
Journal

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Claudia Montero, Latin Grammy Award Winner

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Women Composers in Mexico and South America: Music for Piano

ANA CERVANTES

Among my primary goals as both a musician and a pianist has been to develop a repertoire of contemporary Mexican concert music and introduce it to audiences in Latin America, the United States, and Europe through live performances and recordings. With time, this goal has grown organically as a result of my two commissioning and recording projects:

1) *Rumor de páramo* (Murmurs from the Wasteland) for solo piano (2006-08). The central theme is Juan Rulfo, visionary Mexican proto-magic realist writer and photographer. The project was expanded to include a second compact disc titled *Solo Rumores* (Solo Murmurs). I knew from the beginning that I wanted to commission an international collection of composers, from both inside and outside the Ibero-American world, not just Mexico commenting on itself. It was a challenge to inform the non-Spanish-speaking composers about Rulfo and his work, but it was well worth it: the music that resulted from *Rumor* was extraordinary. In addition, among the musical creations that flowed from the project was a chamber opera on *Pedro Páramo* from Stephen McNeff of Great Britain, and a cantata from Alba Potes (Colombia), inspired by the same novel, to be premiered in New York City in May 2015.

2) *Canto de la Monarca: Mujeres en México* (Song of the Monarch: Women in Mexico) (2009-13). I asked sixteen composers from six countries for a piece for solo piano inspired in some way by a woman who played a transcendental role in Mexican artistic or social history. I chose the Monarch butterfly as the emblem for this project because it is a potent symbol for tenacity and valor in a body fragile only in appearance. (Monarchs, which migrate from North America to Mexico, are the only butterflies capable of transatlantic flight. They have been found as far away as Australia and the Canary Islands.) As with *Rumor*, I wanted *Monarca* to be Mexico in dialogue with the world.

In both projects the central theme emanates from Mexico, and the composers are from there and five other countries. In the case of *Monarca*, although the central axis of the project is women in Mexico,

I also invited male composers to participate because their perspective was equally valuable for me. Thus distinguished living creators, both women and men, comment on Mexico from within and without. As a performer, I do not aim to interpret women composers exclusively, but nevertheless I design programs that could be described as focusing on “compensatory history.” Of the *Monarca* project’s sixteen composers, fortuitously eight are women. (For more specific information on the *Monarca* project, please see my article in the *Journal of the LAWM*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2012.)

I have organized musical group residencies—often multidisciplinary—around

the music of Mexican composers and, more recently, around the themes of these two commissioning projects, both of which lend themselves very well to interdisciplinary activities. The first of these was *Muchas Voces – Un piano* (Many Voices – One Piano) in 2001, whose partners were the Mexican Cultural Institute of Washington, The Catholic University of America, and the Organization of American States. The closing concert was the occasion for the U.S. premieres of *A Contraluz* by Hilda Paredes, *Cuatro Piezas* by Georgina Derbez, and *Como el agua en el agua* by Marcela Rodríguez; as well as performances of *Salmodia I* by Alicia Urreta and works by

Claudia Montero, 2014 Latin Grammy Award Winner

Claudia Montero was awarded the 2014 Latin Grammy for the Best Classical Contemporary Composition for her Concerto for Violin and String Orchestra. Congratulations! The prize was awarded on November 20, 2014 in Las Vegas, Nevada, and her photo, holding the Grammy, is on our front cover. She will be writing an article about her award-winning work for the next issue of the *Journal*.

Claudia was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and has been an active composer for more than twenty years. Although she moved to Valencia, Spain in 2002, many of her compositions are still inspired by the soul of the tango and the emotions and evocations of her native city. Her music has been commissioned and performed by some of the most prestigious soloists, orchestras, and chamber ensembles. She has been featured as guest composer and lecturer at a number of music festivals, and her compositions have been played in concerts in Spain, France, Italy, Serbia, Montenegro, England, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Brazil, Mexico, the United States, Taiwan, China, and South Africa.

She is especially interested in multidisciplinary projects in which music

connects with other art forms; for example, she and the singer Agueda Fernandez Abad collaborated on the Alfonsina Storni Project. (Alfonsina Storni, 1892-1938, was one of the most important Latin American poets of the modernist period.) They commissioned several composers to write music based on her poetry, and they organized concerts featuring the commissioned works. Claudia has created exchange projects, taking her works and those of other composers to remote places in Taiwan, South Africa, South America, and Europe.

