

THE ART SONGS OF JAIME LEÓN:
A TEXTUAL AND MUSICAL ANALYSIS

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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2011

ABSTRACT

The thirty-six art songs of Colombian composer Jaime León (b. 1921) represent an important addition to the art song repertory. Chapter 1 introduces the topic and the literature on Jaime León and Latin American art song. Jaime León's biography forms Chapter 2, including his training as a pianist and conductor at The Juilliard School, his affiliations with Broadway musicals, the American Ballet Theatre, and the Orquesta Filarmónica de Bogotá, and his evolution as a song composer. To date this chapter represents the most comprehensive biography of Jaime León to appear in either Spanish or English. Biographical sketches of each of the poets that León set to music forms Chapter 3. Every León song is analyzed in Chapter 4 from a textual, melodic, harmonic, rhythmic and formal standpoint. Original translations of each poem into English accompanies the analyses. Edited portions of the author's interviews with Jaime León appear in the appendix.

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the Conservatory of Music and Dance, have examined a thesis titled “The Art Songs of Jaime León: A Textual and Musical Analysis” presented by Victoria Sofia Botero, candidate for the Master of Musicology degree, and hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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To my son, Lorenzo James Francis Botero, that you may know the
rich heritage into which you were born

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Colombia has experienced a renaissance of literature since the late nineteenth century, producing one of the richest poetic traditions of any country in Latin America. It was an anthology of this poetry that inspired the Colombian conductor Jaime León (b. 1921) to begin composing songs in 1952. His song catalog, now totaling thirty-six examples, constitutes a rich new vein of art song repertoire. León's songs have been recorded, published, and performed multiple times, indicating that his songs merit further critical attention.

The nineteenth-century German *lied* and French *melodie* repertoire developed in part because of a flowering of poetry starting in the latter half of the eighteenth century and a deep cultural reservoir of folk music from which to draw musical inspiration. It follows then that a flourishing of poetry in another country with strong folk music traditions could similarly inspire the development of the art song. Jaime León's songs are, in the best tradition of the nineteenth-century art song, exquisitely attuned to the poetry in tone, meter and prosody. León's musical vocabulary includes the Colombian and pan-Hispanic folk music that is part of his heritage, as well as American musical theatre and European

symphonic repertoire mastered over a lifetime of conducting important performing organizations in the United States and Colombia.

I first encountered León's music as an undergraduate at The Catholic University of America, where I came across a photocopy of the manuscript for "Aves y ensueños" shelved in the Latin American Music Library at the Benjamin T. Rome School of Music. Around the same time I received a gift of the Colombian art song anthology *Música colombiana: la canción culta* and in it found another León song, "La campesina." Upon starting graduate school at the University of Missouri— Kansas City I decided to make León the subject of what was supposed to be a short research paper. Through family connections I came into phone contact with Jaime León, who was living in Bogotá, and learned that he had a few dozen songs, most unpublished. I received a travel grant from the UMKC Women's Council Graduate Assistance Fund to conduct further research and in the spring of 2003 I interviewed Maestro León in Bogotá. I had the great pleasure of being coached by León on many of his songs and he gave me copies of his scores to take with me. I also spent time researching in the archives of the Centro de Documentación Musical, where the Colombian government houses the manuscripts of many of Colombia's composers. It was then that I realized an entire repertory of Colombian art songs existed by numerous composers, mostly unpublished, and without any critical study in English.

Focusing on the songs of Jaime León as the sole subject of a thesis was a natural choice as I already had experience with his music, and he gave me permission to interview him and write about his life and music. The three chapters focus on León's life, the lives of

the poets that he set to music, and analyses of all thirty-six songs. The biography of Jaime León goes into detail regarding his musical influences early in life, his training at Juilliard, and beyond. In addition to his lifelong love of poetry, León brought a unique set of skills when he turned to composing after having trained and worked as a conductor and pianist. This chapter represents the first lengthy biographical entry from his birth to 2010 and covers his life in Colombia and the United States and his accomplishments as a conductor and composer. I was able to interview Jaime León in Bogotá, Colombia in 2003 and 2005 and used the transcripts as a starting point for research. Based on his biography that he dictated to me during our interviews I expanded my research to the Juilliard School archives, and American and Colombian newspaper and journal archives for evidence of performance. The file on “Leon, James” at the Juilliard School revealed a key document from 1951 in León’s own hand that outlined his early childhood academic and performance experiences. It also indicated that León went by an anglicized name while living in the U.S. The discovery of this new search term led to a trove of articles in the *New York Times* and other publications from the 1940s until León’s departure from the U.S. in 1972. For his life in Colombia afterward, I utilized the archives of the Bogotá newspaper *El Tiempo*, and sources such as *Nueva historia de Colombia*, as well as *Historia institucional de la Orquesta Filarmónica de Bogotá, 1967-2004* and *Ópera de Colombia 30 años: una crónica* to verify his oral biography.

León’s biography reveals a professional life that was witness to the effect of racial, political and cultural diplomacy in a tumultuous period of American history. His experiences such as conducting an all-black dance group in the segregated south, serving as assistant

conductor for the historic first air-lift tour of Latin America by a major dance company, performing at the White House during important political negotiations, and incorporating jazz compositions by composers such as Duke Ellington into mainstream classical programming demonstrate a commitment to performance that pushed boundaries. Within Colombia his efforts to reinvigorate the Orquesta Filarmónica de Bogotá and serve as a founding member of the Ópera de Colombia and a consultant to ColCultura, the cultural department of the Colombian government, cement his reputation as a prime mover in the musical life of Colombia, in addition to his activities as a conductor and composer. León's programming choices also reveal him to be an important disseminator of contemporary composition in Colombia.

The chapter on the poets serves to introduce the significant contributions of selected Colombian and Ecuadorian writers to an English-reading audience. Primary and secondary sources were consulted for each entry, many of which are digitally published by the Biblioteca Virtual del Banco de la República. I corresponded directly with Francisco Delgado Santos and with Renán de la Torre's daughter via email for biographical information not available by other means.

The final chapter is a musical analysis of León's thirty-six songs. León's love of literature and his preference for composing quickly based on his initial reading of a poem led me to analyze his songs through the lens of text. As he stated many times, he would read a poem and then immediately start composing; most of his songs were written in a day or even in just a few hours. Thus the formal elements of melody, harmony, rhythm and form are

analyzed as they relate to the text, either illustrating or providing shades of meaning. The use of folk music idioms is important in León's songs. A discussion of the history and form of a particular folk style and how it relates to the poem is discussed wherever it was possible to discern that influence.

Particular attention was paid to the correct presentation and punctuation of each poem. León's musical interpretation of each poem is clearly based in part on line division and punctuation; however, his manuscripts frequently leave out the original punctuation or have discrepancies with the original text. These omissions have passed into the printed edition of his works. The presentation of the poem at the beginning of each analysis is based on the original published poem or a reputable critical edition. All of the poems are translated and the translations are my own. While translations are always a pale shadow of the original, it is my hope that a correct understanding of the poem by an English speaking performer or teacher will enhance performance and encourage further exploration of this repertory.

Only a handful of theses and dissertations on Latin American art song exist. Harry M. Switzer's "The Published Art Songs of Juan Bautista Plaza" (DMA diss., University of Miami, 1985) and Jonathan Kulp's "Carlos Guastavino: A Study of His Songs and Musical Aesthetics" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2001) were particularly helpful. Switzer's approach is a biography of Plaza and formal musical analysis of Plaza's fifteen songs. Kulp, writing about Guastavino's 500-plus catalogue of songs, gives a thorough biography of Guastavino and his musical influences followed by a description of Guastavinian style periods using particular songs as examples of those periods.

This thesis represents the first full-length scholarly work on Jaime León's life and songs. Sources for scores and biographical material include the first known publication of Jaime León's songs, a 1987 Poligráfica edition of the his song cycle *Las canciones de Pequeña, Pequeñita*, published in Ecuador. This edition did not include biographical information and appears to be a facsimile of León's original handwritten score of the song cycle. The Centro de Documentación Musical at the Biblioteca Nacional in Bogotá (Musical Document Center of the National Library, heretofore referred to as CDM) has catalogued a collection of music by Jaime León. It includes original manuscripts and photocopies of León's songs, works for piano and orchestrations. Of particular note are two ring-bound books containing twenty-one León songs.¹ These appear to be photocopies of a two-volume publication that unfortunately does not contain any editorial information or date of publication. In attempting to determine the date of publication it should be noted that none of the songs in Volume I, which comprises León's compositions from poetry by Eduardo Carranza, contain dates. However other sources indicate that the Carranza songs were completed in 1992.² Each song in Volume II contains a date that spans from 1977-1990. Thus the publication of the two ring-bound volumes can be approximately dated as post-1992. The volumes are entitled *Canciones de Jaime León: poesías de Eduardo Carranza* and

¹ There is a song in *Volumen II* entitled "Cartagena" that is erroneously ascribed to Jaime León but is in fact by the Colombian composer Adolfo Mejía (1905-1973). León knew Mejía well and recorded this song about their native city with soprano Carmiña Gallo. The song is possibly an arrangement by León of Mejía's well-known *bolero*.

² Carlos Barreiro Ortiz, "Poetas colombianos en música," *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico* 37, no. 53, (2000): 73.

Canciones de Jaime León: Volumen II. Despite the lack of bibliographic information in the scores, these are important volumes and represent the first time a majority of León's songs were presented as a typeset collection seemingly prepared for a performer's use. They were clearly the source material for many of the subsequent editions of León's songs. Notably absent from the CDM collection are León's two song cycles: the four *villancicos* from 1977, and *Las canciones de Pequeña, pequeñita* from 1986.

Other published information on Jaime León's songs include the 1992 publication of his second song, "La campesina," in the anthology *Musica colombiana: La canción culta* published by ColCultura with a brief biographical paragraph on León. In 1998 Kathleen L. Wilson's *The Art Song in Latin America: Selected Works by Twentieth Century Composers* marked the first time that León's music became commercially available in the United States, through Pendragon Press. This song anthology again includes "La campesina" and a translation of the biographical paragraph on León from the 1992 ColCultura publication. In 2007 three of León's songs and a biographical sketch of the composer appeared in the Edicions Tritó anthology *La canción artística en América Latina: antología crítica y guía interpretativa para cantantes*, edited by Patricia Caicedo. In 2009 Caicedo self-published León's complete songs in *The Colombian Art Song, Jaime León: Analysis and Compilation* under the Mundo Arts banner. This edition includes a brief biography and timeline on Jaime León, paragraph length entries for the poets, and English translations of the songs. Biographical sources are not included in the Mundo Arts edition.

Several important sources were used as models for my chapter analyzing León's songs. Carol Kimball's *Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature* provided a model for creating a style sheet to analyze León's songs from a formal standpoint.³ *Tchaikovsky's Complete Songs* by Richard D. Sylvester analyzes the text of Tchaikovsky's songs as lyrics.⁴ He discusses the changes that were made from the original poem to a song lyric and how the textual changes reflect Tchaikovsky's musical aesthetic. Sylvester also lists the basic factual data of each song such as the name of the poet, date of poem composition, date of music composition, meter, tempo, recordings, and so forth, in a section at the end of the analysis. I adapted both Sylvester's literary emphasis and organizational format.

Lorraine Gorrell's *The Nineteenth-Century German Lied* was a helpful reference on the early masters of the art song genre.⁵ I also looked at the songs of composers who were not part of the Western European canon of song literature such as the Polish composer Karol Szymanowski. *The Songs of Karol Szymanowski and his Contemporaries*, edited by Zofia Helman, provided a window into approaching a composer of art songs who was influenced

³ Carol Kimball, *Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature* (Hal Leonard: Milwaukee, 2005).

⁴ Richard D. Sylvester, *Tchaikovsky's Complete Songs* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 2004).

⁵ Lorraine Gorrell, *The Nineteenth-Century German Lied* (Amadeus Press: Pompton Plains, New Jersey, 1993).

by the Russian, French and German song-writers and was also driven by his own cultural references.⁶

The first appendix is a letter of permission from Jaime León to include musical examples. The second appendix is an edited version of my interviews with the composer organized by topic. My conversations with Jaime León spanned over six hours of recorded material and some of his commentary may be of interest to future scholars and performers.

⁶ Zofia Helman, ed., *The Songs of Karol Szymanowski and his Contemporaries* (Polish Music Center At USC: Los Angeles, 2002).

CHAPTER 2

BIOGRAPHY OF JAIME LEÓN

Jaime Roberto León Ferro was born on December 18, 1921, in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia. His family, who called him Jaime, left Colombia for the United States when he was only three years old in what would be the first of many uprootings during his life. The León family arrived first in San Francisco and after a short period moved to New York, where the future musician began his musical training in piano first with his father and then with Leo Holtz (dates unknown).¹

He attended St. Benedict's Preparatory School in Newark, New Jersey for two years and then returned to Colombia at the age of sixteen after his father was offered a position with an oil company in Cúcuta. Cúcuta was—and remains—an isolated city on the border of Venezuela with few cultural outlets. Therefore León was dispatched to a boarding school in the capital, Santa Fe de Bogotá, to continue his primary education and encourage his burgeoning musical talent.² He attended the exclusive Hermanos Cristianos school (known

¹ Helbert Chamat, Liner Notes, *Grandes poetas grandes compositores, grandes melodías de la canción colombiana*, Martha Senn, mezzo-soprano and Pablo Arevalo, piano, Fondo Financiero de Desarrollo FONADE Monograph CD, no issue number, 1998.

² Jaime León, interview by author, Bogotá, Colombia, January 31, 2005

today as Colegio de la Salle), graduating in 1939. León then attended the Escuela Nacional de Comercio, receiving a degree (the U.S. equivalent of an associate degree) in Social Science.

While at the Escuela Nacional de Comercio, León was also attending the Conservatorio Nacional de Música. He studied piano with Lucía Pérez, who has been called “the mother of pianists” in Colombia for the length of her tenure at the conservatory and her fiercely technical pedagogy.³ Other professors included pianist Tatiana Goncharova de Espinoza and composer Guillermo Uribe Holguín (1880-1971). Uribe Holguín, with whom León studied theory, was the founder of the conservatory and is considered to be the father of the Colombian nationalist school.

León studied with renowned Chilean pianist Claudio Arrau (1903-1991) during the latter’s brief residency at the Conservatory in 1941. The contact may have continued after León moved to the States, for he listed Arrau as a reference ten years later, using the famous pianist’s home address in Queens, New York.⁴ Encouraged by this encounter and the faculty at the Bogotá conservatory, León applied to the Juilliard School, where he was accepted and began studying in the fall of 1943. He enrolled under the Anglicized version of his name,

³ Luis Antonio Escobar, *La música en Cartagena de Indias*, (Bogotá: Intergráficas, 1985) under “Elvia Mendoza,” <http://www.lablaa.org/blaavirtual/musica/muscar/elvia.htm> (accessed August 14, 2009).

⁴ Placement Bureau document for Jaime León, June 7, 1951, Lila Acheson Wallace Library, The Juilliard School of Music, New York, NY.

James Leon, a name that he used interchangeably with “Jaime León” until he left the United States in 1972.⁵

His principal piano teacher at Juilliard, Carl Friedberg (1872-1955), was a key musical influence. The German Friedberg was a consummate pianist and pedagogue; he was also one of the last pupils of Clara Schumann (1819-1896) and Johannes Brahms (1833-1897). He was famous for exhorting his students with the phrase “Talent Oblige!” meaning that if one had the talent to be a musician they were obligated to use their technique in the service of expression. León tells of his arrival at Juilliard as a young man:

I graduated from the conservatory here in Colombia as a pianist. Lucía Pérez was my teacher so from there I jumped into Juilliard. Can you imagine? I was accepted and suddenly the opinion of the jury and my teacher also was this, “he’s not a pianist, but he has talent.” To tell my mother that, well she nearly committed suicide! Juilliard taught me how to play a piano. My teacher [Carl Friedberg] used to say, “The piano is not a percussive instrument.” And I had no idea what he was talking about. He would say, “This is a noble instrument. You have to sing. Have you ever heard a singer?” and quite frankly no I hadn’t, “Well go and hear a good singer. Listen how they phrase.” And he taught me to do the same at the piano. Not by pressure, no I never even suspected it. He was a brilliant man.

The consensus opinion there was that I was not a pianist. To be told that straight in the face was terrifying because I thought, “My God, I am the world’s greatest pianist.” You have to be modest. They taught me modesty and they taught me how to play, how to be a musician.⁶

⁵ It is probable that León had been using his “American” name since his primary school days at St. Benedict’s Prep in New Jersey.

⁶Jaime León, interview by author, Bogotá, Colombia, July 22, 2003.

The opinion of the jury was not lost on León, and he began exploring the field of conducting with a small company in New York, the Mascagni Opera Guild.⁷ León recalled the primitive nature of the company:

It was directed by a woman Giuseppina La Puma [1895-1986] who was the first wife of a man called Leodo who had been the pianist of the symphony in Colombia. So when my mother, father and I went to the United States when I entered Julliard, Leodo gave my father a letter and said, “Give this to Giuseppina because I know Jaime likes directing the orchestra.” I used to practice behind the stage curtain in the Cartagena orchestra that he used to conduct. In Bogotá they did the *Barber of Seville*, like about a thousand years ago, and I had to do the part, “La forza, la forza, aprite qua” in the chorus and I loved it. I get to New York and I go to this company but it was a company of amateurs; the orchestra was from Julliard, yes, but nobody got paid a cent. It was barbaric training for me. If you wanted for example to sing Violetta [in *La traviata*] you paid the quota like \$100-200 and they gave you all of the equipment, chorus, orchestra, everything. It was in some tiny theatre.⁸

Among his colleagues at the Mascagni Opera Guild were the young conductors Nicola Rescigno (1916-2008) and Julius Rudel (b. 1921), both of whom went on to have important international careers in opera and orchestral conducting. After completing his degree work in piano, León won a conducting fellowship at Juilliard to study with Edgar Schenkman (1908-1993). A significant experience confirmed León’s path to the podium. He recalled:

⁷ This company was also known as the La Puma Opera Workshop. “Up-Beat New York: Where to Sing and Play,” *New York Magazine*, Feb 28, 1972, 39.

⁸ León interview, 2003.

I had a colleague of mine whose name was Glauco d'Attili (1921-?), a pianist and pupil of the same teacher [Friedberg], who knew a concerto by Giuseppe Martucci. Apparently [Arturo] Toscanini (1867-1957) heard about this and called him and told him, "I would like to hear you because I premiered that concerto in 18-something or other." So Glauco said, "Jaime would you do me a favor? Would you come and play the orchestral part on the second piano?" I said, "Me? Play for Toscanini?" – Well, you can imagine! So we go to Studio 8H at Radio City Music Hall in Rockefeller Center and there he was, the Maestro, and two pianos. We played and he was very enthused and he said, "Benissimo Glauco, you will be my soloist. But I don't have the score, will you leave it for me?" This was on a Tuesday and next Friday was the rehearsal. So I asked maestro, "Would it be possible—now this was mind you prohibited—if I could come to rehearsal?" and he said, "Of course." I went Friday to the rehearsal and he was conducting from memory.⁹ And something happened to me; I wanted to be a conductor.

He had been hired by the Metropolitan Opera in those days to do the cycle of four Wagnerian operas on Saturday afternoons. I didn't have the money for tickets so I [purchased a standing room-only ticket]. The performance was at two, so at nine in the morning I was there waiting so I could get a spot watching over the orchestra pit. I looked and there was the scenery, then I turned and looked down into the pit and instead of a music stand there was just a light—[Toscanini was conducting] from memory, all from memory. Not that his conducting from memory made me want to become a conductor but that man was a genius. I will never get to that point, I thought, but I wanted to try it out. And I did. Then came the process of luck. I had a lot of luck.

León received invitations to return to Colombia that year for a series of engagements in September of 1946. He gave solo recitals and conducted the orchestras of Medellín, Cartagena and the Sinfónica Nacional (National Symphony) of Bogotá. When Guillermo Espinosa, the artistic director of the Sinfónica Nacional, resigned his position suddenly to take up a post with the Union Panamericana in Washington, D.C., León's contacts put forward his name as a successor. Juilliard gave him permission to withdraw, recognizing the

⁹ The January 20, 1946 radio broadcast of *Arturo Toscanini with the NBC Symphony Orchestra* was later released commercially. *Martucci Piano Concerto No. 2*, Glauco d'Attili, piano and Arturo Toscanini, conductor, NBC Studio Orchestra, ATS 1073, 1946.

unique opportunity for the twenty-six year old and the reflection his appointment would have on the school. As the permanent conductor of the Sinfónica Nacional from 1947-1949 he led thirty-four concerts in Bogotá with prominent soloists such as pianist Jesús María Sanromá (1902-1984). He also had a guest conducting engagement with the Philharmonic Symphony of Guatemala during this period. León's work was recognized by the board of trustees in Bogotá and he received an award of Honorary Director of the National Symphony Orchestra of Bogotá "for having led the organization for two seasons and obtaining a high standard of artistic performance."¹⁰ During this tenure in Colombia he was also appointed a professor at the Conservatory, where he had only recently been a student, teaching piano, orchestral conducting, and choral conducting. Two years after his arrival he was appointed Dean and while in that position met a beautiful young woman named Beatriz who worked in the conservatory office and whom he later married.

León's rapid upward trajectory was halted, however, by the *Bogotázo* massacre on April 9, 1948. The assassination of the Liberal party presidential candidate, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, sparked days of extreme violence that marked the beginning of decades of civil unrest in Colombia. Gaitán, who was killed at the height of his popularity, had been a champion of workers and ethnic minorities. León remarked of that time:

I came to Colombia to be a musician but everything was interrupted on the ninth of April, 1948. It was the revolution. Right outside here in the street they killed twenty people. They had named me Dean of the conservatory and Beatriz, my wife, was my

¹⁰ Placement Bureau, 1951.

secretary at the time. I was caught in Bogotá on the ninth of April and it interrupted everything.¹¹

León quickly returned to New York and enrolled in the post-graduate orchestral conducting program at Juilliard.¹² This time he studied with Dean Dixon (1915-1976). Of his teacher he noted:

My conducting teacher was Dean Dixon, who was a very famous American conductor who, unfortunately for being Negro, was never accepted in any of the orchestras, but he made his reputation in Europe. He was a great conductor, a fantastic teacher. The only problem is he had a little chip on his shoulder all the time. You can understand why in the late 40's... He was part of the whole cycle of refusal, as it were. He had a professorship at Juilliard that was discontinued because of that. It was something that I don't want to remember. It was cruel, very cruel. But he made his career in Europe in Stockholm. He had his own orchestra, had a lot of records, a marvelous man.¹³

León withdrew from Juilliard in 1949 without completing another degree. He returned to Colombia, married Beatriz and organized and conducted a weekly chamber ensemble for the Colombian radio under the sponsorship of the Government Broadcasting station in Bogotá. He also accompanied solo artists visiting Colombia including the famed concert violinist Jan Tomasow (1914-1961). The return, however, was short lived; the political environment in Colombia remained too unstable and the Leóns again turned north where Jaime sought work as a freelance musician in New York:

¹¹ León, interview 2005.

¹² Placement Bureau, 1951.

¹³ León, interview 2003.

Time passed and we decided, now married, let's go make our life in the United States. We returned to New York in 1950 and we didn't go back until 1972.

His work in New York in the early 1950s was regular if somewhat haphazard. León picked up jobs such as leading a summer-long chamber trio at Camp Timberland, a popular Adirondacks camp for adults in Pottersville, New York. He looked for other work through the Juilliard Placement Bureau, a department of the school that worked as a referral service for students and alumni. On the application form he listed himself as available for all types of work: performing, accompanying and teaching. In each of these categories though, he either adds or double underlines opera work. Even though his professional work to that point had been principally in orchestral conducting, it seems that his “barbaric training” at La Puma had left him wanting more and that Friedberg’s exhortation to go and look for singers had not diminished with the end of his studies. In October 1951, León composed his first song, “Aves y ensueños.” He says that the song just poured out of him one day, “I wasn’t writing it for anyone in particular. The inspiration just came to me.” Looking at the text of the song (see the discussion of this song in the analysis chapter) and its theme of dashed illusions, one wonders if there was some autobiographical element. After scaling the career heights in Colombia at such a young age, the early years in New York trying to support a family must have been difficult.

When León applied at the Placement Bureau he listed a future engagement as the pianist and conductor for the Tropicana Ballet on their tour of the American south in February and March 1952. In our interviews however León, recounted, traveling with an all-

black group called the Haitian Ballet.¹⁴ On tour León witnessed firsthand the racism and segregation that were part of American culture. He noted:

That was for me an education. I traveled with them [the ballet] in the south of the US. I was not familiar with the problems of the blacks. I had not really had contact with that. The Haitians, beautiful people, were put on a bus to do a tour in the south and I was their pianist. There were three of us who were white, myself, the driver and the director; everyone else was black, about 20 people total. We stopped in a place close to New Orleans to go to the bathroom and there weren't any facilities at all [for the dancers]. There was a restaurant, a cafeteria; I bought 20 hamburgers, 20 coffees and everything else because they wouldn't let them inside. And the guy at the counter asked me, "Are you going to eat this? We don't serve niggers here." We got to New Orleans and the bus driver, the director and I were sent to one hotel and the others to a horrible little hotel on the other side of the tracks.

A month after returning from the tour he composed "La campesina," setting a text rich with themes of social struggle, and later in October 1952, "Canción de noel" (see discussion of these songs and all other songs referenced in the analysis chapter). No other songs appear in his catalog until 1976. León remarked that his composing began simply as a musical exercise, and when accompanying and conducting work started to pick up for him in 1953 and 1954, as evidenced by notices in music magazines like *Dance Observer* and *Violins and Violinists*, there was likely little time to compose. In addition his wife Beatriz gave birth

¹⁴ It is likely these are one and the same troupe. There were at least two other all-black Haitian companies touring in the 1950s, both led by Jean-Léon Destiné, the *Afro-Haitian Dance Company* and the *First Troupe Folklorique Nationale*, also known as the *Haiti National Folklore Troupe*. It is possible that León toured with one of these groups.

to their only son Roberto (Rob) in 1953.¹⁵ León gained a reputation as a reliable accompanist for soloists on radio broadcasts and as a conductor of pit bands for musicals and ballet companies. Representative engagements included recitals through the Concert Artists Guild and the WNYC American Music Festival, in addition to a tour of the U.S. with Hurtado de Cordoba and his Spanish Ballet.

The Spanish Ballet was wildly successful in their European tour. Hurtado De Cordoba choreographed a mixture of classical and folkloric Spanish music with representative composers such as Isaac Albéniz and the flamenco arrangements of Federico García Lorca, all done with more than a nod to elaborate stagecraft. Their 1954 American debut tour started in New York City with a four-week engagement at the 48th Street Theatre. John Martin's *New York Times* review was dismissive of de Cordoba's mix of high and low art and the writer thought the production was better suited to a night club than a large theatre: "Mr. de Cordoba, who is not only chief dancer but also choreographer and designer of costumes and décors, strives untiringly to please, and uses everything at his disposal to put himself over. In the process it is the sorry lot of the art of Spanish dancing to be mauled considerably by a perhaps misguided concept of showmanship."¹⁶ Martin seemed to think that León, who was brought in as the musical director for the American tour, was at the mercy of the troupe's leader when he remarked, "The pit band was conducted by James Leon

¹⁵ Rob Leon had an extensive performing and recording career as a jazz bass player working with musicians such as Dave Brubeck, The Dolphins, Joni Mitchell and The Band. He died in 2004.

¹⁶ John Martin, "Spanish Ballet Opens Run Here," *New York Times*, October 11, 1954.

and was called upon for considerable mayhem from time to time, especially when Mr. de Cordoba was adapting Albeniz to his own uses.”¹⁷

León’s experience with dance companies in the early 1950s helped him secure his most significant position to date. In 1955 he was appointed conductor of the American Ballet Theatre (“ABT”) by music director Joseph Levine (1905-1994). ABT was formed in 1939 to bring together the best of the classical dance repertoire with new works by contemporary choreographers and composers. The company has toured the United States and the world, often sponsored by the U.S. State Department. In his three years with the company, León conducted works by Copland, Strauss, Gould, Bernstein, Britten, Meyerbeer, Offenbach, Tchaikovsky and Schoenberg, to name only a few, for audiences in Latin America, Europe, the United States and the Middle East.

In his first year with the company León traveled with ABT on a five-month goodwill tour of South America sponsored by the US Government. The music director Joseph Levine wrote a two-part article for *Etude* magazine about the tour, which was billed as the first all air-lift tour attempted by a ballet company. The scope of the operation was unprecedented not only for the number of dancers, costumes and set pieces that were traveling but also for the work required of the two conductors.¹⁸ Levine and León rehearsed and conducted the

¹⁷ Martin, “Spanish Ballet Opens Run Here.” Note that the review uses the Anglicized version of Jaime León’s name, “James Leon,” omitting the accent.

¹⁸ All references and quotes about ABT’s South American tour come from: Joseph Levine, “Podium Perils South of the Border. Pt. I” *Etude* (July-August 1956), 22, 58-60 and Joseph Levine, “Podium Perils South of the Border. Pt. II” *Etude* (Sept-Oct 1956), 14, 40-41. Note that in the article Levine uses León’s Anglicized name, “James Leon,” omitting the accent.

resident orchestras of the fifteen cities they visited to play the repertoire of the ballet, which included several challenging contemporary scores. The musicianship level of the orchestras varied significantly as did performance conditions. For the program in Guatemala City with the Sinfónica Nacional of Guatemala, Levine requested two pianos to be moved into the orchestra pit to reinforce the small orchestra with ABT's staff pianists Mary Levine and Irving Owen. It was a request that the theatre only acceded to just as the performance was about to begin. As Levine noted:

When my assistant conductor Mr. James Leon, went down into the pit to start the program with "Les Sylphides," he found the place in an uproar, four sweating stagehands shifting the pianos and disrupting the music stands. The cellists and violists who had been displaced were yelling angrily, their bows stabbing the air. It was a desperate moment as the house lights dimmed, but the bedlam continued. Mr. Leon, who is a Colombian by birth, exhorted the men in Spanish to calm themselves and begin the prelude. All through the first thirty-two bars of music the cellists ran in and out of the pit with lumber on their shoulders in order to extend the floor for their chairs. When my colleague returned to the dressing room at the conclusion of the ballet, his coattails covered with sawdust and sweat pouring down his face, I knew conditions were rough.

The ballet made three stops in Colombia, aided in part by León's connections with orchestras located outside of the capital. Bogotá, however, was still "seething with political unrest" under President Rojas Pinilla, whose presidential palace, known as the Casa de Nariño, was directly across from the Teatro Colón, where the company performed. The company endured some harassment from the military police and were denied the regular players of the Sinfónica Nacional of Colombia, but in Medellín and Cali they played with

excellent musicians to enormous cheering crowds. When the ballet traveled to Quito, Ecuador, Levine concluded that the altitude of the city had shut it off from outside influences and accounted for the poor state of the orchestra. He asked León to step in:

The percussion section was filled with drums which I'm sure must have served Simon Bolivar when he crossed the Andes. But the man stationed behind them not only could not read music, but he didn't even know how to hold the sticks correctly. Mr. Leon, who had been standing behind him in the pit, coaching him along, looked at me with despair. I looked at him and nodded. Mr. Leon took over the drums and the rehearsal resumed.

Political unrest followed them to Buenos Aires, Argentina, where shortly after arriving, a military curfew was imposed, and all activity was cancelled for a week. The members of the ballet company became, in effect, hostages in the midst of the violent revolution that erupted. Finally, on the night of September 21, 1955, the entire company of sixty-three huddled in the basement of the hotel to avoid the street battle and off-shore shelling that ousted President Juan Perón. The next day the city returned to life and rehearsals and performances resumed.

Not all of their experiences were so dramatic. The company scored triumphant performances in Mexico and Brazil and Levine noted individual concertmasters and conductors throughout the tour who were achieving great results with their orchestras. He and León also had the opportunity to meet and in some cases review the latest scores of such Latin American composers as Blas Galindo, Carlos Estrada, Andrés Sas and Alberto Ginastera.

During ABT's off-season León took jobs with music theatre productions. He was the musical director for the 1957 national tour of the Frank Loesser musical *The Most Happy Fella*, produced by Robert Goss and directed by George Lipton.¹⁹ Back in New York in the summer of 1958, he was the musical director for the supper club revue *A La Carte*. Bob Bernstein of *Billboard* noted: "The whole thing is very English and would be a smash in a London cabaret. Meanwhile, it enhances the revue scene in N.Y. with artless charm."²⁰

León also became Music Director at the Dallas State Fair Musicals, one of the largest summer stock theatres in the country at the time, where he worked with major musical theatre stars such as Ginger Rogers and Kaye Ballard. León returned for five summers and has referred to that time as one of the most joyful of his career.²¹ Nicola Rescigno, León's friend from his early days with Mascagni Opera, was also in Dallas in 1958 founding the Dallas Civic Opera. He invited León to serve as chorus master for the inaugural season. That fall León worked as the répétiteur and chorus master for *La Traviata*, *Medea*, and *L'italiana in Algeri*. The first two productions starred the Greek soprano Maria Callas (1923-1977). León recounts his first meeting with the great diva:

Rescigno hired me as a repetiteur. I had no idea who was singing. It was *Traviata*. I sat at the piano and I hear this voice [asking me], "Do you know

¹⁹ BroadwayWorld International Database, "The Most Happy Fella (National Tour, 1957)," <http://broadwayworld.com/bwidb/sections/productions/full.php?var=10634> (accessed August 11, 2009).

²⁰ Bob Bernstein, "Veddy English, and Quite Nice," *Billboard* (June 2, 1958): 7.

²¹ León, interview 2005.

your score? I do not work with amateurs.” And that’s how I met Maria Callas. I sat at the piano and I swear I played like Horowitz. I swallowed that bitter pill of my own pride that I was not used to doing. And afterwards she did not excuse herself but she looked at me with something like incredulity. We didn’t become friends but I got to know the great artist. As a woman though, she was absolutely impossible. At her side was Teresa Berganza, a beautiful person, really tiny. She had just gotten married and she was crying because she missed her husband. Since we both spoke Spanish we understood each other. The director, a really young kid, was named Franco Zeffirelli. So I passed through stages like that. I could now say I had worked with Callas and it opened doors for me.²²

León is credited as the chorusmaster on a November 1958 Melodram live recording of *Medea* starring Callas, Jon Vickers (b. 1926) and a very young Teresa Berganza (b. 1935) as Neris. The performance occurred just hours after one of the most famous backstage moments in operatic history: Rudolf Bing firing Maria Callas from the Metropolitan Opera via telegram. One can only be grateful the microphones were running that evening; Callas was at her finest and most furious and the disc has been universally hailed by recording aficionados as preserving her greatest incarnation of *Medea*.²³

After Dallas, León was involved with a string of high profile opera and musical theatre productions in New York. He was the music director for the world premiere of *Bartleby*, an opera by William Flanagan with a libretto by Edward Albee, at the York Theatre

²² León, interview 2003. The October 1958 production of *La traviata* starred Maria Callas and the November 1958 production of *Medea* starred Callas with Teresa Berganza in the role of Neris. Complete cast listing also available at the Dallas Opera, “Dallas Opera’s Archives,” <http://www.dallasopera.org/archive/results.php?cid=&ptitle=&pdate=1958&send=Search> (accessed August 14, 2009).

²³ Anne Edwards, *Maria Callas: An Intimate Biography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), 185.

(1961). The one-act opera was on a double bill with *The American Dream*, a short play also by Albee. Reviewers flocked to the production, eager to see if the writer was able to follow up on his successful *Zoo Story*. Unfortunately both *Bartleby* and *Dream* were roundly panned and *Bartleby* was withdrawn after only two weeks. León escaped unscathed and received high marks for his contribution from several reviewers.²⁴ The New York City Center Light Opera Company engaged him for their 1962-1963 season as the musical director for *Can-Can* by Cole Porter, starring the one-named French actress Genevieve. León returned at the end of that season as associate conductor for Bernstein's *Wonderful Town* with Kaye Ballard. In the fall of 1963 he was the musical director for the world premiere Broadway production of *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* by Bertolt Brecht with incidental music by Jule Styne and starring Christopher Plummer at the Lunt Fontaine Theatre.²⁵ The following year he was the associate music director for *To Broadway With Love* at the Texas Pavilion's Music Hall for the New York World's Fair. *Broadway*, billed as a "musical extravaganza," was a lavish production staged by prominent Broadway director Morton Da Costa (1914-1989) of hit songs from the first half of the twentieth century with a few new pieces written for the show by Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick.²⁶ In the latter part of 1964 a new company, the Harkness

²⁴ Howard Taubman, "The Theater: Albee's 'The American Dream'," *New York Times*, January 25, 1961.

²⁵ Internet Broadway Database, "Arturo Ui (aka The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui)," <http://ibdb.com/production.php?id=3041> (accessed August 12, 2009).

²⁶ Howard Taubman, "Theater: Tribute To Musical Comedies," *New York Times*, April 30, 1964. The original cast recording of this production was recently re-released on CD, *World's Fair: To Broadway with Love*, Carmen Alvarez, Miriam Burton, Bob Carroll, Rod Perry,

Ballet, was formed as a touring company with principal dancers that included Erik Bruhn and Marjorie Tallchief. León conducted the debut program in Cannes in February 1965, followed by a two-week residency in Paris at the Opéra-Comique and a tour of major European cities.²⁷

Just after the Harkness debut León served as the musical director for two Atlanta companies: the Atlanta Civic Ballet and Theatre Under the Stars. During his tenure with the ballet the company performed *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty*, being one of the first companies in the nation to do so.²⁸ Theatre Under the Stars was a major arts operation in Atlanta that produced opera, Broadway plays and musicals year round and operated on the star system. León was in the pit with such performers as Dorothy Kirsten, Richard Tucker and Robert Merrill on stage.

American Ballet Theatre re-engaged León for three more seasons (1968-1972) as principal conductor. His duties began with a tour of Japan. As León recalls, the Japanese Emperor was unable to attend the performances in Tokyo and sent his Prime Minister, Eisaku Sato, instead:

The emperor did not go, instead they sent this minister and he fell in love with North American music; *Fancy Free*, the ballets of Copland, etc. When Nixon invited him to

Guy Rotondo, Kelly Brown, Morton Da Costa, James Leon and George Schaefer, DRG, 2009. Compact Disc.

²⁷ “Harkness Dancers Leave For Europe,” *New York Times*, January 11, 1965.

²⁸ Atlanta Ballet, “Atlanta Ballet Chronology,” <http://www.atlantaballet.com/about-history.shtml?p=chronology> (accessed March 27, 2009).

the US he asked him what he wanted to see, he answered “American Ballet Theatre, *Fancy Free*.”²⁹

Sato met Nixon in the White House in 1969, and a state dinner was arranged with entertainment by the American Ballet Theatre. The company, conducted by Jaime León, performed Bernstein’s *Fancy Free* with choreography by Jerome Robbins.³⁰

In 1968 American Ballet Theatre was designated the resident company of the yet unfinished Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C. It was an appointment the ballet had eagerly sought. Even though the company would only be in residence in Washington for eight weeks of the year, for ABT it implied a kind of crowning as the national company.

Within the same time period in Colombia the Orquesta Filarmónica de Bogotá (1967) was formed with two major goals. First, it would democratize classical music by bringing symphonic music to marginalized sectors of Bogotá such as its universities, educational centers, factories, barracks, popular theatres, unions and other businesses. Secondly, it would provide symphonic and chamber music opportunities to native-born instrumentalists and

²⁹ León, interview 2003

³⁰ Sato was awarded the 1974 Nobel Peace Prize for his lifetime activities in promoting peace. The Nobel committee singled out his White House meeting with Nixon when he signed a U.S.-Japanese nuclear non-proliferation agreement.

composers with the tacit acknowledgement that there were more musicians of merit in Colombia than could be hired by the Sinfónica Nacional.³¹

The first goal of the Orquesta Filarmónica de Bogotá (OFB) was easily met and the new entity quickly became part of the cultural fabric of the city through its didactic concerts and radio broadcasts. The decision to rotate programming between contemporary Colombian composers, standard orchestral repertory, and orchestrated versions of traditional Colombian music genres like the *bambuco*, *porro* and *cumbia* was also a hugely popular move. The instrumentalist roster however, was still limited and non-Colombians were hired to fill out various sections. Music directors were subjected to short tenure and frequently replaced. Until 1971 the OFB was in essence an expanded chamber ensemble with repertory limited to the Classical period.³² That year it reorganized with the intention of expanding and raising the technical level of its members.

Though he had been largely absent from Colombia for more than twenty years Jaime León's accomplishments in the United States were well known in his homeland. After an international search the OFB extended León an invitation to become the permanent fulltime music director. Faced with a choice between two organizations that were at critical junctures, the ABT and the OFB, León decided to move back to Colombia. He began commuting to Colombia from New York to oversee the audition and planning process for what was essentially a new OFB.

