

RUMOR DE PÁRAMO / *Murmurs from the Wasteland*

Ana Cervantes, pianist: commissioning artist

Rumor de Páramo (Disc One, 2006)

GEORGINA DERBEZ (MÉXICO, 1968): Del viento, la esperanza (*From the wind, hope*)

The piece seeks to evoke the atmosphere of enormous solitude and silence –the parched plain, useless and without life—through which four people walk in search of hope. This distant hope is only glimpsed, conveyed by the wind. The piece’s gestures, perceived from very far away (time seems to stretch out in the course of the journey) slowly tend toward a dialogue, and the things which represent that distant dream –the presence of a town, of human life, of greenness—become increasingly present.

CHARLES B. GRIFFIN (USA, 1968): Murmuring in Comala

Rulfo’s striking sonic palette --groaning wheels, rattling windows, falling rain and murmuring ghosts-- echoes the complex narrative unfolding, where we rarely begin by knowing whose voice we are hearing. A sound implies a someone making the sound, and so we recognize the voices peripherally, like registering a ghost image. We discover whose voice it was rather than whose voice it is. Equally striking is the novel’s non-linear conception of time. It flowers slowly in multiple directions. This is a lovely analogy to music, which is surprisingly multidirectional: we listen ahead and backward simultaneously, constantly reinterpreting each new musical gesture by placing it in its previous context and anticipating its direction.

JACK FORTNER (USA, 1938): Vine a Comala (*I came to Comala*)

Vine a Comala (“I came to Comala”) are the first words in Juan Rulfo’s novel *Pedro Páramo*. The piece is constructed in a traditional A-B-A design (fast slow, fast), but is really a transliteration of some of the striking imagery from the novel: the mirage and mountains approaching Comala; the ringing of the church bell and the ghostly sounds of the village; and, finally, the death of the narrator, Juan Preciado.

TOMÁS MARCO (SPAIN, 1942): Siluetas en el camino de Comala (*Silhouettes on the road to Comala*)

This work for solo piano was written in 2005-2006 at the request of pianist Ana Cervantes, to whom it is dedicated, for her project *Rumor de Páramo / Murmurs from the Wasteland*. The work alludes to the ambience of suggestions, hints, half-tints and mysteries which Rulfo’s novel evokes, and is based on the constant but varied use of a descending figure which acts as a continuous presence as well as a formal connection, around which appear a series of sudden fleeting silhouettes, which emerge, take on presence and vanish. There is no descriptive and certainly no narrative intention – rather, a desire to evoke an ambience, to ground these mysterious but very real silhouettes which arise in the road to the mythical Comala.

HORACIO URIBE (MÉXICO, 1970): Cinco visiones sobre Comala (*Five Visions of Comala*):

- I. Chorale for the anguished soul of Miguel Páramo
- II. Murmurs in the village
- III. Sounds of the graveyard
- IV. Father Rentería
- V. Fiesta in Comala (after the death of Susana San Juan)

I imagine Rulfo’s world, *Pedro Páramo* and *El llano en llamas*, as desolate places deformed by heat emanating from the earth. Fantastical places, so common yet mysterious. Through this work I have tried to evoke images, not by anecdote, but simply the first images that came to me from the book

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the first time that I read it at the age of 10 or 12. I cannot avoid the association of a Mexico painted through the music of Silvestre Revueltas, and so I dedicate this piece to his memory.

EUGENIO TOUSSAINT (MÉXICO, 1954): Palabras sin sonido (*Words without Sound*)

Palabras sin sonido is sustained by an ostinato of diatonic cluster chords that form a non-conductive spiral around which a series of melodic lines are woven that are similar to soundless words. The piece is inspired by a fragment from **Pedro Páramo** in which the narrator speaks of hearing words that “*had no sound at all, did not resonate; were felt; but without sound...*”

VICENTE BARRIENTOS (MÉXICO, 1974): Llanuras Verdes (el color de la tierra)

(*Verdant Plains (the color of the earth)*)

