

Viñao, Ezequiel

Viñao was born in Buenos Aires in 1960. He first studied piano with Manuel Rego, composition with Jacobo Ficher, and acoustics at Buenos Aires' Municipal Research Center for Communications. In 1978 his skill at the keyboard drew the attention of American pianist Earl Wild. The mid-seventies were something of a cultural dead end in Argentina, particularly in so far as aesthetics came to be subordinated to politics and questions about acceptable ideological lines. Wild was instrumental in securing a grant from the United Nations that allowed Viñao to leave his home country and move to New York City. From 1981 to 1987, Viñao attended the Juilliard School, where he also studied with Gyorgy Sandor and Milton Babbitt. After graduating, he was invited to Avignon, France, to work with Olivier Messiaen in a series of televised master classes. This experience had a lasting influence on Viñao's style, particularly in relation to the use of dissonance and consonance as pure color, rather than as tension and release.

Early on he developed an interest in music technology and in the rhythmic cycles of Indian music, both of which were later to become features of his music. In works from the 1980's such as 'La Noche de las Noches' for string quartet and electronics (*"concentrated, evocative, of austerely theatrical force"* The Times, London).

Another source of inspiration is the Mozarabic tradition, drawing from Spanish chant Viñao creates melodic contours that unfold into vast harmonic fields, as is the case in his 'Arcanum' (which Le Monde de la Musique described as possessing *"great contemplative beauty."*)

And then there is a practice Viñao calls "reinterpretation", which could also be described as the re-contextualization of past narratives or disciplines.

It is perhaps this sense of diversity in the music that has prompted a wide range of organizations and performers to collaborate with Mr. Viñao: the list includes Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center and City Opera in New York; the Almeida Theatre in London; the Musikverein in Vienna; the Kennedy Center in Washington; the Presences and Bourges Festivals in France; the Concertgebouw and the Philips Muziekcentrum in Holland; the Helsinki Biennale; the Tanglewood, Ravinia and Aspen Music Festivals; Stuttgart's Liederhalle in Germany; the Shobi Institute in Tokyo; musicians as varied as Dennis Russell Davies, Paul Hillier, Kristjan Jarvi, Anne Akiko Meyers, Joseph Kalichstein and Cristina Pato; ensembles such as Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France; American Composers Orchestra; Buenos Aires Philharmonic; Absolute Ensemble; Lincoln Center's Chamber Music Society and Chanticleer; as well as the Juilliard, St. Lawrence and Brentano String Quartets.

Viñao is the recipient of numerous honors, including a Kennedy Center Friedheim Award; a First Prize from International Music Council Latin-American Rostrum of Composers; and awards from the Argentinean Academy of Fine Arts, the San Antonio Festival and the New York Foundation for the Arts.

Viñao's more recent works include 'Saga', an evening length work for large chamber ensemble and soloists written for Miller Theater in New York and 'Sonetos de Amor', a multimedia show based on poems by Pablo Neruda for voice, bandoneón, clarinet, piano, bass, hand-drums and laptop commissioned by the Jebediah Foundation for the Lincoln Center in New York.

Program Notes

Sirocco Dust

For string quartet.

Seamen tell us of "red fogs" which they sometimes encounter in parts of the Mediterranean Sea. These showers of African dust, brick-red or cinnamon color, are called "Sirocco Dust" because of the Saharan winds which accompany them. A curious fact is that the dust is also found to consist of some particles whose habitat is not Africa, but South America, the result of a perpetual current of air that flows from southwest to northeast. Just like these red fogs, my quartet carries particles of varied sources: Tango, Flamenco, Qawwali (the devotional music of the Sufis), rhythms associated with devotional drums such as the Batá and the Darbouka, and of course elements of Western Classical music too ... these "particles" (rhythmic patterns in fact) shift and morph over a constant metric tide (a "groove" in threes), so that the conflict between pulse and pattern is framed by the relentless flow of a metrical wind.

This piece is the second in a set of three projected "reinterpretations" of minimalism. These reinterpretations do not focus on the repetitive aspects of minimalist techniques, but rather on the concept of "recurrence" as understood in Indian music. The idea of rhythmic cycles implies development in the sense that what we hear "comes back" rather than repeats. "Sirocco Dust" is a continuous movement where the "narrative" is entirely driven by rhythmic transformations. We hear five sections (A-B-A1-B1-C) but meter and tempo remain constant for the duration of the piece. All the materials we hear along the way originate from "particles" present in the first few measures. The effect I was looking for was that of a process where change occurs organically, and where a listener would be unable to pin-point the exact moment where a given transformation occurs: an environment with no ripples on its surface. In a sense, music that allows us to both drift and return to it without feeling lost, and at the same time, one that provides an experience that we would also find satisfying in those moments when we are disposed to follow every single note.