³¹ José Manuel Jaramillo Giraldo, *Historia institucional de la Orquesta Filarmónica de Bogotá, 1967-2004* (Bogotá: Secretaría General, Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, D.C., 2006), 22.

³² Jaramillo Giraldo, 34.

León's strategic plan required critical changes such as programming seasons three years in advance; increasing the roster to seventy-five instrumentalists, the minimum number required of a symphonic organization; and increasing the technical abilities of the current players. In this way the standard and contemporary repertory could be sufficiently covered. Implementing León's ambitious plan, however, meant a six-month hiatus from performing for the OFB.

Before this could happen León had to fulfill his obligation to the American Ballet Theatre in New York. The capstone event of his career in the United States was quickly approaching with his engagement conducting the *The River*, a newly composed ballet by Duke Ellington choreographed by Alvin Ailey at the dedication ceremony of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts on September 11, 1971. As León noted it also marked the end of his New York-based career:

The last person I worked with in the States before leaving was Duke Ellington. It was a composition of his called *The River*. We did it at the Metropolitan but it was not a success. It was not complete, or rather it was inconclusive. The idea was to do a history of the Mississippi river, its birth until its death passing through different epochs. Jazz in the United States is beautiful music but it [*The River*] was not well received at the first performance. Later the Kennedy Center opened with Bernstein's *Mass*. The second night we opened with *The River* and it was a complete success. So I ended with a complete success in the States and then I went to Colombia.³³

³³ León interview, 2003. León is referring to ABT's premiere of *Seven Dances from a Work in Progress Entitled 'The River'* which took place at New York's Lincoln Center June 25, 1970. See review by Deborah Jowitz, "Dance: The Youthful Art Notes," *The Village Voice*, July 2, 1970 where León is described as a conductor "who can make a ballet orchestra sound like a big-voiced, full-scale one." The Kennedy Center performance on September 11, 1971 was simply entitled *The River*.

From that point on León's career was centered in Colombia. As Fernando Toledo described in a book commemorating the OFB's twenty-fifth anniversary, León's subsequent six-year tenure was marked by dramatic gains in the orchestra's professionalism. León's contribution to the OFB was noted in a book marking the 25th anniversary of the orchestra:

The arrival of the new conductor—a loved and respected figure in all musical circles in the country—marked the start of a period of transformation which culminated in the orchestra reaching the threshold of artistic and cultural maturity. León suggested that instrumentalists should be brought in from other countries in order to increase the number of musicians, and made it an obligation that some of the new arrivals should give training and instruction in their respective sections. Features of this period were a notable increase in the orchestra's repertoire, the development of a consolidated work base with test and study methods, and an internal discipline which was in line with that imposed in the world's great symphony orchestras. Although there continued to be uncertainty over the question of budgets, the fact that the philharmonic was becoming more and more professional pointed the way to the future.³⁴

León's pedagogical work with the OFB began immediately in December 1971 and lasted until June 1972. He emphasized fundamentals with his new orchestra but was cognizant of the season ahead, so focused on the works of Bach, Mozart, Copland, and Chabrier and planned a Romantic season around Rossini, Mendelssohn, Saint Saens, and von Suppé.³⁵ The changes to the OFB were immediately noticed:

During six months Maestro León put the musicians under an intensive study and training to remedy many of the musical problems that afflicted the Orchestra. He

³⁴ Fernando Toledo, ed. and Michael Sparrow, trans., *Orquesta Filarmónica de Bogotá: 35 años tocando el alma de la gente* (Bogotá: Consuelo Mendoza Ediciones, 2002), 105.

³⁵ Jaramillo Giraldo, 34.

promised to give the best concert of the year in Bogotá and was very close to achieving it. A first look shows the enormous and beneficial changes realized: discipline, refining, rhythmic unity, and a remarkable improvement in the string section.³⁶

Prior to León's appointment the orchestra had begun appearing on a weekly didactic TV program *Música para todos* [Music For Everybody] that was the centerpiece of the OFB's educational mission. Under León's tenure the OFB received the Ondra award in 1972 and 1973 for the most outstanding cultural program on Colombian television. His programming choices reflected his work in the United States and was weighted towards the Romantic repertoire and twentieth-century American works. In his first season he also presented works by Colombian composers such as Lelio Olarte (1885-1940) and Jesús Pinzón Urrea (b. 1928).³⁷ When asked if he thought about balancing European, North American, and Latin American repertory for the Filarmónica he responded:

Music to me is just music. I'm not a specialist but I like Romantic music. Tchaikovsky, Brahms, Schumann, that's my forte, and North American music. I brought into [Colombia] a lot of Copland, Gershwin and Roger Sessions, David Diamond. All of these people [had] never been heard of before [and] I brought their music in. For example, the piano concerto by Gershwin was done by Teresa Gomez and myself for the first time here, [as well as] selections from *Porgy and Bess*.³⁸

³⁶ Jaramillo Giraldo, 34.

³⁷ Olarte was known for composing in the *bambuco*, *pasillo*, and *guabina* styles typical of the Santander region of Colombia. Universidad Nacional de Colombia, *Musicología en Colombia* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2001), 117. Pinzón Urrea is a noted ethnomusicologist and composer whose music involves aleatoric techniques and timbral experimentation to refer to traditional and popular musics of Latin America. Ellie Anne Duque, *Escala: Jesús Pinzón Urrea. Músico* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1987), 2-3.

³⁸ León, interview 2003.

Under León's directorship (1971-1977) the OFB made dramatic strides. An internal (orchestra-sponsored) school, a long held goal of concertmaster Frank Preuss, was established and led by section leaders to emphasize contemporary artistic processes. The position of Resident Composer was established in 1976 and first filled by Francisco Zumaque (b. 1945), a Colombian living in France who wrote orchestral arrangements of Colombian popular music for biweekly performances. A permanent home was established for rehearsals and concerts at the León de Greiff Auditorium at the Universidad Nacional, a relationship that continues as of 2010. Of that early period with the orchestra León noted:

I took over as resident conductor at a time when the orchestra had no home of its own. Rehearsals were in a house in the Montes District in southern Bogotá. We gave concerts in churches, schools, anywhere that could be used as a setting for a listening to a Beethoven symphony or a *pasillo* by Luis A. Calvo. This was the start of a period of experimentation, a period which educated a whole generation of lovers of good music.³⁹

And finally, in 1976, the OFB expanded its mission to perform with the newly established Ópera de Colombia as well as ballet, theatre and choral companies. These changes were not always met with universal acclaim; the internal school in particular was met with resistance from a number of players.⁴⁰ León's efforts to set the highest possible performance standards

³⁹ Toledo, 110.

⁴⁰ Jaramillo Giraldo, 36. See also Toledo's comments on the internal school, 105: "[D]espite all the problems and the storms that raged over an enlightened project which nevertheless went totally against the grain of things at the time, and all the gossip that went on in what

for the OFB were such a departure from what had transpired prior to his tenure and achieved such remarkable results that he is sometimes mistakenly referred to as its first music director.⁴¹ The music directors that immediately followed him, Carlos Villa, Marshall Stith, and Agustín Cullel, emphasized the continuation of León's projects and brought the orchestra to the point where today the Orquesta Filarmónica de Bogotá is considered the finest orchestra in Colombia and one of the finest in all of Latin America.⁴² León was formally recognized by the OFB Board of Directors in 2002 for his foundation-laying work, described as the "Dean of Colombian conductors," and presented with the inaugural award *Orden Filarmónica* (Order of the Philharmonic).⁴³

Though he retired from the OFB in 1977, León continued his involvement with other major organizations as the Concert Master and Director of the Orchestra of the Ópera de Colombia, Artistic Director of the Opera Festival of the Colombian Cultural Institute, and Director of the Banda Sinfónica Nacional. As part of his work with the Opera Festival of the Colombian Cultural Institute León was the conductor for traveling opera productions. On one

was basically a closed environment... the orchestra was coming to be looked upon as a sound and mature group."

⁴¹ See "Vuelven los conciertos de la Orquesta Filarmónica a la UN," <http://www.mineducacion.gov.co/cvn/1665/article-131384.html>, accessed February 20, 2009. León's experience with reorganizing the OFB served him well when the Sinfónica Nacional was disbanded and restructured in 2003. He served as the consultant on the selection panel for the new orchestra.

⁴² Toledo, 105.

⁴³ Toledo, 47. The *Orden Filarmónica* was also presented that year to Frank Preuss and Otto de Greiff who were critical to the early development of the OFB.

occasion he was sitting with soprano Beatriz Parra in Popayán enjoying Donizetti's opera *L'elisir d'amore* when they spotted fellow colleague Martha Senn seated in a different section. During intermission León invited Senn to join them for dinner. Only minutes later a bomb exploded precisely where Senn had been sitting killing one person and injuring many others.⁴⁴ Of that night he told me:

I saved Martha Senn's life. We were in Popayán, during the opera season it was a night when I was not conducting. And in the intermission I told her and Beatriz Parra, "Why don't we go out and get something to eat?" Leaving the theatre a bomb went off, a bomb that was right where Martha had been sitting. The person who had been sitting to the side of her lost his legs; he was a prominent member of Popayán's society. But if she had been there five minutes earlier, it would have killed her. Immediately I went in to find [Beatriz Parra's] mother for her. Her mother – God rest in peace – was a sturdy woman and I found her there in her element giving instructions, "Leave through this door, leave through that one!" She saved a lot of lives. It was a very dramatic moment. I remember very much the people from the opera, dressed in their costumes running through the streets, the musicians were running leaving the theatre because the theatre had been totally destroyed.⁴⁵

As León was leaving the OFB he renewed his composing and began writing songs again, starting with "Cancioncilla" in 1976, a setting of a poem by Eduardo Carranza. His Carranza songs are now ten in number, a far greater number than for any other poet in his oeuvre. When I asked León about his connection to Carranza and the other writers whose poems he set, he traced it back to one book:

⁴⁴ Martha Senn, *Notas sin pentagrama: Fragmentos autobiográficos* (Bogotá: Villegas editores, 2000), 125-129.

⁴⁵ León interview, 2005. Martha Senn goes into further detail on the incident in her memoirs (see prior note for citation).

The first contact that I had, having been away so many years from Colombia, was Luis Antonio Escobar, a musician. He arrived in New York, it was 1950-something, and he gave me an anthology of Colombian poetry and there was a section of poetry by Eduardo Carranza. Years passed, I arrived in Colombia and during the administration of Betancur a week of Colombian music was sponsored in Buenos Aires, Argentina. I was among the invited, along with other personalities. We [he and Carranza] met on the plane. “Have you written music that was mine [from my poems]?” I said, “yes,” “And why haven’t I heard them?” “I promise you,” I replied. But I never did; he died.⁴⁶

León made the first recording of his songs when he returned briefly to the United States in 1977 under the auspices of the Organization of American States to collaborate with Colombian soprano Carmiña Gallo (1939-2004) on an album titled *Nostalgia and Fantasia—Latin American Art Songs*.⁴⁷ Four of his songs are on the disc which was recorded in Washington, D.C. at The Catholic University of America, Benjamin T. Rome School of Music. The late 1970s saw more songs and the cycle of *villancicos* to poetry by the Ecuadorian poet Rigoberto Cordero y León. In 1980 León’s *Misa Brevis* for soprano, mezzo-soprano and mixed voices had its premiere at the Festival de Música Religiosa in Popayán.⁴⁸

The impetus for León’s other song cycle came from a recital that he gave with Ecuadorian soprano Beatriz Parra in Cuenca, Ecuador. Prior to the performance, Parra, who was then serving as Ecuador’s Undersecretary of Culture, commissioned several poems from

⁴⁶ León interview, 2005. León refers to President Belisario Betancur’s term in office 1982-1986. Eduardo Carranza died in 1985.

⁴⁷ Carmiña Gallo, soprano and Jaime León, piano. *Latin American Art Songs*. Inter-American Musical Editions, Phonorecord 3687, 33 rpm, 1977.

⁴⁸ Carlos Barreiro Ortiz, “Música Para Entrar En Comunión,” *El tiempo*, June 22, 1994.

children's literature essayist and poet Francisco Delgado Santos.⁴⁹ León composed the six-song cycle *Las canciones de Pequeña, pequeñita* (1986) for Parra over a period of twenty-one days. Texts came from newly written poems by Delgado Santos and his frequent collaborator Jorge Renán de la Torre, and one previously written poem by Adalberto Ortiz. The cycle was recorded, and the score published in Ecuador by Poligráfica in 1987. It is the first known publication of León's songs and has since been orchestrated and performed with the Orquesta Filarmónica de Bogotá.⁵⁰

By 1992 León had composed thirty-six songs based on poetry from Colombian and Ecuadorian authors, including two song cycles, ten songs based on Carranza poems, and sixteen other songs. These songs constitute León's current known catalog.⁵¹ Twenty-one of his songs were printed shortly after the last song, "La casa del lucero" was completed, though it is not known how accessible this two-volume set of songs was to musicians in Colombia. (See information on the CDM volumes in the first chapter). It is certain that one of León's song became commercially available in Colombia through the 1992 publication of "La campesina" in an anthology by the Colombian Cultural Institute.⁵²

⁴⁹ Francisco Delgado Santos, email message to author, October 8, 2009.

⁵⁰ Jaramillo Giraldo, 99. I first learned of the recording through my correspondence with Mr. Delgado Santos. The details of the recording, however, have not been located (see prior note).

⁵¹ I was not able to ascertain why León ceased to compose songs after 1992.

⁵² The songs appears in *Musica Colombiana: la canción culta*, (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura – Centro de Documentación Musical, 1992); Kathleen L. Wilson subsequently published "La campesina" in *The Art Song in Latin America: Selected Works*

For the remainder of the 1990s, León continued his involvement with guest conducting, judging music competitions and taking on a few advanced students in piano and conducting. During this period a few performances of his vocal and instrumental music occurred. Finally in 1998 he was presented in a gala recital in Bogotá as pianist for soprano Gloria Londoño, who sang twenty of his songs. The concert was subsequently broadcast on the radio and was the catalyst for a profile of León in *El Tiempo* entitled “Five Decades of Work.” In it León refused to refer to himself as solely a composer saying “when it comes to composition I am self-taught.” The article states:

His songs have been described as full of well crafted expressivity, and in them the composer perceives influences of German lieder in the treatment of the pianistic element.

Lightened from the burden of formally studying composition, the music of Jaime León is exempt from the avant-garde tendency that would have taken him outside of tonality. There is a rhythmic emphasis that defines a simple and inspired melodic line.(...)

In this land of poets, Jaime León has discovered the rich vein of national poetry for his songs. And in this, one also appreciates his affinity with the Germanic vocal inheritance: “The voice is the perfect instrument “– he says with emphasis.⁵³

Despite León’s reluctance to call himself a composer his reputation as one only grew both within Colombia and among the international community of classical vocal music. Several commercial recordings of his songs were released by singers such as Martha Senn, Patricia Caicedo, and Maria Teresa Uribe (see full details on recordings in the song analysis

by *Twentieth Century Composers*. (Stuyvesant, New York: Pendragon, 1998), marking the first León song available in the United States.

⁵³ Carlos Barreiro Ortiz, “Cinco Décadas De Oficio,” *El Tiempo*, July 1, 1998.

chapter). In addition to the 1987 Poligráfica edition his songs were published by Pendragon, Trito Edition, and a self-published edition under the Mundo Arts banner. A few of his songs made it into the recital programming of internationally acclaimed singers such as Ainhoa Arteta and Montserrat Caballé. The latest sign of León's entry into the repertoire is found in a course catalog for the *Convocatoria Música 2009: Programa Distrital de Estímulos* (2009 Music Convocation: District Stimulus Program) which describes the audition procedures for a national singing contest. Jaime León's music makes up a significant portion of the suggested repertoire.⁵⁴

Jaime León's manuscripts and personal papers relating to his career as a conductor and composer were donated in 2009 to the EAFIT University in Medellín, Colombia. Mezzo-soprano Martha Senn, director of the Centro Cultural Biblioteca Luis Echavarría Villegas (Cultural Center of the Luis Echavarría Villegas Library) and Jaime León's longtime friend and collaborator, initiated the project to preserve Jaime León's musical legacy in his native country. As of this writing Jaime León and his wife Beatriz live in their spacious apartment in Bogotá.

⁵⁴ Orquesta Filarmónica de Bogotá, *Convocatoria Música 2009: Programa Distrital de Estímulos* (Bogotá: Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, 2009), 47-48.

Awards:

- 1988 *Orden al merito cultural* presented by President Virgilio Barco
- 2001 *Orden al merito cultural* presented by the Colombian Ministry of Culture
- 2002 *Orden Filarmónica* presented by the Orquesta Filarmónica de Bogotá
- 2003 *Orden “Edmundo Mosquera Troya”* presented by the Festival de Música Religiosa in Popayán
- 2003 *Medal of Distinction for Cultural Work* presented at the opening ceremonies of the XI International Art Festival of Cali.

Music Festivals Featuring Songs by Jaime León:

- 2005 Semana Colombo-Catalana Conference sponsored by Universidad EAFIT and the Institut Ramon Llull of Catalan, Spain.
- 2005 Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano
- 2005 Medellín Tercer Festival Música De Cámara De Compositores Colombianos
- 2008 International Music Festival of Medellín and the Orquesta Filarmónica of Medellín
- 2009 Barcelona Festival of Song



Figure 1 Jaime León and Victoria Botero, 2005

CHAPTER 3

BIOGRAPHIES OF THE POETS

The fascination and appreciation that Colombians have for poetry dates to the beginnings of its history. Reading and writing poetry has long been considered a sign of education and character and poets are so highly valued that they often hold political or diplomatic positions. Colombia had a lengthy tradition of declaring a national poet by crowning them with laurel leaves and presenting a presidential decree to a writer for his or her work. Several of the poets in the following pages have been so honored.

The contemporary iteration of this fascination with poetry exists in the annual Medellín Festival of Poetry. It was originally conceived by local writers in 1990 as a symbol of peace in a city where ten people were being murdered daily. From its humble beginnings the festival has evolved into a destination for poets from around the world to read their works in the public parks and auditoriums of Medellín, often to thousands of people at a time.

What follows are short biographies of all of the poets whose works León set to music. An understanding of their lives and poetic styles, albeit brief, sheds light on the characteristics that attracted him to their works. Biographical sketches of each poet appear alphabetically and the León songs that they are associated with are listed at the beginning of each entry for easy cross reference.¹ Particular attention is given to José Asunción Silva because of his standing in the canon of Colombian poetry and to Eduardo Carranza from whose poems Jaime León wrote ten of his thirty-six known songs.

¹ Since the primary focus of this thesis is the music of Jaime León the poets are listed alphabetically rather than chronologically to facilitate cross-reference with the song analysis in Chapter Four. Readers who are interested in reading further about the history of poetic movements in Colombia and Ecuador will find many resources in the Reference List.

Eduardo Carranza (1913–1985). *Cancioncilla, Letra para cantar al son del arpa, Canción, Tu madre en la fuente, Rima, Cancion de cuna, Don Paramplin, Ojuelos de miel, Vago soneto, La casa del lucero*. A poet, journalist, diplomat and academic, Carranza was one of the founding members of the *Piedra y Cielo* (Rock and Sky) literary movement in 1939 (this movement is discussed in detail later in the chapter). His many public posts include member of the Colombian Language Academy, editor of the literary pages for the prominent newspaper *El Tiempo*, director of the National Library, and cultural ambassador to Spain, Venezuela, and Argentina. He was open with his leftist political convictions and led protests against the government as a young man. He campaigned for candidates whom he supported, such as López Pumarejo, and formed the "Alianza Nacional Revolucionaria" (Revolutionary National Alliance) in 1944 during an intensely partisan period. Carranza maintained a lengthy friendship with the major Hispanic and Spanish writers and artists of his time, including Pablo Neruda and Joan Miró. Carranza's poetry focuses on four principal themes: the female/love, nature, country, and death. His early poems were often about young women who were described in radiant metaphors and wrapped in spiritual eroticism.¹ In his later years he preferred delicacy over exuberance and turned his thoughts inward towards his own mortality and moral failings.

Carranza's roots are in Apiay, Colombia, far from the urban centers where he would spend most of his adult life. The landscape of the region of his youth deeply affected him, and references to the towns where he spent his childhood such as Guataquí, Tocaima, Chipaque, and Cruz Verde continually appear in his work. His widowed mother transplanted

¹ Fernando Charry Lara, *Poesía y Poetas Colombianos* (Bogotá: Procultura, 1985), 108.

the family to Bogotá when Carranza was 13. He received a scholarship to attend the Christian Brothers School and received a certificate of teaching.² As a student he constantly read other poets and entered poetry contests. Shortly after his graduation he began teaching primary school, had his first poems published in the literary supplement of *El Tiempo*, and began hosting political rallies in support of Colombia's war with Peru. He published his first two books, *Canciones para iniciar a una fiesta* (Songs to Start a Party, 1936) and *Seis elegías y un himno* (Six Elegies and One Hymn, 1939) while also running a political party Acción Nacionalista Popular (Popular Nationalist Action). Despite his activities in academia, politics, and later, in diplomacy, Carranza always considered his principal job to be that of a poet.³

From the mid 1930s to the early 1950s Colombia witnessed political assassinations, government massacres, military coups, and dictatorships. And while many critical studies point to a recurring theme of nationalism in Carranza's work, it is difficult to find actual references to the reality of his times when one considers how involved he was politically.⁴ The unabashedly positive nature of Carranza's work in the face of such upheaval is best described in his own words:

I want to personally invite poets to build a front against the poetry that destroys, the poetry that promises, and return to positive sentiments against negative sentiments; to invite poets to write against poetry of emptiness and death, against the murky poetry

² Jaime León attended the same school years later.

³ Charry Lara, 110.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

that surrounds us to the poetry of hope, ideals, faith, honor, truth. To reclaim the right to express ourselves poetically in positive and creative sentiments.⁵

Carranza's positive outlook has as much to do with historical circumstances coupled with his political inclinations as with his own temperament. His arrival on the literary scene coincides with gains by the Liberal Party of Colombia after forty-five years of Conservative rule. Other changes in Colombia at the time included industrial development, social security, and the 1936 Constitutional reforms that guaranteed the right to strike and the freedom to worship, buy land, and invest money. The climate of dynamism and opportunity that came with these long-needed reforms—even though they were accompanied by tremendous violence—perfectly coincided with Carranza's positive attitude.⁶

Regarding Carranza's personal politics, he was a curious mixture of left and right leanings. His conservative religious training from the Christian Brothers influenced his tendency towards authoritarianism and nationalism, two themes that are present in his writing. He came of age during the rise of fascism in Germany, falangism in Spain, and communism in Russia and found himself attracted to the grandeur of their theories but repulsed by their excesses. The literature and nationalist politics of Spain also had tremendous influence on his writing and politics. His experiences with Spanish culture led him to the conclusion that to form a proper Hispanic consciousness one must embrace the indigenous values and aesthetics of Colombia.⁷

⁵ María Mercedes Carranza, *Carranza por Carranza* (Bogotá: Editorial La Rosa, 1985), 29.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 31

In 1939 a group of like-minded writers, including Carranza, came together in Bogotá and they called their gathering *Piedra y Cielo* (Stone and Sky).. The group established itself as a reaction to the previous generation of poets, *Los Nuevos* (The New Ones), with whom they felt little connection.⁸ Their name, borrowed from the title of a book by Spanish author Juan Ramón Jiménez, a spiritual father to *Piedra y Cielo*, symbolized their attempts to find an expression that bridged earth and sky, Heaven and Hell, sensuality and spirituality. They were not bound together so much by common writing traits as by commonly shared literary heroes and villains. They expressed distaste for what they considered the simplistic poetic verisimilitude of the immediate past in favor of writers such as the Spaniards Juan de la Cruz (1542-1591), Francisco de Quevedo (1580-1645), Gustavo Adolfo Becquer (1836-1870) and the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío (1867-1916). These *piedracielistas*, as they were known, rejected sentimentality and the logical, commonsense poetry that reflected the nineteenth century rather than their own age.⁹ They dispensed with spectacle and affectations, such as the use of foreign languages (especially French) and mythological references, that impeded real emotional intimacy. Instead they placed value on symbolism, ambiguity and shaded meanings, wordplay and fantasy.¹⁰

⁸ Charry Lara, 87.

⁹ In María Mercedes Carranza's book about her father she explains that Colombian poetry in the mid 1930s that preceded the *Piedra y Cielo* movement was noted for 1) "perfection in the use of language," 2) "conservatism," 3) "disdain for risk taking, adventure, experimentation or exploring original terrain," 4) Modernism. Carranza, 11.

¹⁰ Charry Lara, 106.

Carranza's writing reflected the ideals of the group. He was widely published in Colombia and abroad. This visibility allowed him to assume on his own the title of leader of the group, "I, proud captain of *Piedra y Cielo*, profess always, against wind and tide, the pride of my poetic generation that I consider, as such, a homogenous generation, the most important in the history of Colombian poetry."¹¹ Although Carranza's statement, according to Fernando Charry Lara, remains controversial, it is certain that *pedracielismo* ushered in a change in Colombian literature that previous generations had been unable to achieve.

By 1943 Carranza was named editor of the literary supplement of *El Tiempo*, the *de facto* national newspaper of Colombia, a weekly section that published works by both Colombian and international writers. It was a prestige appointment that carried with it tremendous cultural influence. He published the works of writers such as the aforementioned influences on *Piedra y Cielo* and the likes of Otto de Greiff and Julio Flórez. Long after he left *El Tiempo*, Carranza continued to champion his favorite writers through articles, literary conferences, and his connections in the editorial world.

Carranza served two terms as cultural ambassador for Colombia between 1945-1958. His first period was in Chile (1945-1947), where he became immersed in the literary circle that included Pablo Neruda, Vicente Huidobro, and Nicanor Parra.¹² He served as a professor in several Chilean universities and published two more books. His diplomatic post in Spain

¹¹ Rogelio Echavarría, *Quién es quién en la poesía colombiana* (Bogotá: El Ancora Editores, 1998), 99.

¹² Carranza later lobbied the Perón government of Argentina to grant Neruda asylum who was then in hiding from an arrest warrant issued by the Chilean President González Videla. Perón granted the request; Neruda's asylum, though, was ultimately effected in France. Carranza, 185.

(1951-1958) was even more productive, during his work there he founded the first Female Hispano-American Congress in Madrid, presided over the first three International Poetry Conferences (located in Segovia, Salamanca, and Santiago de Compostela respectively), participated in the first Iberoamerican Congress of Libraries, Archives and Intellectual Property. He also taught and lectured on Colombian and Latin American literature. He received multiple honors from the Spanish government and medals for his work in literature and Hispanic culture.¹³

The rest of Carranza's career was spent as it had begun, dividing his time between writing, academia, and diplomatic or political pursuits. Upon his death in 1985 he was lauded by colleagues around the world. Gregorio Marañón said in his eulogy:

The most interesting thing about Carranza's work, and the reason it is so profound, was the totality of his activity: oratory, poetry, humanitarianism, diplomacy. I consider him one of the greatest orators of the Castilian language and one of our greatest contemporary poets.¹⁴

Carranza was survived by his wife, Rosita de Carranza and two children.¹⁵ Since his death his works have received more critical attention than any other Colombian poet save for José Asunción Silva, and they continue to be published in new editions.

¹³ Carranza inserted himself again into international politics and lobbied the Spanish government in 1957 against granting asylum to former Colombian dictator Gustavo Rojas Pinilla.

¹⁴ Echavarría, 100.

¹⁵ Among his children, his daughter, María Mercedes Carranza also became a poet of some renown and wrote a memoir on her father's life and poetry *Carranza por Carranza*. She was a friend of Jaime León. His songs from Eduardo Carranza's poetry were sung at her funeral in 2004.

In his first book, *Canciones para iniciar a una fiesta* (1936), it is immediately clear that Carranza is searching for a new language of poetic imagery distinctive from what had existed previously. His early period, prior to the Piedra y Cielo years, is marked by exuberant metaphors related to nature and the power of magic dreams. His metaphors equate nature with the feminine, not as a comparison but in total identification, as in the poem “Tierra-mujer” or “Earth-woman.” For Carranza the natural world *is* female.¹⁶ His early works cover only a few themes: adolescent women, young love, the absence of love, and infancy. Carranza’s narrow focus was a radical departure for a Colombian poet; for the first time there complete absence of historical or cultural references is evident. For poets prior to Carranza it had been almost obligatory, after the French manner, to evoke Biblical or other literary themes to contextualize poetry.¹⁷

The natural terms by which Carranza describes women are specific to the Colombian landscape: palm trees, guava, coconuts, jasmine, and stallions. Sensory and emotional perception reign in his poems. Other landmarks like islands and balconies have historical associations for him from his childhood and act as symbols of the innocence of nature. The impressionism that results from such prolonged imagery comes from an eagerness to create a reality via the senses rather than relate it on an intellectual or rational level.¹⁸

Carranza’s daughter Mará Mercedes, herself a poet, writes in her book *Carranza por Carranza* that her father’s rebellion against logic in poetry was political support for the

¹⁶ Carranza, 24

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

irrationalism of fascism. She points to characteristics in his writing that match his political views: nationalism, exaltation of youth, irrationalism, and idealism. Carranza himself declared at one time that poetry must support great causes and declare grand passions.¹⁹ Still, if his poetry exhibited some of his deepest political leanings it was never directly expressed.

With the publication of *El Olvidado y Alhambra* in 1957 Carranza moved into another period of his writing where his earlier themes evolve and deepen. His previous reliance on imagery and metaphor is dispensed in favor of precision and efficiency. The adolescent female-nature figure transformed into a sensual woman who serves as a pretext for exploring new themes, namely the passage of time, transience of experience, romantic nostalgia, and himself. Previously Carranza had been absent from his own poems but now he becomes an object of investigation and comment. Eventually the subject of self will dominate his work, a lifelong trajectory from contemplating the physical to exploring his inner world. His late works, full of pessimism and anguish, are foreshadowed in *Olvidado*.²⁰

Carranza's last book, *Epistolá mortal y otras soledades* (1975), is a meditation on death, the transience of life, and loneliness. The elegiac tone of this, his last work, can also be seen as homage to one of his favorite writers, Jorge Manrique, who was obsessed with the fleetingness of life in the face of death. Carranza's former themes of nature, women, and nationalism are all left behind for dialogues with himself on his memories and impending death, events which he views as signifying the loss of identity.²¹

¹⁹ Carranza, 32.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 38.

Jorge Carrera Andrade (1902–1978). *Tu amor es como la piel de las manzanas*. The distinguished Ecuadorian poet and diplomat spent the first part of his adult life as a socialist agitator writing for underground newspapers that fomented revolutionary ideals.²² His radicalization stemmed in part from witnessing political violence firsthand from an early age and the influence of his father, a Liberal Party member and attorney who regularly defended indigenous people against landowners.²³ Carrera Andrade eventually channeled his energies into organized political work and rose to the position of Secretary of the Senate. The administration at the time, one of many in a dizzyingly violent century of Ecuadorian politics that rivals Colombia's own history, assigned him as consul to Paita, Peru. It was the first of many diplomatic posts that took him to places such as France, Japan, the United States, Venezuela, and England. His posts involved real engagement of the political and economic issues affecting Ecuador but he simultaneously maintained an active writing career. His approach to diplomatic assignments was to make his office a center of literary and cultural exchange by engaging in correspondence with the leading literary figures living in the country of his residence.²⁴ In this way he came to know directly or through correspondence such literary lights as Thomas Merton, Williams Carlo Williams, Muna Lee, Nicolás Guillén, Gabriela Mistral and Pablo Neruda. The 1940s was a watershed decade for his recognition in the English-speaking world. Carrera Andrade's poems appeared in anthologies, influential

²² Jorge Carrera Andrade, *Selected Poems of Jorge Carrera Andrade*, trans. and intro. H. R. Hays (Albany: SUNY Press, 1972), x.

²³ *Ibid.*, ix.

²⁴ Steven Ford Brown, "Jorge Carrera Andrade in America," *Jacket* 12 (July 2000), <http://jacketmagazine.com/12/andr-intro-brown.html> (accessed August 9, 2009).

literary journals like *Books Abroad* and *Poetry Magazine* published essays on his work, and the writer Muna Lee translated his complete works to that point into English under the title *Secret Country*.²⁵

Carrera Andrade's poetry alternated between metric and free verse; metaphor played a strong role in most of his work. In essays and speeches he noted that his poetry has always reflected the times in which he was writing. He held a particular concern for social issues and the plight of the indigenous people of Ecuador. As the twentieth century wore on his poetry was preoccupied by a technology-driven world and the destruction of natural resources.²⁶

In 1975 he was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature. After his death in 1978, however, Carrera Andrade's work faded into obscurity. In the first decade of this millennium interest in his works revived with a new translation in English of selected poetry sponsored by UNESCO in 2002 in honor of the centenary of his birth; more translations, articles in important publications worldwide and scholarly symposiums have followed.²⁷

José Joaquín Casas (1866–1951). *Aves y ensueños*. Casas was a model of that peculiarly Colombian archetype of politician and artist. He trained first as a lawyer and

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Jorge Carrera Andrade, *Reflections on Spanish-American Poetry*, trans. by D C. Bliss and Gabriela de C. Bliss. SUNY Press, Albany 1973, 66.

²⁷ Steven Ford Brown, "The Rediscovery of Jorge Carrera Andrade," *Poetry Among Friends: Jorge Carrera Andrade*, <http://www1.assumption.edu/users/grijalva/poetryamongfriends.htm> (accessed August 9, 2009).

began his career as a regional magistrate progressing to, among many positions, Congressman, Senator, Supreme Court judge, Secretary of State, and Ambassador. Throughout his life he was closely associated with educational reform and, as the Minister of Public Education, he established the system of primary, secondary, industrial and agricultural schools that still exists today in Colombia.²⁸ In addition to his poetry he is remembered for founding a series of intellectual academies, the most important of which was the Colombian Academy of History. Its aim was to nurture a new generation of historians by collecting from private homes the documentary evidence of Colombia's history and organizing it for the use and education of all. In 1939 he was crowned national poet.²⁹ Casas' entire life as a poet-statesman was dedicated to advancing the cause of a collective national conscience.

Casas was a prolific author and beginning in his mid-twenties he published poetry, investigative journalism, editorials, and translations, including the first Spanish edition of Horace's *Ars Poetica*. His love of his country extended to the popular, nativist manner in which he wrote poetry. This is reflected in the titles of some of his works, for example, *Village Chronicle*, *Songs of the Maiden Country*, and *Creole Poems*.³⁰ His poems reveled in the details of ordinary objects and the lives of the working class. He used descriptive writing to capture the emotion of a thing and its essential philosophy, often couched in a mood of decay and regret.

²⁸ Javier Ocampo Lopez, "Casas, José Joaquín." *Gran enciclopedia de Colombia del círculo de lectores*, s.v. Digitally published by the Biblioteca Virtual del Banco de la República. <http://www.lablaa.org/blaavirtual/biografias/casajose.htm> (accessed September 12, 2006).

²⁹ Echavarría, 108.

³⁰ López.

Dora de Castellanos (b. 1924) *Algún día*. Since 1948 Dora de Castellanos has written over twenty volumes of poetry. In her early life she worked in administration and public relations for corporate and governmental offices. She served as a columnist for the major newspapers of Colombia and Venezuela, *El Tiempo*, *El Espectador*, and *El Nacional*, and the lifestyle magazine *Cromos*. In 1978 she became the first woman elected to the Colombian Language Academy. She is also now a member of the International Academy of the Spanish Language. Castellanos has extensive family and professional ties to Venezuela and in the 1980s she served as cultural attaché to Caracas.³¹

The voices of writers were severely curtailed by the government during the period of Colombia's history known as *La Violencia* that began with the country-wide massacre of 1948 and lasted until the mid-1960's. Castellanos at the time was associated with the literary magazine *Mito*, a magazine that published dissenting writers such as Jorge Gaitán Durán and Gabriel García Márquez.³² The magazine was one of the few that openly opposed the Rojas Pinilla dictatorship. Her participation in *Mitos* was brief and is not considered a major influence on her work.³³

³¹ Republic of China (Taiwán) Government Information Office, *Poetisa colombiana visita Taiwan*. Press release Vol. 27, no. 13 (May 16, 1997), 3.
<http://www.gio.gov.tw/info/noticia97/13/p2.htm> (accessed Sept. 15, 2006).

³² Andrés Holguín, *Antología crítica de la poesía colombiana* (Bogotá, Banco de Colombia, 1974),

³³ Presidencia de la Republica, 29.

Castellanos' poetic forms are traditional including rhyme, sonnet, and the epic, and she often writes on themes of love, death, and historical subjects.³⁴ Her love poems have received close attention, especially the book *Zodiaco del hombre* (1980) which she wrote as an answer to centuries of masculine poetry extolling the virtues and vices of women.³⁵ Two of her epic poems, *La Bolivariada* (1984), on the life of South American liberator Simon Bolivar (1783-1830), and *Hiroshima, amor mío* (1971), a reflection on the atomic bomb, were awarded prizes in poetry in Colombia, Venezuela, Japan and the former U.S.S.R. Her work has been translated, recited internationally, and set to music by various composers.³⁶

Eduardo Castillo (1889–1938). *Canción de Noel*. Castillo, a modernist poet, was associated with the literary branch of the *Centenaristas*, a group of historians, writers, philosophers and critics who came together around 1910 on the 100th anniversary of Colombian independence. The *Centenaristas* were a loose coalition of writers who wanted to express in concrete form the undercurrent of a spiritually vacant society that was filled with potential for violent uprising.³⁷ They were the artistic representatives of the political

³⁴ Dora Castellanos, *Recital poético de Dora Castellanos: Introspectiva y perspectiva de su obra* (Bogotá: Casa de Nariño, 1984), 30-32.

³⁵ Castellanos, 33.

³⁶ Jacqueline Nova, Colombia's noted electro-acoustic composer, set portions of *Hiroshima amor mio* as an oratorio for mixed voices commissioned in 1972 by the Colombian Cultural Institute. Due to economic and political factors the work has never been performed. Ana Maria Romano G., "Jacqueline Nova, recorrido biográfico," *A Contratiempo* 12 (2002): 30.

³⁷ Maria Isabel Vargas Arango, "Castillo, Eduardo." *Gran Enciclopedia de Colombia del Círculo de Lectores*, s.v. Digitally published by the Biblioteca Virtual del Banco de la República. <http://www.lablaa.org/blaavirtual/biografias/castedua.htm> (accessed September 20, 2006).

movement that eventually overthrew the repressive government of General Rafael Reyes. As the second wave of modernism, the Centenaristas, and Castillo in particular, paid homage in their writing to their forbears José Asunción Silva (see entry for Silva later in the chapter) and Guillermo Valencia (1873-1943).

Castillo served as Valencia's personal secretary for years and widely promoted his chief's writing in his newspaper articles. Castillo's work as a journalist, translator and promoter of all things literary provided him with the financial means to write poetry, his first love, though he published only a few collections. He served as the supplement editor for various publications, including *El Tiempo Nuevo* and *Cromos*. His main responsibilities were to select, translate, and comment on literary works of the day. In this way he introduced Colombians to the writings of Poe, Baudelaire, Verlaine, D'Annunzio, Wilde, and Kipling, among others. Finally, in 1918, he published his first book of poetry, *Duelo lírico*, followed by *El árbol que canta* (1928). Many of his poems were published individually during his lifetime and a collected works edition was published posthumously. Known as the "Black Pope" for his black cape and wide brimmed hat, he died in Bogotá blind and addicted to morphine.

His poetry is described as modern because of its economy of language and self-referential tone.³⁸ Castillo's intent was to uncover the essential nature of whatever he was writing about; to that end he was not bound by form and wrote in a variety of styles and rhyme schemes, opting for a break with the nineteenth-century tradition of formalism and

³⁸ Echavarría, 116.

legalistic grammar.³⁹ His major themes of religion, death, and eroticism explore the mysterious and unexplainable in human nature through suggestive rather than descriptive or narrative language.

Rigoberto Cordero y León (1916-1998). *Cancioncilla de navidad, El asnillo y el buey, Villancico de la estrella, Villancico de las campanas*. Cordero y León was an Ecuadorian poet, critic and journalist who in his prolific career authored or edited more than eighty-five separate titles. In addition to his poetry he had a lifelong fascination with the works of Beethoven and Chopín and wrote musicological tracts on these and other European composers. He was devoted to his native city Cuenca, a regional capital in Ecuador with a robust intellectual life, and dedicated himself to supporting its intellectuals by editing and publishing their works.⁴⁰ Along with Isabel Moscoso Dávila, Enrique Sánchez Orellana and Luis Cordero Crespo he formed the Cultural Department of the Red Cross of Azuay to promote regional writers.⁴¹ Cordero y León was recognized in 1960 for his writing and promotional efforts and was awarded the Fray Vicente Solano award from the city of Cuenca.⁴² In 2003 he was posthumously recognized by the National Congress for his contributions to the cultural life of Ecuador and a local ordinance was passed honoring him

³⁹ David Jimenez Panesso, *Rafael Maya*, Procultura: Bogotá, 1989, 13.

