

Luis Zubillaga (1928–1995) was an Argentine composer and educator. He was born in Flores, Buenos Aires and was the lifelong partner of artist Elda Cerrato. As an adolescent, he felt that music, especially jazz, was his calling. From 1948 to 1952, he studied trumpet, theory and harmony with Bernardo Barbará; piano, harmony and composition with Cayetano Marcolli; and from 1955 to 1959, he studied composition with Juan Carlos Paz.

After living in Venezuela from 1960–1963, Zubillaga returned to Argentina and took up a lectureship at the National University of Tucuman in 1964. Further appointments were held at the National University of La Plata, the Central University of Venezuela and the Conservatory of Music in Moron, Argentina. In 1973, he served as Artistic Director of Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires.

Zubillaga's passion and uniqueness as a composer is inseparable from his spiritual search. As a youth, he felt deeply moved by the music of George Gurdjieff and Thomas de Hartmann. Zubillaga's own music not only intends to evoke highly charged emotional inner landscapes, but also expresses his political militancy and the cultural struggles of 20th-century Latin America.

A composer of more than 30 works, Zubillaga himself divides his output into three stages. Notable works from his first period (1961–1966) include "Haiku", "Passages in Fluctuation", both for solo piano, "Directions" for String Quartet, as well as "Music for 10 Instruments" for the film *El Huerco (Hell)*. A turning point arrived in 1967, with his music taking on more subtle expressive nuances, such as the timbral effects of "Ambientes" for solo piano, composed in 1967. In 1968, he became a member of the New Music Group (*Agrupacion Nueva Musica*) presided over by his teacher Juan Carlos Paz.

His third period began from 1970 when his music becomes more improvisatory, perhaps due to his experiences playing in the Group of Improvisation (*Grupo de Improvisacion*) with Enrique Gerardi and Jorge Blarduni. Representative pieces include "*Cuando estamos, cuando no estamos*" for 8 instruments and "*Todos los dias... ninguno*" for chamber ensemble, which won the composition award at the Simon Bolivar University in 1978.

Zubillaga composed *Ongilash* in 1968. The title originates in the music of George Gurdjieff, a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke and the first word pronounced by the composer's new-born son, Luciano, to whom the work is dedicated. It is written for a large orchestra which includes three saxophones, multi-divided strings and extensive percussion. The work avoids using conventional musical language and notation and instead embraces an experimental graphic style, that engages the creativity of each of the performers, but within strict parameters. In the score, very few musical pitches are precisely defined.

During the course of the work, dynamics are taken to the limit, from the barely audible to quadruple *forte*, combined with special sound effects (such as having the strings play behind the bridge), meticulous durations stipulated in seconds, and the use of the voices of the performers. In these respects the listener can perceive connections with, on the one hand, American experimental composers such as John Cage and Morton Feldman, and on the other, with composers of the Polish avant garde 'sonorous school', particularly Krzysztof Penderecki.

*Ongilash* received a posthumous premiere performance in 2012 by the Argentine National Symphony Orchestra in Buenos Aires. The UK premiere was given on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2015 in London at the Bargehouse, Oxo Tower Wharf by the LCM Camerata and members of the ECO ensemble, conducted by Peter Rudnick. This event, forming part of the opening night of Sluice Artfair, was

curated by Gordon Shrigley and Filmarmalade and also included the premiere of the powerful feature film 'Things to Come' by the composer's son, Luciano Zubillaga.