The work and its development are inspired by a passage in **Pedro Páramo** in which the author speaks of green plains and of “*seeing the horizon rise and fall with the wind which moves the stems of wheat, the ruffle of the evening with a rain of triple ruffling. The color of the earth, the scent of alfalfa and of bread. A town which smells of spilled honey...*”

ANNE LeBARON (USA, 1953): Los Murmullos (*The Murmurs*)

The Mexican poet Octavio Paz once said that Juan Rulfo is “the only Mexican novelist to have provided us an image - rather than a mere description - of our physical surroundings.” Referencing spectral murmurs filtering through the streets of Comala, whisperings of dreams, and groanings in the ghost town cemetery of Juan Rulfo’s **Pedro Páramo**, this work for piano pays homage to the sonic images of the secret nonvoices populating Rulfo’s novel. I’m grateful to the marvelous pianist Ana Cervantes, for whom the composition is written and to whom it’s dedicated, for the invitation to write for her and to be included in her ambitious and worthy project.

FEDERICO IBARRA (MÉXICO, 1946): Páramo pétreo (*Páramo unyielding*)

The connection I found to Rulfo in this piece came through his obsessions; in fact, the author’s repetition of various themes or atmospheres in his stories such as the presence of dust, the wind; the journey, which can be flight, walking, obligation, persecution; of ghosts, confront my own obsessions. The construction of the piece is simple: A theme of three incessantly repeated notes gains variation through new counterpoint, giving it the character of a *passacaglia* or a *chaconne* though its structure is far from similar. The name of the piece evokes the author’s play with consonants in the titles of his books: the double L in el Llano en llamas, the P in Pedro Páramo, this last title having served my transformation.

CARLOS CRUZ DE CASTRO (SPAIN, 1941): Vértigo en Comala (*Vertigo in Comala*)

The simultaneity of contrary elements is a logical consequence in surrealism. The simultaneity of contrary elements is part of the essence of the novel **Pedro Páramo**, and the simultaneity of contrary and rapid elements provokes a dizzying whirlwind. The idea of vertigo in **Pedro Páramo** comes from the incessant contradiction between that which exists and does not exist, between that which never existed and is nevertheless assumed to have existed. Staticness, tedium, lassitude and existence without knowing why or what for in Comala, form part of a whole which in the novel produces an explosive vertigo as a reaction to the staticness, tedium, lassitude and existence without knowing why or what for in Comala. In this duality of dizziness, between the slow disturbance of the sense of reality and the whirlwind resulting from the awareness of conflicting elements, is the vertiginous idea which has given rise to this one and a half- minute sketch. This work, composed in Madrid in 2006, is dedicated to Ana Cervantes, who commissioned it for her project **Rumor de Páramo / Murmurs from the Wasteland**.

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MARIO LAVISTA (MÉXICO, 1944): Páramos De Rulfo (*Wastelands Of Rulfo*)

Páramos de Rulfo is intended as an evocation of the literary and photographic world of Juan Rulfo, a world of spaces which are open, slow, filled with emptiness, with murmurs, with things half-said, with silence and resonance; with time that does not move.

STEPHEN McNEFF (UNITED KINGDOM, 1953): Pavane (in the old way) for doña Susanita. Music of all kinds permeates the themes of *Pedro Páramo* even when it is mostly unheard. As a composer I could pick and choose from an abundance of ideas, but kept being drawn to the character of Susana San Juan, almost mad and unobtainable. I had a striking sound image of her which reminded me of Ravel's *Pavane* in its formality and restraint. I was inspired partly by my English predecessors who composed pavaues, embracing the mystery and elegance of the Iberian forms with their magnificent darkness as well as blinding light. There is a beguiling complexity of history and relationships here – a subtext of love and hate. We are persuaded by hints and gestures of things that were or could have been; like Pedro Páramo himself we hear the unobtainable. Towards the end the music becomes unrestrained, then quietens and, like the characters, crumbles to silence.