⁴⁰ Ana Abad Rodas, “La Isla de los Poetas,” *Diario El Mercurio*, December 11, 2005 http://www.elmercurio.com.ec/web/titulares.php?nuevo_mes=12&nuevo_ano=2005&dias=11&seccion=c8Nrl3r (accessed August 10, 2009).

⁴¹ Rodolfo Pérez Pimentel, *Diccionario biográfico del Ecuador* (Guayaquil, Ecuador: Litografía e Imprenta de la Universidad de Guayaquil, 1987), s.v. “Moscoso Davila, Isabel.”

⁴² Abad Rodas.

and other Cuenca writers by designating an island in the Tomebamba River that passes through Cuenca as the “Island of Poets.”⁴³

Francisco Delgado Santos (b. 1950). *El muñeco dormilón, Caballito de madera, Pequeña Pequeñita*. Delgado Santos is an author, editor, illustrator and cultural ambassador for the children’s literature of Ecuador. This interest comes as a legacy from his father, a professor of children’s literature who was publicly humiliated and fired from his position by a military dictatorship that opposed his work after he wrote an editorial defending his post.⁴⁴ A highly recognized author, Delgado Santos began winning poetry and short story contests at the age of twelve and wrote his first book, *Atardecer sentimental*, at sixteen.⁴⁵ He is credited with over twenty titles, including collections of his own essays and multi-author anthologies of children’s literature. In addition to being an author he has been an active promoter of children’s literature, serving as an associate editor of *Bookbird* (1978), the international magazine of children’s literature based in Austria, and publishing a weekly column in 1979, “Mundo de la Literatura Infantil,” (“Children’s Literature World” in the *Diario El tiempo* newspaper of Quito. Delgado Santos credits that column with helping him define his fundamental aims to: “contribute in some way to the aspects and consciousness of parents and especially teachers, with respect to the problem generated by the abandonment of

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Francisco Delgado Santos, “Cuento-Dedicatoria,” in *Ecuador y su literatura infantil: estudio y bibliografía*, 2nd ed. (Quito, Ecuador: Subsecretaría de Cultura del Ministerio de Educación, 1984), 11-12.

⁴⁵ Delgado Santos, 245.

children's literature in Ecuador, and to alert the national authorities of the colossal and urgent task that was waiting for them."⁴⁶

For that purpose Delgado Santos has worked nationally and internationally promoting literacy and cultural enrichment via the government of Ecuador, the World Bank, the Regional Center for the Promotion of Books in Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLALC), and other organizations. He founded and directed Ecuador's national public library system from 1986-1988.⁴⁷ Of particular note among his editorial projects are the two series that he created and edited, *Así me gusta a mi* and *Abrelatas*.⁴⁸ Delgado Santos has continued to receive accolades well into his career, in 1996 he received a national prize for literature from the Government of Venezuela and in 2006 his book *La pelea* won the National Storytelling prize for pre-adolescent audiences. In addition to his work as author and editor he served as the executive director of the Ecuadorian office of publishing firm Alfaguara Infantil Juvenil. Santos' stories and poems concern everyday situations and events that a child might encounter but are retold with a tender inventiveness that captivates his intended young audiences.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Delgado Santos, Preface to the first edition 1982, 15.

⁴⁷ Francisco Delgado Santos, Afterward to *Taca-Taca-Tan* (Quito, Ecuador: Subsecretaría de Cultura, Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deportes, 1994), 30.

⁴⁸ Sara Vanegas Coveña, *Diccionario de autores ecuatorianos contemporaneos Provincia de Uzuay y Cañar* (Universidad de Uzuay: Cuenca, Ecuador, 2005), 49.

⁴⁹ Vanegas Coveña, 49.

Julio Flórez (1867–1923). *Cuando lejos, muy lejos*. Despite a life filled with tragedy and a society that alternately embraced and rejected him, Julio Flórez remains one of the most beloved poets of Colombia.⁵⁰ The attraction to the Bohemian life came early to Flórez. He was fifteen when his education was halted due to civil war and instead of returning to school when the situation had normalized, he began spending time with Bogotá’s literary faction, a group that included José Asunción Silva (see entry later in the chapter) and Candelario Obeso (see entry later in the chapter). Both of these men felt a rejection from the city’s elite and enjoyed their reputations as iconoclasts and misfits. Within a period of three years, however, Obeso committed suicide and Flórez’s brother Leonidas died from wounds received in a political riot.⁵¹ Flórez, who at seventeen was already a published poet, emulated his heroes to the extent that he tried to survive only by his writing and, as an ardent liberal, rejected the offers of government positions with the ruling conservative party. Despite his disdain for contemporary society, Flórez’s poetry, which is filled with eroticism, military pride and morbid sensuality, was quickly embraced by both critics and the general public.⁵² He became fashionable and moved in the highest circles of Bogotá society, where he became known as the “Divine Flórez.” Musicians clamored for his poems in order to set them to

⁵⁰ In 1987 Flórez’s poem *Las flores negras* came in third place in a nationwide referendum on “Best Example of Colombian Poetry”. Echavarría, 186.

⁵¹ Gloria Serpa-Flórez de Kolbe, “Flórez, Julio.” *Gran Enciclopedia de Colombia del Círculo de Lectores*, s.v. Digitally published by the Biblioteca Virtual del Banco de la República. <http://www.lablaa.org/blaavirtual/biografias/florjuli.htm> (accessed September 20, 2006).

⁵² *Ibid.*

music, Flórez himself would make up songs with *tiple* accompaniment to his own texts.⁵³ He was a prolific writer for political and social causes and was praised for his simplified verses that exuded a spirit of improvisation though at times degenerating into a haphazard style.

During a period that overlapped with the Thousand Days War (1899-1902), when Colombia was again wracked by extreme violence and bloodshed, Flórez formed the literary group *Gruta Simbolica* (Symbolic Cave). In addition to an exchange of ideas and writing, the group also indulged in fin-de-siecle entertainments such as graveyard carousing, opium, and absinthe for which Flórez became a political target.⁵⁴ In 1904 the new President, Rafael Reyes, expelled Flórez from the country just as he was at the height of his career.⁵⁵ He spent five years in exile, traveling throughout Latin America and Europe. He published several books of poetry, including *Cardos y lirios* (1905) and *Gotas de ajeno* (1909) that are infused with his sense of loss and betrayal. He returned to Colombia in 1909 to great fanfare but promptly entered into seclusion in the remote village of Usiacurí. There he lived with his common-law wife and spent his remaining years as a farmer raising five children. He continued to write poetry and his late works show evidence of a turn towards reflection and interiority.⁵⁶ In his last months Flórez returned to the Catholic Church and married his long-

⁵³ Gines Albareda and Francisco Garfias. *Antología de la poesía hispano-americano: Colombia* (Biblioteca Nueva: Madrid, 1957). The *tiple* is a stringed instrument similar to a guitar; it is traditionally used to play *bambuco*.

⁵⁴ *Grandes Poetas, Grandes compositores, Grandes melodias de la canción colombiana*, 15.

⁵⁵ The ascendancy of Reyes ended the war but ushered in an extreme rightist government under which civil liberties were severely curtailed. Reyes, oddly enough, forbade Flórez's attempted reentry to Colombia after three years by naming him to the Legation in Spain.

⁵⁶ Serpa-Flórez de Kolbe, "Flórez, Julio."

time partner. Less than a month before he died Flórez was finally recognized as a poet of the people and crowned national poet of Colombia.

Alfredo Gómez Jaime (1878–1946). *Siempre*. Once a famous poet, both in Colombia and abroad, Alfredo Gómez Jaime has been all but forgotten, except as the poet whose words formed the basis for a few popular songs.⁵⁷ He held diplomatic posts in Ecuador and Spain and was responsible for establishing literary magazines and organizations such as the *Asociación Literaria Internacional de America* (1906) in Bogotá and the *Revista Latina* in (1907) in Madrid. He published nineteen books of poetry and fiction, wrote extensively for newspapers and literary magazines around the world, and had individual poems published in international anthologies.⁵⁸ Gómez Jaime wrote the text for the official hymn of the city of Tunja, his birthplace, and was crowned Poet Laureate of the city when it celebrated the 400th anniversary of its founding in 1939.⁵⁹

Daniel Lemaitre (1883-1962). *Evocación*. Lemaitre was one of the few individuals who were successful in both business and the arts. The company he founded and that existed until the 1980s, Daniel Lemaitre y Cia., developed numerous real estate and industrial ventures in the city of Cartagena. Early in his career Lemaitre began writing a column for the

⁵⁷ Two of those songs are “Ella” a *pasillo* set by Carlos Brito, and “Para ti” set by Daniel Zamudio.

⁵⁸ Albert Baeza Flores, *Antología de la poesía hispanoamericana* (Buenos Aires: Tirsó, 1959), 51.

⁵⁹ Echavarría, 216.

newspaper *El Porvenir* where he chronicled the daily life of Cartageneros. Gradually his vignettes turned into lyrics which he set to popular dance music; several became so well known (such as “Pepe,” “Yo tengo un amor chiquito,” and “Sebastian rómpete el cuero”) that they have now entered the realm of folk music, seemingly without author.⁶⁰ As a member of the city’s elite, Lemaitre served as patron to numerous artists and musicians. He sponsored band director Lucho Bermúdez (1912-1994) and composer Adolfo Mejía (1905-1973), the latter of whom set several of Lemaitre’s more serious poems, including “Arruru,” “Tu vives en mi,” and most importantly, “Hymn to Cartagena,” the official song of the city.⁶¹ Lemaitre’s book *Corralito de piedra* (1949) is a paean to Cartagena. It is filled with poetry and essays about the port city that began its life as an immense stone fortress built by the Spaniards in 1533. In return for Lemaitre’s dedication to the city, Cartagena has enshrined Lemaitre’s memory by naming a library, auditorium, neighborhood, street, and bus line after him. A television documentary on his life *Daniel Lemaitre: canto, cuento y olor del corralito* was produced by the poet Jorge García Usta.⁶²

Antonio Llanos (1905–1978). *Si no fuera por ti*. Though he lived well into his seventies, Antonio Llanos’ creativity after his mid-thirties came only in short bouts, when he began to suffer from various physical and mental maladies. By that time, however, he had

⁶⁰ Héctor Rojas Herazo, “Un Secreto de Daniel Lemaitre,” in *Antología de poetas costeños*, ed. Rómulo Bustos and Ramón de Zubiría (Bogotá: Colcultura, 1993), 221.

⁶¹ Peter Wade, *Music, Race, and Nation: Música tropical in Colombia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 85.

⁶² *Daniel Lemaitre: canto, cuento y olor del corralito*, directed by Jorge García Usta, n.d.

already gained the respect and admiration of many fans and colleagues who supported him financially as he tried various treatments, including electroshock therapy. Llanos was born and educated in Cali, a provincial city in the Cauca Valley sorely lacking, according to Llanos, in culture.⁶³ He sought to remedy this and in 1930 started the regional magazine *Revista del Oriente*. It single-handedly brought national and international attention to overlooked writers of the Cauca Valley, including himself. He published many of his poems in *Revista* as well as in the Bogotá newspaper *El Tiempo*. He became friends with the Bogotá writers Eduardo Carranza and Jorge Rojas, and formed part of the new movement *Piedra y Cielo* (Rock and Sky) in 1939 (see p. 46 for a more detailed description of this literary movement). He wrote numerous books of poetry during periods of lucidity especially the period between 1932-1943 including *Temblor bajo los ángeles* (1942), *Casa paterna* (1950), *La voz entre lágrimas* (1950), *Rosa secreta* (1950) and *La madre muerta* (1958). A tribute to the poet was held in Cali in 1962; he was brought to the event in his sick bed while his supporters and colleagues, including Carranza, spoke on his behalf.⁶⁴ In 1984 the Antonio Llanos Prize, a national poetry contest, was named for him.

Images of natural beauty and mysticism suffused with pain are found throughout Llanos' poetry. Like his most admired poet, St. John of the Cross, he preferred to write of the inner life rather than relate to the outside world and to search for serenity in the Cauca

⁶³ Llanos frequently complained of this aspect of Cali. He was known to prefer the company of Dante and carried around a bust of the Florentine. Llanos would sit facing him in cafes and talk about life, death, Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. Harold Alvarado Tenorio, "Antonio Llanos," *Anales de la literatura hispanoamericana*, no. 12 (1983): 170.

⁶⁴ Echavarría, 287.

landscape as an antidote for sadness.⁶⁵ Some of his poetry recalls delicate moments of happiness, tenderness, and eroticism, though Llanos, who was gay, most often wrote of these moments as interludes on the path to misfortune and loss.

Isabel Lleras Restrepo (1911–1965). *La campesina*. Born into a wealthy Bogotá family, Lleras Restrepo was initially drawn to the violin and later turned to writing as her primary creative outlet. Her work was recognized quickly and she won several poetry prizes including the Grand Prize from the Colombian Academy of Language. Like Rafael Maya (see entry later in the chapter) she preferred the sonnet to any other form and was openly disdainful of modern literary advances.⁶⁶ She was enamored with Bogotá's Colonial period and her most famous poem about that time, "El Camarín del Carmen," is included in many anthologies of poetry about the city.⁶⁷ Her poems deal most often with devotion to family and ancestors, honor, and almost narcissistic self-reflection. In her time, she was lauded as the quintessential "Lady Poet," and her writing was noted for its elegant form and aristocratic tone.⁶⁸ She published four books of verse, *Sonetos* (1936), *Lejanía* (1952), *Canto comenzando* (1960) and *Más allá del paisaje* (1963). Lleras Restrepo was the sister of Carlos Lleras Restrepo, who became president of Colombia in 1966.

⁶⁵ Alvarado Tenorio, 170.

⁶⁶ Isabel Lleras Restrepo, *Sonetos* (Bogotá: Editorial Minerva, 1936), xv.

⁶⁷ Echavarría, 288.

⁶⁸ Biblioteca aldeana de Colombia, *Las mejores poetisas colombianas* (Editorial Minerva: Bogotá, 1936), 55.

Luís Carlos López (1883-1950). *A mi ciudad nativa*. Known as “El Tuerto Lopez” (One-Eyed Lopez) for his famously twisted countenance and the spirit of his poetry, López endured a love-hate relationship with Cartagena, his native city where, save for brief consular postings in Baltimore and Munich, he spent his entire life. He took a critical, often scathing view of Cartagena and his early writing was considered simultaneously grotesque, incomprehensible, vibrant, and full of fervor.⁶⁹ The shock-value of his early work gave way to a more nuanced approach and the emergence of major themes of realism, social satire, proverbs, and the relationship between Spain and her lost provinces.

López welcomed his trips abroad as a break from the provinciality of Cartagena but, as he noted in his poem “New York,” he found himself at odds with the fast-paced culture and longing to return:

See for yourself if it is not idiocy to travel on an escalator,
not knowing ourselves, great-grandsons of backwardness,
how to play that scientific game of golf!
Let us go back to the village, to the pleasantly dark crevice
of my hometown.⁷⁰

Gradually the divisions over his writing ended in acceptance and admiration throughout Colombia and Latin America. He received accolades from the literary greats of the Hispanic world such as Miguel de Unamuno and Rubén Darío, his poetry was included in major anthologies, and in 1940 he was crowned Poet Laureate of Cartagena. He was also honored with a public sculpture of a pair of old shoes in reference to the last line of his most

⁶⁹ Echavarría, 277.

⁷⁰ Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda, *Historia portátil de la poesía colombiana: 1880-1995* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores, 1995), 57.

famous poem, “A mi ciudad nativa” (the complete poem and a photo of the sculpture can be found in the analysis chapter that follows).

Considered the first realist poet of Colombia and a pre-cursor to the magic realism of Gabriel García Márquez, López’s work is filled with irony and satire channeled through his preferred form, the sonnet. López took this favored vehicle of Colombian poets, traditionally used to lulling effect, and turned it to his satirical ends.⁷¹ He dispensed with an intellectual treatment of his subjects in favor of a direct tone. He was a lover of objects, places, and exact moments. Still, López did not consider that he had broken any new ground: “I was never interested in innovation in poetry, or being the “new poet” of my time. I consider myself only an author with a distinct feeling, a product of my own temperament.”⁷²

Rafael Maya (1898–1980). *Todo pasó*. A revered poet who was best known for his association with the literary movement of the 1920s, *Los Nuevos* (The New Ones), Maya was born in Popayán and spent his adult years in Bogotá. He worked as the editor of the literary supplement for a variety of publications, including *El Tiempo*, *El País*, and *Cromos*. At *Cromos* he was a colleague of Eduardo Castillo (see earlier entry for Castillo). He was a founding contributor to two literary magazines, *Los Nuevos* and *Revista Bolívar*. In addition to his prose and poetry (Maya published nineteen books), he is best known for his academic work. From 1960 to the end of his life he became one of the most sought after professors of

⁷¹ Dudley Fitts, ed., *Anthology of Contemporary Latin-American Poetry* (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1942), 616.

⁷² Cobo Borda, 54.

literature and philosophy.⁷³ He taught in all of Colombia's major universities and spent 1956 in Paris as part of the Colombian Legation to UNESCO, teaching at the Sorbonne. He was crowned National Poet in 1972.

The members of *Los Nuevos*, who published their first issue in 1925, took their name as a form of opposition to the literary movement the preceded them, the *Centenaristas*.⁷⁴ The members of *Los Nuevos* were all born at the turn of the century and came of age in the 1920s and 30s, when Colombia, particularly Bogotá, experienced tremendous change. The growth of the petroleum industry, the building of rail lines, the political and financial repercussions of the partition of Panama, and the overhaul of the government's financial system brought an agrarian, rural country into the twentieth century.⁷⁵ New schools and universities opened in Bogotá to accommodate a wave of internal migration from rural areas and international immigration from Europe and the Middle East. Electricity became more common, a famously dark and somber city was lit, a new nightlife developed to accommodate the foreigners, business people, and nascent working class. In order to make room for the changes, as Maya noted, "the erudite, scientific and learned Colombian was left practically outside of the official orbit, excluded from the administration in favor of the domination of financiers, businessmen, protagonists of a technical and industrial culture that advanced over the ruins of

⁷³ Jimenez Panesso, David, 4. Maya himself rated his academic work as his greatest contribution to Colombia.

⁷⁴ See the entry for Eduardo Castillo, a member of the *Centenaristas*.

⁷⁵ Carmen Neira Fernández, *Rostros y voces de Bogotá* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2004), 46.

humanism.”⁷⁶ Maya viewed this loss of values as coming directly from the political and social reforms called for by the *Centenaristas*, many of which were viewed by him and *Los Nuevos* as failures.⁷⁷ The answer from various members of the group was to radicalize politically in both directions, thus promoting both fascism and socialism. Maya, whose personal politics were conservative, rejected open partisanship and resolved to be a poet only, albeit one who revered and promoted the past in the mold of Virgil and José Asunción Silva (see entry for Silva later in the chapter).⁷⁸

Maya’s poetry extols nature, colonial Colombia, peasant life, and ancestors. He evokes classical symbols such as myrtle, laurel, sacred hills, and offerings that represent a search for harmony and thoughtfulness. His ruminative poetry has been likened to the type of nineteenth-century mansion that he adored, filled with long hallways, hidden corners, and circuitous stairways in contrast to the hyper-functional domiciles that were spreading all across Bogotá.⁷⁹ Maya placed emphasis on the technical aspects of his poetry; he was a master of rhyme scheme and meter. To him a poem out of balance was analogous to a world out of balance. The sonnet in particular was a favored form, a nostalgic vote for civility in the face of accelerating urbanization.

⁷⁶ Panesso, 6.

⁷⁷ It is important to note that the *Centenaristas* were a political as well as intellectual cohort. Three of its disciples became President of Colombia.

⁷⁸ Maya served one term in Congress as a conservative; however, his experience confirmed his distaste for politics.

⁷⁹ Neira Fernández, 52.

Candelario Obeso (1849–1884). *Canción del boga ausente*. In his brief lifetime Obeso rose from a humble, provincial childhood in Mompóx to literary and political successes, albeit fleeting. He was the illegitimate child of Eugenio María Obeso, a wealthy white ranch owner and lawyer for the Liberal Party who legally recognized—an unusual occurrence—the son that he had with the black washerwoman, María de la Cruz Hernández.⁸⁰ Obeso showed early promise as a student, particularly in languages, and received a government scholarship to attend a military college in Bogotá. When the government failed, his scholarship was suspended and he promptly transferred to the Universidad Nacional.⁸¹ There he studied law and political science, but left after two years for lack of money. He returned to Mompóx where he taught school and wrote textbooks for the study of English, Italian and French. These and his other textbooks for Spanish grammar and mathematics were adopted in a number of Colombian schools.⁸² While teaching in Mompóx and the neighboring town Magangué he was arrested several times for theft and dueling. His run-ins with the law prompted him to pseudonymously write the short story *La Familia Pigmalión* (1871) as a thinly-veiled account of his detractors.⁸³

The isolation of Mompóx, an interior island of Colombia bounded by two branches of the Magdalena River, and Obeso's encounters with the law led him to return to Bogotá where

⁸⁰ Amir Smith Córdoba, *Vida y obra de Candelario Obeso* (Bogotá: Centro para la Investigación de la Cultura Negra, 1984), 29.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁸² Richard L. Jackson, *Black Writers in Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979), 55.

⁸³ Candelario Obeso, *Cantos populares de mi tierra* (Bogotá: Fundación Editorial Epígrafe, 2003), 5.

he made a living translating everything from a manual of infantry drill tactics to such writers as Shakespeare, Hugo, Lord Byron, de Musset and Longfellow.⁸⁴ In addition to his translations he began publishing his poems and essays in national publications.

Obeso published his most important work in 1877, *Cantos populares de mi tierra*, a book of poems inspired by the Afro-Colombian society in which he was raised. Written in the dialect of the peasant farmers and boatmen who work on the Magdalena River it explored new means of writing by using quotidian expressions with words of African origin to explore subtle philosophical dilemmas that presented themselves in the ordinary situations of mixed-race men in a poetic manner.⁸⁵ The poetry revealed and validated for the first time in Colombian literature the material and spiritual life of the boatmen of the Magdalena, Colombia's mother river.⁸⁶

The book received little attention and Obeso continued to produce short works and translations. His increasing frustration with his lack of means and social movement was chronicled in his largely autobiographical long poem *La lucha de la vida* (1882).⁸⁷ In his later years Obeso took the unpopular position through his books and editorials that racial bias still existed despite the prosaic harmony between the white, black, and indigenous peoples of

⁸⁴ León de Sagher, *Nociones de táctica de infantería, de caballería y de artillería*, trans. Candelario Obeso (Bogotá: Imprenta H. Andrade, 1878). The preface to this edition, written by then Colombian President Julián Trujillo, thanks Obeso for giving the country the first modern military war manual for non-officers.

⁸⁵ Jackson, 55.

⁸⁶ Laurence Emmanuel Prescott, *Without Hatreds or Fears: Jorge Artel and the Struggle for Black Literary Expression in Colombia* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 43.

⁸⁷ Jackson, 61.

Colombia being touted by the white Bogotá elites.⁸⁸ The circumstances surrounding Obeso's death—he shot himself in the abdomen on June 29, 1884 and lived three days before dying—remain a mystery. Some claimed it was an accident while others, pointing to Obeso's despondent writings, insist the author committed suicide.

His works were revived in the early part of the twentieth century and he is now considered by many critics to be the father of *poesía negra* (black poetry) in Latin America. In particular Obeso's influence can be seen in the poetry of Cuban writer Nicolás Guillén in its form, meter, subtle protest and racial pride.⁸⁹ In 2009 the Colombian Ministry of Culture celebrated Obeso as part of *El año de la poesía negra* (The Year of Black Poetry) and sponsored conferences and papers on his work.

Adalberto Ortiz (1914–2003). *La Tunda para el negrito*. An Afro-Ecuadorian novelist, poet, diplomat and painter who is most known for his first novel, *Juyungo* (1942), Ortiz described his early life in Esmeraldas, a predominantly black region of Ecuador, as having an almost Eden-like quality, for there were no roads, rail lines, or electricity, only jungle and rivers.⁹⁰ His family was well-educated, though poor, and he won a scholarship to attend school and eventually university in Quito, the capital. The speech, customs, and people of his childhood in Esmeraldas would later punctuate much of his writing. At first

⁸⁸ Prescott, 47. Obeso was part of the first generation of post-emancipation Afro-Colombians—slavery ended in Colombia in 1852.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁹⁰ Carlos Calderón Chico, *Tres maestros* (Guayaquil, Ecuador: Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, 1991), 104.

Ortiz had no aspiration for a literary career. But a chance encounter at the age of twenty-four with an anthology of black American poets inspired him to write.⁹¹ Ortiz identified himself as both black and of mixed race and he began publishing poetry from a black and mulato perspective. In 1942 he published *Juyungo*, the first Ecuadorian novel to have a black male as the protagonist and which cast light on an overlooked segment of Ecuadorian society. The book immersed readers in the black experience and the intertwining of race and class. It won the National Prize for the novel and was quickly translated into many languages, receiving international critical acclaim. His second book, a collection of poems titled *Tierra, son y tambor: cantares negros y mulatos* (1945), alternates between the voices of mulato, black, and white speakers.⁹² Ortiz wrote six more novels and books of poetry; served for ten years as a diplomat in the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Paraguay and France; and, late in his life, turned to painting. Still, it is his early work that determined his presence in the canon of Hispanic and Black literature.

Ortiz's style consciously mimics the rhythms of Afro-Ecuadorian music, something he referred to as the Culture of the Tan Tan or tambourine.⁹³ His poetry shows a preference for onomatopoeia, syncopation, and words of African origin. His prose, charged with race and eroticism, is tempered with a dark, often bitter, sense of humor.

⁹¹ Adalberto Ortiz, *El animal herido* (Quito, Ecuador: Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, 1959), 7. Despite the reception for *Juyungo* Ortiz's second work was published in Mexico because the Ecuadorian cultural council did not consider this new work "real poetry" and refused to print it.

⁹² Ortiz commented on his ambivalence over his mixed ancestry "When a mulato is proud to be lighter than other blacks, and unashamed to be less white than other whites, he will have become an individual, himself, nothing more or less than a man." Ortiz, 15.

⁹³ Calderón Chico, 106.

José Asunción Silva (1865-1896). *Serenata, Los maderos de San Juan, A ti*. In the genre of Spanish-language poetry José Asunción Silva is ranked as a master and one of the fathers of Modernism. It is all the more surprising then that his stature in the literary world is based only on a few slim volumes of poems and one novel. His lasting legacy is due in large part to Silva's international literary circle of friends who spread his works far beyond the borders of Colombia after his death.

Silva was raised in a wealthy home and educated in the best schools of Bogotá alongside other children descended from the Spanish aristocracy. He was one of six children, only three of whom survived into childhood. Silva's early and frequent encounters with death, including that of a childhood friend, led to an obsession with death and the afterlife.⁹⁴ He showed early literary promise but financial strains forced his parents to take him out of school at age thirteen in order to help his father in the family business. Silva continued writing in his spare time and completed a book, *Intimidades*, by age eighteen (unpublished until 1977). He traveled to Europe in 1885 as an agent of the family business, passing through France, Switzerland, and England. He spent the most time in Paris where he lived with a great uncle and quickly entered in the circles of the artist Gustave Moreau and the writers Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Verlaine. Silva immersed himself in the Parisian avant-garde during this period and amassed a large library representative of the literary and philosophical tendencies of the period including the works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Henrik

⁹⁴ Maria Isabel Vargas, "Silva, José Asunción." *Gran enciclopedia de Colombia del Círculo de Lectores*, s.v. Digitally published by the Biblioteca Virtual del Banco de la República. <http://www.lablaa.org/blaavirtual/biografias/silvjose.htm> (accessed March 3, 2006).

Ibsen, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer.⁹⁵ His experience with the *fin-de-siècle* literati only heightened his pessimistic outlook and led him to fully renounce his Catholic faith in favor of rationalism and morbidity. Silva returned to Colombia in 1886 and became involved with a group of writers led by José María Rivas Groot who edited an anthology of their works, *La lira nueva* (1886), that has since become a milestone publication in Colombian letters. Eight of Silva's poems appeared in *La lira nueva* and two more in the anthology *Parnasso colombiano* (1886). On the basis of this slender output, Silva's reputation as a major poet was established.⁹⁶

His father died in 1887, and Silva's lack of business acumen, coupled with the political and social unrest in Colombia, led to a prolonged personal financial crisis. Only four years later his beloved sister Elvira died. She had been his closest confidant and muse; he regarded her as a goddess, immortal and pure. He spent lavishly on her funeral, but was unable to pay for the costs, forcing him to abandon the family home for less expensive lodgings. Her death and its aftermath inspired him to write his most famous poem, "Nocturno," in January 1892.

With the family business gone, Silva turned to journalism and worked at *El Telegrama*, co-writing a column, "Casos y cosas," with Sanín Cano. The success of "Nocturnos" and his newspaper writing confirmed his place as a recognized literary figure in Colombia. His literary credentials and family connections led to an appointment to the

⁹⁵ María Mercedes Carranza Coronado, "José Asunción Silva y el modernismo, obra del poeta," *Revista Credencial Historia* 76 (April 1996), <http://www.lablaa.org/blaavirtual/revistas/credencial/abril1996/abril2.htm> (accessed August 20, 2009).

⁹⁶ Vargas.

Colombian Legation to Caracas, Venezuela (1894). While in Caracas he wrote prodigiously, creating several poems, a short novel, and translations of Tennyson. Silva's nascent literary and spiritual renewal, however, was not to last. On his return to Colombia he was shipwrecked aboard the *Amerique* as it was leaving the port of Caracas in 1895. Silva survived; the bulk of his complete works, however, did not. He was able to reconstruct his novel *De sobremesa* from memory, but the loss of so much of his work, the spiritual desolation from his sister Elvira's death, and financial ruin led Silva to commit suicide by gunshot at the age of thirty-one before he saw even one of his books published.⁹⁷

Silva's poetic language bridges Romanticism and Modernism through his use of musical and onomatopoeic language. His verse is more likely to describe sensation and personal perception in sonorous rhymes than through hard concepts. Silva focused on the spiritual ideals of the upper class and an infinite anguish for love. Likewise, his writing generally avoided humor or irony. His poem "Nocturnos" has been described by the esteemed poet Juan Ramón Jiménez as the most representative poem of late romanticism and early modernism.⁹⁸ Héctor Orjuela posits that with the posthumous collection *Gotas amargas* (1908), Silva made a definitive break with Spain and "became the first great poet of hispano-america in the modern era."⁹⁹ Others note that Silva's modernism is more evident in his prose rather than his poetry, which depends heavily on traditional forms and the Romantic

⁹⁷ At his death Silva literally had only a few cents in his bank account and fifty-two liens against him for the cost of Elvira's funeral. Carranza Coronado, *Revista Credencial Historia*.

⁹⁸ Albareda, Gines and Francisco Garfias, 54.

⁹⁹ Luis Suardíaz, *José Asunción Silva, Luis Carlos López, Porfirio Barba Jacob, León de Greiff, Luis Vidales* (Medellín, Colombia: Extensión Cultural Universidad de Antioquia, 1985), 25.

influence of the Spanish poet Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer (1836-1870).¹⁰⁰ The wide array of opinions is evidence of the near continuous study of his oeuvre over the last century, an interest that has resulted in hundreds of Latin American and international books, articles and dissertations.

Renán de la Torre (1945-2005) *Viaje, El columpio*. De la Torre was an Ecuadorian professor of literature, poet and narrator who wrote many works for children.¹⁰¹ He entered the literary scene in Ecuador, along with a cohort of other writers, through national literary contests sponsored by the Cuenca newspaper *Diario El Mercurio* in the 1970s. Two of his short stories, “Piquiocioso” (1974) and “Maritín, la mariposa vanidosa” (1975), won prizes in the children’s story and fable categories. Together with Francisco Delgado Santos he became a cofounder and president of FELIJ (1977), *Fundación ecuatoriana para el libro Infantil y Juvenil* a sister group to the International Board on Books for Young People.¹⁰² In the early 1980s, through the agitation of FELIJ, the Subsecretaría de Cultura del Ministerio de Educación recognized the need to publish the body of children’s literature created through these contests that was now in danger of being forgotten. This government department recognized the lack of adequate children’s literature in Ecuador and sponsored collections of short stories, poetry, and plays with the deliberate aim of creating a permanent cultural

¹⁰⁰ Suardíaz, 16.

¹⁰¹ Biographical information including de la Torre’s birth and death dates were kindly provided by the late author’s daughter and used with permission. Tatiana de la Torre, e-mail message to author, October 13, 2009.

¹⁰² Renan de la Torre Torres, under “Datos del autor” *Piquiocioso: y otros cuentos y adivinanzas* (Quito, Ecuador: Edit. Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, 1990).

legacy by publishing original works and oral folk traditions.¹⁰³ Through the Subsecretaría de Cultura effort de la Torre contributed to *Fábulas* (1982) and *Cuentos* (1982). He also collected and published the Ecuadorian oral epics “Maria Angula” (*Cuentos de Espantos y Aparecidos*, 1984) and “Nunkui, la creadora de las plantas” (*Como Surgieron los Seres y las Cosas*, 1986). His contributions to other works include *Adivinanzas* (1984), *El agua dorada* (1987), and *Ecuador, cuentos de mi país* (1996) which has gone into six printings.

De la Torre described most of the literature for children published in Ecuador prior to the 1970s as didactic and condescending, with no appreciation for how children truly experienced the world through language. In his works he sought to write for a child who lived to dream. Still, De la Torre insisted that children’s literature need not disconnect a child from the everyday world, rather it could delight them while dealing with serious issues such as illness, death, abandonment and war by weaving in a thread of hope.¹⁰⁴ In addition to his writing he taught Spanish and Literature at the prestigious Quito high school Sebastián de Benalcázar.¹⁰⁵

Maruja Vieira (b. 1922). A poet of Anglo extraction Vieira was a member of the *cuadernícolas* (one who uses an exercise book), a group so named because of the volumes of poetry published in notebook format under the title *Cántico* between 1944-1949. Her cohorts

¹⁰³ Rafael Cobo Espinoza, Francisco Delgado Santos, and Renán de la Torre, Preface to *Fábulas*, by Juan Valdano Morejon (Quito, Ecuador: Subsecretaría de Cultura del Ministerio de Educación Ecuatoriana, 1982).

¹⁰⁴ Delgado Santos, Francisco, *Ecuador y su literatura infantil*, 243.

¹⁰⁵ Francisco Delgado Santos, *Ecuador, cuentos de mi país* (Quito, Ecuador: Alfaguara, 2004), 62.

among the *cuadernicolas* such as Jorge Gaitán Durán and Rogelio Echavarría later established the *Mito* literary magazine/movement. Though Vieira was closely associated with these writers, her male colleagues never invited her to contribute to their publications. Instead she published many of her poems in newspapers and weeklies such as *El Tiempo*, *El Espectador*, and even *Semana*. She has also published nine poetry collections.

Vieira, like most poets, has written poems that deal with love and eroticism and for this her work has sometimes been unfairly shunted into the lesser category of “women’s poetry.”¹⁰⁶ More characteristic of her work than romantic themes is the restless quality and extensive use of traveling metaphors, especially those concerning water.¹⁰⁷ She prefers direct language, either rhymed or in free verse, and employs an economy of language, eschewing a metaphysical or subjective approach to her subjects.¹⁰⁸ Her poem “Mas que nunca” is one of her most popular works and has been reprinted in various national and international anthologies of poetry. Vieira has been active with the Colombian Academy of Language and has served as secretary for the Colombian PEN Club, an international organization that advocates the rights of free expression and literary fellowship. She continues to be active in the literary community and in 2005 participated in Medellín Festival of Poetry.

¹⁰⁶ It is worth contrasting Echavarría’s entry in *Quien es quien en la Poesía colombiana* with that of Caillet Bois in *Antología de la Poesía hispanoamericana* and p. 66 of *Antología de la poesía hispano americana: Colombia* by Gines de Albareda and Francisco Garfias.

¹⁰⁷ Alfredo Ocampo Zamorana, ed., *Tierra, Agua, Aire, Fuego e Infinito* (Bogotá: Apidama, 2004), 45.

¹⁰⁸ Carlos-Enrique Ruiz, “Maruja Vieira en la poética de la ausencia,” *Revista Aleph* 137 (April-June 2006), under “Maruja Vieira, sin patrones en la poesía,” http://www.revistaaleph.com.co/index.php?option=com_k2&id=55:maruja-vieira-en-la-poetica-de-la-ausencia&view=item&Itemid=0 (accessed October 12, 2006).

CHAPTER 4

SONG ANALYSIS

Thirty-six known solo songs from the pen of Jaime León are extant. I analyzed the songs from the standpoint of León's interpretation of the meaning of the poem through melodic features, rhythm, harmony, and form. The songs are ordered chronologically when that information is known from 1951-1992. Approximately dated compositions appear at the end of the chapter and are listed alphabetically. Each song is prefaced with basic information contained under the sub-headings TEXT, MUSIC, and RECORDINGS. Further detail on each of those sub-headings follows. The scores used for analysis came directly from Jaime León, who kindly gave me a volume of his song cycle *Las Canciones de Pequeña, pequeñita* and copies of his other songs to work from, as well as permission to reprint examples (see Appendix A). I also relied heavily on a two-volume set of León songs catalogued at the Centro de Documentación Musical. In the following chapter these volumes are referred to as the CDM edition. Since I began working on this project his complete songs have become available in another two-volume set edited and self-published by Patricia Caicedo under the

Mundo Arts banner in 2009. Caicedo has made important contributions to the dissemination of Jaime León's music, however, the Mundo Arts publication presents a number of challenges and inconsistencies, these are noted in the text where relevant.

The TEXT subheading begins with the name of the author of the poem. Every effort was made to find the book where the poem was first published and to include the bibliographic information; full citations are found in the bibliography. Where that was not possible a reputable edition was listed. Jaime León, like many composers of art songs, purposely shaped a specific meaning in a poem by excising or repeating lines; I have indicated where the poem has been changed from the original.

The MUSIC subheading includes the date of composition if known, the key and time signature in the first measure and tempo indication, expressive marking and dedicatory remarks, if any. I have also included the vocal range and the length of each song in measures.

The name after the RECORDING sub-heading corresponds to the singer in the following recordings, listed chronologically:

Gallo, Carmiña, soprano, and Jaime León, piano. *Latin American Art Songs*. Inter-American Musical Editions, 1977. Phonorecord 3687. The Organization of American States contacted León about making this recording and he selected the Colombian soprano Carmiña Gallo to perform with him. It includes an assortment of songs by Latin American composers, including four by León.

Londoño, Gloria, soprano, and Jaime León, piano. Recital July 1, 1998 at the Luis Angel Arango Recital Hall, Bogotá, Colombia. First broadcast July 2, 1998 on RadioEmisora HJCK. Jaime León kindly gave me a recording of the radio broadcast of this recital which was an entire program of his songs sung by the accomplished Colombian soprano Gloria Londoño.

Senn, Martha, mezzo-soprano, and Pablo Arevalo, piano. *Grandes poetas grandes compositores, grandes melodías de la canción colombiana*. Fondo Financiero de Desarrollo (FONADE), Monograph CD, 1998. This was a special edition recording commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of FONADE's development work in

Colombia. It includes six songs by Jaime León.

Senn, Martha, mezzo-soprano, and Pablo Arevalo, piano. *Un ruiseñor en la catedral*. Villegas Editores, 2000. CD. Colombian mezzo-soprano Martha Senn published her memoirs by the same title with this companion recording that includes one of León's songs.

Caicedo, Patricia, soprano, and Pau Casan, piano. *Canciones del arte de Latinoamérica*. Edicions Albert Moraleda, 2001. CD. This is Caicedo's first recording and includes two of León's songs.

Uribe, Maria Teresa, soprano, and Balázs Szokolay, piano. *Canciones de las Américas*. Hungaraton Classic, HCD 32044, 2002. Chilean dramatic soprano Maria Teresa Uribe includes four of León's songs.

Caicedo, Patricia, soprano and Eugenia Gasull, piano. *A mi ciudad nativa*. Mundo Arts, 2005. CD. Caicedo's follow-up recording is named after the León song and includes five selections by him.

Vocal coaching sessions on selected songs were part of my conversations with Jaime León in 2003 and 2005. I used these recorded sessions as guides when I did not have a professional recording of a song. His comments from these interviews as they related to specific songs are cited in the analyses. Since there are discrepancies in the poems among the various editions of León's songs I chose to use the texts of the poems as they were published in the first printing of the Mundo Arts publication from 2009. Currently this is the only commercially available edition of León's complete songs. Any significant discrepancies are noted between the Mundo Arts texts and the poems in other editions of León's songs or with the original poem. An original line-by-line English translation of each poem accompanies the text. All translations in this document are by the author.

Aves y ensueños

TEXT. José Joaquín Casas¹

First published in *Crónicas de aldea*, 1919. The poem is set in its entirety.

MUSIC. October 20, 1951. C minor,² Common time, *Lento*, C⁴-G⁵, 54 measures.

RECORDINGS. Gallo.

