

ALFREDO ROLANDO ORTIZ

World Adventures With My Harp

Art Form: Music

Style: Traditional and Contemporary

Culture: South American

MEET THE ARTIST:

Alfredo Rolando Ortiz was born in Cuba in 1946. Composer, lecturer, author and recording artist, he emigrated to Venezuela in 1958. He began learning to play the Venezuelan folk harp from a school friend in 1961. He commenced his studies with Alberto Romero on the Paraguayan harp a year later. Within three years, Alfredo was performing professionally, recording his first album, and beginning his medical studies in Medellin, Colombia. Music, which eventually would win Alfredo international acclaim and become his life's focus, supported him through his medical studies. Like his background, Dr. Ortiz's harp music is rich and eclectic. His repertoire covers the folk, classical and popular music of many countries. This multi-talented artist is a master on the Paraguayan harp, a warm and accessible educator, and an engaging performer for audiences of all ages. He is also a prolific recording artist and composer whose work has been performed and recorded by classical and folk harpists in many countries.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

World Adventures With My Harp is woven around Alfredo Ortiz' real life journey of migrations, hardships and successes. The performance, which features the Paraguayan harp, reflects the rich cultural and musical heritage of South America. It demonstrates lively and contrasting traditional and popular music from several countries, and includes some well-known melodies like *La Bamba*. Dr. Ortiz also explains the harp's construction and the way construction affects sound and technique. Questions are encouraged during the performance, and one student is invited to play the instrument.



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

Music is an important element in the life of any culture, and is in part shaped by its history. First brought to South America by the Spanish in their early days of exploration and conquest, the harp evolved into an important instrument in folk and popular music. In 1588, Jesuit missionaries arrived in the settlement of Asuncion, Paraguay and converted many Guarani Indians. They built villages, taught wood carving used for church ornamentation, and shared their music for church services. They were expelled by King Charles III of Spain in 1767, but the Guarani continued to build and play the harp and guitar, blending their music with Spanish music to create a new musical sound.

Today the harp is an important instrument in folk and popular music throughout South America. Harps are played for festivals and celebrations by street musicians and concert artists, and in ensembles with guitars and violins. In ensembles, musicians will often play "head" or "ear" music. This is music they have learned by listening and improvising instead of reading from a printed score. Ensemble music also varies from region to region. The *galopa*, a lively dancing rhythm, and the *guarania*, a slow and flowing melody, are two types of Paraguayan music traditionally played on the harp and accompanied by guitars playing a syncopated strumming pattern.

Harp design, like harp music, varies from region to region but the *Arpa Paraguaya*, the national instrument of Paraguay, is the most popular of the Latin American harps. Hand crafted from wood and very light (10-15 pounds), the *Arpa Paraguaya* has a bright, powerful sound. Most South American harp players use their right hand to play the melody while their left is used to play the accompaniment on lower strings. The right plays with the fingernails while the left with fingertips or fingernails. The harp is tuned to the diatonic major scale or natural minor scale. Most harps have 32 to 36 nylon strings.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What did you think of the *Arpa Paraguaya*? How does the shape, weight, and number of strings affect the harp's sound?
- Discuss the 'full' sound of the music played on the harp. What happens to the way a song sounds when the harpist can both play the melody and accompany it?
- Which of the songs did you like best? Why? What country was the song from?
- Were there distinct differences or similarities between the music of different countries or regions? What were those differences or similarities?
- What are the origins of South American harps?
- How did harp music develop and evolve in Paraguay?

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - SOC STUDIES:

Paraguay is a country whose history includes colonization by Spain and the resulting blending of Indigenous and Spanish cultures. This blend is evident today. Paraguayan folk and popular music incorporate both cultures' instruments, rhythms and melodies, and song lyrics are often composed of both Guarani and Spanish words. Not only does the music, art and literature of Paraguay reflect this cultural mix, but so do government policies. For example, Spanish and Guarani are the country's two official languages and while both are spoken in large cities, Guarani is the everyday language of the countryside. Have students select another type of folk or popular music and in cooperative groups research and report on its origins and evolution. Suggested research questions: Is this music a blending of two or more cultures? Which cultures? Are there elements in the music that are unique to each culture? What are they? Are there instruments that are unique to each culture? What are they? What can this blending tell you about the culture's history?

- Legend:
- 🌀 Artistic perception
 - ❖ Creative expression
 - ▶ Historical & cultural context
 - ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
 - * Connections, Relations, Applications

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- ❖ In pairs, have students explore the concept of "head" or "ear" music. First, have each student create a sound pattern using body percussion: slaps, claps, stomps, clicks, etc. Once their phrases are established, have them mirror or mimic each other's phrase. Then incorporate a few of their own unique sound patterns while remaining true to their partner's original phrase.
- 🌀 Listen to the two types of Paraguayan music which are traditionally performed on the harp: the *galopa*, a lively dancing rhythm, and the *guarania*, a slow flowing melody. Ask the students to draw a picture while listening to each type of music, using the music as a source of inspiration for their artwork. Encourage them to experiment with the elements of line, shape and color as they express their ideas and feelings.
- ❖ The class may enjoy learning some Latin American songs after hearing the music in the performance. Many songs are available in music textbooks. Teach the class a song. Students who speak Spanish can be of help in teaching the words. Make up movements to go with the last few lines of the song. After the students learn the song, add hand drums, claves and maracas.
- ▶ On a map which includes both South and North America, identify and label the places that Spain explored and then conquered and colonized in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.
- ⇒ Investigate and report on another musical instrument that is often used in South American music (e.g., guitar, claves, maracas). What are its origins? Describe any changes in the instrument's evolution or use, and discuss any distinct or special qualities that it may have.



BIBLIOGRAPHY/WEBLINKS:

- Jermyn, Leslie. *Cultures of the World - Paraguay*. Benchmark Books, Salt Lake City, UT, 2000.
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