Solo Rumores / Solo Rumors (Disc Two, 2007)

ARTURO MÁRQUEZ (MÉXICO, 1950) Solo Rumores (*Solo Murmurs*)

Native of Sonora, Mexico, Márquez studied at the National Conservatory of Music, (he National Institute of Fine Arts of Mexico and the California Institute of the Arts, as well as pursuing his studies in Paris. Federico Ibarra and Morton Subotnick were his principal teachers. He has received recognition from the Mexican and French governments and is a former Fulbright Scholar. His music, for chamber ensembles, symphony orchestras and soloists, has been performed and recorded the world over, He has also composed music for a significant number of film, dance and theater projects. Various institutions have awarded him commissions and grants, including the UNAM, the Festival International Cervantino, the Seville World Exposition 1992, the Rockefeller Foundation and CONACULTA (Mexico). Since 2004, he has been a member of CONACULTA-FONCA's National System of Creators of Art and Music. In 2006, he was awarded the National Medal of Fine Arts of Mexico.

MARCELA RODRÍGUEZ (MÉXICO, 1951) Entre las ramas rotas (*Among the Broken Branches*)

This piece was inspired by the short story **The Man** from Juan Rulfo's book *The Burning Plain*. The complete passage from which I drew the title, is: "Not a drop of air, only the noise he had made echoing among the broken branches," a sentence filled with sonority and silence, as is all of Rulfo's oeuvre. Musically, the piece is based on an octatonic scale. The use of silence is reiterative and plays an important role in the building of the drama. The obsessive triplets become a metaphor for the man's stride and the fast notes, combined with the play between the two rhythms, represent the pursuit of the man: a phantom-like pursuit, born in the imagination of someone who -we are never quite sure- has perhaps from the very beginning of the story been dead.

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RAMÓN MONTES DE OCA (MÉXICO, 1953-2006) *Ecós del llano* (*Echoes of the Plain*)

When he delivered this piece, Ramón -only half-joking- called it an "archaic" work. Speaking of its vocabulary, he explained in answer to my questions. After thinking about this for some time I decided that for me the piece evokes, rather, a feeling of timelessness. There is here a certain serenity which results in part from circularity: much of the time we end up exactly -or almost exactly- where we began. There are outbursts of violence, and moments of great lyricism and passion; but we always return to something which, it seems, we can't escape; which always reasserts itself and which thus, is almost comforting; something which is, I believe, the timeless rhythm of life that Rulfo evokes, interior yet universal. (Note: Ana Cervantes)

JUAN FERNANDO DURÁN (MÉXICO, 1963) "Entonces el cielo se adueñó de la noche ... " (*"Then the sky took over the night ... "*)

Dedicated to pianist Ana Cervantes, the piece takes as its title and commentary in the score this fragment from the first version of the novel **Pedro Páramo**: "*Then the sky took over the night ... and next to the Media Luna always remained that heap of scattered stones that once was Pedro Páramo.*" Rulfo was referring to ghosts, a sense of belonging, destruction and death; also to hope and to silence. When I compose music, I think not of words but of my own ghosts and sense of belonging; perhaps also of the destruction of myths and their demise. I think of the hope of my fantasies and of the silence of my notes; I think of music, and in this case, of Juan Rulfo. This work is from the **Second Book of Preludes for Piano**, composed as part of my project for the National System of Creators of Mexico.

HILDA PAREDES (MÉXICO, 1958) *Sobre un páramo sin voces* (*On a Voiceless Wasteland*)

Through Ana Cervantes' initiative, I buried myself once again in the marvellous stories of **The Burning Plain** and transported myself deep into the heart of Mexico, a place that is close to my own heart. Each and every one of these stories presents a plethora of possibilities to explore. Rulfo went beyond a depiction of landscape through words, rediscovering a Spanish very much of México; 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 for this project.

JOAQUÍN GUTIÉRREZ HERAS (MÉXICO, 1921) *Canto lejano* (*Distant Song*)

This piece, inspired by the works of Juan Rulfo, attempts to evoke a certain simplicity associated with the countryside and the empty spaces portrayed by Rulfo both in his photographic images and in his writing. Nevertheless, in the middle of the piece the tempo changes and is transformed into something pressing and vivid, as if memory of a sudden became very present, fruit of some turbulence or yearning. Later, the music subsides, returning to the original theme and gradually drifting away. **Canto lejano** was composed in 2006 at Ana Cervantes' request for her project **Rumor de Páramo**.