Aves y ensueños

Se van las tardes del azul verano,
se van con él las raudas golondrinas,
se van las horas del bullicio ufano,
de alegre sol y diáfana neblina.

Se van los sueños del amor temprano;
poniente sol alumbrá nuestras ruinas;
no torna el gozo al corazón humano
ni a su alero de ayer las golondrinas.

¡Mustio desmaya cuanto fue risueño!
¿A qué horizonte os dirigís temprano
veloces aves, ilusión de un sueño?

Os va siguiendo el corazón las huellas.
Adiós las tardes del azul verano
veloces aves, ilusiones bellas.

Birds and dreams

Gone are blue summer afternoons,
gone with them are the swift swallows,
gone are the hours of noise and pride,
of a happy sun and translucent mist.

Gone are the dreams of an early love;
the sunset illuminates our ruins;
joy cannot return to the human heart
nor the swallows to the eaves of yesterday.

What was once cheerful faints and withers!
To what horizon do you go so early
you fast birds, illusion of a dream?

You are following the footsteps of the heart.
Goodbye to the blue summer afternoons
fast birds, beautiful illusions.

Perhaps the defining characteristic of Jaime León's songs is his ability to set the Spanish language as it is spoken. Joan Wall, in *Diction for Singers*, describes the rhythm of spoken Spanish as a "breath phrase" she adds,

between breaths all words are run together and pronounced as a stream of even-length syllables. You will hear the word boundaries disappear within the breath phrase, which essentially causes the words to sound like one long word.³

¹ León originally attributed the poem erroneously to a "Jesus" J. Casas. The Mundo Arts edition contains this appellation.

² Note: The copy of the composer's manuscript used for this analysis differs in presentation and key signature from the version published in the 2009 Mundo Arts edition.

³ Joan Wall, et al. *Diction for Singers*. (Dallas: Psst., 1990), 233.

León has a natural affinity for setting Spanish in its natural spoken rhythm within a vocal line. He knows when to place the key word on a stressed beat or alter the rhythm to accommodate a text fragment so that it can be sung as it would have been spoken. “Aves y Ensueños” is remarkable in that the principal traits of León’s style (use of recitative, motivic development, using harmony as subtext, painting a general mood rather than specific words, and an exacting sense of setting the Spanish language) all spring forth in his inaugural effort at song writing. (See Example 1 for the complete score of the song).

In his first song the text is paramount in driving the rhythmic setting of both the vocal and the piano parts. When the voice first enters (m. 12) in a monotone but free flowing tumble of words, the rhythmic pattern of the accompaniment acts as a support system; it doubles the melodic line and plays partial chords on the first and third beats. Later, arpeggios in the accompaniment highlight the text briefly (mm. 18-19, 22, 26), but again doing nothing to overshadow the vocal declamation. León expands the arpeggiation in the short interludes between vocal phrases (mm. 27-30, 33-34), and uses this as an opportunity to carry the narrative forward by making the birds actors in the song (represented in the piano interludes). For example, the arpeggios in the accompaniment represent the birds flying away quickly before the vocal line enters to react with the text, “¿A qué horizonte os dirigís temprano...?” (To what horizon do you go so early?) (mm. 33-35). As soon as the voice enters the accompaniment drops away signifying that the birds have left; the piano line becomes very sparse, consisting only of simple block chords on the second and third beat.

León is not as straightforward in using text painting in the vocal line. Instead he uses combinations of flexible rhythmic patterns to mimic spoken prosody, with longer notes

falling on the natural stress of the word and shorter sixteenth or eighth notes for word groups. The melody is the vehicle for painting the mood of the speaker in the poem. The melodic line is alternately static for several measures and then suddenly disjunct with many leaps and changes in direction. The erratic melody is tied to the internal struggle of the speaker. In the first stanza she names four elements of her life that are no longer, first in a monotone on G⁴, then expanding through interval leaps of fourths and fifths, until finally at “no torna el gozo al corazón humano” (joy cannot return to the human heart) when the vocal line settles on a monotone on C⁴ (mm. 22-24). The melody continues in the vein of a lyric recitative until the end of the vocal line (mm. 46-52), when a soaring motive enters that spans an octave to G⁵. The motive repeats four times as the speaker says goodbye to what she has lost; the repetition is a melodic comment on the opening four statements of the text.

Chromaticism and motivic development are other elements that León employs to highlight emotion and subtext. The stacked block chords in the opening of the song (mm. 1-5) are altered with notes outside of the key signature and in second inversion. The first four bars resolve differently each time they are heard indicating a change in the speaker’s mood without a note being sung. For example, the first resolution collapses into dissonant clusters (m. 6). This chord progression immediately repeats (mm. 9-12) emphasizing the depressing atmosphere that reflects the speaker’s emotional state just before the voice enters. When the motive returns (m. 40) it resolves to an F-major chord, signifying a new phase of acceptance.

Examples of chromaticism in the melodic line are plentiful (mm. 38-39). For example, a dissonant F# is used to highlight the word “sueño” (dream) in the question “ilusión de un sueño?” (illusion of a dream?). At the end of the song, when the speaker

concludes that these are “ilusiones bellas” (beautiful illusions), León raises the B-flat a half step turning the final ascending motive into a G major dominant chord and a consonant release. The song ends with a plagal cadence, completing the psychological journey that began in despair and concludes in acceptance.

Difficulties arise in interpreting the work due to inconsistencies in its translation to music. With “Aves y ensueños” León established the precedent of composing his songs in one day and allowing for lapses and changes from the original text. León uses “temprano” (early) instead of “lejano” (far) in the line, “¿A qué horizonte os dirigís temprano?” (To what horizon do you go so early?). And “neblinas” becomes singular “de alegre sol y diáfana neblina” (of a happy sun and translucent mist). This kind of minor text change is found throughout León’s work. Since it is often of minor consequence to the interpretation of the song, these types of changes will be noted in the translation of the poem at the start of each analysis but will not be elaborated upon.

The original poem also includes considerable punctuation in the form of commas, semicolons, exclamation points, question marks, and periods. These are missing in León’s manuscript for “Aves y Ensueños,” a copy of which is at the Catholic University of America in Washington D.C., where he first recorded this song with Carmiña Gallo in 1977. Even though he did not include the interpretive markings in the manuscript, it is clear that León was reacting to the punctuation as well the text. For example, the opening of Casas’ poem is presentational, and the use of archaic forms of Spanish emphasizes the formal and reserved mood. León marks the text of the first stanza *senza espressione*. Indeed, few measures go by in this song without some kind of interpretive marking. In the third stanza the poem takes a

sudden passionate turn, and Casas employs exclamation points and question marks. León responds with a melodic line that makes several short leaps, the tessitura climbs, the rhythm quickens, and the music is marked *agitato*. Unfortunately the punctuation of the majority of the poems that León set has not found its way into any of the printed editions of his music, including the 2009 Mundo Arts edition. One hopes that future editions will correct this oversight.

Example 1 "Aves y ensueños," complete score

POESIA DE
JESUS V. CASAS
Casa Nacional Musical
Jaime Leon R.

AVES Y ENSUEÑOS

MUSICA DE
JAIME LEON

LENTO

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15

SE VAN LAS TARDES DELA ZULVE RA NO SE VAN CON EL LAS RAUDAS GO LON DAINAS

SEN LA ES P RESSIONE

SE VAN LAS HO RAS DEL BU LLIC IO U FA NO DE A LEGRE SOL Y DIA FA NA NE BU NA SE VAN LOS

pp

pp

p

19

SUEÑOS DEL AMARTEH PRA NO PONIENTE'L SOL A LUMBRA NUESTRAS

22

PIU MOSSO

RUIÑAS NO TORNA EL GOZO AL CORAZON NI SU A...

PIU MOSSO

25

RIT.

Spurio

LE RO DE A VER LAS COLONDRINAS

RIT. *Spurio*

28

AGITATO

MUSTIO DES MAYA

AGITATO



32

CUANTO FUE AL SUEÑO

AGITATO

f

Detailed description: This system contains measures 32 to 35. It features a vocal line with lyrics and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes dynamic markings like *f* and *sf*, and the tempo marking *AGITATO*. The lyrics are "CUANTO FUE AL SUEÑO".

35

A QUEHO RI ZON TE OS DIRIGIS TEM PRA NO VE JESSES

mf

Detailed description: This system contains measures 35 to 38. The vocal line continues with lyrics "A QUEHO RI ZON TE OS DIRIGIS TEM PRA NO VE JESSES". The piano accompaniment has a dynamic marking of *mf*.

38

A VES I LU SION DE UN SUEÑO ?

LUNGA

pp

Detailed description: This system contains measures 38 to 41. The vocal line has lyrics "A VES I LU SION DE UN SUEÑO ?". The piano part includes a dynamic marking of *pp* and the tempo marking *LUNGA*. There are also some handwritten notes and markings in the piano part.

41

OS VA SIGUIENDO EL CO RA ZON LAS HUELLAS

p

Detailed description: This system contains measures 41 to 44. The vocal line has lyrics "OS VA SIGUIENDO EL CO RA ZON LAS HUELLAS". The piano part includes a dynamic marking of *p*.

45

pp

A DIOS LAS TARDES DEL AZUL VERANO NO AVELOCES

49

A VES ILUSIONES BELLAS

52

NYC 10-20-51

AVES Y ESCUENOS

SE VAN LAS TARDES DEL AZUL VERANO -	NO TRAMA EL CIELO AL BORRACHO HUMANO
SE VAN CON EL LAS RAJAS GOLETRINAS -	NI SU ALFARO DE ATRÁS LAS GALANERIAS
SE VAN LAS HECHAS DEL BULLICIO OFANDI	MUNDO DESMAYADO CUANDO FUEGOS ROJOS
DES ALICIA SUE Y DIAPANA NEBLINA	A LOS VENTOS DE LOS BIRICHIS TOMARON
SE VAN LOS TIEMPOS DEL AMOR TEMPORAL	VELOCES VIENTOS - RUSIAS DE UN SEÑOR
SE VAYEN DE DEL ALMORZA NUESTRAS RUMBA	DE LA VIDA NUESTRO CORDON LAS ALICIA

SE VAN LAS TARDES DEL AZUL VERANO
 VENTOS AVES
 ILUSIONES BELLAS

La campesina

TEXT. Isabel Lleras Restrepo. First published in her collection *Sonetos*, 1936. The poem is set in its entirety.

MUSIC. May 7, 1952. D minor. 3/4, *In modo de Bambuco*, ♩ = 108, D⁴-A⁵, 96 measures.

RECORDINGS. Gallo, Londoño, Caicedo.

La campesina

Caminando con lánguida pereza
asoma por el recodo del camino,
ya terminó el trabajo campesino,
es la hora en que el Angelus se reza.

En sus pupilas brilla la tristeza
que abunda en el paisaje vespertino;
medita en su monótono destino
y resignada inclina la cabeza.

Entonando un cantar que es una queja,
por detrás de los árboles se aleja
apoyada en su rama de bejuco;

se pierde su figura dolorosa,
pero queda la raza que solloza
en las dolientes notas del bambuco.
Ah!⁴

The Peasant Woman

Walking with languid laziness
she appears at the bend in the road,
the peasant work is done for the day,
it is the hour that the Angelus is prayed.

In her eyes glows a sadness
that is abundant in the evening countryside;
she meditates on her monotonous journey
and resigned she bows her head.

Intoning a song that is a moan,
behind the trees she walks out of sight
supported on a branch of vine;

her painful figure is gone,
but the people remain who cry out
in the sorrowful notes of the bambuco.
Ah!

León's second song, "La Campesina," is also his most popular to date. It has been published three times, professionally recorded, and is often heard in concerts.⁵ The compelling character in the sonnet by Isabel Lleras Restrepo, "La campesina," is a peasant woman who walks home after a day in the fields. As the poem continues her personal story expands to become a symbol of the poor who seemingly have no end to their struggle.

⁴ Added by León, not in the original poem.

⁵ The songs appears in *Musica colombiana: la canción culta* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura – Centro de Documentación Musical, 1992); Kathleen L. Wilson, ed., *The Art Song in Latin America: Selected Works by Twentieth Century Composers* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon, 1998); and Patricia Caicedo, ed., *The Colombian Art Song* (Barcelona: Mundo Arts, 2009).

Though Lleras Restrepo's social commentary stems from the 1930s it seems that León's setting reflects his experience of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Its composition in May 1952 came only a few months after his tour with the Tropicana Ballet where he witnessed racism directed at the dancers. It was also a mere four years after the Bogotazo, a defining moment in Colombian history marked by social unrest. Lleras Restrepo's poem must have seemed particularly prescient to León who, in 1952, was living in New York watching *La violencia* unfold in Colombia. Carlos Lleras Restrepo, brother of the poet, was a leader in the Liberal party at the time and fought pitched political battles against the Conservatives who supported the state of siege imposed by the Colombian government.⁶ León probably would have recognized the significance of the text and the family name that went with it when he composed the song.

León sets the song in the style of a *bambuco*. A *bambuco* is a popular Colombian dance form thought to have roots in the three racial groups that make up Colombian society: indigenous, African, and European. The form was associated with the lower classes and therefore was the perfect genre to represent the protagonist of "La campesina." The rhythmic pattern consists primarily of a syncopated measure followed by three regular beats in 3/4. León uses several rhythmic combinations of this formula but does not interchange them. Instead he establishes a pattern in the accompaniment that acts as an ostinato for a several measures until another pattern emerges. The variety of the rhythmic patterns maintains a rhythmic pulse that propels the song forward. In contrast to the established rhythmic patterns

⁶ Marcos Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence*, trans. Richard Stoller (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 145.

of the accompaniment, the rhythm of the vocal line changes constantly to fit the prosody of the text while still hewing closely to a *bambuco* feel.

León's use of hemiola and triplets in the vocal line is also an effective method of creating tension and release. The tempo indicators in the recitative section, *col canto*, make it clear that the singer is to bend the rhythm to the natural stress of the words (See Ex. 2).

Example 2 "La Campesina," mm. 36-39

The musical score for Example 2, "La Campesina," mm. 36-39, is presented in a standard musical notation format. It consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The vocal line begins with a short phrase of two measures, followed by three measures of rest, and then continues with phrases of six and nine measures. The piano accompaniment starts with the left hand in the bass clef and gradually adds the right hand playing static block chords. The score includes tempo indicators "col canto" and "ritard."

The melody consists of successively longer phrases which correspond to the old peasant woman walking in slow, sometimes faltering steps, and then gaining energy. The opening vocal gesture is short, only two measures, and is interrupted by three beats of rest before continuing with three more measures of melody. Subsequent phrases expand to six measures, then to nine—another incidence where León is more intent on declaiming the text as it is spoken than sticking to a preconceived song form of regular phrases. The shape of the phrases alternates between arching lines and static contours with small intervals that rely more on rhythm than melodic contour to carry the phrase forward. The accompaniment has a similarly sparse beginning, at first featuring only the left hand in the bass clef and gradually adding the right hand playing static block chords (m. 17), which expand to a fully realized accompaniment using arpeggiated figures and broken chords (m. 28).

Just as each phrase becomes longer the tessitura also continues to rise with each vocal gesture, moving from A⁴, B^{b4}, D⁵ and E⁵ respectively until finally arriving at F^{#5} at the climax of the A section (mm. 36-39) on the text “medita en su monótono destino” (she meditates on her monotonous journey). The remainder of the song returns to a lower tessitura around B⁴ until the final leap to a high A⁵.

León symbolizes the woman’s constant plodding with a simple three-note motive first heard in the opening vocal phrase on the word “caminando” (walking), A-G-A (see Ex. 3). The motive is repeated and transformed throughout the song. León places it at different pitch levels: D-C-D (m. 8), E-D-E (m.16-17). It appears with elongated rhythmic values (m. 27) and is also shared between the vocal and piano line (m. 28, 32, 49, 61). The only time it is not heard is on the parlando phrase line “medita en su monótono destino” (she meditates on her monotonous journey). (See Ex. 3). The absence of the motive here is her physical pause and self reflection, perhaps the only one during her day.

Example 3 “La Campesina,” mm. 4-6

Other examples of text painting include bells in the piano part (mm. 28-32) immediately after the phrase “es la hora en que el Angelus se reza” (it is the hour that the Angelus is prayed). Although this is based on the same walking motive from the melody, it is transformed into block chords with an added chord marked *cantabile* to mimic the bells traditionally played three times a day to call Catholics to the Marian devotion of the Angelus. The end of the poem is illustrated musically with a wordless “ah!” that León adds to the original text. It is sung on A⁵ and held for four measures as a literal and figurative wail.

Canción de Noel

TEXT. Eduardo Castillo. First published in the magazine *El Gráfico*, 1929. Poem is set with a minor text change (marked by a *) and is missing a half line (see note).

MUSIC. October 31, 1952. D major, 3/4, *Allegretto*, ♩ = 130, F#⁴ - B⁵, 105 measures.

RECORDINGS. Londoño.

Canción de Noel

Nochebuena!... Nochebuena!
Sobre el lino del mantel,
cerca de la copa llena
de rosas, está la cena
de Noel.

Está el vino moscatel
todo espumoso y dorado,
el gordo pavo trufado
y los buñuelos en miel.

¿No oyes, soñador, un coro
bajo la noche, y también
en tu espíritu sonoro?
Son las campanas de oro
de Belén.

Bajo la noche nevosa
de diciembre, el niño Rey
mullidamente reposa
- tan frágil como una rosa -
entre la mula y el buey.

Llévale a Jesús, poeta,
tu alma en ofrenda de amor,⁸
Tu alma, como de poeta
es un alma de pastor.

Christmas Song

Christmas Eve!⁷ Christmas Eve!
Laid out on the linen tablecloth,
close to the cup full
of roses, is the Christmas
dinner.

There is the muscatel wine
sparkling and golden,
the fat truffled turkey
and honeyed cheese puffs.

Do you not hear, dreamer, a choir
in the night, and also
sonorously in your spirit?
They are the golden bells
of Bethlehem.

Under the snowy night
of December, the child king
softly reposes
- as fragile as a rose -
between the mule and the ox.

Take to Jesus, poet,
your soul as an offering of love,
Your soul, like that of a poet
is the soul of a shepherd.

⁷ Translated literally “Nochebuena” means “The Good Night.” In Spanish-speaking countries Christmas Eve is celebrated, rather than Christmas Day. It is traditional to eat a turkey stuffed with truffles before attending midnight Mass.

⁸ There is a line in the original poem at this point, “bajo la noche discreta” or “under the discrete night,” that was excised from the song.

También, como los pequeños,
tu tienes necesidad
de juguetes y de ensueños....
Que importa, si son ensueños*
que no sean realidad!

¿No oyes, soñador, un coro
bajo la noche, y también
en tu espíritu sonoro?
Son las campanas de oro
de Belén.

Also, like the little ones,
you also have need
of toys and illusions....
What does it matter, if they are illusions
that are not reality!

Do you not hear, dreamer, a choir
in the night, and also
sonorously in your spirit?
They are the golden bells
of Bethlehem.

This is León's first attempt at a Christmas song or *villancico*. The *villancico* is a genre of Spanish song in a verse-refrain structure that dates from the mid-fifteenth century and its texts were as apt to be secular as religious or devotional.⁹ A custom arose at the cathedral of Granada in the late fifteenth century substituting vernacular religious *villancicos* in place of Latin liturgical responses. These devotional *villancicos* were incorporated into Marian feasts, the feast days of saints and major feasts such as Corpus Christi, Christmas and Epiphany.¹⁰ Though after 1507 the pope and later King Phillip II prohibited this practice, the custom of using the vernacular *villancicos* as part of the Latin Mass was already in place. The composition and performance of *villancicos*, particularly during the Christmas season, quickly spread throughout the Spanish Empire.¹¹ The lyrics combined religious themes with humor and detailed descriptions of rustic feasts and merrymaking. The genre became increasingly important in the Latin American conversion of the indigenous population to

⁹ Paul R. Laird, *Towards a History of the Spanish Villancico* (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1997), 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 20.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 19.

Catholicism, serving as a delivery method of the principal tenets of the new religion. By the nineteenth century the *villancico* became associated solely with Christmas carols.¹² It is still traditional throughout Spain and Latin America to sing *villancicos* on December 24.

A simple folk-like melody appears in the introductory four measures and immediately echoes in the text of the first stanza. This is the only repetition of material in the song; the remainder is through-composed marking a departure from the traditional verse-refrain form of a *villancico*. The introductory melody is a lively dance tune with simple tonic and dominant harmonies appropriate for the text, which describes a traditional Colombian Christmas feast. When the poem moves from a presentational to a more personal tone in the second stanza, the harmony becomes richer with ninth chords and passing dissonance (mm. 35-39). The melody takes on a more arching lyrical shape that subsequently leads into an extended melisma that ends with a dramatic leap to a B⁵. This melismic section, marked *quasi recitativo* (mm. 39-48), is supported by B-major harmonies. (See Ex. 4) The bright tonal color is clearly meant to evoke the golden bells of Bethlehem referred to in the text. Another recitative-like section follows (mm. 49-58) as the text describes a sleeping baby Jesus. A melody that echoes the opening of the song then appears, creating the impression of a refrain (mm. 64-89). As in the first stanza, the rhythmic nature of this section is lively (the alternating two- and three-beat groupings gives both sections a distinct dance feel). León ends the song with a reprise of the text and lyrical melody of the second stanza, with the melody set a whole step higher than before. Jazz-derived harmonies support the lush melody until an echo of the opening measures returns and moves toward a cadence in E-major.

¹² *Ibid.*, 3

Example 4 “Canción de Noel,” mm. 41-46

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Canción de Noel" (Example 4), measures 41-46. The score is presented in two systems. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/8. The lyrics "o - ro de be - len" are written under the vocal line. The piano accompaniment features a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and sixteenth notes, often grouped with slurs. The vocal line is melodic and includes some rests, with the lyrics "o - ro de be - len" spread across the measures.

At 105 measures in length “Canción de Noel” is León’s most ambitious song in his early compositional period. He employs several new techniques not previously seen. The length of Castillo’s poem and its irregular phrase lengths present particular challenges of pacing, prosody, and repetition. León responds mainly by using combinations of flexible rhythmic patterns to regulate movement. Phrases of jaunty eighth-note figures in the accompaniment are sometimes replaced with glissandi lasting throughout the measure. León also makes extensive use of hemiola and cross-rhythms with a vocal line that emphasizes the dance feel (mm. 13-15, 25-26) (see Ex. 5). This rhythmic layering effectively varies the speed within a section without changing the actual tempo.

Example 5 “Canción de Noel,” mm. 10-16

co - pa lle - na de ro - sas es - ta la ce - na de No - el es - ta la ce - na de No - el

Several delightful moments of text painting occur in the song, as on the text “entre la mula y el buey” (between the mule and the ox) (mm. 56-58). Dissonant clusters in the accompaniment are accented and marked *Rítmico forte* and aptly describe the mule and ass at the manger. The previously mentioned melisma signifying the bells of Bethlehem is an unexpected and virtuosic moment for the singer. To set the text in a speech-like manner León relies heavily on triplets, quadruplets, and quintuplets in the vocal line. It feels at times rushed and awkward, as if the text had been forced to fit over regular lilting rhythms.

Cancioncilla

TEXT. Eduardo Carranza. First published in *Esta era un rey*, 1945. The poem is set with a few changes (indicated by * or note).

MUSIC. July 15, 1976. Key of F# Major, Common time, *Soñando*, ♩ = 60, C#⁴ - F#⁵, 34 measures, “A Catalina.”¹³

RECORDINGS. Gallo, Senn, Uribe, Caicedo.

Cancioncilla

Duérmeme mi niña,
mi niña no llores:
Irás a la luna
en un tren de flores.

Niña que no duerme
sueños no tendrá:
Si no tiene sueño*
nadie la querrá.

La luna se duerme
del cielo en la cuna.
En avión de nácar
irás a la luna.

Jugar con mi niña
un ángel quisiera;
En la plazoleta
del sueño la espera.

En un tren de flores
llegas a la luna,
mi niña dormida:
el cielo es tu cuna.

Duérmeme mi niña,
mi niña no llores.¹⁴

Little Song

Sleep my girl,
my girl don't cry:
You will go to the moon
on a train of flowers.

The girl who doesn't sleep
cannot have dreams:
If you don't have a dream
no one will love you.

The moon sleeps
her cradle in the sky.
On a plane of mother-of-pearl
you will go to the moon.

An angel wants to
play with my girl;
In the little plaza
of dreams she waits for her.

On a train of flowers
you arrive on the moon,
my sleeping girl:
the sky is your cradle.

Sleep my girl,
my girl don't cry.

¹³ The orchestrated parts for “Cancioncilla” are held in the CDM.

¹⁴ Sentence added by León, not in the original poem.

“Cancioncilla” marks the first of ten poems by Eduardo Carranza set by Jaime León. Some of his León’s most inspired songs come from the poetry of Carranza. León described his connection to the poet:

Luis Antonio Escobar, a composer, arrived in New York in the sixties and he gave me an anthology of Colombian poetry. There was a part of it with poems by Eduardo Carranza. The years passed, I returned to Colombia and during the administration of Betancur there was a festival of Colombian music held in Buenos Aires, Argentina.¹⁵ Among the invitees were myself and others. Well we [Carranza and León] met on the plane. “Have you written my music?” [Carranza asked] I said, “Yes.” “Well why haven’t I heard it?” “I promise you,” I replied. But I never did and he died.¹⁶

In “Cancioncilla,” the text is sung to a child who is having trouble sleeping. A very simple melody, in the style of a lullaby, with repetition and consonant intervals, appears for the first two lines of text. The accompaniment doubles or repeats the vocal line in the right hand while the left provides chromatic tonal coloring. The entire section is then repeated, hinting at strophic form.

As the song continues, chromaticism moves from the accompaniment into the vocal line to accentuate specific words. The opening melody is reprised at the line “Niña que no duerme/ sueños no tendrá” (the girl who doesn’t sleep/cannot have dreams) but is altered by using an A \flat rather than an A \sharp . In the next line “Si no tiene sueño,” (if you don’t have a dream) the word “no” (m.10), is also lowered, this time to E \flat , rather than an E \sharp . In another song such simple changes would hardly be notable but in this particular place, which is a play on the meaning of “dream,” the nighttime activity versus major life aspirations, the chromatic alteration of a few notes outside the key of F \sharp provides a similar play and change

¹⁵ Belisario Betancur was the president of Colombia from 1982-1986

¹⁶ León, interview 2005. Eduardo Carranza died in 1985.

of mood from soothing to gentle warning. León adds a piano flourish (m.11) as a moment of suspense just before the cadence on the words “nadie la querrá” (no one will love you).

For the remainder of the song, the vocal style alternates between lyrical melody and recitative. The recitative serves a storytelling function. At the *poco mosso* (mm. 21-23), León sets the text, “En avión de nácar irás a la luna. Jugar con mi niña un ángel quisiera” (on a plane of mother-of-pearl you will go to the moon. An angel wants to play with my girl) to a rhythmically engaging melody. Syncopation in the vocal line and arpeggios in the accompaniment appear for the first time, thus providing an aural contrast to the sweetness of the opening section. (See Ex. 6) This new musical material immediately disappears into static recitative at the words, “En la plazoleta del sueño la espera” (in the little plaza of dreams she waits for her) (mm. 24-25).

Example 6 “Cancioncilla,” mm. 21-25

En a-vión de ná-car i-rás a la
lu-na. Ju-gar con mi ni-ña un an-gel qui-sie-ra.
en la pla-za-le-ta del sue-ño la-es-pe-ra.

While it may not appear to make any sense for the melody to suddenly become static on text that indicates action, the poem continues, “En un tren de flores llegas a la luna, mi niña dormida: el cielo es tu cuna” (On a train of flowers you arrive on the moon, my sleeping girl: the sky is your cradle) and it becomes clear that the earlier recitative section represents the realization of the parent that the child is very close to falling asleep. Hence, a lively melody is no longer appropriate, now a simple hushed tone is what is needed. León repeats the first line of text and melody for the last phrase, marked *mf* instead of *pp*, indicating that perhaps the parent has stepped away from the bed and is singing more to herself than to the girl. At the final measure she turns around and sings to the sleeping child a line added by León to the original poem. The passage is marked appropriately *sotto voce*, “Duérmete mi niña,/ mi niña no llores” (Sleep my girl, my girl don’t cry).

Serenata

TEXT. José Asunción Silva, 1888, first published in the newspaper *La patria*, December 6, 1901.¹⁷ The poem is set in its entirety.

MUSIC. January 31, 1977. Key of F# minor, 3/4, *Andante tranquilo*, ♩ = 85, C⁴-E⁵, 74 measures.¹⁸

RECORDINGS. Gallo, Londoño, Uribe, Caicedo.

Serenata

La calle está desierta; la noche fría;
velada por las nubes pasa la luna;
arriba está cerrada la celosía
y las notas vibrantes, una por una,
suenan, cuando los dedos fuertes y ágiles,
mientras la voz que canta, ternuras narra,
hacen que vibran las cuerdas frágiles
de la guitarra.

La calle esta desierta; la noche fría;
una nube borrosa tapó la luna;
arriba está cerrada la celosía
y se apagan las notas, una por una.
Tal vez la serenata con su ruido
busca un alma de niña que ama y espera,
como buscan alares donde hacer nido
las golondrinas pardas en primavera.

La calle está desierta; la noche fría;
en un espacio claro brilló la luna;
arriba ya está abierta la celosía
y se apagan las notas una por una.
El cantor con los dedos fuertes y ágiles,
de la vieja ventana se asió a la barra
y dan como un gemido las cuerdas frágiles
de la guitarra.

Serenade

The street is deserted; the night is cold;
the moon passes veiled by the clouds;
the lattice above is closed
and the vibrant notes, one by one,
sound, when the strong and agile fingers,
while the voice sings, tenderly narrating,
makes the fragile guitar strings
vibrate.

The street is deserted; the night is cold;
a hazy cloud covers the moon;
the lattice above is closed
and the notes end, one by one.
Maybe the serenade with its noise
looks for a soul of a girl who loves and waits,
the way birds look for where to make a nest,
the dun-colored swallows in the spring.

The street is deserted; the night is cold;
In a clearing shines the moon;
the lattice above is open
and the notes end, one by one.
The singer with his fingers strong and agile,
from the old window he grabbed hold of the
crossbar and a moan emits from the fragile strings
of the guitar.

¹⁷ Silva wrote two versions of “Serenata.” León set the second version. See *José Asunción Silva, obra completa: edición crítica*, ed. Héctor Orjuela (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1990), 46.

¹⁸ The CDM edition indicates ♩ = 108. Also, there is an additional measure in some recorded versions of “Serenata” that is not in either the Triton or CDM printed editions. The Gallo, Uribe and Caicedo recordings include a measure of piano solo after the text “La calle está desierta; la noche fría;” (m. 30) and before “una nube borrosa tapó la luna.”

In “Serenata” José Asunción Silva experimented with the seguidilla, an archaic Spanish verse form that consists of quatrains with the syllabic pattern 7-5-7-5 and a rhyme scheme *abab*.¹⁹ In his poem about a mysterious guitar player whose serenade spills out into the cold night air he writes verses of double quatrains and frequently uses punctuation to separate the hemistich. This is one of three poems by José Asunción Silva set by León. His response to “Serenata” is an inspired musical setting that pays homage to the seguidilla in both its verse and song forms.

The piano opens the song, entering with the left hand playing a solo staccato arpeggiated figure for three measures. The disjunct, angular arpeggios with chromatic notes for color set the mood of a hushed and empty street when the voice enters in the fourth measure on an off-beat, as if stealing into the scene. (See Ex. 7) Like the piano line that preceded it, the melody has many changes of direction, often disjunct with large leaps. Throughout the song the piano and vocal line maintain similar shapes and at times share melodic phrases. The light, linear accompaniment allows the singer to maintain soft dynamics.

¹⁹ Susana Zanetti, “José Asunción Silva, Modernista,” (paper presented at the Casa de Poesía Silva conference “Silva, su obra y su época - Año del Centenario de José Asunción Silva 1896-1996,” Bogotá, Colombia 1996). Digitally published by the Biblioteca Virtual del Banco de la República <http://www.lablaa.org/blaavirtual/revistas/csilva/silva/smodern2.htm> (accessed March 25, 2009).

Example 7 “Serenata,” mm.1-6

The image shows a musical score for the first six measures of a piece titled "Serenata". The score is written in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It consists of four staves. The top staff is a vocal line, which is mostly empty in the first three measures. The second staff is a piano accompaniment, starting with the instruction "siempre p e stacc." and featuring a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The third staff is a vocal line with the lyrics "La ca- lle'stá de - sier - ta, la no - che fri - a". The fourth staff is a piano accompaniment, starting with a piano dynamic marking "p".

Most vocal phrases begin off the beat in keeping with the style of a seguidilla. León makes effective use of triplets and dotted rhythms to maintain the feel of 7-5-7-5 in the rhythm and likewise to hew closely to the spoken text. Vocal phrases coincide with the punctuation of the poem. Silva makes extensive use of the semi-colon and León observes this musically with short three-measure phrases that end in half cadences or else employs temporary modulations to distant keys. The inconclusiveness of the phrasing constantly propels the song forward. Frequent meter changes between simple and compound, duple and triple meter in the second stanza are another way that León represents the restless wandering of the text.

León illustrates Silva's extensive repetition of text with melodic reprise and sequences. For example, each stanza begins with the same text: "La calle está desierta; la

noche fría” (The street is deserted; the night is cold). A version of the opening melodic fragment for this text appears in the second stanza with different accompaniment, indicating a new shade of meaning in the repetition. The third repetition of the text includes new melodic material which is then sequenced for the remaining phrases of the stanza.

Text painting is an important feature of the song and León uses multiple techniques to illustrate the images and characters in the poem. Arpeggiated eighth-notes that dominate in the accompaniment serve as a symbol of the guitar player. When the guitarist stops playing in the poem, “y se apagan las notas, una por una” (and the notes end, one by one,) the music follows suit with sparse accompaniment and the text is declaimed statically on one note, C⁴ (mm. 63-66). Other text painting examples include the words “El cantor” (the singer) set as an *a capella* melisma that is immediately echoed in a section marked *bocca chiusa* (m. 66), and the word “ruido” (noise) which is underscored with dissonant clusters. Furthermore the shifting tonalities in the second stanza reflect the searching quality of the text (m. 41). The idea in the second stanza that the guitar serenade is like a swallow crisscrossing the landscape looking for a place to nest is amplified in the piano transition into the third stanza through mixed tonalities and cross-rhythms in the accompaniment (mm. 50-53).

Recorded versions of the song reveal how it lends itself to slight variations of tempo and added grace notes by the singer. In particular Carmiña Gallo takes some notes up an octave for added effect on the word “frágiles,” while Londoño makes the most of a rubato in the *bocca chiusa* (m.66).

Cuando lejos, muy lejos

TEXT. Julio Flórez. Originally published in *Gotas de ajenjo*, 1909.

MUSIC. March 13, 1977. Key of D^b major, 6/8, *A la barcarola*, ♩. = 46, E^b4 – A^b5, 67 measures.²⁰

RECORDINGS. None.

Cuando lejos, muy lejos (Originally “Gotas de Ajenjo”)²¹

Cuando lejos, muy lejos, en hondas mares,
en lo mucho que sufro pienses a solas
si exhalas un suspiro por mis pesares,
mándame ese suspiro sobre las olas.

Cuando el sol, con sus rayos, desde el oriente,
rasgue las blondas gasas de las neblinas,
si una oración murmuras por el ausente,
deja que me la traigan las golondrinas.

Cuando pierda la tarde sus tristes galas,
y en cenizas se tornen las nubes rojas,
mándame un beso ardiente sobre las alas
de las brisas que juegan entre las hojas.

¡Que yo, cuando la noche tienda su manto,
yo, que llevo en el alma sus mudas huellas,
te enviaré, con mis quejas, un dulce canto
en la luz temblorosa de las estrellas!

When far, very far (originally “Drops of absinthe”)

When far, very far, in deep seas,
when you think sometimes of how much I
suffer/ if you breathe a sigh for my sorrows,
send me that sigh on the waves.

When the sun, with his rays, from the east,
scratches the golden gauze from the mists
If you murmur a prayer for the absent,
let the swallows bring it to me.

When the afternoon loses its sad finery,
and the red clouds turn to ashes,
send me an ardent kiss on the wings
of the breezes that play among the leaves.

That I, while the night tends its cloak,
I, who carries in my soul her silent footsteps,
I will send you, with my laments, a sweet
song/ in the trembling light of the stars!

This song is something of an ode to French *mélodie* with its *barcarolle* setting and impressionist and exotic harmonies. The marking at the beginning of the song *A la barcarola* is homage for the water music of Venetian gondoliers and French composers like Gounod and Fauré who made that form famous. Water persists throughout Flórez’s poem in images

²⁰ The CDM edition is marked *Agitato* ♩. = 60.

²¹ Originally this song was titled “Gotas de ajenjo” after the name of the book from which this poem comes. León’s wife Beatriz told me she was relieved when Jaime changed the title to the first phrase of the poem because she always thought that “ajenjo” was such an ugly word. León, interview 2005.

of waves, mist, and clouds. León also uses the style to invoke the secondary quality of a barcarolle, its sentimental and melancholy mood that emerges from the lilting arpeggiated 6/8 figures in the accompaniment (See Ex. 8).

Example 8 “Cuando lejos, muy lejos,” mm. 10-15

The image shows a musical score for a vocal piece. It consists of two systems of music. Each system has a vocal line on a single staff and a piano accompaniment on two staves (treble and bass clef). The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 6/8. The lyrics are written below the vocal line. The first system covers measures 10-12, and the second system covers measures 13-15. The piano accompaniment features a prominent arpeggiated pattern in the right hand and a steady eighth-note bass line in the left hand.

Aside from the opening musical gesture, which is heard on each couplet in the first stanza, the vocal line is through composed. The melody alternates between large disjunct leaps to fluid stepwise motion; similarly it passes between lyricism and recitative-like declamation. Consequently frequent meter changes and the use of triplets and quintuplets are used to complement multiple rhythmic patterns and tempi indications.

Minor tonalities alternate with exotic sonorities throughout the song. For example, León uses a pitch set with an augmented second (F-G \sharp -A-C-D) (m. 21), a collection

associated with orientalism, in the phrase, “Cuando el sol, con sus rayos, desde el oriente” (when the sun, with his rays, from the east), (mm.19-21) (See Ex. 9).

Example 9 “Cuando lejos, muy lejos,” mm. 18-21

Tertian and quartal harmonies juxtaposed in the last measures of the song aptly illustrate the tremulous starlight and prepare a final consonant cadence in D^b-major (See Ex. 10).

Example 10 “Cuando lejos, muy lejos,” mm. 65-67

Los maderos de San Juan

TEXT. José Asunción Silva. First published in *Revista Ilustrada*, November, 1892. Poem is set in its entirety.²²

MUSIC. August 15, 1977. F major, 2/4, *Allegro moderato*, E^b⁴ – B^b⁵, 161 measures.²³

RECORDINGS. None.

Los maderos de San Juan

¡Aserrín!

¡Aserrán!

Los maderos de San Juan,

piden queso, piden pan,

Los de Roque,

alfandoque;

Los de Rique,

alfeñique,

los de triqui, triqui, tran!

Y en las rodillas duras y firmes de la Abuela
con movimiento rítmico se balancea el niño
y ambos agitados y trémulos están.

La abuela se sonríe con maternal cariño
mas cruza por su espíritu como un temor extraño
por lo que en el futuro, de angustia y desengaño
los días ignorados del nieto guardarán.

Los maderos de San Juan,

piden queso, piden pan.

¡Triqui, triqui,

triqui, tran!

The woodsmen of San Juan

Sawdust!

sawdust!

The woodsmen of San Juan,

they want cheese, they want bread,

Those from Roque,

honey cakes;

Those from Rique,

almond sugar cakes,

those of triqui, triqui, trán!

And on the hard and firm knees of his grandmother
the boy balances with rhythmic movement
and both are trembling, agitated.

The grandmother smiles with maternal affection
but a strange fear crosses her spirit
for what in the future, of anguish and betrayal
in unknown days awaits her grandson.

The woodsmen of San Juan,

they want cheese, they want bread.

Triqui, triqui,

triqui, tran!

²² This poem has been published with slight variations for more than a century thus any changes from the critical edition are rendered inconsequential. See Orjuela for an accepted critical edition. I have used this version to insert punctuation which is missing from the Mundo Arts edition of the song. *José Asunción Silva, obra completa: edición crítica*, ed. Héctor H. Orjuela (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1990), 11-13.

²³ The manuscript held in the CDM is marked *Allegro molto*.

Esas arrugas hondas recuerdan una historia
de sufrimientos largos y silenciosa angustia
y sus cabellos, blancos, como la nieve, están.
De un gran dolor el sello marcó la frente mustia
y son sus ojos turbios espejos que empañaron
los años, y que en tiempos, las forma reflejaron,
de cosas y de seres que nunca volverán.

