

Program notes

Berta Rojas at the Concertgebouw, 21 January 2012

I

VINCENT LINDSEY-CLARK (b. 1956)

Laura

The English composer Vincent Lindsey-Clark is himself a guitarist, a fact that affords him special insight into the challenges of writing for the instrument. This lively piece is named after his daughter Laura, and was written when she was very young. It reflects the joyful nature of a small child at play.

Vuelo de la mariposa

Vuelo de la mariposa is the third movement of the *Fiesta Americana* suite, written for Berta Rojas. Vincent wanted to include a piece that would highlight the expressive quality of Berta's playing. In this song, the gentle beating of butterfly wings can be heard alongside evocative pastoral melodies: the composer imagines that from his garden in England a butterfly takes wing, is carried on a breeze, and eventually comes to rest in Paraguay.

Salsa Roja

Salsa Roja is the second movement of *Fiesta Americana*. Berta requested the composer write a suite based on Latin American dance styles, with the pieces combining an element of fun as a balance to their intellectual challenges. The Cuban 'salsa' has become popular around the world; Vincent first heard it in London when Spanish friends took him to a live music club there. Berta introduced him to the salsa style known as 'tumbao', its popular two-bar bass groove first established by the great Cuban musician Israel 'Cachao' Lopez. In *Salsa Roja*, Vincent weaves the melodies and chord sequences around this bass line, condensing a nine-piece salsa band onto a single guitar.

QUIQUE SINESI (b. 1960)

Terruño

This song is inspired by the composer's homeland, Argentina, and his sense of the deep bond he shares with it. Musicians spend a lot of time travelling from one place to another, and cherish the knowledge that one place, with its sounds, smells, colors, and so much else beyond description in words, belongs to them, and they to it. Here the rhythm of the 'chacarera' is interwoven with melodies from the Argentinian coast.

Cielo Abierto

Sinesi's compositions are grounded in tango, and in folk music such as the 'candombe', from the Río de la Plata, whose rhythm is the basis for *Cielo Abierto*. The candombe is a Uruguayan form that makes use of three types of drums: the *piano*, the *repique*, and the *bombo*, all traditional Uruguayan percussion instruments whose sounds are imitated in the piece. Sinesi's music also mixes elements of jazz, classical and world music in subtle improvisations - which he himself plays on seven-string guitar, piccolo, steel-string acoustic guitar and charango! Berta plays an arrangement by Victor Villadangos.

EDIN SOLIS (b. 1963)

Pasaje Abierto

Suggestive of a journey into a broad, natural open space, *Pasaje Abierto* (*Open Lane*) was originally written in 2000 by the group Éditus for their album *Decadauno*. Based on forms and sounds from traditional Costa Rican music, the piece was adapted in two movements for the guitar at the request of the organizers of the National Guitar Competition of Costa Rica in 2005, so that it could be included in the competition as a mandatory piece.

Preludio (Tema de Alicia)

The melodic and harmonic language of the first movement evokes genres as diverse as New Age, jazz and 'bolero'. It features in the soundtrack of the 2005 documentary *Coiba Paraíso Salvaje* by director Rick Rosenthal, where it appears with the title *Tema de Alicia (Alice's Theme)*.

Danza

Strongly influenced by Afro-Caribbean rhythms typical of the Costa Rican Atlantic coast, the second movement is conceived as a study in E major for the right hand. The melody, carried by the thumb, is in the middle and low registers, while the high notes create an ostinato effect throughout most of the piece.

II

AGUSTIN BARRIOS 'MANGORÉ' (1885-1944)

El Último Canto

This masterful piece exemplifies Barrios' unique artistry and craftsmanship. His use of the 'tremolo' technique allows the guitar to sing much like the violin, or indeed the human voice. There are various stories told around the inspiration for the piece which, regardless of their strict accuracy, serve to bring us closer to the music. One describes an old woman who knocked at Barrios' door one day asking for "Alms, for the love of God." Barrios did not have money; he could offer only music. Inspired by the visitor, he composed *Una Limosna por el Amor de Dios (Alms, for the Love of God)*. It was destined to be his last composition, and as a result is also formally known as *El Último Canto (The Last Song)*. This extraordinary work offers us the image of a poor woman, hands reaching out in supplication to Barrios, who is sadly unable to offer help. We do not know if the woman ever learned that she was the inspiration for Barrios' creation. I would like to think that she did.

Maxixe

One of Barrios' best known pieces, *Maxixe* is a vigorous, vibrant work, full of contagious dance-like rhythm. The rhythmic form here is close to the 'habanera'. Barrios' lively instrumentation even allows one to imagine percussion parts that could well accompany the guitar.

Two Paraguayan Dances:

Ca'azapa

Jha Che Valle

The first of these dances bears the name of one of the provinces of Paraguay, Ca'azapa. The mood is sentimental, carried by a rhythmic movement taken directly from the Paraguayan polka, related in turn to the habanera. In the second section, the piece acquires a more lively tempo and greater complexity. *Jha Che Valle* is an expression in the Guaraní language of Paraguay used to refer nostalgically to one's birthplace, usually in a remote part of the countryside. In the opening bars, built on a chord sequence, the work appears misleadingly simple; in contrast, the section that follows is technically brilliant.

Waltz Op. 8 No. 4

Far removed from the spirit of a concert waltz, *Op. 8, No. 4* is a work rooted firmly in the popular waltz tradition known in Paraguay as a 'valsecito criollo'. The tempo is lively, with a ringing 'campanella' middle section. Like its counterpart *Op. 8 No. 3*, however, it is in fact a sequence of shorter waltzes in themselves close in spirit to the Viennese tradition.

Estudio de Concierto

The *Estudio de Concierto* is among the most ambitious and complex music in the program, from structural, harmonic and performance perspectives. An arpeggio study in A major, it displays the composer's concern with the formal structure of an étude in the moto perpetuo style. The homogeneous texture also requires

fluid right hand technique, with moving barré in the left hand, the legato melody emerging brightly from a stream of notes. It is a challenge for any guitarist.

La Catedral

Preludio

Andante Religioso

Allegro Solemne

La Catedral is the best known work by Barrios Mangoré. Its first, slow, movement is built on open strings supporting the high, ethereal melody. The second is more somber, more mystical in outlook. One hears references to the bells of the cathedral of San José in Montevideo, Uruguay, the church that inspired the piece. In spite of its designation, the third movement, *allegro solemne*, seems hardly solemn at all, at least in terms of tempo. Rather, it has many of the features of a concert étude, with its solid and compact development and unflagging pace. *La Catedral* remains concert tour de force.