

Macario Santiago Kastner (1908-1992)

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TEXTO EM HOMENAGEM A MACARIO SANTIAGO KASTNER (1908-1992) NO 25º ANIVERSÁRIO DA SUA MORTE
IN HONOUR TO MACARIO SANTIAGO KASTNER (1908-1992) ON THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS DEATH

ON 12 MAY 1992, ONE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY'S greatest pioneers in musicology, Macario Santiago Kastner, passed away. With him went eighty-six years of vivid, colourful memories of a life lived to the fullest. I first met Macario Santiago Kastner nearly forty-five years ago when a friend who knew of my interest in the clavichord suggested I might want to get in touch with him. I made the trip to Lisbon and there began a relationship which would evolve over the years from mentor to colleague to very dear family friend.

Within the walls of his unforgettable blue room with its countless bookshelves and array of keyboards, I spent hundreds of hours with Kastner. His desire to share his knowledge knew no limits. One thought would set off another, the information would tumble forth, the references and cross-references, the sheer memory... astounding. Often he would clamber up the ladder for a dust-covered book on an upper shelf that contained a note on a subject we were discussing. Though clearly the book had been dormant for many years, and though there must have been over a thousand books in the room, he had an uncanny way of always recalling exactly where each one was, even if he had not consulted a particular book in several decades. His insatiable curiosity and profound culture in all fields—history, art, literature, economy, sociology, etc.—made him one of the only true humanists that I have met in the strict sense of the term. This, combined with his exceptional memory and an amazing power of synthesis, gave him a singularly global view of the phenomena of music in its human context.

Musically, Kastner had an unequivocal preference for the clavichord, an instrument which he had been playing since the 1930s and on which, in his words, ‘man communicated with God’. However he never hid his decision that in his next lifetime he would play the harp, his second instrument of predilection. In the days when only Arnold Dolmetsch and a handful of others could define a clavichord, Kastner was presenting mixed programmes—a few pieces on the clavichord before turning to the piano or harpsichord—in what was a personal attempt to educate and familiarize the public with this instrument. To the end of his life, Kastner tuned and played his clavichords daily and they remained his greatest source of joy.

A passion for Iberian repertoire led him, in the 1930s, to monastic archives throughout Portugal and Spain. From his home in Lisbon he would traverse the Iberian Peninsula by taxi, procuring lodgings for himself and his driver in the monasteries or parish houses to which the archives were customarily attached. With his deft ability to recognize musical worth, he laboriously copied out hundreds of pieces which were later printed by Europe’s leading music publishers. Amazingly enough, some forty to fifty years later Kastner still remembered the whereabouts of pieces in remote villages that he had not had the time to copy and would send younger musicologists off to do the job in his stead.

Kastner knew and kept up correspondence with musicians and musicologists all over the world, a task simplified by his fluent command of eight languages. I myself have preserved well over one hundred two- to three- page letters, often typed in a combination of black, green and red coloured ribbons to differentiate visually his frequent switches from one language to another. Often I have wondered how many others have such a collection of letters from his hand. What I do know is that every Sunday, he would position himself ritually at the side of his closed, grand piano. Upon its lid would be placed his manual typewriter and there, standing, he spent the day conversing with the world at large, answering the continual flow of correspondence he received, with delight and enthusiasm. The distance between Lisbon and other Western capitals never isolated Kastner and never deterred him from keeping fully abreast of new developments in musicology. He received all the major periodicals and most specialized books in musicology were in his library well before I had ever seen them.

Erudite though he may have been, Kastner was a familiar sight in the teeming streets of Lisbon, where he delighted in making the rounds of the various shops, never failing to exchange familiar words with shopkeepers, asking after their families and exchanging bits of local news. In his eyes Lisbon remained a small town; he had frequented the same barber, tailor and commodity shops for half a century. He knew where to find spices, the best port and the choicest rabbit and he did each of

these things with the same enthusiasm he demonstrated in teaching, playing his clavichord and writing.

Here was a true humanist, a musicologist and mentor with a cultural understanding of Western man with few equals today. Coupled with all this was a poetic sensitivity which combined to form a truly exceptional human being and a man who, in his teaching, writing and work, has left an indelible mark and a model to follow as we make our way through the twenty-first century.