Claudia has taught seminars about Argentina’s chamber music at the Conservatory of Trieste, Cagliari, and Udine in Italy, at the University of Alcalá in Spain, and at Hsing Hua University in Taiwan. She has been Professor of Music and Performing Arts of the Generalitat Valenciana since 2003, teaching in the Composition Department, currently at the Conservatory Salvador Seguí Castellón. She has been interested in promoting the music of women composers for quite some time, and she founded the Women in the Arts Association in Valencia. As president, she has organized concerts, conferences, meetings, and seminars.

Mexican women composers of earlier generations: Guadalupe Olmedo (1853-1889) and María Teresa Prieto (1895-1982). Often when I plan a program, I place recent music into dialogue with works from the “standard” repertoire as a way of forming connections between the creation of today and that of yesterday. Sometimes the focus may be on women composers past and present, but just as often, the program combines genders. Mixed programming, whatever its focus, is a potent tool for enlarging the audience for new musical creation.

In 1998, I was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship and my project was to develop a repertoire of contemporary Mexican concert music for subsequent performance in the U.S. It is important to understand the situation in Mexico when I first started connecting with composers there. The Internet was still very limited and many people, especially in Mexico, had little access to it. At that time the idea of a composer having a website was barely a gleam in anyone’s eye. Today, with Wikipedia and Google and all the tools we have, this seems relatively trivial; in 1999 it was anything but. The only way to get touch with people was by telephone. Programs such as Sibelius and Finale were in their infancy in the U.S. and even more so in Mexico. Scores did not arrive as they do now, via email, in PDF format. No, they arrived via “snail-mail.” They were almost always photocopies of hand-written manuscripts, and they often had their share of author’s alterations. Thus all seven of the composers whose music I recorded on *Agua y piedra*—my first “made in Mexico” CD—were people with whom I first made contact on the telephone.

We did, of course, have *Ediciones Mexicanas de Música* (Mexican Music Editions) or EDIMEX, as they are fondly known here: the publishing house founded in the 1950s by Carlos Chávez and Rodolfo Halffter, whose sole mission is to publish the work of Mexican composers; and a very beautiful job they do, to this very day. But even they were able to publish only a small part of what was being produced. It was through Isolda Acevedo, the general manager, that I was able to contact Marcela Rodríguez, Federico Ibarra, Joaquín Gutiérrez-Heras, Mario Lavista, Georgina Derbez, Ramón Montes de Oca, and many more Mexican creators with whom I have had the honor to have some association. The composers whom I have known the longest are those

from Mexico. I am awed and moved by the growth and evolution I hear in their individual voices—all singular, all compelling—over the last fifteen-plus years.

One purpose of this article has been to catalog the works of several Mexican and South American women composers with whom I have had a musical, and in some cases a commissioning, relationship. The list is not exhaustive, and it is necessarily personal, since it is limited to music I have performed. (In the various lists of works, an asterisk after the title indicates that it was also commissioned by me.) I hope that as a result of my article the pieces that I have commissioned will be more widely performed and that fruitful musical relationships will germinate between composers and interpreters.



Ana Cervantes

In all cases, if you seek to learn more about new music in Latin America, the composers in this article will certainly be helpful sources: this is a generous community characterized by considerable solidarity. In that same spirit, I encourage you to seek out the voices of the next generation. The two generations of women composers I talk about in this article are already nurturing the voices of the new ones. In Mexico, in Colombia, in Brazil, they are working hard, they are growing and creating.

Silvia Cabrera Berg (b. 1958), Brazil

I first read through some piano music of Silvia Berg in 2003 or 2004 and very much liked what I heard, but didn’t see where it might fit into my programming. At the end of 2006, I needed to commission another thirty-odd minutes of music to round out the second disc of *Rumor de páramo*. A tiny voice inside me whispered:

What about South America? And almost immediately I remembered Berg. Like all of the non-Spanish-speaking *Rumor* composers, she knew nothing about Juan Rulfo; but when she Googled his name she stumbled upon the photo that would become the inspiration for *Dobles del páramo* (Reverberations of the Wasteland), the compelling piece that she composed for *Rumor*. So compelling in both inspiration and music, in fact, that *Dobles* is the redemptive final piece of that second disc, *Solo Rumores*.