Mañana cuando duerma la anciana, yerta y muda,
lejos del mundo vivo, bajo la oscura tierra,
donde otros, en la sombra, desde hace tiempo están
del nieto a la memoria, con grave son que encierra
todo el poema triste de la remota infancia,
cruzando por las sombras del tiempo y la distancia,
de aquella voz querida las notas vibrarán!

Los de Rique, alfeñique
¡Triqui, triqui, triqui, trán!

Y en tanto en las rodillas cansadas de la abuela
con movimiento rítmico se balancea el niño
y ambos agitados y trémulos están,
La abuela se sonríe con maternal cariño,
mas cruza por su espíritu como un temor extraño
por lo que en lo futuro, de angustia y desengaño,
los días ignorados del nieto guardarán.

¡Aserrín!
¡Aserrán!
Los maderos de San Juan
piden queso, piden pan,
los de Roque,
alfandoque,
los de Rique,
alfeñique,
¡Triqui, triqui, triqui, trán!
¡Triqui, triqui, triqui, trán!

Those deep wrinkles recount a history
of long suffering and silent anguish
and her hair, white, is like the snow.
A great pain marks its seal on her withered forehead
and it is her eyes, turbid mirrors, that fogged
with the years, sometimes reflects the form
of those things and people that will never return.

Tomorrow when the old woman sleeps, rigid and
mute/ far from the living world, under the dark earth/
where others, in the shade, have been for so long/ her
grandson will remember, with a grave song that
encloses the sad poem of his distant childhood
crossing through the shadows of time and distance
from that loving voice the notes will vibrate!

Those from Rique, almond sugar cakes,
Triqui, triqui, triqui, trán!

Meanwhile on the tired knees of the grandmother
the boy balances with rhythmic movement
and both are trembling and agitated,
The grandmother smiles with maternal affection
but a strange fear crosses her spirit
for what in the future, of anguish and betrayal,
in unknown days awaits her grandson.

Sawdust!
Aserrán!
The woodsmen of San Juan
they want cheese, they want bread,
those from Roque,
honey cakes,
Those from Rique,
almond sugar cakes,
triqui, triqui, triqui, trán!
triqui, triqui, triqui, trán!

The children' song "Los maderos de San Juan" has many versions depending on the Spanish speaking region where it is sung but it always begins with the same refrain, "Aserrín aserrán! Los maderos de San Juan," and is often accompanied by a game; an adult bounces a

child on her knees, slowly at first but gradually gaining in speed. José Asunción Silva used the words to this ancient song as a metaphor for time, and a starting point for exploring the memories of an old woman's past, and her fears for the unknown future of her grandson.

In León's version, the children's tune outlines a D-minor chord and is set, like a boy's unchanged voice, in a high tessitura that rides over a basic repetitive accompaniment outlining F-major (See Ex. 11).

Example 11 "Los maderos de San Juan," mm. 1-10

The musical score for Example 11, "Los maderos de San Juan," mm. 1-10, is presented in two systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the first five measures. The vocal line begins with a rest, followed by the lyrics "fa-se rrin a-se-ran los ma-". The piano accompaniment features a repetitive rhythmic pattern in the right hand and a simpler pattern in the left hand. The second system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the next five measures. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "de-ros de san Juan pi-den que-so pi-den pan". The piano accompaniment continues with the same repetitive patterns. Dynamics include a forte (f) marking.

León contrasts the sing-song nature of the children's tune with a more dramatic setting for the grandmother's story of the second and fourth stanzas, her melody has a much larger range, chromaticism and occasionally large leaps (mm. 20-48 and 56-87). The music here is presentational, a straightforward setting of a lengthy text. A syncopated staccato accompaniment mimics the grandmother bouncing the boy on her knees while repeated

diatonic notes or melodic figures carry most vocal phrases. Chromatic and dissonant harmonies are used in obvious places such as “en el future de angustia” (in the future of anguish) (m. 42-44) and the sequence leading up to the crux of the poem, which has a decidedly operatic build up and climax, on the text “y son sus ojos turbios espejos que empañaron/ los años, y que ha tiempo la forma reflejaron/ de cosas y de seres que nunca volverán.....” (and it is her eyes, turbid mirrors that fogged with the years, sometimes reflects the form of those things and people that will never return) (See Ex. 12).

Example 12 “Los maderos de San Juan,” mm. 76-87

o - jos tur-bios es - pe - jos que em - pa - ña - ron los a - ños

y que en tiem-pos las for-mas re - fle - ja - ron de co - sas y de se - res que

Tempo I

nun-ca vol - ve - ran

A twelve-measure piano interlude follows that acts as the transition in time between the third and fourth stanza of the poem when the now grown grandson takes over the narrative while standing at his grandmother's grave (mm. 85-99). The broken accompaniment figures, marked *allegro molto*, that underscored the children's tune in the beginning of the song move to block chords outside the key and arpeggiated augmented triads marked *lento*. The graveside text is set as recitative, chromatic and dissonant. León emphasizes the melancholy nature of the man's memory by setting a remnant of the children's tune more obviously in the minor mode and over the syncopated knee-bouncing accompaniment figures that refer to his grandmother but now in D-minor and no longer staccato (mm. 116-120).

A mi ciudad nativa

TEXT. Luis Carlos Lopéz; first published in *Por el atajo*, 1920. The poem is set with a few minor changes indicated by *.

MUSIC. August 19, 1977. Key of F major, 2/4, *Rítmico*, ♩ = 75, E⁴-G⁵, 66 measures.

RECORDINGS. Londoño, Senn, Caicedo.

A mi ciudad nativa

Noble rincón de mis abuelos: nada como evocar, cruzando callejuelas, los tiempos de la cruz y de la espada, del ahumado candil y las pajuelas... Pues ya pasó, ciudad amurallada, tu época de folletín... Las carabelas* se fueron para siempre de tu rada... -¡Ya no viene el aceite en botijuelas!- Fuiste heroica en tiempos coloniales, cuando tus hijos, águilas caudales, no eran una caterva de vencejos. Mas hoy, plena de rancio desaliño, bien puedes inspirar ese cariño que uno les tiene a sus zapatos viejos...

To my native city

Noble corner of my grandfathers: nothing evokes like, crossing little streets, the times of the cross and the sword, the smoky lamp and bygone era... Well now it has passed, walled city, you in the age of serial novels... the tall ships have left forever from your shiplanes...²⁴ -Oil doesn't come anymore in clay jugs!- You were heroic in colonial times, when your children, proud eagles, were not a throng of swallows. Moreover today, full of worn antiques, you more likely inspire the affection one has for a pair of old shoes...



Figure 2 “Monumento a los Zapatos Viejos” Cartagena de Indias, Colombia

²⁴ Two- and three-masted ships used for exploration by the Spanish and Portuguese starting in the fifteenth century. Cartagena was a major port of entry for these ships in the Age of Exploration.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the popularity of this poem in Colombia; López's verse has achieved nothing short of cult status in Cartagena, the city about which he writes. A very large bronze sculpture of a dilapidated pair of shoes was dedicated in his honor in a prominent location near the fortress of San Felipe de Barajas, once the jewel of the Spanish Main guarding the city against invasion and now a popular tourist destination. (See Fig. 2) Parts of the sonnet have become Colombian colloquialisms such as "caterva de vencejos," "rancio desaliño" and especially "zapatos viejos." These phrases, long divorced from the poem, are used as shorthand for delivering literary insults.

Cartagena is also Jaime León's native city and the home of Colombia's most famous musical export, *cumbia*. León wraps the poem in this traditional dance form that has its roots in eighteenth-century Cartagena. Like the *bambuco* of "La Campesina," the *cumbia* has influences from the three dominant cultures in Colombia: indigenous, African, and European. The characteristic rhythm in the first measure is heard throughout the song in both the vocal and piano parts (See Ex. 13).

Example 13 "A mi ciudad nativa," mm. 1-4

The image shows a musical score for the first four measures of "A mi ciudad nativa." The score is in 2/4 time, marked "Rítmico" with a tempo of quarter note = 75. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part has a characteristic cumbia rhythm in the first measure, marked "p".

The rhythmic motive serves to unify the song and represents the nobility of Cartagena; hence it is notably absent in the sections when the text is mocking or sarcastic. Its return propels the song forward until the next verbal aside. The noble rhythm notwithstanding, there is an element of commentary in the tempo that León sets, $\text{♩} = 75$, a comparatively slow beat for a *cumbia*. The unmistakable irony of a popular and sensual dance performed at such a slow pace is evident. The song is like the city itself, which lacks the energetic, enigmatic bustle of its younger days.

The shape of the melody responds to the sudden changes of the poem, which alternate between laudatory praise and sarcastic insult. The vocal line opens with a fluid, undulating melody as the speaker describes the proud and beautiful city of Cartagena. At the point where the speaker announces that the days of old have ended the melody becomes disjunct (mm. 23-26) with many changes of direction. The line referring to clay jugs (mm. 34-35) is set as recitative. The static accompaniment combined with an intensely chromatic and rhythmically complex vocal line makes the phrase stand apart from the rest of the song, just as it does in the poem—an aside that does not develop any further either verbally or musically.

To illustrate the proud, militaristic text: “Fuiste heroica en tiempos coloniales, cuando tus hijos, águilas caudales” (You were heroic in colonial times), León uses extended intervals and a march-like rhythm (mm. 38-44). However, the line that immediately follows and completes the sentence, “no eran una caterva de vencejos” (were not a throng of swallows) is disjunct, with chromatic notes and tritones that sound like cawing birds. The poem concludes with its famous line that the love the speaker feels for the old city is now akin to the affection

one has for a pair of old shoes. The song, however, does not end there. Instead León repeats the first line of text, “Noble rincón de mis abuelos” (Noble corner of my grandfathers), and brings back the gentle melody from the opening. León also chooses not to set the quote by J.M. de Heredia that precedes López’s first line of the poem, “Ciudad triste, ayer reina de la mar” (Sad city, yesterday’s queen of the sea). By preempting his own poem with a quote López emphasized the decay of the city over its nobility. By excising this line León does the inverse, thus softening López’s bitter tone and allowing the sharper moments in the poem to stand in greater relief to the gentle opening and closing.

The piano part is in contrast to the often sharp nature of the poetry; arpeggiated figures dominate the piano part and establish a gentle lulling mood that evokes the waves that splash on the ancient walls of Cartagena. An instance of direct text painting occurs in the *Poco lento* section (mm. 28-31); the accompaniment changes from arpeggiated chords and the *cumbia* rhythm to rolled chords, one per beat. The text seems to have inspired León to write chords that on the page look like the tall masts of the ships that used to sail into the harbor of Cartagena (See Ex. 14).

Example 14 “A mi ciudad nativa,” mm. 28-31

The image shows a musical score for the song "A mi ciudad nativa" (Example 14), measures 28-31. The score is in G major and 4/4 time, marked "Poco Lento". It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "Las ca-ra-be-las se fue-ron pa-ra siem-pre de tu ra-da." The piano part consists of tall, vertical chords that resemble masts of ships, with some arpeggiated figures. The tempo is marked "Poco Lento".

A ti

TEXT. José Asunción Silva. First published in *El Tiempo*, May 25, 1924.²⁵ The poem is set without the final two lines.

MUSIC. 1977-1981.²⁶ F major, 3/4, *Tempo de valse lento, sempre ppp*, “Dedicada a mi querida esposa Beatriz,” G⁴-G⁵, 51 measures.

RECORDINGS. Londoño, Senn, Caicedo.²⁷

A ti

Tú no lo sabes... mas yo he soñado
entre mis sueños color de armiño,
horas de dicha con tus amores
besos ardientes, quedos suspiros
cuando la tarde tiñe de oro
esos espacios que juntos vimos,
cuando mi alma su vuelo emprende
a las regiones de lo infinito.

To you

You don't know... but I have dreamed
in my dreams the color of ermine,
delightful hours of your love
ardent kisses, soft sighs
when the afternoon tinges with gold
those spaces that we saw together,
when my soul takes flight
to the regions of the infinite.

“A ti” is a passionate and respectful ode to a lover. The speaker is talking directly to his beloved and the opening line “Tú no lo sabes...” indicates that the speaker is making a

²⁵ This poem has a curious provenance. Silva's manuscript is dated May 1881 and was originally entitled “Sub-Umbra.” The poem remained unpublished until 1924 when it was printed sans the final two lines under the title “A ti” in *Lecturas Domenicales* the weekly literary supplement to Bogotá's daily newspaper *El Tiempo*. This altered version made its way into various anthologies and a few Silva “complete works” editions. In time it even came to be confused with another poem by Diógenes Arrieta (1848-1897) also entitled “A ti” with which it was sometimes switched. The work of Héctor Orjuela, a noted Silva scholar, has done much to restore the poem to its original length, title and author. See *José Asunción Silva, obra completa: edición crítica*, ed. Héctor Orjuela (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1990), XXX, 131.

²⁶ There are multiple dates on different version of the song ranging from 1977, November 16, 1978 and March 9, 1981.

²⁷ Basque soprano Ainhoa Arteta, known for her performances with the Metropolitan Opera, Covent Garden and other international opera houses, regularly programs this song on her solo recitals in an orchestral arrangement by Albert Guinovart. Javier Pérez Senz, “Hechizo antillano en Peralada con Ainhoa Arteta,” *El País* (Madrid), August 4, 2007, http://www.elpais.com/articulo/revista/agosto/Hechizo/antillano/Peralada/Ainhoa/Arteta/elpepirdv/20070804elpepirdv_3/Tes (accessed May 29, 2008).

confession, perhaps revealing a secret long held. In the original poem the last two lines leave unanswered whether this is a long standing-relationship or unrequited love,

aunque me olvides, aunque no me ames even if you forget me, even if you don't love me
aunque me odies, ¡sueño contigo!" even if you hate me, I dream of you!

Since León titled the song after the erroneous title of the poem (see note) it seems probable that he was not aware that these last two lines existed. In any case the original ending changes the tone of the poem. Without them the poem places the confession of the speaker squarely within an existing relationship. The title "A ti" emphasizes the intimate nature of the poem and was likely the inspiration for León's dedicatory "to my beloved wife Beatriz." The message of the poem is not meant for anyone else but the lovers themselves to hear in a place where formal names are not necessary. León's response to such a simple and intimate declaration was to compose a similarly uncomplicated song held together by a few repetitive elements and illuminated by touches of harmonic color.

León creates a tranquil, dream-like setting for Silva's poem. An opening rhythmic pattern of broken chords that alternate between F-major and D-minor recalls Satie's *Gymnopédies*. Out of this simple accompaniment brief vocal gestures emerge in a fluid, arching melody. Two of these gestures (mm. 6-9 and 10-11) become motives upon which the rest of the melody is built (See Ex. 15). They either repeat directly or are sequenced at different pitch levels throughout the song (mm. 14-21, 28-31, 41-45). Regardless of their alteration each figure begins on an offbeat. Thus León shapes the poem, which consists of one long sentence, as a series of spontaneous thoughts expressed immediately

Example 15 “A ti,” mm. 6-11

The image shows a musical score for Example 15, measures 6-11 of the song "A ti". It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat major/D minor) and a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are: "Tu no lo sa-bes, mas yo he so - ña-do. En-tre mis sue-ños". The piano accompaniment is in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and features broken chords and arpeggiated figures.

After “suspiros” (sighs) León inserts a short six-measure interlude of broken chords that repeats previously heard harmonies. The interlude provides a space to continue the serene, worshipful mood and allows the past few phrases to resonate with the listener. León changes the mood by again alternating between F-major and D-minor. A chromatic alteration of a C#, heard previously in the song tonicizing D (see Ex. 15), is brought back in new melodic material that burnishes the text “esos espacios que juntos vimos” (those spaces that we saw together) (mm. 32-36) (See Ex. 16). The last lines of the poem are set against extended dominant and diminished chords that intensify the imagery of a soul taking flight. The harmony then releases into diatonic chords and the song closes as quietly as it began.

Example 16 “A ti,” mm. 32-37

The image shows a musical score for Example 16, measures 32-37 of the song "A ti". It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat major/D minor) and a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are: "e-sos es - pacios que jun-tos vi-mos, cuan-do mi al - ma". The piano accompaniment is in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and features extended dominant and diminished chords, as well as diatonic chords.

Rima

TEXT. Eduardo Carranza. First published in *El Olvidado y Alhambra*, 1957. The poem is set in its entirety.

MUSIC. 1979 or 1983.²⁸ F# minor. 2/4, *Allegro*, ♩ = 90, E#⁴-F#⁵, 60 measures.

RECORDINGS. Senn.

Rima

No puedo decirte
ni con el silencio,
ni con las palabras,
ni aun con la música
más desesperada.

Tal vez con la luna
o con un aroma
de violetas, húmedo
de vino y de música,
sufriendo, nocturno.

Tal vez con la noche,
cuando es solamente
un rumor de hojas
con viento y estrellas
para el desvelado.

Tal vez con la luna,
si la luna oliera
a vino y violetas.
Tal vez con palabras nocturnas,
y si las palabras miraran.

No puedo decirte.

Rhyme

I can not tell you
with silence,
nor with words,
not even with the most
desperate music.

Maybe with the moon
or with the smell
of violets, humid
with wine and music,
suffering, nocturnal.

Maybe in the evening,
when there is only
a rumor of leaves
with wind and stars
while you lie awake.

Maybe with the moon,
if the moon could smell
of wine and violets
Maybe with nocturnal words,
and if the words could see.

I cannot tell you.

León's treatment of the prosody in "Rima" ranks as one of his best creative efforts. He achieves this accomplishment through flexible rhythmic patterns that approximate the cadence of spoken Spanish, and through syncopation and alternations between duple and

²⁸ The Mundo Arts edition gives 1979 as the date of composition; *Grandes poetas, grandes compositores* lists the date as 1983; the CDM edition does not provide a date.

triple beat divisions. He also maintains the integrity of the text by treating each stanza as a single phrase, sometimes nine or ten measures in length.

Each stanza has a fluid and lyrical shape comprised of many small leaps that favor one direction. The first two stanzas move downward, the third stanza is static, the fourth stanza moves generally upward, and the fifth phrase of the melody is an exact repetition of the first stanza in text and melody. The directional changes are not obviously text related; rather they are part of the larger musical structure.

It is in the harmony that León comments directly on the text. Diatonic chord progressions are enlivened with unresolved diminished and dominant chords. These unstable harmonies add color and a sense of urgency until the modulation to the D^b-major section (mm. 22-34), when their absence provides a moment of calm reflection as the third stanza begins. The transition back to F[#]-minor midway through the fourth stanza signals a return to the quick harmonic pulse with extended (ninth and eleventh) and diminished chords.

It is worth going into detail about the key changes in “Rima” as a way of investigating León’s facility with harmony as it relates to text. The aforementioned modulation from five flats to three sharps occurs in the fourth and final stanza of the poem. The distantly related keys are reconciled by introducing F-minor tonic and dominant harmonies (mm. 34-36) and then progressing through a chromatic bass line from F to C[#] over relatively fixed pedal tones (mm. 37-40) (See Ex. 17). Even though the poem, as originally written by Carranza, has ended, León’s harmony in this section keeps moving the narrative forward.

Example 17 "Rima," mm. 33-40

lu - na si la lu - na o - lie - ra a

vi - noy vio - le - tas.

quasi rec.

Tal vez con pa - la - bras noc - tur - nas, y si las pa - la - bras mi - ra - ran.

lunga

León then repeats the first stanza in the return to F#-minor. In particular a key phrase in the first stanza, “ni aun con la música más desesperada” (not even with the most desperate music), repeats and is further reinforced in the same piano interlude (mm. 10-14, 50-55). This harmonically and rhythmically adventurous interlude functions as the “desperate music” of the preceding phrase.

The overall soundscape of the song makes it seem as if “desperate music” was the key phrase that inspired its composition. “Rima” opens with a series of sixteenth-note triplets that expand, transform and contract as the song moves forward, providing a frenetic musical pace. The simultaneous use of contrasting rhythms within the accompaniment and between the vocal and piano lines creates a thick rhythmic texture that is the strongest identifying element of the song. When the unrelenting drive stops completely for a line of recitative (see m. 40 in previous example) the effect of the words in relief is all the more dramatic, “tal vez con palabras nocturnas y si las palabras miraran” (maybe with nocturnal words, and if the words could see).

Villancico Cycle

The following songs form a cycle on the poetry of the Ecuadorian writer Rigoberto Cordero y León:

1. “Villancico de la estrella”
2. “El asnillo y el buey”
3. “Cancioncilla de Navidad”
4. “Villancico de las campanas”

The poetry fits squarely in the *villancico* genre so I have labeled this set of songs the *Villancico Cycle*. The history behind Jaime León’s decision to compose his first song cycle or his choice of the Nativity subject is unknown. The exact dates of the songs are also unclear. The Mundo Arts edition provides a date for only one of the songs in the cycle. The third song, “Cancioncilla de Navidad,” is dated 1977; the other three songs are left undated. Cordero y León’s poetry, however, was first published until 1979 in *Villancico, sonrisa del alma*. The songs do not appear in the CDM edition. I have chosen to list the date for the entire cycle as “circa 1979” to include all possible dates.

Villancico de la estrella

TEXT. Rigoberto Cordero y León. First published in *Villancico, sonrisa del alma*, 1979.²⁹

The poem is set in its entirety

MUSIC. Circa 1979. F major, Common time, *Andante*, ♩ = 100, F#⁴-G⁵, 42 measures.

RECORDINGS. None.

Villancico de la estrella

Floreció una estrella
dentro del portal:
ampo de jazmines,
Jesús nació ya.

Vedle los ojillos,
clara claridad,
seda del rocío,
sueño del cristal.

Vedle las manitas,
tierna suavidad,
pétalos temblantes
de la flor de azahar.

Cielo el de su frente
con alas de amar.
Cada sonrisilla
beso angelical.

Floreció una estrella
dentro del portal:
ampo de jazmines,
Jesús nació ya.

Carol of the star

A star blossomed
in the doorway:
shining white jasmine,
Jesus was born.

See his lovely eyes,
clear clarity,
silk of dew,
dream of crystal.

See his little hands,
tender softness,
trembling petals
of the orange blossom flower.

Heaven in his brow
with wings for love.
Every little smile
an angelic kiss.

A star blossomed
inside the doorway:
shining white jasmine,
Jesus was born.

León seems to have been inspired by the declamatory opening stanza of the poem to set the first song of this cycle from the point of view of the angel at the nativity. Paintings of the nativity scene often include an angel holding a trumpet. The song begins with repeating

²⁹ Rigoberto Cordero y León, *Villancico, sonrisa del alma*. (Cuenca, Ecuador: Imprenta América, 1979), 11.

sixteenth-note flourishes in the soprano clef of the piano reminiscent of a trumpet fanfare (See Ex. 18).

Example 18 “Villancico de la estrella,” mm. 1-3

The image shows a musical score for three measures. The top staff is a vocal line in soprano clef, and the bottom two staves are piano accompaniment. The piano part features a sixteenth-note flourish in the soprano clef. The vocal line includes the lyrics "Flo-re - ción u-na es-".

Interspersed in the repetition are foreign chords like D and E-major that all together creates a brilliant atmosphere like the starlit night indicated in the title. León carries the presentational nature and trumpet theme into the vocal line, as if the angel was making her proclamation through the instrument. The key phrase of the opening stanza, “Jesús nació ya” (Jesus was born), is set apart from the rest of the music by setting it in a whole tone scale (G-F-B-C \sharp), the first time that chromaticism is used in the melody (mm.6-8).

This bombastic opening gives way to a gently rocking diatonic accompaniment after the modulation to F \sharp -major (mm. 8-16). Here the poem tenderly describes baby Jesus’ “ojillos” (lovely eyes) and “manitas” (little hands), and the vocal line, now in a lower tessitura, takes on a caressing role for the middle section of the song. The opening trumpet figures return with the repetition of the first stanza and the song ends with a plagal cadence in F-major.

El asnillo y el buey

TEXT. Rigoberto Cordero y León. First published in *Villancico, sonrisa del alma*, 1979.³⁰

The poem is set in its entirety

MUSIC. Circa 1979. G major, 3/4, *Allegretto*, F#⁴-E⁵, 92 measures.

RECORDINGS. None.

El asnillo y el buey

Para darle calorcillo
a Jesús, en su Belén,
arden en aromas simples
el asno dulce y el buey.

El arrullo de María
teje lo azul del querer,
y en el cielo las estrellas
cantan un canto de miel.

Pero el niño tiene frío
en su cuna de Belén:
las pajas son de los cerros
y no calientan sus pies.

Pero están allí, por eso,
como presencia del bien,
los dos puros animales
que lamen de amor su piel.

Dios puso en premio, por siempre,
estrellitas de Belén
en los ojos del asnillo
y otra estrellita en su sien;

Y dos lagos transparentes
en los ojazos del buey,
retratando los paisajes
en nostálgico vaivén.

The Little Donkey and the Ox

To give a little warmth
to Jesus, in his Bethlehem,
they warm with their simple aroma
the sweet donkey and the ox.

Mary's lullaby
weaves the blue of her caring,
and in the sky the stars
sing a song of honey.

But the baby is cold
in his Bethlehem crib:
the straw comes from the hills
and doesn't warm his feet.

But they are there, for that reason,
as a presence of good,
the two pure animals
that lick his skin with love.

God prized, forever,
the little stars of Bethlehem
in the eyes of the little donkey
and another little star on his temple;

And two clear lakes
in the large eyes of the ox,
portraying the landscape
nostalgically rocking.

In this unique poem representing a rustic view of the donkey and ox at the Nativity León creates a noisy manger atmosphere signified by a repeated disjunct syncopated figure in

³⁰ Cordero y León, 19.

the right hand of the accompaniment. It is heard almost continuously throughout the song in different octaves and slightly different guises; the animals signify their devotion by never leaving baby Jesus' side (See Ex. 19).

Example 19 "El asnillo y el buey," mm. 7



When the text refers directly to the animals León evokes the braying of the animals by adding dissonance to the accompaniment, which alternates between intervals of a perfect fifth and a tritone, and between voice and piano which causes clashes of major and minor seconds (See Ex. 20). The story is really told in the accompaniment, though the important text of the fourth stanza is emphasized by setting it as recitative. Generally the vocal line relies on repeated notes and melodic cells that outline the chord or hover around the dominant (See Ex. 21).

Example 20 "El asnillo y el buey," mm. 13-17

Musical score for Example 20, measures 13-17. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "Ar - den en a - ro-mas sim - pies el as-no dul-ce y el buey". The piano accompaniment consists of a right hand with eighth-note patterns and a left hand with a simple bass line.

Example 21 "El asnillo y el buey," mm. 44-49

Musical score for Example 21, measures 44-49. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "pe-ro, es tan a - lli por e-so co-mo pres-cen-cia del bien". The piano accompaniment features a right hand with sustained chords and a left hand with a simple bass line. Dynamics include *f* (forte) and *p* (piano).

Cancioncilla de Navidad

TEXT. Rigoberto Cordero y León. First published in *Villancico, sonrisa del alma*, 1979.³¹

The poem is set in its entirety.

MUSIC. Circa 1979. E^b major, 3/4, *Allegro*, ♩ = 40, B^b³-G⁵, 120 measures.

RECORDINGS. None.

Cancioncilla de Navidad

Mirad: María no tiene
con qué arropar a su niño.

Siendo su carne de estrella
está temblando de frío.

Dadle pañales pasados
por manojos de jacintos.

Dadle un bordado de luces
por cucuyos encendido.

Dadle un ensueño de nardos.
Dadle la piel de los lirios.

Dadle la nube que puso
la madre a su corderillo.

Dadle la seda del aire
cuando prepara los nidos.

Dadle caricias de menta
para que apague suspiros.

Dadle el collar de ternura
con que se anuncia el rocío.

Dadle luz que viste suave
al tallo recién nacido.

Dadle la gasa del musgo
que en el rosal ha crecido.

Dadle el calor del jilguero
que le florece los trinos.

Little Song of Christmas

Look: Mary has nothing
to clothe her child.

His flesh made of star
is trembling with cold.

Give him swaddling
wrapped with hyacinth.

Give him embroidery
lighted by fireflies.

Give him an illusion of tuberoses.
Give him lily skin.

Give him the cloud that
his mother put on the kid.

Give him the silk of the air
when it prepares nests.

Give him caresses of mint
to calm his sighs.

Give him the necklace of tenderness
announced by the dew.

Give him light that softly dresses
the newborn stem.

Give him the gauzy moss
that grows on the rosebush.

Give him the warmth of the goldfinch
with blooming trills.

³¹ Cordero y León, 9.

Dadle, dadle el corazón
en flor azul florecido.

Mirad: María no tiene con qué
arropar a su niño.

Siendo su carne de estrella
está temblando de frío.

Give him, give him the heart
of a blue flower in blossom.

Look: Mary has nothing to
clothe her child.

His flesh made of star
is trembling with cold.

The paralogical metaphors in this poem that contrast Mary's material poverty with her spiritual wealth do not lend themselves well to the text painting that is a signature of Jaime León's songwriting. Instead he grounds the religious text in an accompaniment that alternates between the popular Colombian folk dance of a *pasillo* and a waltz, from which the *pasillo* is derived. The form of this song is a blended version of an instrumental and vocal *pasillo*. Though not strictly a rondo—the A section does not return in the middle—it resembles an instrumental *pasillo* in its other key components: brisk tempo, multiple sections with contrasting tonal centers and alternation between duple and triple meter.³² The sentimental text is in keeping with the vocal *pasillo* style. The song opens as a *pasillo*; two distinct lines can be heard in each hand of the piano and represent the stringed instruments that are associated with this music, the *triple* and *bandola* (See Ex. 22).

Example 22 "Cancioncilla de Navidad," mm. 1-6

The image shows a musical score for the first six measures of "Cancioncilla de Navidad". It is written in 3/4 time and B-flat major. The vocal line is on a single staff, and the piano accompaniment is on two staves. The vocal line starts with a rest, followed by the lyrics "Mi - rad" and "Ma - ri - a no". The piano accompaniment features a melodic line in the right hand and a rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand. The dynamic marking "mf" is present in both parts.

³² William Gradante, "Pasillo," In *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.mnl.umkc.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/21008> (accessed July 30, 2009).

The setting of the second couplet is chromatically altered to reference A^b harmonies and is characterized by a stricter waltz style: emphasis on the first beat of the measure and no separate lines in the accompaniment. The music for the third couplet returns to the *pasillo* and delves further into chromaticism, referencing the Locrian mode. The rest of the song continues in like fashion, alternating sections between *pasillo* and waltz. The format is particularly effective when León develops a waltz melody over couplets 7-9 (mm. 49-72) and gradually weaves the *pasillo* into the accompaniment. A four-measure chromatic passage, marked with a crescendo, takes the waltz tune with its emphasis on the downbeat directly into a new section with a lively syncopated *pasillo* style (See Ex. 23).

Example 23 “Cancioncilla de Navidad,” mm. 68-77

68
 con que sea - nun - cialei ro - ci - o
 73
 dad - la luz que vis - te sua - ve al ta - llo re - oén na - ci - do - dad - le la ga - sa

Villancico de las campanas

TEXT. Rigoberto Cordero y León. First published in *Villancico, sonrisa del alma*, 1979.³³

The poem is set complete minus a couplet in the fourth stanza.

MUSIC. Circa 1979. A major, 2/4, *Allegro*, E^b⁴-E⁵, 100 measures.

RECORDINGS. None.

Villancico de las campanas

Esta noche son campanas
los cálices de las flores.

En el aire todo diáfano
suenan con fragantes sonos.
Están tocadas por ángeles
pequeños y soñadores.

Son el alma encantadora
de ternísimos albugues
y la ternura hecha gasa
de sencillos ruiseñores.

Parece que sólo suenan
como leves surtidores
³⁴

Todo es distancia de gracia
de mil estrellas insomnes
que desvelaron su sueño
por guiar a los pastores.

Esta noche son campanas
los cálices de las flores.

Carol of the bells

The chalices of the flowers
are bells tonight.

In the air all diaphanous
they sound with fragrant songs.
They are touched by angels
small and dreamy.

They are the enchanted soul
of delicate cymbals
and the tenderness made gauze
of simple nightingales.

They seem only to sound
like soft fountains

It was all a graceful distance to
a thousand sleepless stars
that awakened from their dream
to guide the shepherds.

The chalices of the flowers
are bells tonight.

³³ Cordero y León, 21.

³⁴ In the original Cordero y León poem this stanza is completed with “que el viento pasa/ besando con pétalos y canciones” (the wind passes/ kissing with petals and songs). These two lines were excised from the 2009 Mundo Arts edition (mm. 55-63) and replaced with “que esta noche son campanas/ los cálices de las flores” (that the chalices of the flowers/ are bells tonight). I have not seen the manuscript for this song nor is the cycle part of the CDM edition so it is unknown whether this change was intentional by León or a misprint from the publisher. It should be noted that the lines from the original poem easily fit into the rhythm of mm. 55-63, complete the meaning of the stanza, and better follow the prosody.

In this fanciful poem flowers are turned into bells by the angels on Christmas Eve. Their ringing sound reaches across the heavens to tell the stars to shine their light and guide the shepherds to the Nativity scene. León takes the image of the bells and sets the majority of the text in a bright sounding, diatonic melody characterized by a dotted rhythm and leap of a perfect fourth, a common bell tuning, on key words like “diáfano” (diaphanous), “ángeles” (angels), and “encantadora” (enchanted). The accompaniment is dominated by sixteenth-note arpeggios as if a thousand tiny bells are ringing in rapid succession (See Ex. 24).

Example 24 “Villancico de las campanas,” mm. 12-15



León interrupts this melody with a section of recitative marked *meno mosso* (mm. 65-79), in order to accentuate the connection between the bells, angels, stars and shepherds: ”Todo es distancia de gracia de mil estrellas insomnes que desvelaron su sueño por guiar a los pastores” (It was all a graceful distance to a thousand sleepless stars that awakened from their dream to guide the shepherds).

The harmony in the song follows standard diatonic chord progressions. Where it differs, the chromatic alterations emphasize some aspect of the text. For example, the word “pequeños” (small) (mm.22-23) is illustrated by a D-major seventh followed a D diminished seventh chord and the music leading into the word “gasa” (gauze) is of gauze-like texture

marked by compressed arpeggiations of an A dominant seventh chord that expand in aural texture and visual spacing to a B^b-major chord (See Ex. 25).

Example 25 “Villancico de las campanas,” mm. 37-40

The musical score for Example 25, "Villancico de las campanas," mm. 37-40, is presented in a three-staff format. The top staff is the vocal line, written in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The lyrics are "y la ter - nu - ra he - cha ga - - - sa". The middle and bottom staves are the piano accompaniment. The right hand plays arpeggiated chords, and the left hand plays a more active bass line. The key signature changes from G major to B-flat major in the final measure.

Letra para cantar al son del arpa

TEXT. Eduardo Carranza. First published in *El olvidado*, 1948. Poem is set with a few minor word changes (indicated by *) and minus one line from the original.

MUSIC. 1979. Key of G^b Major, 3/4, *Allegro vivace*, ♩ = 90, E^b⁴ – A^b⁵, 76 measures.³⁵

RECORDINGS. None.

Letra para cantar al son del arpa

Del lado del arpa
ya vamos, amor.*
Pradera dormida,
velada de lluvia.
Orilla del mar,
un ala de música,
un ala visible
de ángel la oculta.*
Una margarita
lleva entre sus labios
el viento del arpa.
La luna del arpa,
cantando en voz baja,
borda su pañuelo.
Árboles azules
del lado del arpa.
Y, entre sus ramas,
desnuda, la luz.
Se abre otra rosa
al lado del arpa.*
Hacia allá sonriente*
los niños dormidos.
Y mira hacia allá,
por sobre la tarde,
la absorta doncella.
Hacia ese lado
vuelan las palomas.
Del lado del arpa,
está el desenlace
del cuento olvidado.
Y esperan los sueños
un pecho dormido.
La palabra amor

Words to sing to the song of the harp

On the side of the harp
we are going, my love.
Sleeping grasslands
veiled in rain.
Shore of the sea,
a wing of music,
a visible wing
of the archangel hides it.
A daisy
carries in its lips
the wind of the harp.
The moon of the harp,
singing in a low voice
embroiders a handkerchief.
Blue trees
on the side the harp.
And, within the branches,
naked, the light.
Another rose opens
on the side of the harp.
Smiling over there
are the sleeping children.
And look over there,
by the afternoon,
the enchanted maiden.
On that side
the doves fly.
On the side of the harp
is the ending
of the forgotten tale.
And dreams wait
for a sleeping bosom.
The word of love

³⁵ The CDM edition is marked ♩ = 80.

que tú me decías,³⁶
aquella sonrisa
parecida a un beso,
viven para siempre
del lado del arpa,
en aire de música,
igual que en un cielo.
Hacia el fin del aire,*
hacia el azulado
comienzo del ángel,
del alma, del alba,*
vayamos, amor;
hacia otro lado*
del arpa.

that you were telling me,
with that smile
like a kiss,
that lives forever
by the side of the harp,
on the air of music,
like that of a sky.
Towards the end of the air,
towards the bluish
beginning of the angel,
the souls, the dawn,
let us go, love;
to the other side
of the harp.

Carranza's poem consists of forty-eight lines with no divisions. In setting the poem to music León created his own sections by assigning the portions of the poem with references to music or flight as the "harp song" of the title. The three sections of "harp song," marked by brackets in the translation, are heard at the beginning, middle, and end of the song. The mostly diatonic accompaniment in G^b—a typical harp key signature— is marked by thirty-second note arpeggios with a few glissandos interspersed to mimic the playing of a harp. The melodic phrases of the "harp song" always begin with a narrow range and likewise end with a leap of a fourth – an interval that plays an important role throughout the song (See Ex. 26).

³⁶ At this point one line in the original poem, "la mirada última" (the last look), was excised from the song.

Example 26 “Letra para cantar al son del arpa,” mm. 1-5

Allegro Vivace (♩ = 80)

Del la - do del ar - pa ya va - mos a -
mor, Pra - de - ra dor - mi - da ve - la - da de

This melody inhabits a much higher tessitura than those seen in previous León songs, and, while the prosody always closely matches the text, it seems that the eerie timbre of the voice in this strange key supersedes the words. The melody becomes increasingly chromatic in the second iteration of the “harp song” (mm. 43-49), clashing dissonantly with the accompaniment, and incorporating some of the elements of the non “harp song.”

For the two sections of non “harp song” (mm. 24-42 and 50-63) León creates the atmosphere of the archaic, enchanted dream world of the poem by delving into quartal

harmonies and a pentatonic scale built on the black keys: F \sharp -G \sharp -A \sharp -C \sharp -D \sharp (note that this is a variant of the key of G \flat spelled enharmonically). The tessitura of these sections are lower and highly chromatic consisting principally of variations on the triplet figures heard in the “harp song.” Earlier “harp song” figures were entirely in the accompaniment; now the undulating movement of a harp melody is passed between piano and vocal line (See Ex. 27).

Example 27 “Letra para cantar al son del arpa,” mm. 24-28

The musical score for Example 27 is set in G-flat major (three flats) and 3/4 time, marked "Meno Mosso". It consists of four systems of staves. The first system shows the vocal line with the lyrics "Ar-do-les a-zu-les" and the piano accompaniment. The second system continues the vocal line with the lyrics "del la-do del ar-pa." and the piano accompaniment. The piano accompaniment is highly chromatic and features many triplets and syncopations, creating a complex texture. The vocal line is characterized by its lower tessitura and undulating movement, which is passed between the piano and vocal lines.

This is in keeping with the more personal poetry in these sections. The speaker relates the harp’s song to his own desire for “La palabra amor que tú me decías” (The word of love that you were telling me). León uses these sections to illustrate how the harp song goes from something that is heard to a song that is created by the lovers. The lower tessitura helps the text declamation, aided by the syncopation, intersecting lines and articulation markings in the accompaniment.

Tu amor es como la piel de las manzanas

TEXT. Jorge Carrera Andrade. First published in *Rol de la manzana: poesías*, 1935.

MUSIC. May 21, 1979. A^b major. Common time, *Andantino*. ♩ = 70, F⁴- A^b⁵, 27 measures.³⁷

RECORDINGS. None.

Tu amor es como la piel de las manzanas

Tu amor es como el roce
tímido de la mejilla de un niño,

como la piel de las manzanas
o la cesta de nueces de la pascua,

como los pasos graves
en la alcoba donde ha muerto la madre,

como una casa en el bosque
o más bien como un llanto vigilante en la noche.

Your love is like the skin of apples

Your love is like the timid
brush of a boy's cheek,

like the skin of apples
or the basket of Easter walnuts,

like the grave steps
in the bedroom where the mother died,

like a house in the forest
or rather like a vigilant cry in the night.

This short song lasting scarcely ninety seconds has a memorable melody, shifting chromatic harmonies, and layered, syncopated rhythmic patterns that recall the style of George Gershwin (1898-1937), a favorite composer of León. The choice of poem by one of Ecuador's finest poets also reflects León's interest in illustrating metaphor.

