

## Mexican-Born U.S. Pianist/Composer Orlando Otey



At the age of two Orlando Otey was placed at the piano by his mother. It was 1927. This young pianist went on to give his first concert at the age of four at the Teatro Iris in his native Mexico City.

Otey was written up in *El Nacional Revolucionario* September 28, 1929 – “Mexico Tiene El Orgullo De Contar Con El Pianista Mas Pequeno Del Mundo” (‘Mexico Is Proud To Have The World’s Youngest Pianist’).

By the age of five he had toured Mexico and by seven he had toured Europe. He began to study with Luis Moctezuma at that time, and when he was just 14 Otey composed his first piano concerto, already having completed a list of other compositions.

In 1940 while on tour in Mexico giving programs of his own compositions that included several mazurkas, nocturnes and etudes, Otey was heralded as *The Chopin of Mexico* by the press.

Otey could improvise in Romantic-Chopin style, and his compositions, listeners and critics quipped, were “works that Chopin forgot to write”. Otey was not enthusiastic about this name, but it followed him in the press internationally for many years afterwards.

At 17 Orlando became the youngest professor on the faculty at the University of Mexico School of Music where he taught and began formulating systematic ways to present music to students. At that time WWII was escalating, and Otey enlisted, trained and was deployed as a co-pilot in the European theater. When he returned to Mexico in 1944 he re-focused his ambitions as a concert pianist. And after touring in Mexico he headed to the U.S. where a scholarship opportunity arose at The Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, PA. Otey was awarded a full scholarship based on his piano concerto and other works, and he studied with Gian-Carlo Menotti and Vladimir Sokoloff.

In 1949 Otey applied and was accepted as one of three pianists to represent the U.S. at the Chopin Centennial Piano Competition in Warsaw Poland. Though performing admirably Otey encountered a bias from a Soviet judge who indicated Otey should compete for Mexico rather than the U.S.. Disappointed, Otey returned to the U.S., but was subsequently questioned about his visit to communist Poland as the McCarthy era of the 1950’s arose.

Otey continued to compose and turned his focus in the 1960’s to teaching in the Philadelphia area. In 1968 Otey became Executive Director of the Wilmington Music School, making numerous improvements to the curriculum and adding distinguished teachers to the faculty. In the mid 1970’s Otey began his own school of music and thereafter continued to refine his teaching methods organizing a systemic approach that allowed students to excel in the understanding of notation, scales, modes, staffs, rhythm and other aspects of music composition. He developed *The Otey Music Theory System* which is separated into 9 patterns of music that comprises a holistic approach for students. Otey performed concerts until 2002 as well as recorded with Ionian Productions, Inc..

The feedback Otey received included, “...Otey has maintained a fluent technique as an octogenarian, like Vladimir Horowitz and Arthur Rubinstein” - Andrew Quint, Philadelphia Music Makers Magazine, 2008

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