When I started gestating *Monarca* in 2009, I had no doubt that I wanted Silvia Berg to be part of this new project. She has a very personal connection with Mexico, dating back to the 2007 world premiere of *Dobles del páramo* in Mexico City. Thanks to the support of the government of Denmark (where Berg was living at the time), she was able to come to Mexico for that concert and also give a talk and master class at the National Center for the Arts. We spent a day seeing some sights in the fabulous City of Mexico and our last stop was the Casa Azul (Blue House) of the artist Frida Kahlo in Coyoacán. Remembering that day, in 2010 Berg composed *El sueño ... el vuelo* (The Dream ... the Flight) for *Monarca*. The piece’s joint muse is the architectural plan of the Casa Azul and Kahlo’s painting *La Columna rota* (The Broken Spine).

The composer says in her program note that the piece is dedicated to me, “to Johnny, in memoriam [Berg’s husband who died suddenly in 2009], and to Frida Kahlo and the intense relationship existing between her work, her life and her house.” She continues, “Written in the form of a toccata, the composition emphasizes the virtuosic aspect of the piano in the broadest sense of the term tocar (‘to touch’). It is written in a structure that reflects the architectural plan of the Blue House: using four sections of 24 measures in constant metamorphosis, while the fifth section, also of 24 measures, is the coda: the transformation of the Monarch, the unplanned voyage that we all must make.” (Translation from Portuguese by Priscilla Hunter.) *El sueño ... el vuelo* has become a sort of iconic piece for *Monarca* and a signature piece for me.

For a catalog of Berg’s works, see <http://buscatextual.cnpq.br/buscatextual/visualizacv.do?id=K4796120H5>. The compositions I have performed include *Autumn*, 2007; *Dobles del páramo** (Reverberations

of the Wasteland), 2007; and *El sueño ... el vuelo** (The Dream ... the Flight), 2010.

Alba Potes (b. 1954): Columbia

I had heard some of Alba Potes' music in my pre-Fulbright New York City days, and was struck by her austere yet eloquent voice. Potes' *Seis instantes* (Six Instants) is potent music delivered in a voice of extraordinary economy of means. The piece has two muses: Charlotte of Belgium (wife of Maximilian of Hapsburg) and the environment. In her note on the piece, Potes says that it reflects her "concerns about the processes of destruction of the environment, animals, and human beings, all of them represented here by the Monarch butterflies." Potes explains that she selected "Charlotte of Habsburg, Empress Carlota of Mexico, for the fragility of her character that brought her to a complete emotional collapse after the assassination of her husband, Maximiliano, the Emperor, in 1867 in México." She explains further: "I chose her as my muse, inviting a meditation on the effects of violence on the emotions and lives of women."

One way or another, various *Monarca* pieces have proven to be profoundly moving, sometimes in unexpected ways for unexpected listeners. Potes' piece is one of these: listeners with very little experience listening to new music are often wiping their eyes when I finish the piece.

For a catalog of her works, see <http://albapotes.com/catalog.htm>. I have performed the premiere of *Desde el aire: Seis instantes** (From the Air: Six Instants) in México, the U.S., and Colombia.

Alicia Urreta (1930-1986): Mexico

Although alphabetically she is the last of the Mexican composers here, I put her first because Alicia Urreta was a kind of pioneer in Mexico: as interpreter, composer, and pianist.

Born in the state of Veracruz, Alicia Urreta trained at the National Conservatory of Music, where she studied composition with Eduardo Hernández Moncada and Rodolfo Halffter, who, exiled from Franco's Spain, like many of his fellow artists found a home in Mexico and made enormous contributions to this country's cultural life. As a pianist she took master classes with artists of the stature of Alfred Brendel and Alicia de Larrocha. Urreta later specialized in electronic and electro-acoustic music at the Schola Cantorum in Paris. She composed music for film, dance,

and the theater. From 1957 until her death in 1986, she was the pianist of the National Symphony Orchestra, and she served as the Director General of the National Opera Company from 1973 to 1976.