The two measures of piano before the voice enters introduce a melodic drone on E^b-F and a pedal point on A^b. Save for a few measures, the drone is present throughout the song, marking its importance. It is not clear though how it ties to the text. Given the song's harmonies and rhythms the drone might represent an instrument in a jazz combo, such as a

³⁷ When I sang through this song with Jaime León in 2005 he seemed to think there was something missing, that it was too short, or as he said, "it's over before it starts!" Certainly the song lacks some of León's usual methods for filling out a brief text like the repetition of important phrases, a piano interlude or a key change. While León's intention may have been to revise the song no changes were made between the early 1990s CDM edition and the 2009 Mundo Arts publication.

pitched snare drum, rather than Carrera Andrade's poetic sensibility (See Ex. 28).³⁸

Example 28 "Tu amor es como la piel de las manzanas," mm. 1-4

The image shows a musical score for Example 28, "Tu amor es como la piel de las manzanas," measures 1-4. The score is in 3/4 time, key of B-flat major (two flats). It features a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The piano part consists of a right hand with chords and a left hand with a bass line. The vocal line is melodic and carries the lyrics: "Tua-mor — es comoel ro - ce tí - mi-do".

The text is carried on a lilting, lyrical diatonic melody supported by tonic and augmented dominant harmonies in the piano (see Ex. 28). For the third stanza that references death, León breaks with the I-V relationship. The phrase, marked *sforzando*, is subdued and moody, incorporating chromatic quartal and diminished harmonies in the accompaniment and an interplay of major and minor seconds achieved through the lowered third of the scale, C^b, in the melody (See Ex. 29).

³⁸ See analyses for "La campesina," "Serenata" and "Letra para cantar al son del arpa" for other instances where León writes for other "instruments" in the piano part.

Example 29 “Tu amor es como la piel de las manzanas,” mm. 12-17

The image displays a musical score for Example 29, consisting of two systems of music. The first system covers measures 12-14, and the second system covers measures 15-17. The vocal line is written in a treble clef with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. The piano accompaniment is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The lyrics are: "Co-mo los pa-sos gra-ves en laal - co - ba donde ha muer - to la ma - dre." The piano part includes dynamic markings such as *sfz* (sforzando) in measure 12, *rit.* (ritardando) in measure 15, and *pp* (pianissimo) in measure 16. The piano part features a chromatic descent of quartal harmonies in measure 21 and a tritone leap in measure 22.

Though the vocal line returns to a version of the diatonic melody for the last stanza, León maintains the chromaticism in the piano to prepare a brief moment of text painting. A smooth chromatic descent of quartal harmonies by half-step in m. 21 sets in relief the tritone leaps in m. 22 that invoke the “llanto” (cry) of the final line. As soon as León exhausts the text he provides a jazz-tinged ending through an inconclusive cadence built on a chromatic quartal chord leading to an F-minor chord accompanied by the recurring drone melody.

Todo pasó

TEXT. Rafael Maya. First published in *La vida en la sombra*, 1925.³⁹ The poem is set a change indicated by *.

MUSIC. November 5, 1980. F# minor, 6/8, *Andante tranquilo*, ♩. = 55, E⁴-F#⁵, 55 measures.

RECORDINGS. Uribe, Senn.

Todo Pasó

Todo pasó como la breve sombra
de un ave que atraviesa el firmamento.
Pasó la eternidad en un momento,
y el recuerdo traidor ya no te nombra.

Tan sólo el corazón gime y se asombra
ante la realidad de su tormento:
¡Noche oscura, relámpagos y viento,
y un manto de hojas que el sendero alfombra!

Pero hasta ayer, no mas fuiste la vida
luz del pasado, apoyo del futuro,
timón del alma y venda de la herida.

Hoy pienso en ti, mi bello amor lejano
cual recuerdo, sobre el lecho duro,*
el sueño de una noche de verano.

Everything passed

Everything passed like a brief shadow
of a bird that crosses the firmament.
Eternity passed in a moment,
and the treacherous memory doesn't name you.

Alone the heart cries out and is amazed
at the reality of its torment:
Dark night, lightning and wind
and a cloak of leaves covers the path!

But only yesterday, there was life
light from the past, support of the future,
rudder of the soul and bandage to the wound.

Today I think of you, my beautiful distant love
which I remember, lying on a hard bed,
the dream of a summer night.

León employs harmony to illustrate the psychological turmoil of the speaker in this emotionally laden sonnet by Rafael Maya. A fluid melody built on stepwise movement and a relatively narrow vocal range floats over an active and texturally dense accompaniment. (mm. 3-17). The first two words of the song, “Todo pasó” (everything passed) (mm. 2-4), are an example of León’s use of chromaticism in the piano harmony to sustain tension and indicate a lover who fluctuates between angry and happy memories. The word “pasó” is first

³⁹ Rafael Maya, *Obra poética* (Bogotá: Ediciones de la Revista, 1972), 35.

sustained by a B-major chord (Major IV in the key of F#-minor) and then immediately followed by a B-diminished chord (See Ex. 30).

A short piano interlude (mm. 18-22) is characterized by a thick texture of unstable harmonies built on diminished ninth and thirteenth chords. The “Sturm und Drang” nature of this passage reflects the text immediately preceding it: “Paso la eternidad en un momento, y el recuerdo traidor ya no te nombra” (Eternity passed in a moment, and the treacherous memory doesn’t name you). León resolves the highly chromatic harmony by returning to the home key with a cadence in F# -minor. In another example of harmonic text painting, the line “Tan sólo el corazón gime y se asombra” (Alone the heart cries out and is amazed) (mm. 25-27) is supported by dominant seventh chords traded back and forth without resolution, culminating in an A-minor scale that ends in an E-minor chord marked *forte*. The shifting sonorities with unexpected endings precisely match the turmoil of a spurned lover who goes on to describe his current state: “¡Noche oscura, relámpagos y viento, y un manto de hojas que el sendero alfombra!” (Dark night, lightning and wind and a cloak of leaves covers the path).

The turn in the sonnet occurs immediately after this moment when the lover reflects on happier times, reflected harmonically in a brief section in B-major (mm. 37-42). The theme of loss quickly returns and, in keeping with the lyrics that are now more wistful than angry, the harmony relaxes as the song concludes with a whimper through a weak vii – i cadence in F#-minor marked *ppp*.

The vocal line remains mostly independent of the piano. The lyrical and arched melody rides above the turmoil in the piano. The only exception occurs in the B-major

section, when the right hand of the accompaniment doubles the melody (mm. 36-42). This is in keeping with the text where the lover speaks fondly of past unity. Instead of direct text painting León instead employs chromaticism to tie the vocal line to the sentiment expressed in the harmony. The chromatic notes in the first eight lines of text (mm. 2-33) set the mood and indicate the grief and anger of the spurned lover. When the text is of a lighter nature (mm. 36-42), León uses chromatic notes in the melody to align with major harmonies. Finally, in the last three lines, when the speaker in the poem has spent all of his emotional energy, chromaticism is notably absent.

León unifies the song through a rising stepwise motive that appears in the opening vocal line. The motive is employed to indicate emotional “chapters” in the poem (See Ex. 30).

Example 30 “Todo pasó,” mm. 1-4

The image shows a musical score for the first four measures of the song "Todo pasó". The score is written for voice and piano. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 8/8. The tempo is marked "Andante Tranquillo" with a quarter note equal to 55 beats per minute. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staff. The lyrics "To-do pa - só" and "co-mo la bre-ve" are written below the vocal line. The piano accompaniment features a rising stepwise motive in the right hand, which is mirrored by the vocal line.

It is first heard on the text “todo pasó” (everything passed), when the opening lines of the poem establish the theme of a lover mourning his broken relationship. The motive then appears on the text “tan sólo el corazón” (alone the heart) when the tone moves into an accusatory mode. The notes and rhythm are slightly altered, befitting the angry nature of the

text. Another appearance in a chromatically altered version occurs at “Pero hasta ayer no mas” (But only yesterday), marking the aforementioned “happier” section. And finally, the motive appears exactly as it was in the beginning of the song on the text “hoy pienso en ti” (today I think of you) as the lover finds resolution.

Constant rhythmic movement propels the song forward. The entire song is in 6/8, which evokes a dance feel. The most frequently used rhythmic pattern is one beat of sixteenth-notes followed by a beat of eighth-notes alternating with entire measures of arpeggiated sixteenth-notes. The rhythmic movement slows at the end of each section (section breaks are delineated in the paragraph on motivic writing above) to eighth-notes or dotted quarters in order to emphasize the text and build tension. The return of the faster rhythmic pattern is another way León advances the narrative.

Combinations of rhythmic patterns create flexibility in the vocal line and frequently involve quintuplets and quadruplets over three beats. Parts of my time with Jaime León included coaching sessions on a number of his songs, including this one. He indicated that in the places where the vocal rhythm was divided into four or five beats over three in the accompaniment it was important to follow the text declamation rather than strict rhythmic interpretation. “Take your time, no rush,” he said, “don’t mind what the piano is doing.”

Algún día

TEXT. Dora Castellanos. First published in *Verdad de amor*, 1955. The poem is set in its entirety.

MUSIC. November 15, 1980. E major, Common time, *Molto espressivo e rubato*, ♩ = 95, E⁴- G^{♯5}, 39 measures.

RECORDINGS. Londoño, Senn, Caicedo.

Algún día

Un día llegarás;
el amor nos espera
y me dirás:
Amada,⁴⁰ ya llegó la primavera.

Un día me amarás.
Estarás de mi pecho tan cercano,
que no sabré si el fuego que me abrasa
es de tu corazón o del verano.

Un día me tendrás.
Escucharemos mudos
latir nuestras arterias
y sollozar los árboles desnudos.

Un día. Cualquier día.
Breve y eterno,
el amor es el mismo
en verano, en otoño y en invierno.

One day

One day you will arrive;
love is waiting for us
and you will say to me:
My love, spring has arrived.

One day you will love me.
You will be so close to my bosom,
that I will not know if the fire that burns me
is of your heart or of the summer.

One day you will have me.
Silently we will listen
to the pulsing of our veins
the sob of the naked trees.

One day. Any day.
Brief and eternal,
love is the same
in summer, in fall and in winter.

“Algún día” comes as close as any in León’s oeuvre to being a theatre song or opera aria. However, León was clear that a singer should not get too carried away in the emotion when he said, “It’s not difficult. It has to move, *molto espressivo e rubato*. Don’t work at it, just do it.”⁴¹

⁴⁰ Jaime León indicated in our coaching that the gender of the noun “amada” should be changed so that the song could be performed from either a male or female perspective.

⁴¹ León, interview 2005. León’s 1998 recording of the song with Gloria Londoño proves his point as it clocks in at a brisk 1:47. This is compared to 2:14 and 2:24 for the Senn and Caicedo recordings respectively.

A short, dramatic piano prelude leads into an equally emotional melodic entrance and a heightened atmosphere that never stops during this brief song. The declamatory, yet fluid melody is built on a recurring motive and rising sequences. The text of each of the four stanzas of Castellanos' poem begins with "Un día ..." (one day). León's first vocal gesture appears as a motive each time this particular text returns (mm. 5-6) (See Ex. 31).

Example 31 "Algún día," mm. 5-6

The musical score for Example 31, "Algún día," mm. 5-6, is presented in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a half rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a half note C5. The piano accompaniment consists of a rising sequence of eighth notes in the right hand and a similar rising sequence in the left hand. The dynamic marking *mf* is present in both parts.

The only exception is in the last stanza when he delays the motive until the text "el amor es el mismo" (love is the same) when the return of the motive is transformed in the last three notes into a rising sequence (See Ex. 32).

Example 32 “Algún día,” mm. 33-39

ter - no. El a-mor es el mis-mo en ve - ra - no en o -
to - ño y en in - vier - no.

11-15-80

The opening four measures establish the lush romantic mood of the poem. The prelude includes minor and modal harmonies until the arrival of the home key of E-major for the vocal entrance (m. 5). The song remains in E with interspersed F-major harmonies. Unlike his other songs from the late 1970s and early 1980s, this one does not exhibit extended harmonies. Instead, passing dissonance and the aforementioned coloristic chords provide aural interest. The soundscape of this song is reminiscent of cabaret, lavish in mood but not musically adventurous.

León's use of distant keys adds flashes of tonal color that heighten the effusively romantic sensibility of the poetry. For example, León's passage through F-major harmonies at the ardent text, "que no sabré si el fuego que me abrasa es de tu corazón o del verano" (that I will not know if the fire that burns me is of your heart or of the summer) (mm.17-19), creates a heightened emotional atmosphere. The syncopation in this section also functions as text painting for the mention of the shared heartbeat.

The piano part shares some material with the voice but mainly acts to support it harmonically and to perpetuate forward movement through the reappearance of a few rhythmic cells that are immediately sequenced (mm. 1-2, 24-26). These elements are atmospheric rather than examples of direct text painting, and act to build the musical momentum of a particular phrase to its eventual cadence.

Más que nunca

TEXT. Maruja Vieira. First published in *Campanario de lluvia*, 1947. The poem is set in its entirety with a few minor changes indicated by *.

MUSIC. September 16, 1981. C major, Common time, *Lento*, ♩ = 65, E⁴-F⁵, 51 measures.

RECORDINGS. Londoño.

Más que nunca

Porque amarte es así, de dulce y hondo*
como esta fiel serenidad del agua
que corre por la acequia, derramando
su amorosa ternura sobre el campo.

Te amo en este sitio de campanas y árboles,
en esta brisa, estos jazmines y estas dalias.*
La vida y su belleza me llegan claramente
cuando pienso en tus ojos, bajo este cielo
pálido.

Sobre la hierba limpia y húmeda, mis pisadas
no se oyen, no interrumpen el canto de los
pájaros./ Ya la niebla descende con la luz de la
tarde/ y en tu ausencia y mi angustia
más que nunca te amo.

More than ever

Because loving you is as sweet and profound
as the faithful serenity of the water
that runs through the bursting channel
your loving tenderness in the countryside.

I love you in this place of bells and trees,
in this breeze, this jasmine and these dahlias.
Life and its beauty come to me clearly
when I think about your eyes under this
pallid sky.

Over the clean and damp pasture my steps
cannot be heard, do not interrupt the song of
the birds./ Now the fog descends with the
afternoon light/ and in your absence and my
anguish/ more than ever I love you.

León sets the text of Maruja Vieira's poem "Más que nunca" basically unchanged and invokes the recurring image of water with motive that weaves in and out of the accompaniment. The first two measures contain a rhythmic motive of triplet arpeggios that returns throughout the song as a unifying device signifying water as it is described in the poem in multiple ways: a stream, dew drops, and fog (See Ex. 33).

Example 33 “Más que nunca,” mm. 1-2

The image shows a musical score for the first two measures of the piece "Más que nunca." The tempo is marked "Lento" with a metronome marking of 65. The score is in 6/8 time. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staff. The vocal line starts with a rest in measure 1 and then has the lyrics "Por-quea" in measure 2. The piano accompaniment features a triplet figure in the bass line, marked "p".

The only time this motive is absent is midway through the second stanza when no direct reference to water is present. Block chords, sometimes syncopated, replace it. The change in rhythmic patterns slows the song’s forward movement appropriate to the reflective nature of the text. The arpeggiated triplet figure returns as the song moves to its home key of C-major for the final stanza (mm. 38-43).

Harmony is created through intersecting linear lines with only a few purely vertical chords. The fleeting nature of the harmony is a soundscape, like the shifting sounds of a running stream or the quality of light as it passes through mist. The principal keys of C-major and F-major are separated by excursions to extended chromatic chords and allusions to modality through flatted thirds and sixths. This gives the song the perfume of French Impressionism.

The structure of the melody is also a small departure for León in that he avoids sequencing phrase segments. Instead the vocal line is built on a series of arches at different pitch levels. Each arch is shaped differently, sometimes stepwise and chromatic, other times tonal with small leaps. The phrasing corresponds to the irregular sentence structure of the poem and leads to extended melodic segments of up to ten measures.

Generally the melody, with its straightforward rhythm, exists separately from the accompaniment, which consists primarily of triplets. It is possible that the cross rhythms between duple and triple represent the separated lovers. There are two key moments, however, when the accompaniment doubles the vocal line, intensifying the emotion at the point where the text directly addresses the beloved using the familiar “tu” (you) form, “te amo en este sitio de campanas y arboles” (I love you in this place of bells and trees) (mm. 11-13), and “La vida y su belleza me llegan claramente cuando pienso en tus ojos” (life and its beauty come to me clearly when I think about your eyes) (mm.21-24).

Detailed text painting also occurs towards the end of the song (mm. 31-38) as a gentle scalar passage starting on B^b and ending on a cadence in F-major sustains a fresh outdoor atmosphere while the footsteps in the text are represented in the block chords that give way to arpeggios that refer to the mention of birds in the line “Sobre la hierba limpia y húmeda, mis pisadas no se oyen, no interrumpen el canto de los pájaros” (Over the clean and damp pasture my steps cannot be heard, do not interrupt the song of the birds) (See Ex. 34).

Example 34 "Mas que nunca," mm. 31-38

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Mas que nunca" from measures 31 to 38. The score is written for voice and piano. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The music is in a minor key, indicated by the B-flat and the overall mood.

The first system (measures 31-34) features a vocal line with the lyrics: "so-bre la hier-ba lim-piay hu-me-da mis pi-sa-das no se". The piano accompaniment consists of a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

The second system (measures 35-38) features a vocal line with the lyrics: "o-yen noin-te - rrun-pen el can-to de los pa-ja-ros". The piano accompaniment continues with a similar rhythmic pattern, including a triplet in the bass line at the end of measure 38.

Siempre

TEXT. Alfredo Gómez Jaime. First published in *Parnaso colombiano: nueva antología*. 1910. The poem is set in its entirety.

MUSIC. January 1, 1982. A^b major, 3/4, ♩ = 106, F⁴-F⁵, 130 measures.

RECORDINGS. Londoño.

Siempre

Por ti serán siempre mis hondos cantares,
por ti nuevas trovas ensayan sus vuelos;
tu has sido en mi senda de mudos pesares
rosal florecido de amor y consuelos.

¡La perla mas blanca de todos mis mares,
la estrella mas dulce de todos mis cielos,
la flor mas gloriosa de los azahares
el premio mas grande de ocultos anhelos!

Sólo por amarte comprendo la vida;
tan sólo por verte perdono la herida,
de males que hieren sin tregua ni calma.

Por ti hay nuevas rosas sobre los senderos,
y cómo jazmines, temblantes luceros
despliegan sus broches de luz en el alma.

Always

For you there will always be my deepest songs,
for you new verses test their flight;
you have been on my path of mute sorrows
a flowering rose of love and consolation.

The whitest pearl of all my seas,
the sweetest star of all my skies,
the most glorious flower of the orange blossoms
the greatest prize of the hidden desires.

Merely by loving you I understand life;
if only for seeing you I pardon the injury
of the wrongs that hurt relentlessly without respite.

For you there are new roses on the paths,
and like jasmine, trembling splendors
display their brooches of light in the soul.

In contrast to the conversational prosody of “Rima,” León employs a declamatory style in setting the text for “Siempre.” It is as if one was reciting the poetry, emphasizing the natural stress of words and inserting dramatic pauses. Indeed, at 130 measures “Siempre” is one of León’s longest songs. This is principally due to prominent sections without the voice: in addition to a prelude and postlude, lengthy interludes occur before stanzas three and four. In keeping with the reflective nature of the poem, these sections are used mostly to comment musically on the previous stanza.

León attempts to give each stanza its own melodic and harmonic distinctiveness. The first stanza, in A^b-major, is marked by four exact repetitions of a simple melodic pattern on

three pitches A^b-B^b-C in the first couplet (See Ex. 35). The opening melody in the second stanza, in G^b major, is treated through melodic sequence. The third stanza, in E^b major, also has its own motive which is repeated several times. In keeping with the return to A^b major/F-minor the fourth and final stanza revisits melodic material from the first stanza and ends inconclusively, before the listener realizes the song is actually over. While an examination of the song reveals the distinct shape of each stanza, the musical architecture is not really related to the text; the motives have no inherent meaning. Thus the overall effect of the song is of a gentle melody flowing over a more active accompaniment.

Example 35 “Siempre,” mm. 11-15

The image shows a musical score for a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a treble clef with a key signature of three flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor). The lyrics are "Por tí se-rán siem - pre. mis". The piano accompaniment is in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with the same key signature. The right hand plays a steady eighth-note pattern, while the left hand has a more active bass line with some chromatic movement.

The song does become more text specific when León uses dissonance to emphasize particular words. For example, the harmony under the text “de males que hieren sin tregua ni calma” (of the wrongs that hurt relentlessly without respite) includes several dissonant clusters that paint the text, but in keeping with the spirit of the line, continue moving forward. Similarly, the chromatic notes in the vocal line usually coincides on words of negative connotations such as “pesares” (sorrows), “herida” (injury), “hieren” (hurt), and “ni calma” (without respite) (See Ex. 36).

Example 36 "Siempre," mm. 80-86

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system (measures 80-82) shows a vocal line with lyrics "per-do-no lahe - ri-da de ma-les que" and a piano accompaniment with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The second system (measures 83-86) shows a vocal line with lyrics "hie-ren sin tre gua ni cal-ma." and a piano accompaniment with a *poco* dynamic. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats).

Just as each stanza has its own key signature and melodic character, each is marked by a particular rhythmic pattern: syncopation and suspension in the first, triplets and block chords in the second, a waltz feel in the third, and syncopation and suspension in the fourth. The combination of so many rhythmic patterns provides an active but supportive undercurrent to the placid melody.

Si no fuera por ti

TEXT. Antonio Llanos. First published in *La madre muerta*, 1958. Poem is set with a half line missing.

MUSIC. November 25, 1983. A^b major, Common time, *Mosso espressivo*, ♩ = 110, F⁴-F⁵, 68 measures.⁴²

RECORDINGS. Londoño, Caicedo.⁴³

Si no fuera por ti

Si no fuera por ti, las cosas no tendrían
esa vaga ternura, esa luz de penumbra.
Si no fuera por ti, esta melancolía
de soñar y llorar no fuera la dulzura.

Si no fuera por ti, ¡oh muerte!, tantas cosas
inadvertidas fueran.
Otorga tu silencio soledad a las rosas.
Por ti los ojos míos en el lucero esperan.

Si no fuera por ti, qué triviales serían
el amor y las manos que se unen, amor;
y que triste también el sol de cada día,
si en la tarde no hubiera muriente
resplandor.

Si no fuera por ti, el amor no tendría
* tan firme retener de las cosas que⁴⁴
amamos: nube, flor, poesía,
¡este divino atardecer!

If not for you

If not for you, things would not have
that vague tenderness, that penumbral light.
If not for you, this melancholy
of dreaming and crying would not be so sweet.

If not for you, oh death!, how many things
would unknowingly exist.
Your silence bestows solitude to the roses.
For you my eyes wait in the bright star.

If not for you, how trivial would
love, and the hands that unite me with love, be;
How sad also would the sun of each day be,
if in the afternoon there weren't a dying
splendor.

If not for you, love would not have
such a firm hold on the things that
we love: cloud, flower, poetry,
this divine dusk!

Antonio Llanos' poem, filled with abstract imagery and metaphor, could easily have been turned into song by emphasizing the ideas of light, clouds, dreams, etc. into a lyrical

⁴² The CDM edition is marked cut-time, *Mosso*, ♩ = 100.

⁴³ The Londoño and Caicedo recordings vary significantly. The Caicedo recording puts the song in a different key and includes changes to the melody and accompaniment line. The Mundo Arts edition reflects the song mostly as León plays it in the Londoño recording.

⁴⁴ "tanta dulce ternura" (such sweet tenderness) is original to the poem at the point of the asterisk but was omitted from the song setting.

ode to death. Instead through melodic and textual repetition, León grounds the song in life and the concept that death inspires one to live with greater awareness and appreciation for each moment. The song opens with a striking melody that rises in waves of insistent urgency. The upward stepwise movement of the opening vocal phrase is repeated, with slight changes, at each return of the text “si no fuera por ti” (if not for you). Though the poem verges, in this author’s opinion, on bathos, León relies on the melody to focus the listener on key phrases and words that signify the principal mood of a particular section.

Harmony is also used to focus the listener. Regardless of where the song is harmonically—it begins in the key of A^b and then moves through E, E^b, A^b, and D^b—the progression F-minor - B^b-minor - E^b-minor underlines the repeated text “si no fuera por ti.” Highly chromatic diminished and augmented chords, often extending into ninth and eleventh harmonies, surround the diatonic progression. The constant harmonic shifts have a restless quality that keeps the song moving forward.

The rhythmic patterns are uncharacteristically rigid in this song. León makes substantial use of triplets in the vocal and accompaniment lines and by doing so creates a manic atmosphere. After listening to the recorded versions of this song it is clear that a close adherence to the rhythm as written adds greatly to the energy of the melody and the expressiveness of the accompaniment. For example, in the third stanza block chords in triplets produce a dense almost march-like texture (mm. 34-37) that then gives way to a recitative setting (mm. 39-45). León dispenses with the triplets and writes a delicate melody using sequences that captures the sentiment of the text and brings the song to a climax—but only if a real contrast is made by the singer and collaborative pianist (See Ex. 37).

Example 37 "Si no fuera por ti," mm. 36-46

rí-an el a-mor y las ma-nos que se u-nen a-

mor, y qué tris-te tam-

bién el sol de ca-da dí-a, sien la tar-de no hu-

ble-ra mu-rien-te res-plan-dor.

Las Canciones de Pequeña, Pequeñita

This cycle of six songs is based on poems for children by three Ecuadorian authors, Jorge Renán de la Torre, Francisco Delgado Santos, and Adalberto Ortiz. The cycle is named after the character of the first poem but the poems are not related to each other, nor is there a story linking them together. The six songs in the cycle were written in February 1986 for the Ecuadorian soprano Beatriz Parra. Each song was written in one day and the order of performance differs slightly from the order of composition. The cycle is ordered for performance as follows:

1. “Pequeña, pequeñita”
2. “El muñeco dormilón”
3. “Viaje”
4. “Caballito de madera”
5. “La tunda para el negrito”
6. “El columpio”

The songs were first published by Poligráfica in Guayaquil, Ecuador in December 1987. This edition is a facsimile of León’s manuscript and was the basis for the analysis that follows in performance order.

Pequeña, pequeña

TEXT. Francisco Delgado Santos. Published in *El agua dorada*, 1987. The poem is set in its entirety with minor changes.

MUSIC. February 18, 1986. G major, 3/4, *Valse lento*, ♩ =110, ⁴⁵ D⁴-G⁵, 83 measures.⁴⁶

RECORDINGS. None.

Pequeña, pequeña

Soy todavía pequeña,
pequeña, pequeña,
pero ya puedo andar
como una señorita
y aunque, de vez en cuando
se enreda mi escarpín,
corro por la cocina,
la sala y el jardín.

Cuando siento llegar
a papi del trabajo,
No corro si no vuelo
escaleras abajo;
pero como él es alto
sólo abrazo sus piernas
y escondo mi carita
entre sus manos tiernas.

Ya pinto en las paredes
como una artista⁴⁷
y me muero de miedo
cuando hablan del dentista,
porque a pesar de todo,
- como mi muñequita -
soy todavía pequeña,
pequeña, pequeña.

Little, very little girl

I am still a little,
little, very little girl,
but now I can walk
like a young lady
and even though, sometimes
my shoes get tangled,
I run through the kitchen,
the living room and the garden.

When I hear that papa
has arrived from work,
I don't run I fly
down the stairs;
but because he is tall
I can only hug his knees
and bury my little face
in his soft hands.

Now I paint the walls
like an artist
and I die of fear
when anyone speaks of the dentist,
because in spite of it all,
- like my doll -
I am still a little,
little, very little girl.

⁴⁵ Metronome markings were not printed in the 1987 Poligráfica edition. Jaime León penciled the markings into the score that he generously gave me in 2003. The analysis of this cycle is based on that edition which is essentially a copy of the composer's own manuscript and thus best represents his original intention.

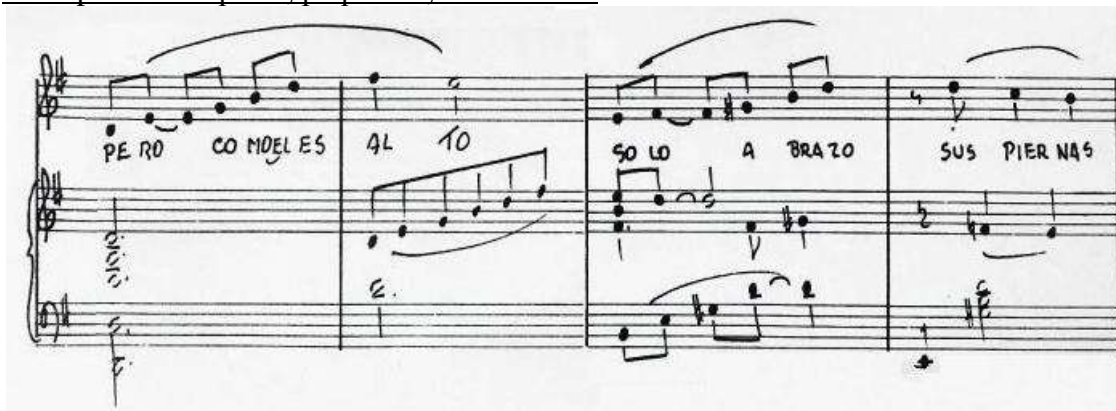
⁴⁶ Note that the Mundo Arts edition has different measure numbers due to the addition and excision of several measures in the first piano interlude.

⁴⁷ In the original poem this line is "casi como una artista" or "almost like an artist."

For a group of songs that explores the light and dark sides of childhood, León chose the delightful “Pequeña, pequeñita” as the introductory song and named the cycle after it. This fun-loving, daydreaming, mischievous, little girl represents youth in all its vitality and counters the darker elements of “Viaje” and “La tunda para el negrito.”

León fittingly builds a lyrical melody about a very little girl on the repetition of short musical motives centered on a major second. Phrases are also short, either three or four measures in length. Direct text painting is avoided except for an ascending E-minor scale (mm. 33-36) that is an illustration of the text “Pero como el es alto solo abrazo sus piernas” (but because he is tall I can only hug his knees). Since he is so tall - “alto” on scale degree 1 - she resolves to hug his legs – “piernas” on scale degree 5. This brief moment is also significant in that it is one of the few melodic phrases with a range of greater than a fifth (See Ex. 38).

Example 38 “Pequeña, pequeñita,” mm. 33-36



A significant piano interlude (mm. 41-56) expands on the flying theme heard earlier in the melody (mm. 28-32) on the words “no corro si no vuelo” (I don’t run I fly) with colorful modal and minor harmonies. The end of the theme dovetails with a chromatic

modulation to E-major at the beginning of the fifth stanza. The modulation to E-major illustrates the confident, powerful feeling of the little girl as an artist painting the walls of her house (mm. 55-59). Those feelings leave quickly though through a circle of fifths progression that unexpectedly goes to E-minor when Pequeña makes a trip to the dentist. Another six-measure piano interlude follows, this time consisting of entirely new material of cascading sixteenth-notes that pass through major, modal, and diminished harmonies as a way of encompassing the many emotions that Pequeña experiences in a day (a minute?).

The text of the last stanza (mm. 70-83), gives Pequeña a moment of self-reflection on her place in the world with the words “porque a pesar de todo” (because in spite of it all) León responds by returning to the home key of G-major and repeating melodic material from the beginning of the song but markedly slowing the tempo to *Lento* (m. 70) and then *Molto lento* (m. 76). Reframing the sprightly melody from the beginning gives the song a thoughtful, whispered conclusion. “Pequeña pequeñita” ends inconclusively on a B-minor chord (iii of G-major) and a reiteration of F#⁴ on the second beat of the last measure, marked with a *fermata*.⁴⁸ A seemingly small detail perhaps, but repeating and then holding the leading tone as the last note captures the wistful turn of the song.

⁴⁸ In the Poligráfica edition only.

El muñeco dormilón

TEXT. Francisco Delgado Santos. Published in *El agua dorada*, 1987. Set in its entirety.
MUSIC. February 9, 1986. F major, Common time, *Ad libitum andantino (Hablado)* then 3/4, *No muy rapido*, ♩ = 120, C⁴-F⁵, 65 measures.
RECORDINGS. None.

El Muñeco Dormilón⁴⁹

*Cuando yo estaba en la escuela
me gustaba una canción
que relataba la historia
del niño dormilón:*

...érase una vez un niño
pequeñito y remolón
que no quiso levantarse
para estudiar su lección;
Y como jamás hiciera
caso a papá ni a mamá,
lo convirtió una extranjera
en muñeco dormilón.

*Cuentan que a partir de entonces
se oye cantar este són:*

Pim, pirín, pirín, pompón.
¡ponte saco y pantalón!

¡Sal de la cama pequeño!
Pim, pirín, pirín, pompón.

Ya no debes tener sueño:
¡ponte saco y pantalón!

*Pedacito de granuja
si no estudias la lección,
te convertirá la bruja
en muñeco dormilón...*

The sleepyheaded doll

*When I was in school
I liked a song
that told the story
of the sleepyheaded boy:*

..once upon a time there was a boy
very little and lazy
who did not want to get up
to study his lesson;
And because he never paid
attention to his papa nor mama,
a strange woman turned him
into a sleepyheaded doll.

*They say that ever since then
you could hear this song:*

Pim, pirín, pirín, pompón.
Put on your shirt and pants!

Get out of bed little one!
Pim, pirín, pirín, pompón.

You shouldn't be sleepy now:
Put on your shirt and pants!

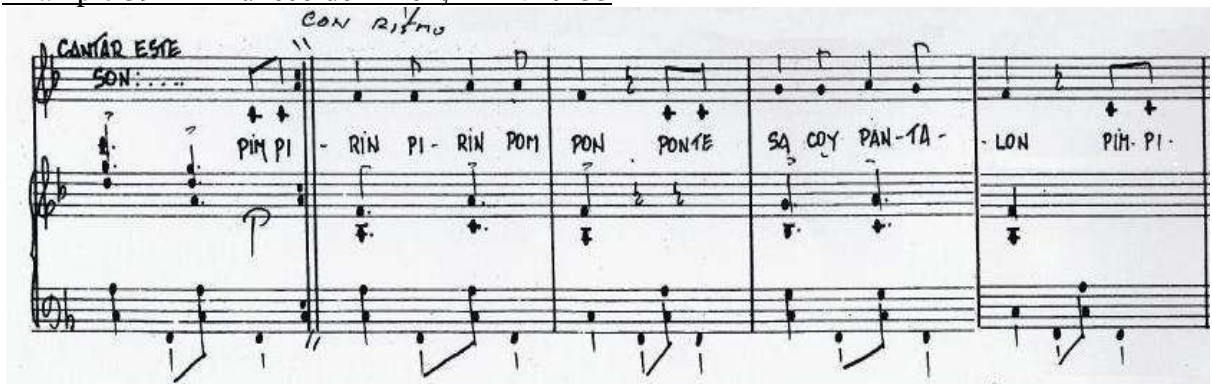
*Little rascal
if you don't study your lessons,
the witch will turn you
into a sleepyheaded doll...*

⁴⁹ Italics indicate the spoken word sections of the song.

Employing the slightest of musical material León creates a miniature play with this amusing bedtime story. It begins as a melodrama with spoken word taking place over musical accompaniment and segues to a simple four-measure melody that is immediately repeated with new text. The simple song is meant to mimic a nursery rhyme for very young children so that the words can be clearly understood. The opening melodic phrase has a narrow range and shape that perfectly matches the playful nature of the rhyme.

More spoken words follow and then the “son” (song) that is indicated in the text by the nonsense syllables “pimpirín pirín ponpón” occurs. This is one of several instances in León’s songs of a diegetic poem.⁵⁰ It is in a lower tessitura than the opening melody and repeats multiple times (See Ex. 39).

Example 39 “El muñeco dormilón,” mm. 29-33



The harmony consists mostly of repeated tonic chords, sometimes for ten measures, followed by conventional I-IV-V-I progressions. Some harmonic interest occurs towards the end (mm. 63-64) through a series of unresolved dominant chords borrowed from other keys. These seem to be a compositional after-thought to distinguish the second iteration of the text “sal de la cama pequeño” (get out of bed little one) from the first.

⁵⁰ See also the analysis for “Canción,” “Letra para cantar al son del arpa,” and “Serenata.”

The principal interest in this song lies in its spoken word element, the only such song in León's output, and its rhythmic features. Though it is the least complex of all the songs in the cycle, the alternation of duple and triple and the cross-rhythms between voice and piano are enough to keep this little song running through the listener's mind for hours.

Viaje

TEXT. Renán de la Torre. Published in *El agua dorada*, 1987. The poem is set in its entirety with minor changes.

MUSIC. February 9, 1986. E major/ C# minor, Common time, *Lento espressivo*, ♩ = 70, E⁴-E⁵, 31 measures.

RECORDINGS. None.

Viaje

En la calle triste
cual si fue se cuna,
se durmió mi niño
bajo de la luna.

Se durmió soñando,
morado de frío,
que iba sin barco
llevando se el rio.

Y en su extraño sueño
desnudo subía,
por cauces fugaces
de azul melodía.

Y allá, en la distancia,
mil seres de espuma,
besaron su cuerpo
vestido de luna.

Journey

In the sad street
As if it were a cradle,
my boy went to sleep
under the moon.

He slept dreaming,
purple with cold,
that he was carried without a boat
by the river.

And in his strange dream
he arose naked,
by the fleeting banks
of a blue melody.

And there, in the distance,
thousands of misty beings
kissed his body
that was dressed in the moon.

“Viaje,” one of León’s most beautiful songs, has a deceptively simple melody, reminiscent of a nursery rhyme, which is transformed during the last four measures into a glimmering, sustained pianissimo recalling the ending of Richard Strauss aria. This lovely moment is prepared in advance by harmonies that create the imagery and heartbreaking sadness of an urchin dying in the street.

Typical of León’s style, the harmony alternates from the beginning of the song between the major and relative minor. “Viaje” opens and closes with C#-minor chords but the internal cadential points are in E-major. He also frequently juxtaposes chords in the

dominant and subdominant of each key. Continuously blurring the tonic in this manner gives the song a sense of unease that belies the easy nature of the melody so that even when the song reaches a cadence, there is no real sense of having reached a moment of rest.

Extended harmonies of ninth and eleventh chords and chords borrowed from foreign keys serve to create the dream atmosphere of the poem. For example, the borrowed chords on the text “mil seres de espuma, besaron su cuerpo vestido de luna” (thousands of misty beings kissed his body that was dressed in the moon) (mm. 25-29) (F#M, GM) support the melody as it moves up by half step providing an aural description of the text (See Ex. 40).

Example 40 “Viaje,” mm. 25-31

Even though the melody and harmony in this example are substantially different from the rest of the song, the rhythm provides unity. The vocal line is based on simple eighth-note patterns which are broken up in certain phrases by quarter-note triplets. In his other songs León frequently uses the triplet as a prosodic device to set the Spanish language as it is

spoken. In the case of “Viaje,” however, the quarter-note triplet serves to accentuate important phrases of text by elongating words and creating musical-dramatic tension with the accompaniment. Each time the device is used, the boy in the poem is in a different physical state: “morado de frio” (purple with cold) (m. 16); “llevandose el rio” (carried by the river) (m. 18) and “vestido de luna” (dressed in the moon) (m. 29) (See Ex. 40 for m. 29).

Caballito de madera

TEXT. Francisco Delgado Santos. Published in *El agua dorada*, 1987. The poem is set in its entirety with minor changes.

MUSIC. February 15, 1986. A major, 2/4, *Con alegría*, ♩ = 102, E⁴ - F^{♯5}, 122 measures.

RECORDINGS. None.

Caballito de Madera

Caballito de madera
valiente y noble Alazán,
compañeros de mis sueños⁵¹
de jinete y capitán.

Tan pronto dejo la escuela
corro a buscarte en mi hogar
y te enseño castellano
antes de hacerte trotar.

Cuando cabalgo en tu cuerpo
conquistó reinos de amor
y siento que poco a poco
me voy haciendo señor.

Juntos vamos por el campo
entonando una canción
que suena linda y sincera
porque es flor de corazón.

Somos amigos del viento,
las cometas y las hadas,
a nuestro paso despiertan
las princesas encantadas.

Pelemos, como en los cuentos,
contra un ogro comelón
y contra un duende perverso
disfrazado de dragón.

Vivimos mil aventuras
contigo, fiel Alazán:
sueños que vienen al paso
y que al galope se van...

Little Wooden Horse

Little wooden horse,
valiant and noble sorrel,
comrades of my dreams
of horse rider and captain.

As soon as I leave school
I run to look for you at home
and I teach you Spanish
before making you trot.

When I am riding astride
I conquer kingdoms of love
and I feel that little by little
I am becoming a gentleman.

Together we go through the country
singing a song
that sounds lovely and sincere
because it is a flower from the heart.

We are friends of the wind,
of kites and of fairies,
our steps awaken
enchanted princesses.

We fight, as they do in tales,
against hungry ogres
and against an evil goblin
disguised as a dragon.

We live through a thousand adventures
with you, faithful sorrel:
dreams that come on our path
and go galloping away...

