

Liner Notes For
Tenochtitlán 1325
Orlando Otey
The Chopin Of Mexico



About the Music

Tenochtitlán was the capital of the Aztecs founded in 1325 that fell to the Spanish in 1521 and became what Mexico City is today. The selections in this album were written and performed by Mexican-born U.S. Pianist/Composer Orlando Otey (b. 1925), who became known as "*The Chopin of Mexico*" by the age of 15. The following descriptions of his music provide insights about Otey's life and influences growing up in Mexico before moving to the United States in 1946:

Fantasia Mexicana (Mexican Fantasy) written in 1939 is based on the unique dance and ballad styles of Mexico's colorful folkloric music.

Sonata "Adelita" 1982 is based on jazz idioms within a classical framework. During the revolution to overthrow the dictator Porfirio Diaz in 1910, a song called "Adelita" was born in Mexico. This Mexican theme is analogous to the 1861 U.S. Civil War themes "Dixie" in the south and "Battle Hymn of the Republic" in the north. The Otey second sonata is called "Adelita" because Otey uses this theme of the Mexican Revolution in the second movement. A bi-tonal arpeggiated bass line is distinctive in Otey's music and is used in the third movement to represent the complexities during the changes in Mexico following the revolution.

Preludio y Tocata "Alacrán" (Prelude and Toccata "Alacrán") written in 1956 is based on the Aztec "Dance of the Scorpion". The Prelude depicts the ebb and flow of Aztec life in the forests and cities. The Toccata, with its driving rhythm of alternating measures of three and four beats, combines idioms of the "Alacrán" with blues harmonies representing the ceremonial fervor of Aztec rituals.

El Mar de Galilea (The Sea of Galilee) written in 1939 is a Romantic work filled with flourishes and trills. One can hear the sea crashing on the shore in some passages yet feel the calm sunset reflecting off the waves in others. This is one of Otey's compositions that is so '*Chopinesque*' in style that it is obvious why he became known as "The Chopin of Mexico". And, it reflects Otey's own spiritual journey through his life since he ultimately re-titled it from the original work that he wrote at age 14.

Sonata "Tenochtitlán" 1948 depicts the history of Mexico from the first note, and describes the famous flight of the eagle to the cactus plant, where the eagle devours a serpent. This later became the symbol of Mexico and the origin of the city itself. The second theme in the first movement develops on a pentatonic Aztec scale. The second and third movements reflect the European influences imposed on the Aztecs by the Spanish Conquistadors who, led by Hernán Cortés, were awed and speechless when they saw for the first time the beautiful thriving Aztec city, Tenochtitlán. The historical-music timeline continues through to the last note of the fourth movement, which depicts the Mexican War of Independence in 1810. It features the folkloric Mexican theme, "El Coconito", arranged into a *vivace* classical-jazz interfusion.

Arabésque written in 1950 is a gentle dancing composition. The left hand maintains a curling, turning motion while the melody guides you through the dance. This work is much like a clock, in that the motion appears so smooth, yet the construction is complex using a bi-tonal arpeggiated bass line. The *Otey Music Theory System* was in its early stages of development when Otey wrote his Arabésque, and this composition marks a transition point in Otey's life, as he pursued perfecting his theory and teaching method thereafter.

Seis Pequeños Estudios (Six Little Etudes) written in 1938, when Otey was 14 years, are Romantic style exercises that critics and audiences alike quipped were "*works that Chopin forgot to write!*" And, like Chopin, Otey wrote these etudes so he could enjoy practicing.

Para Diáne written in 1990 is a nocturne. This melodious work is gentle and dream-inducing, yet Otey uses interesting harmonics and compositional techniques to construct a more intricate composition than first meets the ear.

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About The Artist

1929 was the year that Mexican-born U.S. Pianist/Composer Orlando Otey first walked to the center of the Teatro Iris concert stage in Mexico City, sat down at a grand piano and won the hearts of an audience with his artistry. At that time he was four years old.

By age seven he had toured Europe and by 15 had become known as "*The Chopin of Mexico*". At age 17 he was the youngest faculty member at The University of Mexico City National School of Music.

In 1949, following attendance to Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, PA through a scholarship awarded for his compositions, Otey was selected as one of three pianists to represent the United States at the Chopin Centennial Piano Competition in Warsaw, Poland. Also, during a concert tour of Greece in 1968 Otey was acclaimed "*The Poet of America*". For more about Orlando Otey please visit www.ChopinOfMexico.com.

Over the years the press has given Otey rave reviews for his music, such as:

**"...Otey has maintained a fluent technique as an octogenarian,
like Vladimir Horowitz and Arthur Rubinstein"**

Andrew Quint, Philadelphia Music Makers Magazine, Sept 2008 Issue

"A brilliant performance by Otey ... he should play for us more often."

Evening Journal, May 6, 1977

... [Otey's] own work, 'Toccata' was a brilliantly performed and brilliantly written piece."

The Morning News, Apr. 19, 1968

**"Mr.Otey is to be heartily congratulated ... for presenting
a program which was in every way interesting and thoroughly enjoyable."**

The Main Line Times, Jan. 26, 1956

Engineered, Mastered & Produced by Alexander V. Otey
Co-Produced & Art Direction by Amy S. Otey



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Tenochtitlán 1325

Piano Music by Orlando Otey • The Chopin of Mexico



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