PAUL BARKER (UNITED KINGDOM, 1956) *Pedro's Progress*

The music reflects the halting and teasing structure of Rulfo's **Pedro Páramo**. As in the novel, certain elements seem so normal and everyday, whilst mysterious events are encountered but without explanation in the text. The simple innocence of the language barely masks a sophisticated and surreal world, just beneath the surface. The work portrays a series of events or encounters which, it is hoped, leave more unsaid than explained. The five almost continuous sections seem to have no traditional development, but expand in duration, as if breathing in ever more deeply. They reflect, for me, the

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sense of wonder without explanation I associate with Juan Rulfo's extraordinary story. **Pedro's Progress** was written for and commissioned by Ana Cervantes.

LAURIE ALTMAN (EUA, 1948) **Pedro's Story**

Programmatic music for me can never be a literal, step-by-step process, connected back directly to a word, a gesture, an event or a moment. It seeks to find a tone, an impression, a taste of the thing –the source-- which helps to form the initial inspiration; the seizing of the "glimpse", as the painter Robert Motherwell put it. **Pedro's Story** was for me to be a piece with insistent motion. Nevertheless I wanted to find within this framework a lyrical character, something akin to an "aloneness" inspired by place, time and the sound of the written word. The piece is dedicated "to Ana, in friendship always".

ALEX SHAPIRO (EUA, 1962) **Luvina**

"Wherever you look in Luvina, it's a very sad place. You're going there, so you'll find out. I would say it's the place where sadness nests ... the breeze that blows there moves it around but never takes it away." Such is the bleak world described in Juan Rulfo's short story **Luvina**. When Ana Cervantes asked me to compose a piece in response to the late Mexican author's writing, I had not read any of his work and looked forward to the books that would soon appear in my mailbox. Sitting in my studio, immersed in the grim desert of dire poverty and hopelessness Rulfo describes in this and other equally moving writings, I cried. Long since finishing the music, my thoughts still return to a landscape that is unspeakably sad and, through Rulfo's words, a place where slow and insistent burdens are met with simple, unquestioning acceptance. (Published by Activist Music (ASCAP), EUA)

ZULEMA DE LA CRUZ (ESPAÑA, 1958) **Arenoso: N° 2 de Estudios sobre la tierra** (*Arenaceous: N° 2 of the Studies of the Earth*)

My musical thought in this piece was inspired by the writings and photographs of Juan Rulfo. His manner of capturing the elemental and his way of dealing with time, abandonment, death; as well as his photographic images, which reflect the unwritten, had a great impact on me and impelled me to create this piece. The grainy textures of the composition are akin to deserts, sand, dots, roads, plains, dry landscapes; their juxtaposition with the obsessive rhythm of a ritual dance 'Candomblé, dances in honor of (Goddesses', from Africa and widespread across Brazil and other Latin American countries, in the work's middle section, constitutes the tripartite structure of this study for piano. **Arenoso** was written during the spring and summer of 2007 upon the request of Ana Cervantes for her project **Solo Rumores**, and is dedicated to her.

SILVIA BERG (BRASIL-DENMARK, 1958) **Dobles del Páramo** (*Reverberations of the Wasteland*)

Dobles del Páramo reflects a universe in which time is not linear, in which different moments in history coexist as parallel realities, and in which all stages of narration and everything in the past are present. Allegory, reality and setting combine into one complex structure, in which fragments of memories are placed one on top of the other, tangible yet never said, and are united with silence, the ruined and the unwanted. The echoing and constant repetitions are dominant motifs, as if they were a way to assure, and at the same time re-assure, the pre-determined. Within the architecture of this universe, the echo unites, or later disassociates, seemingly diverse structures. **Dobles del Páramo** was written for Ana Cervantes project **Solo Rumores** and is dedicated to her.