⁵¹ The singular is used in the original poem, “compañero.”

“Caballito de madera” is equal parts piano and vocal solo. Only half of the 122 measures includes the voice and is really a showcase for the pianist’s mastery of the complex rhythmic patterns identified with the horse, the real “subject” of the poem, in the song. Indeed, while the melody is light-hearted and appealing and there are a few unexpected harmonic twists in the accompaniment, León leaves his sophisticated stylings for the rhythm.

Two distinct melodies appear in the song. The text of the first three stanzas comprises the first melody (mm. 1-36). Its jaunty tune is reminiscent of old western movies and full of rhythmic complexity. The second melody, which occurs in the fourth and fifth stanza, the E-major section (mm. 63-90), is marked *meno mosso*, $\text{♩} = 88$.⁵² In keeping with the slower tempo the melody has a more lyrical quality with a broader tessitura than its predecessor, along with longer note values and legato phrase markings. The textual phrase that inspired this melody is certainly, “entonando una canción que suena linda y sincera porque es flor de corazón” (singing a song that sounds lovely and sincere because it is a flower from the heart). León continues to employ syncopation and cross-rhythms in this section, for the text indicates that the boy is still riding his horse. The last two stanzas occur in the return of the A-major section (mm. 91-122) and include elements of both melodies.

León plays with the idea of cowboys riding through unfamiliar territory in the harmony by alternately lowering or raising the leading tone giving an “exotic” sound to the accompaniment. Unlike most of his other songs that modulate, “Caballito” has no preparation

⁵² The basis for this analysis is the Poligráfica edition of the cycle and a coaching session on this song that was part of my 2003 interview with the composer. In the Poligráfica edition measure 63 is marked *meno mosso* $\text{♩} = 88$. The Mundo Arts edition notates this section *Lento* and does not include a metronome marking.

in the measures prior to the key change from A-major to E-major or the return to A-major. For León harmony is subtext; in a straightforward nursery rhyme there is no need to overcompose. In the piano solos a few instances of chromatic mediant chords are used solely for contrast and color. The only real text painting concerning harmony happens in the E-major section of the song, when the tonal center shifts briefly to B-major (mm. 81-82), creating a separate mood for the fairy princess referred to in the fifth stanza.

Rather than the harmony León saves the compositional heavy lifting for the rhythm. The patterns are complex for singer and pianist alike: each line alternates between duple and triple meter and between parts are cross-rhythms, hemiola, and a constant use of syncopation in either the melody and/or accompaniment. The dotted rhythms, triplets, and hemiola maintain the idea that horse and rider are in constant galloping motion.

In setting the text León maintains the general prosody of the text but also extends and compresses rhythms to emphasize certain words. For example, to illustrate “siento que poco a poco” (I feel that little by little) he stretches the melodic rhythm to quarter-note triplets over the duple accompaniment (See Ex. 41). The piano solos comment and expand upon previously heard material in the melody. The largest piano solo (mm. 37-62) is an elaboration of the first melody and introduces the more lyrical second melody.

Example 41 “Caballito de madera,” mm. 30-34.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Caballito de madera" (Example 41), measures 30-34. The score is written for voice and piano. The voice line has lyrics: "-MOR Y SIEN TO QUE PO - CO PO - CO ME". The piano accompaniment features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and syncopation. The score is in A major and 2/4 time.

La tunda para el negrito

TEXT. Adalberto Ortiz. First published in *El animal herido*, 1959. The poem is set without the fourth stanza.⁵³ Song setting also contains other minor changes and word substitutions indicated by *.

MUSIC. February 23, 1986. F major, 2/4, *Ritmico*, ♩ = 80, C⁴-F⁵, 87 measures.⁵⁴

RECORDINGS. None.

La tunda para el negrito

Pórtate bien, mi negrito,*
pa' que yo te dé café,
porque si viene la tunda,
la tunda te va a cogé.

No te escondás, mi negrito,
que ya te voy a buscá
y si la tunda te encuentra,
la tunda te va a entundá.

Pa' duro te estoy criando
y no pa' flojo, ¿sabé?
y si te agarra la tunda,
la tunda te va cogé.*

No quiero que sea bruto,*
sino que sepa leé,*
que si te coge la tunda,
la tunda te va a comé.

La Tunda for the Little Black Boy

Behave yourself my little black boy,
so that I will give you coffee,
because if La Tunda comes,
La Tunda will get you.

Don't hide from me, my little black boy,
because now I am coming to find you,
and if La Tunda finds you,
La Tunda will beat you.

I'm raising you to be strong
and not soft, you know?
and if La Tunda grabs you,
La Tunda will get you.

I don't want you to be dumb,
I want you to learn how to read.
If La Tunda catches you,
La Tunda will eat you.

⁵³ The original poem includes this text directly after the third stanza.

Cuando llegués a sé hombre
vos tenés que trabajá
porque si viene la tunda,
la tunda te va a llevá.

When you become a man
You will have to work
because if La Tunda comes
La Tunda is going to take you away.

It is unknown whether León encountered the poem in a shortened version or purposely left this stanza out. Numbered references to stanzas in the analysis that follows refers to the poem as León set it.

⁵⁴ Note that the Mundo Arts edition has different measure numbers due to the addition of one measure to the second piano interlude.

Y no te dejés de naide,
respétame solo a mí,
porque ya viene la tunda,
la tunda ya va a vení.

Don't obey anyone else,
respect only me,
because La Tunda is coming
La Tunda will be here soon.

Échate pronto en tu magua,
que no te voy a pegá.
¡Huy, que ya llega la tunda!
¡La tunda ya va a llegá!

Quickly get in your hammock
because I am not going to beat you,
Oh! La Tunda is coming!
La Tunda will be here soon!

Adalberto Ortiz's poem is in the dialect of Esmeraldas, a coastal region of Ecuador populated mostly by the descendants of African slaves. The geographic and technological isolation of Esmeraldas from the rest of Ecuador until the mid-twentieth century helped it maintain a distinct Afro-centric culture, including a strong oral tradition that dates back to the earliest settlers. There are multiple stories of the origins of La Tunda. As Ortiz describes it in his 1943 novel *Juyungo* La Tunda was a favored angel who disobeyed the Almighty. The fallen angel was cast down to Esmeraldas to punish her and all naughty children. She haunts the countryside in the guise of an infertile black woman with one human foot and the other made of a hand-mill grinder. La Tunda impersonates family members or pets in order to lure children away to a cave where she leaves them until they are desiccated bones.⁵⁵

Esmeraldas was the home of the self-identified "mulatto" Ortiz and the subject of many of his books and poetry. Ortiz revisited the myth of La Tunda in 1959 with his poem "La tunda para el negrito." The musical rhythm of "La tunda para el negrito" is typical of Ortiz's work, as is the dark humor. The tale of the "Bogey Man" is well known to most native English speakers and the message of this poem falls into a similar vein: obey your parents or the Bogey Man/La Tunda will get you. Ortiz has commented on La Tunda's

⁵⁵ Adalberto Ortiz, *Juyungo* (Quito, Ecuador: Libresa, 2002), 236-239.

origins in African mythologies. Ortiz stated: “It is interesting to observe how some monsters of the forest, like *La Tunda* in Esmeraldas or *Patica* in Colombia –similar to the *Quimbungo* of the Bantus— were transplanted to the new continent from Africa.”⁵⁶ Ortiz refers to the roots of Afro-Ecuadorian culture, which began in the sixteenth century when a ship filled with Africans bound for slavery crashed off the coast of Esmeraldas. The culture that sprang forth from this event included a transference of African tales such as *La Tunda*.

León’s response to the poem was to frame it in a coastal rhythm, reminiscent of a habanera or other Afro-Cuban beat.⁵⁷ The habanera is characterized by a rhythmic ostinato found throughout “*La tunda para el negrito*,” particularly in the first sixteen measures of the song (See Ex. 42). This left-hand ostinato probably also represents some kind of a folk instrument such as the *bombo*, a double-headed drum frequently used in coastal music. Thereafter the song employs multiple syncopated rhythmic patterns.

Example 42 Ostinato rhythm in “*La tunda para el negrito*” mm.1-16



The melody, firmly wrapped around the tonic chord, moves in disjunct leaps with accent marks on unaccented beats and varied rhythm. There are two distinct melodic sections; the first comprises stanzas 1-3, and the second section stanzas 4-5. The final stanza

⁵⁶ Constance Garcia-Barrío, “*La Tunda, Child of the Devil and Other Traditional Afro-Ecuadorian Stories*,” *Wild River Review*, May 2009. [Http://www.wildriverreview.com/spotlight_latunda.php](http://www.wildriverreview.com/spotlight_latunda.php) (accessed June 4, 2009).

⁵⁷ León described the song in such terms, saying “This one’s a *costeño*” (This one is a coastal). León, interview 2003.

repeats the first melody. There is a lengthy piano interlude between each melodic section, which León uses to experiment with chromaticism after emphasizing F-major in the melody; indeed the first ten measures pass before a chord change occurs. The first piano interlude includes harmonic and rhythmic variations on the first melody (mm. 28-44) while the second introduces material that will reappear in the conclusion (mm. 60-73).

León makes few attempts at text painting and his normally heightened sense of prosody is also set aside to maintain the rhythmic integrity over the correct stress of words. The rare exception happens when the vocal line drops to a C⁴, mimicking a growl, when the mother commands her son to respect her (“respetame,” m. 54). The song also slows down dramatically for the last stanza when the parent reveals in the poem that a beating is not really forthcoming. The *Lento* marking (m.74) is used as an interpretive device (See Ex. 43). The melody remains the same until the end but relaxing the tempo transforms the song into a lullaby and it finishes on a *pianissimo* sustained F⁵ marked in both the voice and accompaniment.

Example 43 “La tunda para el negrito” mm.74-77

LENTO

PECHA TE PRONTO EN TU NA-GUA QUE NO TE VOY A PE GAR HUY!

p

p

El Columpio

TEXT. Jorge Renán de la Torre. First published in *El agua dorada*, 1987. The poem is set in its entirety.

MUSIC. February 28, 1986. A^b major, 6/8, *Allegretto* ♩ = 65, E^b⁴-A^b⁵, 58 measures.

RECORDINGS. None.

El Columpio

Vuela pequeñito,
vuela dulce amor,
columpio en el cielo
tu fresco candor.

Vuela pequeñito,
pasta tiernas nubes,
ovejas de plata
en prados azules.

Vuela pequeñito,
cuélgate del sol,
ponle en su pechera
este girasol.

Vuela pequeñito,
deja oír tu voz
-música en cristales-
más cerca de Dios.

The Swing Set

Fly little one,
fly my sweet love,
swingset in the sky
your fresh innocence.

Fly little one,
soft porcelain clouds,
silver sheep
in blue meadows.

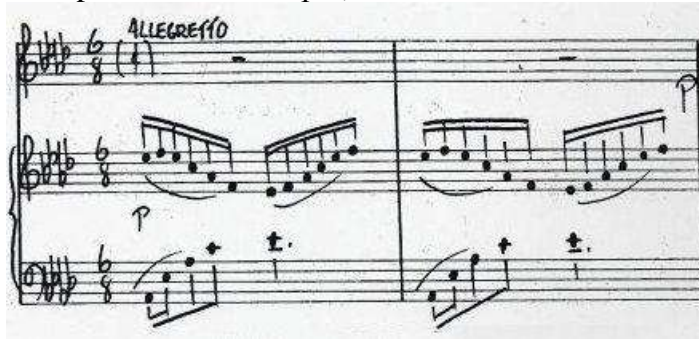
Fly little one,
hang from the sun,
pin this sunflower
on its chest.

Fly little one,
let them hear your voice
-music in crystals-
closer to God.

In “El Columpio” León’s text painting is more detailed than in previous songs. This is the last song he composed for this cycle, which happened in a short span of time: six songs in twenty-two days. In this song one can hear all aspects of his compositional technique in melody, rhythm, and harmony working together to express the texts.

The piano in particular takes on several dramatic roles. It functions primarily as the swing set of the title through a constantly repeating sixteenth-note figure in the right hand. An aural portrait of a swing emerges that rises slightly to gain momentum, then falls and rises again in a smooth harmonic arc (See Ex. 44).

Example 44 “El Columpio,” mm 1-2

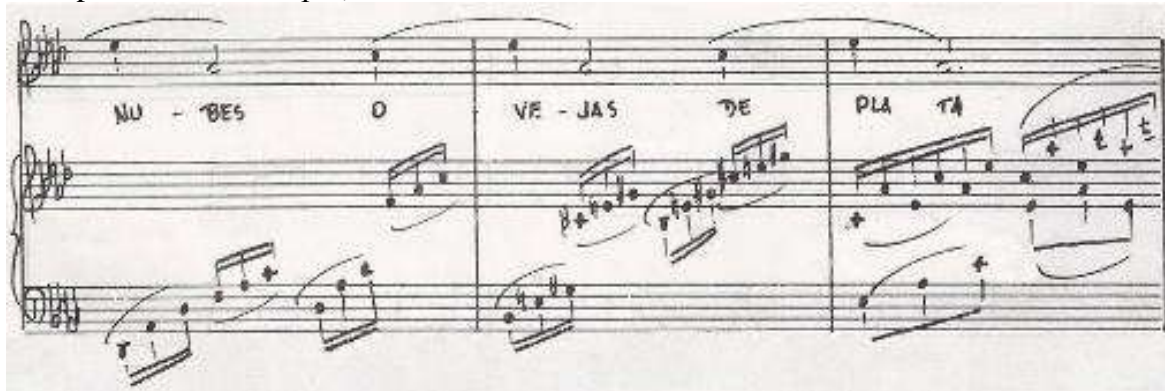


Though the parent is the speaker in the poem, León uses the accompaniment to give voice to the boy on the swing. Twice he shifts the tonal center chromatically to D^b -major in order to effect the voice of the little boy, first in the piano interlude, (mm. 25-57), and later in a more direct manner (mm. 49-51). Here the accompaniment shifts into D^b -major, and an accented figure in the right hand just after the text “deja oír tu voz” (let them hear your voice) beautifully conveys a giggling boy (See Ex. 45).

Example 45 “El Columpio,” mm. 49-51

León evokes the braying of lambs by employing passing dissonant chromaticism on the word “ovejas” (m. 20) (See Ex. 46).

Example 46 “El Columpio,” mm. 20



The first melodic statement is the most “grownup” melody in the cycle. The rhythmic framework of hemiola and cross rhythms allows the voice to soar through the ten-measure phrase. The melody then repeats, with some alterations, for the second stanza, (mm. 15-25). Rhythmic units are smaller, more compressed, indicating that the swing is moving faster.

The third stanza is set within a now familiar extended piano solo. The piano comments on the previous section and shifts harmonically through D^b -major (see earlier commentary) followed by a series of diminished chords that further obscure the tonic until a modulation to E-major (m. 32). The brighter sound sets off the text for the third stanza, which includes a brief moment of lyric-recitative (mm. 34-37). The improvisational nature of the phrase confirms its place within the larger piano interlude.

I sang through this song with Maestro León at the piano and, though it is not written in the score, he indicated that he wanted plenty of *rubato* during this four-measure section to bring out the text. The expressive shaping of the tempo in this section invites the listener to consider these lines as an analogy of a parent’s desire for her child to reach his full potential in life, to “hang from the sun” (cuélgate del sol). The remainder of the piano solo expands on this melodic moment until the final section of the song. The last phrase of text is set by new

melodic material that touches on A^{b5} immediately followed by a borrowed B-major chord and sparkling arpeggios, marked *presto*, in the accompaniment. This texture and harmony continues into the final words where pianist and singer both produce a crystal-like timbre to evoke the text “música en cristales – más cerca de Dios” (music in crystals – closer to God) as the song and cycle conclude in spiritual joy in A^b-major (mm. 53-55) (See Ex. 47).

Example 47 “El Columpio,” mm. 53-55

The image shows a handwritten musical score for three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, with lyrics written below it: "MUSI CAEN CRIS TA LES" (with a plus sign above the first measure), "MAS CER CA DE" (with a '3' above the first measure), and "DIOS" (with a plus sign above the first measure). The middle staff contains piano accompaniment, and the bottom staff contains a lower piano part. The word "PRESTO" is written above the third measure of the top staff. The score is written in a simple, hand-drawn style.

Canción

TEXT. Eduardo Carranza. First published in *Sombra de las muchachas*, 1941. Poem is set in its entirety with minor changes to fit the rhythm.

MUSIC. 1989. F major, 6/4, *Allegro assai*, $\text{♩} = 52$, C⁴-A^{b5}, 67 measures.

RECORDINGS. None.

Canción

Una canción está volando
de flor en rama, de rama en flor;
la mece el aire de verano
en olor de flor y de amor.

Hoja de árbol decembrino,
una canción tiembla en lo azul
y un pajarillo picotea
la mano abierta de la luz.

Mi alma sonrío a las cosas
apoyada en un tenue balcón
hecho de aroma y de silencio
en la casa de la ilusión.

Las nubes, las nubes de oro
van por el cielo sin razón,
igual que vaga sin sentido
por la música el corazón.

Toma en tu mano celeste
mi corazón, mi corazón,
y extrávalo en la floresta
de la música sin razón
igual que vuela esta canción
de flor en rama, de rama en flor.

Song

A song is flying
from flower to branch, from branch to flower
swung by the airy summer
scented of flowers and of love.

Leaf of an evergreen,
a song trembles in the blue
and a bird pecks
the hand open to the light.

My soul smiles at things
supported on a tenuous balcony
made of perfume and silence
in the house of illusion.

The clouds, the clouds of gold
are going in heaven for no reason
just as the heart wanders for no reason
for music.

Take in your heavenly hand
my heart, my heart,
and lose it in the forest
of music that has no reason
just as this song flies
from flower to branch, from branch to flower.

“Canción” challenges the singer and pianist alike with its musical and poetic complexity. León pointed out to me: “It has something to say, the words, the music. That’s why I wrote it, I said ‘this is a good finale piece.’ It’s not easy.”⁵⁸ He made sense of the poem

⁵⁸ León, interview 2005.

by writing two distinct melodies, one representing the song and the other the soul. The themes seem unrelated at first, just as the poem itself is improvisational in nature and thus difficult to parse. Summing up his whole approach to “Canción” León said: “Ad lib. Find your way gradually into the song.”⁵⁹

The song begins in an Allegro tempo with a melody that consists of a series of chromatically altered cascading runs suggesting D^b and G^b-major. Phrases of this melody are set as septuplets against the 6/4 arpeggiated accompaniment, giving the entire section a frenetic, forward-charging character. León uses this melody when the text refers to the song as an anthropomorphized Cupid-like being that flies, trembles and, of course, sings.⁶⁰ In my 2005 interview León indicated that the rhythm in this section should be sung freely with clear text declamation taking precedence over rhythmic accuracy (See Ex. 48).

Example 48 “Canción,” mm.3-4

The image shows a musical score for Example 48, "Canción," measures 3-4. It is written in 6/4 time and features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is marked *p (rubato)* and includes the lyrics "U - na can - ción es - tá vo - lan - do". The piano accompaniment consists of cascading runs in both hands, with the right hand playing a series of eighth notes and the left hand playing a series of sixteenth notes. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat).

The second melody begins at the third stanza when the figure of the lover enters the poem, “mi alma sonríe” (my soul smiles). This section is introduced musically through a

⁵⁹ León, interview 2005.

⁶⁰ “Una canción está volando” (a song is flying), “vuela esta canción” (this song flies), etc.

transition section (mm. 16-19) that passes into E-major. From that point a sensual, andante melody moves seamlessly from piano to voice. This love theme, marked by a lower tessitura and flexible rhythmic combinations, is so different that it truly is a song within a song (See Ex. 49).

Example 49 “Canción,” mm. 33-37



The collision of the flying song and the soulful melody seems inevitable; however, it is not clear how they are related poetically or musically. Only in the last stanza do we understand that the lover has constructed an elaborate analogy of a flying song in order to strike a plea for his beloved to enter into a love that is like “music that has no reason, just as this song flies from flower to branch from branch to flower” (la música sin razón igual que vuela esta canción de flor en rama, de rama en flor). León sets the denouement of the poem in the most direct way possible, as recitative, bringing order to Carranza’s expansive, Impressionist imagery by emphasizing the human connection. The vocal line, marked *lento*, begins on C5 and rises to its highest note, A5, on the words, “take in your heavenly hand my heart, my heart” (toma en tu mano celeste mi corazón, mi corazón) (See Ex. 50).

Example 50 “Canción,” mm. 57-59

The image shows a musical score for a song. The top staff is the vocal line, starting with the tempo marking "Lento". The lyrics are: "ron-da flor to - ma en tu ma - no ce - les - te mi co - ra - zón mi co - ra - zón yek - tra - vi - a lo en la flo ad lib." The bottom two staves are the piano accompaniment. The piano part begins with a piano dynamic marking "p" and ends with a fortissimo dynamic marking "ff". The score includes various musical notations such as treble and bass clefs, a key signature of one flat, a 4/4 time signature, and various rhythmic values and ornaments.

The last eight measures of the song are a combination of the two themes that gradually increase in tempo until, as León put it, “the piano flies at the end.”

Tu madre en la fuente (Canción de cuna)

TEXT. Eduardo Carranza. First published under the title “Canción de cuna” in *Este era un rey*, 1945. The poem is set in its entirety.

MUSIC. 1989. A^b major, 5/4, *Allegro marziale*, ♩=120, E^b⁴-G^b⁵, 62 measures.⁶¹

RECORDINGS. None.

Tu madre en la fuente (Canción de Cuna)

Tu madre en la fuente
tu padre en la guerra.
Duérmete mi niña
que azulas la tierra.

Tu madre en la fuente
recoge la estrella.
Tu padre en la guerra
lleva la bandera.

A tu madre, en sueños,
alcanza la estrella.
A tu padre, en sueños,
sostén la bandera.

Azul de la fuente,
azul de la guerra.
Mi niña dormida
azul de la tierra.

Your mother at the fountain (lullaby)

Your mother at the fountain,
your father in the war.
Sleep my girl
because you make the earth blue.

Your mother at the fountain
gathers the star.
Your father in the war
carries the flag.

In your dreams
let your mother reach the star.
In your dreams
let your father hold up the flag.

Blue of the fountain,
blue of the war.
My sleeping girl
blue of the earth.

León was particularly moved by this poem but had no knowledge of Carranza’s war references saying: “I don’t know the origin of this [poem] but as soon as I read it I composed the song.”⁶² When I interviewed him in 2005 over a period of three days he kept returning to this song and repeating, “This is my favorite ... it is strong.”⁶³ León then went on to recite the

⁶¹ The CDM edition contains sixty measures. The two additional measures in the Mundo Arts edition occur in the piano interlude between the third and fourth stanza.

⁶² León, interview 2005.

⁶³“Esta es mi favorita de todas.... es fuerte.” Ibid.

poetry aloud pausing and savoring the words. We sang through “Tu madre en la fuente” a total of six times and each time he pointed out more details for the singer and pianist to emphasize. He often would say “look at the words,” and another time, “there are two phases: singing to the girl and thinking about her husband and their situation.”⁶⁴

León’s interpretation of the poem is directly linked to the structure of the song. The first four lines of text are set as a martial tune based on the tonic chord. Then the mood of the melody changes for the fifth and sixth lines of the poem (m. 24), the text of which can be interpreted in several different ways. It seems that for León the mother reflects on her struggles at that moment and asks her sleeping daughter to dream in order to ensure her parent’s survival. This quiet, desperate plea is expressed by a chromatic modulation to E^b-minor and longer note values that turns the march into a plaintive melody (mm. 24-38). The song ends with a return to A^b major and the opening martial melody, but marked *lento* (mm. 52-62).

Three principal accompaniment figures are tied to themes or objects in the poem: war, a fountain, and reflection. The war theme is in 5/4 (see Ex. 51).

Example 51 “Tu madre en la fuente,” m. 1



⁶⁴ León, interview 2005.

The fountain theme is in 3/4 and employs cross rhythms in 6/8 (see Ex. 52).

Example 52 “Tu madre en la fuente,” m. 3

The image shows a musical score for measure 3 of 'Tu madre en la fuente'. The vocal line is in 3/4 time, with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The lyrics are 'Ma - dreen la' with 'espr.' written below 'Ma - dreen'. The piano accompaniment is in 3/4 time, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The piano part features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, with a 6/8 cross-rhythm indicated by a bracket over the first two notes of the right hand.

The reflection theme, however, is static, befitting its purpose (See Ex. 53).

Example 53 “Tu madre en la fuente,” m. 22

The image shows a musical score for measure 22 of 'Tu madre en la fuente'. The vocal line is in 3/4 time, with a key signature of three flats. The piano accompaniment is in 3/4 time, with a key signature of three flats. The piano part features a static accompaniment with chords in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

The last measures of the song feature the war theme reflecting León’s thoughts on the future of this little family.

León is particularly adamant about strictly observing the interpretive markings throughout the song. The dynamics and articulations in the voice and piano change depending on the mood of the line; his interpretive markings such as *espressivo*, *intenso*, and *sonoro*, are helpful indicators of his intention. The tempo also moves from *Allegro marziale* to *Poco meno mosso* and finally *lento*.

Regarding harmony León stated: “I purposely put in a few notes outside of it. [It is] a little bit tricky, you know, just to accentuate the war theme. It’s dramatic.”⁶⁵ He refers to the tension between A^b major and the dissonant clusters and borrowed chords from distant keys that exist throughout the accompaniment (see earlier examples). Even though the melody returns to A^b-major for the last line of the poem (mm. 57-61), the final chord is G^b-major. León’s final words to me on the song were an instruction to emphasize the dissonance—“Hold that last note as long as possible”—pitting the A^b in the voice against the G^b-major chord in the piano.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ León, interview 2005.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Evocación

TEXT. Daniel Lemaitre. First published in *Poesías*, 1953. The poem is set with a few changes from the original

MUSIC. August 14, 1990. G^b major, 3/4, *Andante semplice*, ♩=100, D^b4- F⁵, 69 measures.

RECORDINGS. Londoño.

Evocación

Viejo patio que sueñas, perfumado
por el jazmín que en tus arcadas crece.
Serenata de luz do el viento mece
la canción que te deja adormilado.

La luna, que ha tu fuente se ha asomado,
como escuchar el surtidor parece.
¡Oh! ¡Si la luna referir pudiese
lo que el agua y la piedra han dialogado!

Todo lo dio mi alma en sus senderos,
patio en donde aprendí a contar luceros,
y en alas de la sutil reserva⁶⁸

sólo las sombras de un amor ya ido
vienen de los rincones del olvido
a besar la tristeza que me queda.

Evocation⁶⁷

Old courtyard that dreams, perfumed
by the jasmine that grows in your arcade.
Serenade of light where the wind rocks
the song that leaves you asleep.

The moon, that has stared into your fountain,
as if to listen to the spout.
Oh! If the moon could recount
what the water and the rocks have said!

My soul gave everything to its paths,
courtyard where I learned to count bright stars,
and on wings [de la sutil reserva]

only the shadows of a love now gone
come from the corners of obscurity
to kiss the sadness that stays with me.

In Daniel Lemaitre's poem the speaker evokes the image of an old courtyard from her youth through half phrases and seemingly uncorrelated thoughts. Her memory begins with the physical aspects of the space: the architecture of the arcade, the moonlight spilling over the fountain, the smell of jasmine. She then moves to memories of herself running through

⁶⁷ The CDM edition is marked ♩=114.

⁶⁸ In the original poem this line reads "y en alas hoy de la sutil reseda," (and today, on wings made of delicate reseda.). Reseda is a type of fragrant flower often used to make yellow dye. It is not clear if León misread the poem when he was composing or purposely made the word substitutions; they appear in the CDM and Mundo Arts edition of the song as well as the Londoño recording. I have chosen not to attempt a translation.

the courtyard, looking at the stars, and falling in love. This memory of an ancient lost love invigorates the sadness that has been with her all along.

León represents these thoughts musically with a melody that is disjunct and episodic, being more recitative-like than lyrical. The halting nature of each musical phrase resembles the fragmentary sentence structure of the poem itself. Most phrases begin off the beat, cadences are delayed, and the tonic is obscured (See Ex. 54).

Example 54 “Evocación,” mm. 3-10

The musical score for Example 54, "Evocación," mm. 3-10, is presented in two systems. The first system contains the vocal line and the first two staves of the piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a 3/4 time signature and features a disjunct, recitative-like melody. The lyrics are: "Vie-jo pa-tio que sue-nas per-fu-ma-do por el jaz-". The piano accompaniment consists of two staves, with the right hand playing chords and the left hand playing a more active line. The second system contains the vocal line and the next two staves of the piano accompaniment. The vocal line continues with the lyrics: "mín que entus-ar-ca-das cre-ce." The piano accompaniment continues with similar textures, including chords and moving lines in both hands.

The first three couplets of the poem feature this opening melody but raised a half step each time (mm. 3, 12, and 22). By chromatically altering the phrase in this manner León sustains the tension until the fourth couplet. This is the emotional high point and the turn in

the poem—the speaker moves from exterior to interior reflections with the text “¡Oh! Si la luna referir pudiese/ lo que el agua y la piedra han dialogado!” (Oh! If the moon could recount what the water and the rocks have said). León sets this short section with new melodic material in a higher tessitura, though in the same manner as before: disjunct and infused with rests that are not text driven. When the prime melody returns it reflects the emotional change in the poem: the line is softer and different rhythmic values make it more lyrical (mm. 38-51).

This song seems to point in a new direction with its melody made up of broken pieces and less adherence to the prosody of the language. Harmonically it involves a more extensive use of dissonance, borrowed chords, and mixed tonalities than previous songs. Given that “Evocación” was, like many of his songs, written in one day, it is possible that it merely represents a unified moment in time and not an indication of an emerging stylistic shift.

Canción del boga ausente

TEXT. Candelario Obeso. First published in *Cantos populares de mi tierra*, 1877.

MUSIC. September 30, 1990. Bass clef, D minor, Cut time, *Con cadencia rítmica*, ♩ = 50, D^{b3}-E^{b4}, 70 measures.

RECORDINGS. None.

Canción del boga ausente⁶⁹

Qué triste que tá la noche,
La noche qué triste etá;
No hay en er cielo una estrella.....
Remá, remá, remá

La negra del alma mía,
Mientras yo brego en la már,
Bañado en sudo por ella,
¿Qué hará? ¿Qué hará?

Tar vez por su zambo amado
Doriente suspirará,
O tar vé ni recuerda...
¡Llorá! ¡Llorá! ¡Llorá!

Las hembras son como toro
La rostra tierra desgraciada;
Con acte se saca er peje
Der má, der má!...⁷¹

Qué oscura está la noche,
La noche qué oscura está;
Asi no se cura la ausencia....
Bogá, bogá, bogá ...

Song of the absent boatman

How sad is the night,
The night is so sad;
There isn't a star in the sky....
Row, row, row.

The black woman of my soul,
while I toil in the sea,
bathed in sweat for her,
What is she doing? What is she doing?

Maybe for her beloved *zambo*⁷⁰
painfully she will sigh,
or maybe she doesn't even remember me....
Cry! Cry! Cry!

Females are like everything
on the face of this disgraced earth;
with cunning one gets the fish
From the sea, from the sea!...

How dark is the night,
The night is so dark;
[absence is not cured that way]⁷²
Row, row, row...

⁶⁹ This is the version of the poem published in the Mundo Arts edition which is slightly different than the CDM version of the text. Obeso's poem was written in dialect and is regularly rendered into idiomatic Spanish. The Mundo Arts edition strikes a middle ground by using some more common spellings but also retaining many of the words in dialect to maintain the flavor of Obeso's poem. I have added the punctuation and accent marks from the original poem where appropriate.

⁷⁰ Slang for a person of African and indigenous race, now considered pejorative.

⁷¹ The original poem has a stanza at this point that León did not set: "Con acte se abraanda er jierro/Se roma la mapaná../Cojtante y ficme? laj pena!/No hay má, no hay má!..."

This is another León song which is based on a famous poem in the canon of Colombian letters. So it is interesting that in setting it León looks more to the musical style of jazz and early twentieth century atonal composers than to Colombian folk music, as he did for “A mi ciudad nativa.” Nevertheless León pointed out the language of the song had to be maintained, saying: “It has to be sung in their dialect, like the Cartageneros speak.”⁷³

The opening melodic statement comprising the first stanza of text is static; repeated notes distinguished by a throbbing, syncopated pulse evokes the strain and release of a rowing boatman. The second phrase is similarly shaped but, being raised a minor third, adds dramatic tension to the anger creeping into the text, “La negra del alma mía, mientras yo brego en la már” (the black woman of my soul, while I toil in the sea). León resolves this phrase on an A^b-major chord and then completes the second stanza with a languorous chromatic line that is redolent of the boatman’s impotent frustration while he is stuck at sea, “bañado en sudo por ella, ¿Qué hará? ¿Qué hará?” (bathed in sweat for her, what is she doing? What is she doing?) (See Ex. 55). The remainder of the melody follows in the same manner, developing the evocative melodic themes already stated.

⁷² The original line has a distinctly different meaning than the text published in the CDM and Mundo Arts edition. Obeso’s poem reads “Asina ejcura é la ausencia....” commonly rendered as “así de oscura es la ausencia...” meaning “Just as dark is absence...” The brackets are an approximate translation of the text published in the CDM and Mundo Arts edition.

⁷³ León, interview 2005.

Example 55 “Cancion del boga ausente,” mm. 26-32

The song starts in D-minor and modulates midway to F-minor, where it terminates. Surrounding this progressive tonality, though, are atonal chords and scales that gives a distinctly modern jazz color to the soundscape. In particular León makes use of augmented triads (see Ex. 55, m. 27) and an all interval tetra-chord C-C#-E-F#.

In the poem the boatman’s fate remains uncertain, it simply ends with him rowing. León adds a glimpse of what may happen through the harmony. He ends the melody on the tonic, F, indicating that the boatman is resigned to his fate for the moment, but the pungent final sonority – it is not really a cadence in the tonal sense – juxtaposing F-minor and G-major tetrachords points to a doubtful outcome for the boatman and his lover (See Ex. 56).

Example 56 "Canción del boga ausente," mm. 66-70

sen-cia. — bo - gá bo-gá bo - gá.

p

rall.

pp

9-3-90

Canción de cuna

TEXT. Eduardo Carranza. Originally published in *Este era un rey*, 1945. Set in its entirety.

MUSIC. 1992 or earlier.⁷⁴ G^b major, Common time, *Assai lento, sempre dolce e piano*, ♩ = 66, E^b⁴-G⁵, 39 measures.

RECORDINGS. Londoño.

Canción de Cuna

Eres del viento y de la tarde;
ese te mece, esa te arrulla,
y la mirada te la perfuma
la rosa que en tu pecho arde.

Y de la lluvia, mi hijo eres:
en la ventana, líquida infanta,
su vago reino te narras a veces:
esa te canta, esa te canta.

Eres del aire y de la tierra
como los árboles, como tu padre,
y de las nubes y de la luna
como tu madre.

Lullaby

You are of the wind and of the evening;
he will rock you, she will sing lullabies to you.
and their gaze perfumes
the rose that burns in your heart.

My child, you are of the rain:
from the window, my liquid princess,
your vague kingdom speaks to you:
it sings to you, it sings to you.

You are of the air and the earth
like the trees, like your father,
and of the clouds and the moon
like your mother.

This brief, delicate lullaby is structured in an A-B-A design though without any real change of mood in the B section. The initial melody is characterized by small arches and chromatic alterations. It has a chordal accompaniment in G^b-major marked by syncopation and off-beat accents that suggest a gently rocking cradle. The B section is based on sequences and has a sparse accompaniment in E^b-major.

⁷⁴ Starting from this point to the end of the chapter the following Carranza songs, listed alphabetically, are undated in both the CDM and Mundo Arts editions: “Canción de cuna,” “Don Paramplín,” “Ojuelos de miel,” and “Vago soneto.” An approximate date is listed as “1992 or earlier” based on Barreiro Ortiz’s assertion that León composed all ten Carranza songs by 1992. “Los poemas de Eduardo Carranza sirven de pretexto a Jaime León para una serie de diez canciones escritas a lo largo de dos décadas que se inicia en 1976 con *Cancioncilla* para voz y orquesta y termina en 1992 con *La casa del lucero* para voz y piano” (The poems of Eduardo Carranza serve as a pretext for Jaime León for a series of ten songs written over the course of two decades that begins in 1976 with ‘Cancioncilla’ for voice and orchestra and ends in 1992 with ‘La casa del lucero’). Carlos Barreiro Ortiz, “Poetas colombianos en música,” *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico* 37, no. 53, (2000): 73.

León uses the short piano interlude (mm. 20-26) before the return to the A section to elaborate musically on the second stanza. The first few measures consist of the “song” from the preceding text, “esa te canta” (it sings to you). The key returns to G^b-major and a scalar passage leads to the reprise of the A section.

Several detailed moments of text painting occur in the song that are atmospheric more than overt. For example, the word “arde” (burns) (m.10) is surrounded by dissonance when the D[#] in the vocal line clashes with the accompaniment. The rain is described musically by a sixteenth-note figure B-C[#]-B-G[#] that immediately repeats twice in a different rhythmic pattern and then disappears altogether (mm. 11-13) (See Ex. 57). Finally, a miniature soundscape is created via passing chromatic harmony on a C[#] diminished seventh chord that highlights the ethereal nature of the text “y de la luna como tu madre” (and the moon like your mother) (mm. 32-34) (See Ex. 58).

Example 57 “Canción de cuna,” mm.11-13

Y de la llu - via mi hi - jo e - res.

rit.

Example 58 "Canción de cuna," mm. 32-34

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and a common time signature. The lyrics are: "y de la lu-na, — co-mo tu ma - dre. —". The middle staff is the right hand of a piano accompaniment in treble clef, and the bottom staff is the left hand in bass clef. The piano accompaniment features a series of chords in the left hand and a melodic line in the right hand. The lyrics are aligned with the vocal line.

Don Paramplín

TEXT. Eduardo Carranza. Originally published in *Este era un rey*, 1945. Set in its entirety.

MUSIC. 1992 or earlier.⁷⁵ F major, *Allegretto*, $\text{♩} = 80$, cut time, C⁴ - G⁵, 107 measures.

RECORDINGS. Londoño.

Don Paramplín

Don Paramplín, Don Paramplín
el niño no quiere dormir.

Don Paramplín cae del cielo
igual que el sueño en el desvelo.

Y su sombrero, un abadol
saluda vago en derredor.

Con ademanes de humo lento
Don Paramplín empieza un cuento.

Llega el arroyo con su violín
y con sus alas, el serafín.

Llega la abeja con su pareja
que es la cigarra del arpa vieja.

Andando con paso divino
llega la música con pie fino.

Y en puntillas, una floresta
la de la Bella Durmiente, llega.

Por sobre el musgo rueda que rueda
pasa y se queda un tren de seda.

Las flores dejan silla de aroma
y, enlazadas, bailan en ronda.

Y por el claro talle cogidas
bailan también estrellas niñas.

Don Paramplín

Don Paramplín, Don Paramplín
the boy does not want to sleep.

Don Paramplín falls from the sky
just as a dream falls on sleeplessness.

And his hat, a poppy flower,
he vaguely salutes all around.

With movements as slow as smoke
Don Paramplín begins a story.

The stream arrives with his violin
and the angel with his wings.

The bee arrives with her mate,
that cicada who plays the old harp.

Walking with a divine step
music arrives with a fine gait.

And on tiptoes, a lush grove,
- that of Sleeping Beauty- arrives.

Over the moss rolling and rolling
a train of silk comes and stays.

The flowers leave a seat of perfume
and, linked together, they dance a round.

And clinging to their bright waists
the young girl-stars also dance.

⁷⁵ Approximate date based on Barreiro Ortiz's assertion that León composed all ten Carranza songs by 1992. Barreiro Ortiz, "Poetas colombianos en música," 73. See note for "Canción de cuna" for full quote.

Don Paramplín hace una seña,
(el aire ríe, el viento sueña).
Todo se torna en humo azul,
(en la penumbra canta el bulbúl).

Don Paramplín makes a sign,
(the air laughs, the wind dreams).
Everything is wrapped in blue smoke,
(in the half-light sings the *bulbúl*).⁷⁶

En un caballo
colorín
el sueño viene
del sinfín.

On a horse
of many colors
sleepiness comes
from the merry-go-round.

Ya descabalgas
en esa puerta
de tu alma, niño,
al cielo abierta.

Dismount the horse
at the door
of your soul, child,
open to the heaven.

Hace una venia Don Paramplín
y se deslía por el aire
del jardín.

Don Paramplín takes a bow
and then slips away on the air
of the garden.

Carranza's lengthy poem about the wizard-like Don Paramplín, who helps children fall asleep, introduces multiple characters and scenic depictions.⁷⁷ León structures the principal part of the song through two principal themes and corresponding accompaniments. Other sub-melodies and harmonic structures fill the rest of the song and represent the minor characters. These sub-melodies alternate between recitative and lyricism. They tend not to have definitive cadences, thus propelling the music into the next section. Of the many wonderful moments of text painting most happen in the accompaniment.

