece intertwined with memories of my formative years in Mexico and of people who nurtured my love for music).

The music of **Alfredo Carrasco** (b. Sinaloa, 4 May 1875; d. Mexico City, 31 December 1945) offers a compelling example of a compositional language written in a traditional, late-nineteenth-century style. Despite the rise of nationalism in Mexican music during his lifetime, Carrasco continued to write in a conservative manner. He studied flute and organ in Jalisco, where he was appointed organist and conductor of the children's chorus at Guadalajara's cathedral. He began composing at the age of 12, and his compositions won him first prize and a gold medal at the Jalisco Regional Exhibition in 1902. He immigrated to Mexico City in 1918, where he remained until he died. While much of his music has been lost, musicologists estimate that he wrote approximately 200 works, including piano pieces, religious music, choral works, zarzuelas, and chamber music. His surviving compositions demonstrate the influence of composers such as Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924) and César Franck (1822–1890).



**Ricardo Castro** (b. Durango, 7 February 1864; d. Mexico City, 28 November 1907) was one of the most widely recognised pianists, composers, and teachers of late-nineteenth-century Mexico. In 1877, after his family immigrated to Mexico City, Castro enrolled in the national conservatorium to study composition. In 1883, he represented the Mexican Government as a pianist and composer at the Bolívar centenary in Venezuela. He made his first international tour in 1885, representing Mexico at the New Orleans Cotton Festival and performing in Philadelphia, Washington, and New York. From 1885 to 1902, he was an active performer of chamber music and, during this period, completed his famous opera, *Atzimba* (1901), as well as several of his characteristically Schumannesque piano pieces.

After consolidating a successful career as a piano virtuoso, he travelled to Paris to study piano with Eugen d'Albert (1864–1932). While living in Europe, he travelled extensively, published numerous works, and regularly wrote articles for Mexican newspapers, including a 1906 article on female pianists. After returning to Mexico City, he became director of the national conservatorium at the request of the Minister for Education in 1907. Both his Caprice-Valse in E Major op. 1 and Polonaise in G-sharp Minor op. 11 were published by the prestigious German publishing firm Hofmeister.



**Ernesto Lecuona** (b. Cuba, 7 August 1896; d. Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 29 November 1963) wrote his first composition at the age of 11. He graduated from the national conservatorium in Cuba in 1913, receiving first prize and a gold medal. As the leader of a dance band (“Lecuona’s Cuban Boys”), he made several international tours, performing in Latin America, Europe, and the United States of America. He immigrated to New York, where he wrote music for films, musicals, and the radio. When performing, he played his own works as well as compositions written by other Cuban composers. While his salon piano pieces and their characteristic Afro-Cuban rhythms became very popular in Latin America, late in his career he developed a more formal style. His late works, including a piano trio and fragments of a string quartet, reveal a compositional language greatly influenced by Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971).



Following a successful tour in 1871, **Ernesto Elorduy** (b. Mexico City, 11 December 1853; d. Mexico City, 6 January 1913) immigrated to Hamburg and lived in Europe for 20 years. In Europe, Elorduy studied with Clara Schumann (1819–1896) and Anton Rubinstein. He lived in Paris from 1880 to 1884 and worked as Mexican consul in Marseilles, Santander, and Barcelona. He returned to Mexico in 1891 and taught at the national conservatorium from 1901 to 1906. He became the first Mexican composer-performer to build a successful career performing his own piano works, writing approximately 100 short piano pieces (all of them published). His mazurkas, berceuses, and songs without words demonstrate the influence of composers such as Fryderyk Chopin (1810–1849) and Robert Schumann. As a result of his trips through the Balkans and Turkey, the unique character of his music often reveals an amalgamation of styles that combine the popular rhythms of Mexican dances with the use of modal atmospheres.



While **Luis G. Jordá** (b. Barcelona, 16 June 1869; d. Barcelona, 20 September 1951) was born in Catalonia, he spent most of his career in Mexico City, where he was an active pianist, composer, and conductor. Jordá decided to immigrate to Mexico following a successful tour as a conductor of zarzuelas in 1898. During his time in Mexico, he played an important role as a performer of chamber music, introducing Mexican audiences to numerous nineteenth-century compositions and founding a well-known music periodical. He won first prize in two national composition competitions, in 1902 and 1910, the latter commemorating the centenary of Mexico's independence. While he was mainly known as a prolific composer of zarzuelas, some of his vocal works and piano pieces were among the bestselling scores in nineteenth-century Mexico.