Both as interpreter and composer, Urreta worked tirelessly to promote new music. One of her most far-reaching efforts was the Festival Hispano-Mexicano de Música Contemporánea (Spanish-Mexican Contemporary Music Festival) (1973 to 1983), an annual event which Urreta founded and organized jointly with Spanish composer Carlos Cruz de Castro, making possible an impressive sharing between composers of both countries. The first six festivals took place in Mexico City; the seventh in Madrid, and from then on the festival alternated between Mexico and Spain each year. The festival reached across genres to present everything from solo instrumental works to various chamber combinations, contemporary dance, and in the final edition, the National Symphony Orchestra of Mexico participated. All the support for the ten years of this bi-national festival, both private and public, was raised by the two organizers.

On four occasions Urreta was awarded the Mexican Music and Theatre Critics' prize. Urreta's production for the piano is not enormous but includes *Salmodia I* (piano solo), which I have played a number of times, and *Salmodia II* (piano and tape). In both she explores extended techniques for the piano.

Special thanks to Carlos Cruz de Castro for information on Urreta. For additional information, see Wikipedia and various articles on the Internet, in particular http://www.sacm.org.mx/mmc/biografias_detalle.asp?id=1 (in Spanish). For scores, contact the composer's daughter, choreographer Pilar Urreta, at: https://www.facebook.com/pilar.urreta.3?fref=ts&ref=br_tf

Georgina Derbez (b. 1968): Mexico

Georgina Derbez, along with Marcela Rodríguez (see below), was one of the first composers I met in Mexico during my Fulbright year. In her *Cuatro piezas en seis sentidos* (Four Pieces in Six Senses) I heard a sensibility, at once astringent and sensual, that I found captivating. I played the *Cuatro piezas* quite a lot, including premieres in the U.S. and Cuba, and in 2004—with the invaluable help of a grant from the FONCA (National Foundation for Culture and the Arts of Mexico)—recorded them on *Agua y piedra: Música reciente de México*

(Water & Stone: Recent Music of Mexico). When the time came to design my first commissioning project, Derbez' was one of the voices I wanted present. *Del viento, la esperanza* (From the Wind, Hope) opens *Rumor* like a clarion call into the singular and complex world of Juan Rulfo: a worthy introduction to that collection of small masterpieces. It almost goes without saying that it was a signal honor to be chosen by Derbez as the muse for her *Monarca* piece, *Un vuelo para Ana* (A Flight for Ana). Derbez writes about her choice of muse: "I thought, *what better muse than Ana herself*, for she is a true warrior in the construction of musical projects of the highest quality and she is a most sensitive musician. So this piece is inspired by her. It seeks to express the volatile, ephemeral quality of butterflies. You will find that it abounds in quick, melodic turns and its rhythm strictly avoids strong beats in order to strengthen the airborne nature of the piece."

Scores are available from the composer at geoderbez@yahoo.com. The works that I have performed are *Cuatro piezas en seis sentidos* (Four Pieces in Six Senses), 1993; *Del viento, la esperanza** (From the Wind, Hope), 2006; *Un vuelo para Ana** (A Flight for Ana), 2011.

Gabriela Ortiz (b. 1964): Mexico

I had wanted to commission a piece from Gabriela Ortiz for years. Finally, with *Monarca* came the opportunity. One of the various magical things about Ortiz' participation was that I strongly hoped that Jesusa Palancares would be selected as someone's muse, to the point where I was prepared to contravene my own rule and specifically ask one of the composers to choose her. That proved not to be necessary because Gabriela, on her own initiative, picked her. Jesusa Palancares is the name Elena Poniatowska gives the heroine of her biographical novel about the life of Josefina Bórquez, *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*, translated into English by Deanna Heikkinen and available as *Here's to you, Jesusa!* Josefina/Jesusa was born in the Isthmus of Tehuántepec (Oaxaca) at the turn of the twentieth century. As a girl, and then as an adolescent, she became a kind of camp-follower with her soldier-father, and she was caught up in the fever—often fratricidal—of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1923). She traveled widely over Mexican territory, finally settling in Mexico City. This woman was illiterate—she recounted how when she first arrived in the capital she

could not find work and was half-starving because she couldn't read a sign that said "Help wanted"—but she was a warrior, indomitable and unquenchable.

Jesusa is a kind of monument to the spirit and valor of all Mexican women, and by extension of all women. Poniatowska wrote the book after doing a series of interviews with the real-life Bórquez, at that time some eighty years of age. Ortiz's two-part portrait of this unconquerable woman is in every way memorable, gripping, exhilarating.

A catalog of her works is available on her website (<http://www.gabrielaortiz.com>). I have performed her *Preludio y Estudio #3, Jesusa Palancares*.*

Hilda Paredes (b. 1958): Mexico

When I considered Paredes as part of the *Rumor* project, I was thinking of an austere yet lyrical voice that I had heard in some songs she sent to me along with the score of *Tríptico* (Triptych) in the early 2000s. And indeed, this plaintive voice is present in the middle section of the piece. The rest is violent, often brutal, with vertiginous changes of *affekt*, as one might expect from a composer who has also written opera. *Sobre un páramo sin voces* (On a Voiceless Wasteland) makes considerable use of playing inside the piano. The piece also utilizes the piano's extreme registers and percussive characteristics, the latter particularly with three-note clusters which fly up and down the keyboard. Paredes says of the piece, "I buried myself once again in the marvellous stories of *The Burning Plain* [El llano en llamas of Juan Rulfo]." She says, "Rulfo went beyond a depiction of landscape through words, rediscovering a Spanish very much of Mexico; his language is also rich in sound. I wanted not only to illustrate his sonic descriptions but also to explore the dramatic possibilities of characters from *The Inheritance of Matilde Arcángel* and the desolate landscapes of *The Burning Plain*; it was in these two short stories that I found my musical inspiration."

Visit her catalog of works at <http://www.hildaparedes.com/works.htm>. Her publisher is York University Music Publishers, <http://www.uympp.co.uk/composers/catalogue/hilda-paredes>. I have performed *A Contraluz* (Against the Light) from *Tríptico* (Triptych), which was premiered by Ana María Tradatti at the UNAM (National Autonomous University of Mexico), 1996. I played the U.S. premiere in

Washington, D.C. in 2001. I presented the world premiere of *Sobre un páramo sin voces** (On a Voiceless Wasteland) at the Festival Internacional Cervantino, Guanajuato, México, 2006, and performed it again in Veracruz and Seattle.

Marcela Rodríguez (b. 1951): Mexico

When I first spoke to Marcela Rodríguez in 1998 or 1999, she confessed that she had written only one work for the piano: *Como el agua en el agua* (Like Water in Water). This piece, as it happens, had been commissioned and premiered by Alicia Urreta. I was enchanted by the work and played it a great deal—including the U.S. premiere in Washington, D.C. and performances in New York, Cuba, New Mexico, and elsewhere—before recording it on *Agua y piedra* in 2004. Audiences, including many children, have always loved this piece.

I comment in the CD booklet: "Rodríguez' music has a fierce integrity born of its absolute loyalty to the moment which it wants to bring alive. Rodríguez seeks not to make a great musical architecture but rather to realize a very particular moment and make it sonically unique." The same comment holds for all of the pieces mentioned below. I would only add that the use of silence in *Entre las ramas rotas* (Among the Broken Branches), Rodríguez' *Rumor* piece, is devastating and tragic, reinforcing even more her evocation of the terrible moments to which Rulfo alludes in his unforgettable story.

For additional information, see <http://marcelarodriguezr.com/>. I have performed *Como el agua en el agua* (Like Water in Water), 1985; *El fuego* (Fire), 2001, which I premiered at the Festival Internacional Cervantino and played frequently elsewhere; *Flor robada #2* (Stolen Flower #2), the second of the two *Flores robadas*, 2001, which

I premiered in Washington, D.C.; *Entre las ramas rotas** (Among the Broken Branches), 2006, commissioned for *Rumor de páramo* and premiered at the Festival Internacional Cervantino; *Todo en fin, el silencio lo ocupaba** (Everything, after all, was filled with silence), 2010, commissioned for *Canto de la Monarca* and inspired by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.