**Manuel M. Ponce** (b. Zacatecas, 8 December 1882; d. Mexico City, 24 April 1948) began his career as an organist in 1895. Ponce immigrated to Mexico City to study piano and harmony in 1900. In 1904, he moved to Europe to continue his piano studies with Martin Krause (1853–1918), whose pupils included Edwin Fischer (1886–1960), Rosita Renard (1894–1949), and Claudio Arrau (1903–1991). After returning to Mexico, he taught piano at the national conservatorium. In 1910, he formed part of a prestigious panel of judges, alongside Fauré and Saint-Saëns, in a composition competition commemorating the centenary of Mexico's independence (won by Luis G. Jordá). In 1912, his students—including Carlos Chávez (1899–1978)—gave the first public performance of Debussy's piano music in Mexico. In the same year, he performed the premiere of his own Piano Concerto, a composition that displays an interesting blend of Lisztian virtuosity and Mexican tunes. As a result of the Mexican Revolution, he left Mexico from 1915 to 1917 and, like other Mexican artists, immigrated to Cuba where he actively performed, gave lectures, and wrote music reviews. In 1917, he returned to Mexico and became the conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra. From 1925 to 1933, he settled in Paris, where he studied with Paul Dukas (1865–1935). After returning to Mexico, he focused on teaching, composing, and disseminating his contributions as an editor and musicologist. While his compositions, lectures, and publications greatly influenced the development of nationalism in Mexican music, some of his works reveal the influence of impressionist and neo-classical music. Ranging from the late-nineteenth-century style of his first piano compositions to the atonal and bitonal language of his later works, his style was continuously evolving.



**Mario Ruiz Armengol** (b. Veracruz, 17 March 1911; d. Cancún, 22 December 2002) was born into a family of actors and singers of zarzuela. Ruiz Armengol played various wind instruments during his student years and studied piano at the national conservatorium in Mexico. He also studied harmony and composition with José Rolón (1886–1945). He became well-known after working as the arranger and accompanist of Jorge Negrete and Pedro Vargas (both famous singers who appeared in numerous films produced during the golden age of Mexican cinema). Because he had an extremely successful career as a folk musician, Mexican audiences are very familiar with his arrangements of folksongs; however, he also composed works in a classical style, which reveal an impeccable use of traditional harmony. His most celebrated piano works include short pieces that use jazz-influenced atmospheres.



**A**lejandro Alberto Téllez Vargas studied a bachelor's degree in music performance at the Escuela Superior de Música (México). He has taken masterclasses with Geoffrey Tozer, Leslie Howard, Peter Donohoe, Sergei Edelman, Peter Jablonski, Santiago Rodríguez, Gregory Allen, and Stephen Hough. In 2008, Alejandro was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to study a master's degree in piano performance, with a related field of studies in music and medicine, at the University of North Texas (UNT), where he studied under the guidance of Gustavo Romero. He completed a Ph.D.



in Disability Studies in 2016 (University of Melbourne) and was an Endeavour Postgraduate Award Holder from 2012 to 2016 (Australian Government). In 2018, Routledge—one of the most prestigious publishers in the academic world—published his book, *Disability and Music Performance*, which explores the disabling barriers in the world of classical music encountered by musicians with an intellectual, physical, sensory, or neurological disability, or an acquired brain injury. He currently works for the Department of Education and Training (Victorian Government).



1	ALFREDO CARRASCO	Adiós in A Major (“Farewell”)	3:40
2	RICARDO CASTRO	Prelude in A Minor, op. 15, no. 2 (“Barcarolle”)	2:25
3	ERNESTO LECUONA	A la Antigua in D-flat Major (“Old-Fashioned”)	2:07
4–6	ERNESTO ELORDUY	Danzas Tropicales (“Tropical Dances”)	
		<i>Vivo</i>	2:05
		<i>Vivo — Languido, lento</i>	2:29
		<i>Lento</i>	2:19
7	LUIS G. JORDÁ	Danzas Nocturnas (“Nocturne Dances”)	6:45
8	RICARDO CASTRO	Polonaise in G-sharp Minor, op. 11	7:55
9	ERNESTO LECUONA	Ante el Escorial in E-flat Minor (“In Front of the Escorial Monastery”)	4:50
10	MANUEL M. PONCE	Scherzino Mexicano in D Major	1:48
11	ERNESTO LECUONA	La Comparsa in F-sharp Major (“Carnival Procession”)	1:49
12	MANUEL M. PONCE	Intermezzo in E Minor	2:34
13	MARIO RUIZ ARMENGOL	Prelude for piano or harp in E Major	3:27
14	ERNESTO LECUONA	Gitanerías in D Minor (“Gipsy Trickeries”)	1:50
15	RICARDO CASTRO	Caprice-Valse in E Major, op. 1	7:58

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