Lilia Vázquez (b. 1955): Mexico

An accomplished pianist herself, Lilia Vázquez has written extensively for the piano. I find her use of the instrument to be complex and deeply engaging, and I admire her often asymmetrical rhythms and phrases. Her music has both intellectual rigor and a wonderfully hip-moving sensuality. I played the Guanajuato premiere of three of her *Seis estudios* (Six Etudes) in the 29th Festival Internacional Cervantino in 2001, and in 2004 recorded the first *Estudio* as the first track—a kind of prelude—on *Agua y piedra*. Recently, over ten years later, I selected *En la Laguna* (On the Lagoon), from her suite about nature, to perform on a concert honoring women composers and poets this past March 2015. The intellectual rigor is still there and the language is more economical than that of twelve years ago, but those hip-moving asymmetrical rhythms are still deliciously present.

Her catalog of works is available at <https://play.google.com/store/music/artist?id=Avfoabl5kbia3jquchh3ez5wgt4>. I have performed from *Seis Estudios para piano* (Six Etudes): #1, #2, #4, and from *Seis Momentos para piano* (Six Moments for Piano): #4, *En la Laguna*.

Enlarging the Circle: The Next Chapters

This is an ongoing story. In a sense, all music is. It is created, and then—with luck and commitment—it is interpreted and heard by myriad listeners. The commitment part has a lot to do with the interpreter. For

Music from Argentina: Adriana Figueroa Mañas

Adriana Figueroa Mañas, from Mendoza, Argentina, announces the 2015 release of her new compact disc, *Composiciones Sinfónicas y de Música de Cámara* (Symphonic Compositions and Chamber Music), a dual disc, with symphonic works on disc 1 and chamber music on disc 2. The compilation consists of recordings of live concerts performed by musical organizations from around the world. The project was supported with the help of the Province of Mendoza's cultural fund. The music on these discs offers a tour of Latin America and more specifically of Argentina, where the compositions feature the wide palette of colors, rhythms, and melodic and harmonic twists that evoke the different styles of South American music such as the tango and the folk music of Argentina and the Andes region.

me it is essential to share the music I love and believe in with as many listeners as possible. It has always seemed to me the height of folly to spend hundreds of hours preparing an interpretation only to perform the piece once or twice. It could be argued that I should spend more time preparing new repertoire and less time memorizing pieces I have already played. Perhaps and perhaps not. For a related blog, see <http://anacervantespiano.blogspot.mx/2012/08/thoughts-on-memorizing-really-really.html>

The thread that runs through all of this is that of connection: between this new music and audiences—whether in small towns in my home state of Guanajuato, or in Brazil, New York, Madrid, or in an international festival such as the Cervantino. “Only connect,” said the British writer E.M. Forster. For me, this includes the vital connection between composer and interpreter, between interpreter and listener, and between composer and listener through the interpreter.

Performances, Recordings, Videos

For the videos, this is a partial listing. For compact disc recordings, all are world-premiere recordings unless otherwise noted.

1) *Canto de la Monarca: Mujeres en México* (Song of the Monarch: Women in Mexico), 2013, Quindecim Recordings QP238

Silvia Berg: *El sueño ... el vuelo* (The Dream ... the Flight). Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d36HEkKTFG8> Brazil, 2010.

Georgina Derbez: *Un vuelo para Ana* (A Flight for Ana).

Alba Potes: *Desde el aire: seis instantes* (From the Air: Six Instants). Video: <http://vimeo.com/22365175>, Mexico, 2010.

Gabriela Ortiz: *Prehudio y Estudio #3, Jesusa Palancares*. Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ol4UD2RM76A&list=PL3C481B34FD446974&index=1>

2) *Solo Rumores* (Solo Murmurs), 2007, Quindecim Recordings QP186 (Second compact disc of the *Rumor* project)

Silvia Berg: *Dobles del páramo* (Reverberations of the Wasteland). Video: <http://vimeo.com/8953289>; REDCAT, Los Angeles premiere, 2009.

Hilda Paredes: *Sobre un páramo sin voces* (On a Voiceless Wasteland).

Marcela Rodríguez: *Entre las ramas rotas* (Among the Broken Branches). Video: <http://vimeo.com/8655012>; REDCAT, Los Angeles premiere, 2009.

3) *Rumor de páramo* (Murmurs from The Wasteland), 2006, Quindecim Recordings QP164

Georgina Derbez: *Del viento, la esperanza* (From the Wind, Hope). Video: <http://vimeo.com/9285365>; REDCAT, premiere Los Angeles, 2009.

4) *Agua y piedra: Música reciente de México* (Water & Stone: Recent Music of Mexico), 2004, ProDisc Mexico SDL 00147; realized with the support of the FONCA (National Foundation for Culture and the Arts, Mexico) and of the Institute of Culture of the State of Guanajuato.

Georgina Derbez: *Cuatro piezas en seis sentidos* (Four Pieces in Six Senses). Marcela Rodríguez: *Como el agua en el agua* (Like Water in Water). Lilia Vázquez: *Estudio #1 de Seis Estudios* (#1 of Six Studies).

An alumna of Bard College (USA) and a Fulbright-García Robles Senior Scholar (US-Mexico 1999-2000), Ana Cervantes is proud to be included in New York music writer Rebecca Lentjes' (Le Poisson Rêveur) list of Best of 2014: Women in Music. Cervantes names Joan Tower and the late Theodore Lettvin as her most important teachers. She has taught on the adjunct faculties of Princeton University and Westminster Choir College of Rider University, and at the University of Guanajuato. Cervantes, currently based in Guanajuato, Mexico, leads an active international life as a performer and teacher. Critics have praised her as "a physical, emotional performer with mastery of tone and color" (Newark Star-Ledger, USA) and as an artist of "commanding intensity" (Music-Web International, UK). (www.cervantespiano.com; www.anacervantespiano.blogspot.com; www.cantodelamonarca.com)

Ana Cervantes, Pianist: Observations

CARMEN CECILIA PIÑERO GIL

"It's marvelous to have been the midwife of thirty-nine new pieces for the piano...but I also play new music from 250, 150 or 100 years ago!" I think these words of Ana Cervantes, a pianist at the top of her profession on the Mexican and international scenes, roundly and accurately summarize the breadth of vision that her performance holds when she sits down to play.

My first contact with Ana Cervantes, the performer, was in 2009, at the Third Musicology Encounter, “Musicology from the Perspective of Latin America,” celebrated at the University of São Paulo in Ribeirão Preto, Brazil. At the University’s invitation, Cervantes gave an unforgettable concert whose epicenter was contemporary music. Her mastery of her instrument had a real impact on me. She showed a high level of technical skill, demonstrated by the grace with which she approached difficult passages, and she displayed a wide range

of expressive resources and musicality as well as a vibrant personality.

The rapport she established with the public, communicating with her words and body language, won the audience over immediately. The sense of warmth and understanding that Ana Cervantes projects in her recitals makes the public feel they are very much a part of the musical experience, in a constant feedback loop in which performer and listener walk hand in hand through the comprehension and delight of the musical work.

And what musical works they are! For Cervantes’ repertoire consists of the “new music” from the Renaissance through to the present day and spans a wide chronological, stylistic, and geographical range. The fact that this performer refers to the historical repertoire as “new music” reveals exactly the way in which she approaches such compositions, rejecting dead rituals to which a lot of programmers and performers have accustomed us. Cervantes takes on

Byrd, Bach, or Dvorak with the same freshness, intensity and rigor that unfolds in her translation of contemporary composers of the most diverse esthetic backgrounds. This reveals a depth of knowledge in her that exists not only at the level of the music. When one has the opportunity to have a conversation with this spontaneously communicative woman, whose well-chosen words flow easily and articulately, her education and intellectual interests are clearly seen. Ana Cervantes’ personality and preparation are dynamically on display in the organization and success of her professional projects, which range from investigation and research to artistic rigor.

Ana Cervantes’ versatility as a pianist is seen in the chameleon-like sounds that she knows how to create as interpreter of her instrument. Thus, when she approaches the classical repertoire, her subtle, always velvety sound does not reduce the solidity of the full and deeply sonorous element in it, when that is called for. This is made

possible, as has been noted earlier, by an outstanding pianistic technique that enables her to take on the exigencies of virtuosity of different stamps that “new composers” have demanded progressively from the Renaissance to our time. An emotional artist, Cervantes’ interpretation is inseparable from the passion of her performance, which she nevertheless knows how to control with notable mastery. Her phrasing, clear and musically balanced, is accompanied by an elegance of articulation that creates surprising beauty. Her CD *Amor de la Danza* (Love of the Dance) (2002) bears witness to this, moving through a repertory that begins with William Byrd and continues to today’s

composers. Her interpretation of Bach’s Partitas is especially remarkable and serves as the foundation of her inspiration.

Ana Cervantes claims her place as a happy *provocateuse*. She extends an elegant “invitation to the dance” to prominent composers who, inspired by the themes she proposes, make pieces distinguished by their balance and craftsmanship, which collectively work together in the programs Cervantes devises, live in concert or on recordings. Her personal dedication has given us various new edifices of contemporary artistic expression. With a simplicity peculiar to the greats, Cervantes confesses that for her the creation of any art is in essence

a mystery and a miracle. For her, it is a privilege to be part of the mystery that new music manifests. Ana Cervantes’ discography reflects her repertorial breadth and is a testimony to the professional history of one of the most interesting personalities on the music scene today. Cervantes, as a woman, is a true *sound treasure*, an explosive imaginer of cultural projects of the first order, an extraordinary, valued presence in the artistic-musical life of Mexico and abroad.

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The Art Song in Mexico

CECILIA MONTEMAYOR

Researching the Mexican Art Song

Songs are important in our lives: they have followed us since birth and joined us in our playtime activities. They are part of our daily schedule, and they guide us and inspire our spiritual and emotional feelings. For me, the combination of music and the poetry that brings an art song to life has always strongly affected my soul and my very being. I have toured the world singing the art song repertoire, and it has brought me much pleasure.

Ten years ago I started a research project on art songs written by Mexican composers. In those days, its scope was unknown. No information was available that could reveal whether or not the genre was an important part of Mexico’s musical history. My research was published by the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León in 2009 in a catalog of music for voice and piano entitled *El Lied Mexicano*. Its reception from fellow musicians and music lovers alike was outstanding. The results of this research show that the creation of the Mexican art song began when the country established itself as a republic in the year 1824 and has not ceased, reflecting the ever constant and ever changing artistic contributions of a nation that carries music deep in its soul. The catalog lists approximately 1,800 songs written by 260 Mexican composers, both men and women, half of whom are still alive. The composers did not confine their selection to texts in Spanish; they also chose texts in the main European languages in addition to texts in Nahuatl and other indigenous languages.

A catalog such as *El Lied Mexicano* is vital for all countries as a means of preserving their musical traditions. This catalog contains the most complete and reliable information on art songs by Mexican composers to date, and it would be useful for anyone interested in music for voice and piano, whether for music research, teaching, concert performance, or just personal enjoyment. The book can be found in the major libraries and music schools in Mexi-



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co, the USA, and Canada, and it is considered one of a kind in the international field.

Although the catalog has already been published, my research continues as an ongoing process of discovering new composers and their works and finding ways to make this heritage known. Having access to all of these works is fundamental for the study and diffusion of the Mexican art song. New lines of investigation can stem

from its analysis. It also opens up an array of songs from which to choose relatively unknown examples that could be used as class material by voice teachers or performed in non-conventional concerts that include works outside the typical repertoire. All of these possibilities and more are present in the MexicoLiederFest.

The MexicoLiederFest

A music festival is an occasion for celebration, revealing a microcosm of our musical and artistic communities. The MexicoLiederFest: International Art Song Festival, of which I am the artistic director, is a new musical option nationwide. It is the only music festival in Mexico dedicated to the art song. Art songs are presented from different historical periods and styles of composition. The main objective of the MexicoLiederFest is to contribute to the rescue and promotion of our musical heritage and its composers through concerts, photo exhibitions of composers and their works, masterclasses, and lectures. The festival strengthens artistic ties and networks of collaboration and cultural employment between national and international participating artists. It serves as a perfect channel to educate voice students in current vocal pedagogy as well as classic style through lectures and workshops. Its multidisciplinary format attracts both students and adults alike, and the different artistic disciplines offer multiple ways to attract audiences, which include musicians, singers, teachers, students, lovers of the vocal genre, and the general public.