The first theme, a jaunty disjunct melody centered on the tonic, indicates Don Paramplín; it is always heard when his name appears (mm. 1-25, 81-90, 101-107) (See Ex. 55). Don Paramplín's ability to appear in a flash is suggested by the syncopated rhythms,

⁷⁶ Type of songbird found primarily in Africa and Asia.

⁷⁷ The poem has reached popular consciousness in Colombia to the point that a children's clothing store is named after it, Don Paramplín Ltda., in Bogotá.

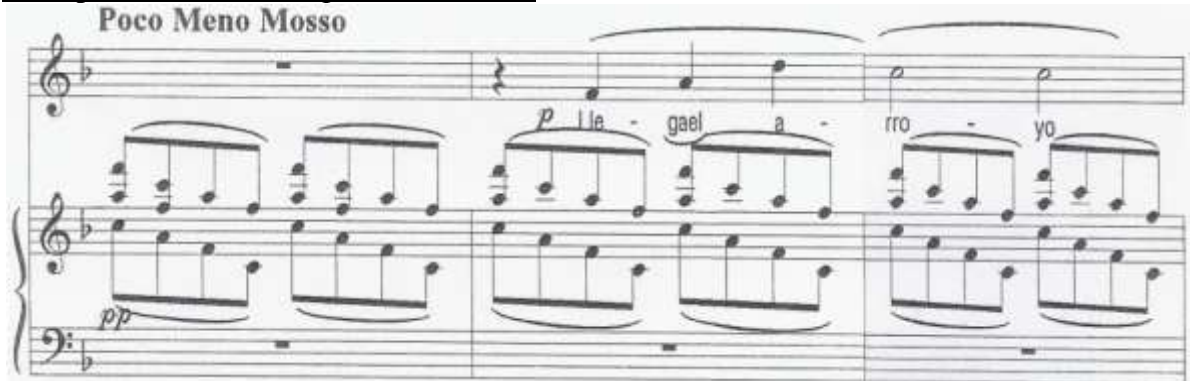
staccati, and sforzandi in the jittery accompaniment. Non-diatonic chords on unaccented beats give an additional sparkle to his theme (See Ex. 59).

Example 59 “Don Paramplín,” mm. 1-4



The contrasting second theme is lyrical and the vocal line is in a higher tessitura. Eighth-note rhythms float over falling arpeggios in the accompaniment. It is associated first with the musicians—the stream, a bee, a cicada, and music itself (mm. 26-54)—and later it is the dream music to which the boy finally falls asleep on the text “en un caballo colorín el sueño viene del sinfín” (on a horse of many colors sleepiness comes from the merry-go-round) (mm. 91-99). The lulling accompaniment, marked *pianissimo* and *poco meno mosso*, and has a static harmonic rhythm, especially when compared to the first theme (See Ex. 60).

Example 60 “Don Paramplín,” mm.26-28



Ojuelos de miel (Canción de cuna)

TEXT. Eduardo Carranza. Originally published under the title “Canción de cuna,” *Este era un rey*, 1945. Poem was originally set in its entirety, (see note below).

MUSIC. 1992 or earlier.⁷⁸ A major, 2/4, *Andante, espressivo*. ♩ = 70, C#⁴ - A⁵, 73 measures.

RECORDINGS. Uribe.

Ojuelos de miel (Canción de cuna)

Ojuelos de miel
- cantaba la madre -
frente de roció,
duérmete mi bien.

Tu, capitán del submarino,
tráele un ramo de coral,
atado con la nueva luna
azul y verde bajo el mar.

La rosa rosada
baja del rosal
y con pies de aroma
hacia el niño va.

Aventurero de las nubes,
tú, de los aires capitán,⁷⁹
tráele un ramo transparente
como la luna matinal.

Con alas de aroma
vuela por la luz
la dulce violeta
de mirada azul.

Tu, marinero desvelado,
tráele de tu soledad
la orquídea nácar de la espuma
en una armada de cristal.

Shining eyes of honey (lullaby)

Shining eyes of honey
- sang the mother-
sleep my beloved,
with your brow covered in dew.

You, the submarine captain,
bring him a branch of coral
tied with the new moon
blue and green under the sea.

The rosy rose
leaves the rosebush
and with perfumed feet
toward the child goes.

Adventurer in the clouds.
You, captain of the seas,
bring him a bouquet as transparent
as the morning moon.

With perfumed wings
the sweet violet
with a blue look
flies through the light.

You, wakeful sailor,
from your solitude bring him
a mother-of-pearl orchid from the surf
in a fleet of crystal.

⁷⁸ Approximate date based on Barreiro Ortiz’s assertion that León composed all ten Carranza songs by 1992. Barreiro Ortiz, “Poetas colombianos en música,” 73. See note for “Canción de cuna” for full quote.

⁷⁹ The CDM version contains the original line of the poem, “tu de las aires capitán” (you, captain of the skies). The Mundo Arts edition changed the line to “tu de las mares capitán” (you, captain of the seas). It is not clear why this change was made since “mares” (seas) does not match the other sky related words “nubes,” (clouds) and “luna” (moon) in the stanza.

Ojuelos de miel
- cantaba la madre -
por el mar y el aire
ya llegan los tres.

Shining eyes of honey
-sang the mother-
by the sea and the air
the three now arrive.

In Carranza's exotic poem a mother sings her son to sleep by calling upon unseen captains to bring her boy three gifts: a branch of coral, a bouquet of roses, and an orchid. The text could be read as a revision of the Epiphany when the three kings traveled over great distances and arrived in Bethlehem to greet Mary holding the baby Jesus and gift him with gold, frankincense and myrrh. León bases his interpretation on the traveling images of sailing and flying which are evoked rhythmically in a constant sixteenth-note pattern (mm. 1-31). This underlying current of energy allows the melody to float freely above the rhythmically rigid accompaniment.

León's melody, lilting and through-composed, exploits the full soprano range and a seductive interplay of triplets, quadruplets and held notes belies the subtitle of the song "canción de cuna."⁸⁰ Indeed the third and fourth stanzas (mm. 23-38) are designed to climax on a *forte* A⁵ and could easily have come straight out of an opera.

Flashes of chromatic color break the thoroughly tonal song, which most often employs a I-ii-V-I progression. In particular the words "bajo el mar" (under the sea) are made especially haunting through the lowered sixth and raised fourth (mm. 19-22) (See Ex. 61).

⁸⁰ Meaning "lullaby" or literally "cradle song."

Example 61 “Ojuelos de miel,” mm. 19-22

The image shows a musical score for measures 19-22 of the song "Ojuelos de miel." The score is in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics "ba - joel mar, ba - joel mar." and is marked "Tempo 1°". The piano accompaniment includes a "poco rit." marking. The piano part consists of a right-hand melody and a left-hand bass line.

While there is some doubling of the vocal line, the accompaniment just as often works against the vocal line rhythmically or melodically. Early in the song the melody has a triplet figure (F#-E-F#) against a sixteenth-note pattern in the accompaniment (E-F#-E-F#) (m. 2) (See Ex. 62).

Example 62 “Ojuelos de miel,” m. 2

The image shows a musical score for measure 2 of the song "Ojuelos de miel." The score is in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics "p0 - jue - los de" and includes a triplet figure (F#-E-F#). The piano accompaniment includes a sixteenth-note pattern (E-F#-E-F#) in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

León ends the song ends with a coda introduced by a piano interlude (mm. 56-61). Since the first line of the poem is repeated, the melody from the beginning of the song also returns briefly before León introduces new melodic material for the last line of text.

Vago soneto

TEXT. Eduardo Carranza. Originally published in *Azul de ti*, 1937. Set in its entirety with minor changes.

MUSIC. 1992 or earlier.⁸¹ F major, 4/4, *Andante espressivo*. ♩ =70, C⁴-F⁵, 38 measures.

RECORDINGS. None.

Vago soneto

Es la mano del humo la que escribe
el epitafio de esta bella tarde.
Y es el rostro del humo el que sonr e
como quien llega de un hermoso viaje.

La Luna se anticipa en los jazmines.
Como un aroma se evapora el valle.
Y entre los dedos de la lejan a
es la rosa del humo la que se abre.

Es la boca del humo la que calla.
Y es la frente del humo la que sue a
para mis ojos este vago mundo.

En su rama el primer lucero canta.
S lo se oye fluir sobre la tierra
mi coraz n que sube como el humo.

Vague Sonnet

It is the hand of smoke that writes
the epitaph of this beautiful afternoon.
And it is the face of smoke that smiles
like one who has arrived after a lovely journey.

The Moon advances among the jasmine.
Like a perfume the valley evaporates.
And between the fingers in the distance
it is the rose of smoke that opens.

It is the mouth of smoke that quiets.
And it is the brow of smoke that dreams
for my eyes this vague world.

On its branch the first bright star sings.
The only sound flowing over the earth
is my heart that rises like smoke.

Endless melody passed back and forth between the piano and vocal line marks this brief, enigmatic song. The same rising gesture repeats and sequences throughout the song and seems to represent the vague image of smoke from the title. The gently undulating chromatic tune is filled with minor seconds, creating slight changes in the line, like smoke wafting in the air (See Ex. 63).

⁸¹ Approximate date based on Barreiro Ortiz's assertion that Le n composed all ten Carranza songs by 1992. Barreiro Ortiz, "Poetas colombianos en m sica," 73. See note for "Canci n de cuna" for full quote.

Example 63 “Vago soneto,” mm. 2-3

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a common time signature. It contains the lyrics "Es la ma - no del hu - mo la que's - cri - be". The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The music is highly chromatic, with frequent changes in key signature and harmonic rhythm.

Though the key centers are nominally F-major and A-major, the highly chromatic, fast harmonic rhythm obscures the tonic. The accompaniment passes from dissonance to consonance and back again in the space of a measure (See Ex. 64).

Example 64 “Vago soneto,” mm. 9-10

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a common time signature. It contains the lyrics "co - mo quien lle - ga de un her - mo - so via - je." followed by the instruction "poco rit.". The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The music is highly chromatic, with frequent changes in key signature and harmonic rhythm.

The modulation to A-major has a markedly brighter sound consistent with the text that speaks of a rose opening, “y entre los dedos de la lejanía es la rosa del humo la que se abre” (and between the fingers in the distance it is the rose of smoke that opens) (m. 15). This section alternates, like the F-major section that preceded it, between its major tonic, the relative minor, and passing atonality. The fourth stanza returns to F-major and marks another release in harmonic tension (m. 29). The smoke motive (see Ex. 63) returns at the end of the song to complete the image on the words “sube como el humo” (rises like the smoke) (mm. 35-38).

La casa del lucero

TEXT. Eduardo Carranza. First published in *Este era un rey*, 1945. Poem is set in its entirety.⁸²

MUSIC. 1992.⁸³ D major, 3/2, *Lento*, ♩ = 60, D⁴ - E⁵, 57 measures.

RECORDINGS. None.

La casa del lucero

La tarde vive en un lucero,
allí violetas ciñen su casa,
y en torno le hacen valle sereno
ángeles vagos con su mirada.

En este valle son las colinas
nubes de oro, nubes de oro;
en lo profundo suena una música,
la vía láctea, río remoto.

Todos los días viene a la tierra
para mirarte, niño dormido;
baja a tu calle por la escalera
de un verso mío.

Entra en tu casa, niño despierto,
te pone en el sueño niño dormido,
y, suspirando, va a tomar el
último tren para el lucero.

The house of the bright star

The afternoon lives on a bright star,
there the violets surround its house,
and all around languid angels
make a serene valley with their gaze.

In this valley are the hills
clouds of gold, clouds of gold;
and from the depths sounds a music,
the Milky Way, distant river.

Everyday it comes to the earth
to look at you, sleeping boy;
it descends to your street by the staircase
of a verse of mine.

It enters your house, awakened boy,
it becomes part of your dream sleeping boy,
and, sighing, it will take the
last train to a bright star.

⁸² The text above represents what is in the CDM edition and exactly matches Carranza's poem. The Mundo Arts edition makes a slight change in the fourth stanza. In mm. 44-45 of the Mundo Arts edition the text reads "Entra en tu casa, niño dormido" instead of "Entra en tu casa, niño despierto." See Ex. 66 for CDM version of these measures.

⁸³ The song was dated through an article by Carlos Barreiro Ortiz, "Poetas colombianos en música," *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico* 37, no. 53, (2000): 73. "Los poemas de Eduardo Carranza sirven de pretexto a Jaime León para una serie de diez canciones escritas a lo largo de dos décadas que se inicia en 1976 con *Cancioncilla* para voz y orquesta y termina en 1992 con *La casa del lucero* para voz y piano." "The poems of Eduardo Carranza serve as a pretext for Jaime León for a series of ten songs written over the course of two decades that begins in 1976 with 'Cancioncilla' for voice and orchestra and ends in 1992 with 'La casa del lucero.'"

A somber chordal accompaniment opens this song as a slow waltz. Each melodic phrase, which extends for a couplet, begins with a descending figure maintaining a familiar repetition that is the hallmark of a lullaby. But León keeps the song from becoming static by making small alterations: an accidental in the melody, a rhythmic figure passed back and forth between voice and piano, alternations between four and five measure phrases, or a harmonic sequence that suggests and then modulates to B-major.

A short modulation to B-major lasting the length of the second stanza (mm. 22-30) seems to exist to set up the harmonic text painting just before the return to D-major. On the text “la vía láctea, río remoto” (the Milky Way, distant river) (mm. 29-30) a dissonant accented figure appears in the accompaniment followed by a rising chromatic scale that accentuates the other-worldly image (See Ex. 65).

Example 65 “La casa del lucero,” mm. 29-30

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom staff is the piano accompaniment. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The vocal line starts with a triplet of eighth notes (F#, G#, A) and a quarter note (B), followed by a triplet of quarter notes (B, C, D). The piano accompaniment features a rising chromatic scale in the right hand (F#, G#, A, B, C, D, E, F#) and a sustained bass note (F#) in the left hand. The tempo marking "molto rit." is present in the piano part.

This harmonic staircase to the Milky Way foreshadows the next section. With the return of the tonic key the original melody stays substantially the same until the text “baja a tu calle por la escalera” (it descends to your street by the staircase) (m. 39-41). Here the vocal phrase begins in a lower tessitura, rising gradually as the text progresses. The harmony

acts as a counterweight to this rise by tonicizing G (mm. 44-46) followed by a C-major dominant ninth chord (m. 48) in the left hand. In the right hand a Phrygian scale is outlined, echoing the same staircase movement seen earlier and supporting the octave jump in the melody. The up/down motion also illustrates the awakened and then sleeping state of the boy in the poem, “entra en tu casa niño despierto, te pone en el sueño niño dormido” (it enters your house, awakened boy, it becomes part of your dream sleeping boy) (See Ex. 66).

Example 66 “La casa del lucero,” mm. 44-48

Like the poem the song ends inconclusively. When coupled with the funereal opening measures and the constant rising figures in the accompaniment one can view this last gesture as a reference to death and the final sleep.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ See the ending of “Viaje” from 1987 for a similar gesture.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Despite the obvious quality of Jaime León's music he remains an obscure composer to most musicians living in the United States. This is due largely to the fact that León scores have only been available for purchase in the U.S. since 2009. León's songs may also be hindered by a built in preference of those who program Spanish-language repertoire to stay with known composers of art songs such as Enrique Granados (1867-1916), Fernando Obradors (1897-1945), Carlos Guastavino (1912-2000), and Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983) rather than an unknown composer from Colombia, a nation which, unlike Spain and Argentina, lacks recognition as a generator of serious music.

Within Colombia, León began to achieve some measure of recognition in the late 1990s. Still, his slim song catalog hardly registers within a culture that, for the last century, has been focused on developing and exporting its popular music. León, for his part, has not done much to advocate for his own songs beyond a few gala performances in Bogotá. There is no evidence that he has ever had strong ties to the composition community in Colombia that might have advanced his music within their own circles and abroad. On the contrary until recently León tightly controlled who could access his music. With the recent publication

of his songs, it is left to scholars, voice teachers, singers, and coaches to bring his songs to a larger audience.

León's songs are unabashedly tuneful, often lushly romantic, and reflect more of the nineteenth-century German and French tradition and twentieth-century American musical theatre style than those of his contemporaries. Greater than any compositional trend or training however, León's musical inspiration always comes directly from the poetry. His main compositional period, starting in the late 1970s, came after half a lifetime conducting the standard symphonic, operatic, musical theatre, and Colombian national music repertory. That his songs exhibit threads of all of these genres is less important than that they intimately portray León's interpretation of the poetry. Though our conversations rarely delved into personal matters, a review of the poetry that grips León reveals a man who is deeply moved by the emotions of childhood, parenting, committed love, and social themes.

Jaime León composed in isolation from other Latin American art song composers; in our conversations he never referred to his contemporaries such as Guastavino, Ginastera or the Venezuelan song composer Modesta Bor (1926-1998). For most of his life León has not seen himself as a composer but rather as a conductor and collaborative pianist. To that end he has kept company with other conductors, pianists, and singers, but rarely with composers who might influence his writing. Still he does share some similarities with Ginastera and Guastavino such as the use of folk material. León's songs regularly allude to folk genres such as *bambuco*, *cumbia*, and *habanera*, rarely though does he cross into literal interpretation. Even "La campesina"—León's earliest song in which he demonstrates his most obvious use of folk material—contains significant portions that are purely León's own

creation. An additional topic in the research of Latin American art song would be a comparative study of León's songs and the songs of other Latin American composers focusing on the different methods by which each blends folk material with their own compositional voice.

The most direct route to familiarize a larger public on the Latin American art song repertory is through performance and recording. Articles in singing and teaching journals on the songs of León and other composers will help educate the most obvious audience that this repertory exists. Brief analytical studies on a number of neglected song composers can give voice teachers, singers, coaches, and scholars the tools to evaluate their inclusion in the ever-expanding art song repertory. Composers whose songs merit further research and attention include the aforementioned Modesta Bor, Salvador Moreno (1916-1999), and Rodolfo Halffter (1900-1987).²⁵⁴

The case for Jaime León's inclusion in the art song canon has begun in his native country. Within Colombia there has been an active and multi-faceted approach to promulgating León's songs as a key part of the national art music heritage. He can certainly be considered the pre-eminent art song composer of Colombia. Outside of his native country, however, Jaime León's place in the art song canon is not clear. Within Latin America León's songs do not receive the same attention as those by Guastavino, Revueltas, Ponce, and Ginastera. All of those composers received the imprimatur of major publishing houses like Ricordi and Schirmer during their lifetime and a few of them even achieved a measure of popular success outside of the art music community. The songs of Revueltas and Ginastera

²⁵⁴ Though Halffter was Spanish by birth he relocated to Mexico and became a citizen in 1939 making significant contributions to Mexican music for the duration of his life.

maintain a hold in the consciousness of scholars by dint of being part of a catalog with important orchestral works that are a source of study and performance. Thus León's songs remain obscure in large measure because they have not been edited by a major publisher, nor have any of them had a popular appeal beyond the classical music world, and finally, León is not known for any large orchestral works which tend to grab the attention of scholars over the smaller scale genre of art song.

Despite these limitations Jaime León's songbook is worthy of a larger audience. His works embody the highest ideals of the art song genre combining beautiful melodies that illuminate fine poetry through sensitive text declamation in collaboration with a detailed and expressive piano part. He treats each hand of the piano as an equal partner to the voice making the harmony the subtext to the poetry declaimed in the melody. Another unique characteristic of his songs is that so many of them reach beyond a piano-vocal collaboration and insist on orchestral coloring through demanding piano parts and strategic use of vocal tessitura. León uses a wide range of musical references from traditional Colombian folk music to mid-century American Musical Theatre, however, pinpointing the reference is less important to understanding his songs than how he deploys those references. To paraphrase León, he takes well known melodies and wraps them in new harmonies. Those "new harmonies" blend folk and theatrical music into the traditional art song genre in order to inform and give depth to the text. The result to the performer and listener is a richly layered experience of poetry and sound.

APPENDIX A

PERMISSION LETTER FROM JAIME LEÓN

Victoria Sofia Botero
Kansas City

April 14, 2009

I grant Victoria Sofia Botero permission to print excerpts of my songs
as part of her academic work at the University of Missouri Kansas
City.

Jaime León
Jaime León

Botero - APRIL 14 - 2009

APPENDIX B

CONVERSATIONS WITH JAIME LEÓN

I spent a total of seven hours in conversation with Jaime León spread over visits in 2003 and 2005. All interviews were conducted in the beautiful Bogotá home of Maestro León and his wife Beatriz. What follows are excerpts of those sessions which took place in both Spanish and English. They were digitally recorded, transcribed and translated when necessary. I have included León's remarks that would seem to be the most relevant to future scholars and also comments that shed light on his personality and range of interests.

Verbal Permission to Proceed with Thesis

Well listen, my blessing on your project. I have manuscripts, it is not published. If there is something that you would like, that I can do for you I am at your service.

Early Life

My life was dedicated to music very early, I'm saying from the age of five or six. I was born on December 18, 1921 in Cartagena. My father, a Bogotano, had studied music in Bogotá. That's why I am a musician today, I come from a musical family, not professionals, but amateurs but they were both music lovers. I, according to the experts, was born with a disposition, what they call talent or whatever. My father took me to every concert that he could attend from the time I was very little. I'm talking about in the best halls in the United States. I remember a time in San Francisco a concert with the symphony and a violinist, he was so young, it must have been in 1924 or '25. Years later I checked and it was Yehudi

Menuhin (1916-1999). I distinctly remember the feeling that I was watching a young child play an instrument.¹

From there we went to New York in 1929. I remember because it was the crisis there over the stock market. We went to Harlem which at the time was a very distinguished neighborhood. My dad went to work for the Colombian consulate but he was preoccupied with me, so he found a professor near us, a pianist, he was Cuban but I don't remember his name. I started to study music, and by study I mean I moved my fingers! But then my father said, "We're going to Colombia" because he found a better post in Cúcuta with the Colombian Petroleum Oil Company. It was a frontier city, there was no musical culture of any kind. A man arrived in Cúcuta, Luis Esguerra, a school friend of my father's. Well he had a pensione in Bogotá on 20th street and he was a music lover. Luis Esguerra said, "Send him to Bogotá to that conservatory and we will take care of him as if he were our own." So there I stayed on 20th street. That was sometime in the 1930s, frankly I don't remember exactly.

Piano at Juilliard

I graduated from the conservatory here in Colombia as a pianist, Lucía Pérez was my teacher. We returned to New York after a time though when my father figured out there wasn't enough musical atmosphere for me in Colombia. He made great economic sacrifices to go to New York and I got in to Juilliard in the 1940s, during the Second World War. Can

¹ Menuhin's first concerto performances with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra took place in 1926 conducted by Louis Persinger. León would have been five years old. It's hard to say though which performance León is referring to as Menuhin performed numerous times in San Francisco.

you imagine? I was accepted and suddenly the opinion of the jury and my teacher also was this, “he’s not a pianist, but he has talent.” To tell my mother that, well she nearly committed suicide!

Juilliard taught me how to play a piano. I got in to the music department to study with a great professor who shortly afterwards died and his replacement was Carl Friedberg. I had no idea who he was, this 70-something year old man. He had been a student of Clara Wieck Schumann—he was about 78 years old then. His story is very interesting. He heard me play and he said, “Do you know how to sing?” And I thought he was joking or at least making fun of me. I told him, “No I don’t how to sing.” And He replied “Well you should sing, because you’re treating the piano like a percussion instrument. You have to sing at the piano.” I had no idea what he was talking about. He would say: “This is a noble instrument, not a percussive instrument. You have to sing. Have you ever heard a singer?” and quite frankly no I hadn’t. “Well go and hear a good singer. Listen how they phrase.” And he sat down and played. I had never before heard the kind of sound that he was able to produce at the piano. And he taught me to do the same, not by pressure; no, I never even suspected it. He was a brilliant man. I learned so much from him and I graduated.

Conducting at Juilliard

I studied classical piano at Juilliard and I was also a student in conducting. I won a scholarship. My piano teacher was Carl Friedberg and was a very important man in my life. His biography is fantastic; it’s called *The Master Pianist*. I studied with him for four years and graduated as a pianist. After that there was a notice in *The New York Times* offering three

conducting scholarships. My father told me to try out. I said, “I don’t know anything about conducting.” But I won the second prize.

My conducting teacher was Dean Dixon, a very famous American conductor. Because he was black he was unfortunately never accepted in any of the orchestras [in the U.S.]. But he made his reputation in Europe. He was a great conductor, a fantastic teacher; the only problem is he had a little chip on his shoulder all the time. You can understand why in the late 1940’s; he was part of the whole cycle of refusal, as it were. He had a professorship at Julliard that was discontinued because of that. It was something that I don’t want to remember. It was cruel, very cruel. But he made his career in Europe in Stockholm. He had his own orchestra, had a lot of records, a marvelous man.

Choosing Conducting Over a Career as a Concert Pianist

I had a colleague of mine whose name was Glauco d’Attili (1921-?), a pianist and pupil of the same teacher [Friedberg], who knew a concerto by Giuseppe Martucci and apparently Toscanini heard about this and called him and told him: “I would like to hear you because I premiered that concerto in 18 something or other.” So Glauco said, “Jaime would you do me a favor? Would you come and play the orchestral part on the second piano?” I said: “Me? Play for Toscanini?”—Well, you can imagine! So we go to Studio 8H at Radio City Music Hall in Rockefeller Center and there he was, the Maestro, and two pianos. We played and he was very enthused and he said: “Benissimo Glauco, you will be my soloist. But I don’t have the score, Will you leave it for me?” This was on a Tuesday and next Friday was the rehearsal.

So I asked the Maestro: “Would it be possible (now this was mind you prohibited) if I could come to rehearsal?” and he said, “Of course.” I went Friday to the rehearsal and he was conducting from memory.² Something happened to me; I wanted to be a conductor.

He had been hired by the Metropolitan in those days to do the cycle of four Wagnerian operas on Saturday afternoons. I didn’t have the money for tickets so I went standing room. The performance was at two, so at nine in the morning I was there waiting so I could get a spot watching over the orchestra pit. I looked and there was the scenery, then I turned and looked down into the pit and instead of a music stand there was just a light. [He was conducting] from memory, all from memory. Not that his conducting from memory made me want to become a conductor, but that man was a genius. I will never get to that point, I thought, but I wanted to try it out. And I did. Then came the process of luck. I had a lot of luck.

Appointed Music Director of the Sinfónica Nacional of Colombia While In His Twenties

It got to a point where people knew me. There was a Colombian named Guillermo Espinosa he was a friend of my mother’s—they were both from Cartagena—and he was the conductor of the old Sinfónica Nacional [in Colombia]. When I was a student he resigned his position to go to Washington, D.C. for a very grand post at the Union Panamericana, known today as the OAS. And they said from the orchestra: “Now who will conduct?” And Espinosa

² The January 20, 1946 radio broadcast of *Arturo Toscanini with the NBC Symphony Orchestra* was later released commercially. *Martucci Piano Concerto No. 2*, Glauco d'Attili, piano and Arturo Toscanini, conductor, NBC Studio Orchestra, ATS 1073, 1946.

told them “There is this Cartagenero with a lot of talent. He lives in New York and he could do the job, so the Colombian government contacted me. I asked for permission from Juilliard where I was enrolled and they gave me permission saying: “This is a great opportunity for you and for us as well as an alumni of ours.”

The Sinfónica had a patron who owned a store, it was called the J. Glottman on Carrera 17 [a street in Bogotá]. The owner was a lover of music and he gave me a fortune for the orchestra to do twenty free concerts here in the Teatro Colón. Those were called the Glottman Concerts. Something new was happening, an attitude to do something for the youth. Those were free concerts, the trick was that you had to go to his store to pick up the ticket. You could go there and walk out with a radio because that was what the guy sold. If you walk into a store and they give you a ticket and before you leave they say, “and here we have a few products that might interest you...” Well you’re going to walk out of there having bought something.

I came to Colombia to be a musician but everything was interrupted on the ninth of April, 1948; it was the revolution. Right outside here in the street they killed twenty people. They had named me Dean of the Conservatory and Beatriz, my wife, was my secretary at the time. I was caught in Bogotá on the ninth of April and it interrupted everything.

Time passed and we decided, now married, let’s go make our life in the United States. We returned to New York in 1950 and we didn’t go back until 1972.

Surviving New York in the Early Years

Let me tell you, the period between graduating and earning your living, that is hard. I did not have an undergraduate degree; that didn't exist at the time. In those days there were two levels of courses, I entered at the advanced level and they gave me a pianist diploma. I defended myself in the market of earning a living. I was a good accompanist and I earned money playing those jobs.

It was a process like this: I started to work with companies because I had a reputation of going through music very quickly. They called me *traganotas*, “the note eater,” and that's very necessary in New York. I was a very good accompanist for singers, one of my specializations was in that, and I also started to have students. So I was running from here to there. There was an opera company called The Mascagni Opera Guild in New York and it was directed by a woman Giuseppina Lapuma who was the first wife of a man called Leodo who had been the pianist of the symphony in Colombia. Leodo gave my father a letter when my parents came with me to the United States when I entered Juilliard. He said: “Give this to Giuseppa because I know you like directing the orchestra.” Leodo remembered that I used to practice conducting backstage while the Cartagena Orchestra played. Here in Bogotá they did *The Barber of Seville*—like about a thousand years ago—and I had to do the part, “la forza, la forza, aprite qua,” in the chorus and I loved it. I get to New York and I go to this Mascagni Opera Guild Company, but it was a company of amateurs. The orchestra was from Juilliard, yes, but nobody got paid a cent. It was barbaric training for me. If you wanted for example to sing Violetta [in *La traviata*] you paid the quota of like \$100-200 and they gave you all of the equipment—chorus, orchestra, everything. It was in some tiny theatre.

Those companies were opera laboratories. The musicians were the stars of the Juilliard Orchestra, we were all in training. That's where I learned my trade. There were three conductors, two of whom are famous today. One was Nicola Rescigno who was Maria Callas' music director all her life, and the other was Julius Rudel of City Center Opera Company. There came a time when we were not in the union though we were supposed to join. So they wouldn't catch us, we exchanged names. Julius was called Rodolfo DiGiulio, Nicola became Nicolai something-or-other I can't remember, and I just kept my name because no one knew who I was anyway. This way no one would suspect that we were working with Mascagni Opera. The union then was something that was worse than the mob in Colombia, the President [of the musician's union] at the time was James Petrillo. Even the President of the United States was afraid of Petrillo, it was called the Local 802.³ It sounds stupid but I tell you that we had to do those things.

The years passed and I picked up jobs, over here Broadway, over there a touring ballet company, the Harkness Ballet, Hurtado de Córdoba, Haitian Ballet. Working with the Haitian Ballet was an education for me. I traveled with them in the south of the U.S. and I was not familiar with the problems of the blacks, I had not really had contact with that. The Haitians are such beautiful people, they put them in a bus to do a tour in the south and I was their pianist. There were three of us who were white: myself, the driver and the director. Everyone else was black, about twenty people. We stopped in a place close to New Orleans to go to the bathroom but there weren't any facilities at all for blacks. There was a cafeteria

³ For more information on the infamous James C. Petrillo, President of the American Federation of Musicians, see *More Than Meets the Ear: How Symphony Musicians Made Labor History*, by Julie Ayer (Syren Book Company, 2005).

there and I bought twenty hamburgers, twenty coffees and everything else because they wouldn't let them inside. The guy at the counter asked me, "Are you going to eat this? We don't serve niggers here." We got to New Orleans and the bus driver, the director and I were sent to one hotel and the others to a horrible little hotel on the other side of the tracks.

Conducting Musical Comedies

I went to the American Ballet Theatre and then did a few more jobs on Broadway, I climbed the ladder, and arrived in Dallas. The happiest moments in my life have been when I was conducting musical comedies. In the summer they would close Broadway and summer stock began. I was a musical director at one of the largest summer stock theatres in the country. It's in Dallas, I was there for five years every summer, I worked with singers like Ginger Rogers.

First Performance Of His Songs

I had a friend in New York who was a good singer but she didn't speak the Castillian language that well. But I never wrote in English, just in Spanish. English doesn't sound to me like a language for music, that's another important thing – Italian, French, yes, but not English. She sang my songs on a station that was called WOR and they were very well received. I got a few phone calls [to publish the songs] but it never occurred to me nor did it interest me to publish.⁴

⁴ WOR 98.7 FM/AM 710 Radio New York. Founded in 1922, WOR 710 HD is New York's oldest, privately-owned and continuously-operated radio station.

Working with Maria Callas, Franco Zeffirelli and Teresa Berganza

I happened to be in Dallas doing musical theatre when Nicola Rescigno arrived to conduct the opening of the new Dallas Civic Opera Company and he hired me as a répétiteur. I had no idea who was singing. It was *Traviata*, I sat at the piano and I hear this voice ask, “Do you know your score?” And that’s how I met Maria Callas. I said “yes” and Callas replied: “I do not work with amateurs.” I sat at the piano and I swear I played like Horowitz. I swallowed that bitter pill of my own pride that I was not used to doing. Afterwards she did not excuse herself but she looked at me with something like incredulity. We didn’t become friends but I got to know the great artist. As a woman, though, she was absolutely impossible. The director, a really young kid, was named Franco Zeffirelli. So I passed through stages like that. I could now say I had worked with Callas and it opened doors for me.

The one who I thought was fantastic [in Dallas] was Teresa Berganza. A beautiful person and really tiny. She was a great person *and* artist. She was very sad because she had left her country for the first time and was apart from her husband too. We became great friends since we both spoke Spanish, we understood each other. We talked and she said, “You are one of the best accompanists that I have ever had.” I know how to follow the voice of the singer because I learned from a pianist at Juilliard, an Italian who was an excellent accompanist and he worked at that, his specialty was opera. He would say to me, “you have to pull them by their nose.” It comes, it goes.

President Nixon and *Fancy Free*

On the wall of my studio is a program at the White House.” I conducted a Bernstein ballet for President Nixon called *Fancy Free*. When we were in Tokyo with the American Ballet Theatre there was the Prime Minister there called Sato. That was during Nixon’s term. The Emperor did not go; instead, they sent this minister and he fell in love with North American music, *Fancy Free*, the ballets of Copland, etc. When Nixon invited him to the U.S. he asked him what he wanted to see, and he answered: “American Ballet Theatre, *Fancy Free*.”

Final Performances in the United States with Duke Ellington

I didn’t study jazz, but I had the benefit of knowing two very important people, Duke Ellington was one, and Morton Gould, people like that. The last person I worked with in the States before leaving was Duke Ellington. It was a composition of his called *The River*. We did it at the Metropolitan, but it was not a success. Or rather it was inconclusive, not a complete success. The idea was to do a history of the Mississippi River, its birth until its death, passing through different epochs. Jazz in the United States is beautiful music, but it was not well received at the first performance. Three months later the Kennedy Center opened with Bernstein’s *Mass*. The second night we opened with *The River* and it was a complete success. So I ended with a complete success in the States and then I went to Colombia. Yes, I have some moments in my life that have been interesting.

Leaving American Ballet Theatre and the United States to return to Colombia

I came into one situation after another. I did a lot of work on Broadway, musical comedy, opera, ballet, especially ballet, because I was the musical director of the American Ballet Theatre. By then I had been away from Colombia almost thirty-five years, maybe more than that. The [Colombian] government asked if I would take charge of the new orchestra; it was called the Filarmonica. So I came to Bogotá. Two months after I went to hear the [Orchestra Filarmónica de Bogotá]—I had license to return to ABT but I decided, no, we're here in Colombia and we are staying.—We've been very content here. I completed my mission to conduct in the United States, and after fifty-two years I was happy. I had luck. I liked Bogotá too, it was not the Bogotá that I had left in the 1940's, it was this Bogotá [motions to the high rise buildings in the skyline]. I love Bogotá and [the OFB] was a good job. I had my own orchestra for the first time in my life. I had never had my own orchestra, I was always conducting somebody else's but this was mine to build. So my wife and I said, "let's go." And what you see in this apartment [in Bogotá] is what we had in New York. We were brought stock and barrel, everything, by the government, my Steinway piano too.

I had a leave of absence from American Ballet Theatre until I finally resigned. I had one more year to go. I didn't keep up my connections, I severed all my connections there in the United States, severed completely. I said, "Why live in two situations? Let's live a new one." And I'm not sorry. It wasn't easy because the cultural shock of returning was tremendous, very hard.

Opera House Bombing

I saved Martha Senn's life. We were in Popayán, during the opera season it was a night when I was not conducting. And in the intermission I told her and Beatriz Parra, "Why don't we go out and get something to eat?" Leaving the theatre a bomb went off, a bomb that was right where Martha had been sitting. The person who had been sitting to the side of her lost his legs; he was a prominent member of Popayán's society. A little to the left, let's say this – it was intentional – and it fell on him. But if she had been there five minutes earlier, it would have killed her. Immediately I went in to find [Beatriz Parra's] mother for her. Her mother—God rest in peace—was a sturdy woman and I found her there in her element giving instructions, "Leave through this door, leave through that one." She saved a lot of lives. It was a very dramatic moment. I remember very much the people from the opera, dressed in their costumes running through the streets; the musicians were running leaving the theatre because the theatre had been totally destroyed.

Getting The Rights To The Carranza Poems

Luis Antonio Escobar, a musician, arrived in New York. It was 1950 something. It was the first contact that I had, having been away so many years from Colombia. He gave me an anthology of Colombian poetry and there was a section of poetry by Eduardo Carranza. Years passed. I was in Colombia and, during the administration of Betancur, a week of Colombian music was sponsored in Buenos Aires, Argentina. I was among the invited, along with other personalities. We [León and Carranza] met on the plane. "Did you make music out

of my [poems]?” he asked. I said, “Yes.” “And why haven’t I heard them?” he responded. “I promise you,” I replied. But I never did; he died.

So I contacted his daughter, but she also died later and she was the director [of Carranza’s estate]. So there I was without him or her. Finally I communicated with his son via Martha Senn. One day we had lunch and he said, “thank you very much, I will leave you the letter.” It was official permission for publication. You have to be very careful about the legal part.

Explaining The Different Musical Styles In His Songs

It comes from the poetry. For example, look at the spoken part in the score for “Muñeco dormilón.” That’s how the poem was given to me and so I started to study it and it occurred to me that the presentation should be spoken. It comes unconsciously. I read the poem and that’s all. There is certain literature or poetry that immediately strikes me with music. That’s what happened with “La campesina.” Sometimes I write something and throw it in the trash. Composing is unconscious. If it were studied it would very forced and very artificial. It comes out naturally, from living in the U.S., in Colombia and conducting musical theatre, ballet and opera. I sit down at the piano, and I start getting ideas, and then I write it.

Other Colombian Composers of Art Songs and León’s Genesis as a Composer

Blas Atehortua, Francisco Zumaque, Jaqueline Nova, they all write in a way that is musically acceptable for the voice but the rest are the avant garde. Do you understand? Holguín is the father of Colombian music; he wrote many orchestral works, twelve

symphonies, very little for the voice. The one composer who has written the most for voice has been myself. I started in the United States in 1951 with a composition exercise and I just kept going. I was not familiar the anthology of Colombian poetry that Luis Antonio Escobar gave me, I started to read it and then to compose. The first person to record my works was Carmiña Gallo. Carmiña and I made a recording on behalf of the Organization of American States (OAS) in Washington. Later Martha Senn sang my works and also the Ecuadorian singer Beatriz Parra. Montserrat Caballé too, the great Catalan soprano. She came to Colombia and sang one of my songs as well. Other people have sung them, voice teachers, their students, etc. But I'm very picky in giving my music to just anyone. Do you understand as a professional that I have to do that? I have to be very careful. Especially so that no one makes bad use of my music; fortunately it's all copyrighted here in Bogotá with the Ministry. I have the registration papers here.

The OAS Recording with Carmiña Gallo

It has some wonderful Villa-Lobos on it. It was a very limited edition recording; I only have one record myself. It got a good review in the *Washington Herald*, especially my music. For a thirty or forty minute disc we spent five days in the studio. It was recorded in Washington D.C. at Catholic University in the small recital hall. It has great acoustics there.

“La campesina”

“La Campesina” is the song that has been the biggest hit. I don’t know why; at the very least it is the ugliest of the songs that I have written!

“Cancioncilla” and “Tu madre en la fuente”

“Cancioncilla” had tremendous success. When Maria Mercedes died, Martha Senn sang it at her funeral. It was just spectacular. The poem was written by Maria’s father when she was born.⁵ But the words were perfect for a funeral; everyone in the church just broke up when she sang. It is a good song for a recital. I have another short one that’s called “Tu madre en la fuente.” It is a story that means something; it is about a soldier who goes to war and leaves his daughter and wife.

Las Canciones de Pequeña, pequeñita

I look for the poets. I was in Quito once with the symphony. Beatriz Parra, an Ecuadorian soprano singer and friend of mine, recommended this poet to me. I was enchanted by his poems and wrote the song cycle very quickly. I read the poems and wrote each song in about a day. I wrote *Pequeña, pequeñita* for Beatriz’s voice, she’s a great singer.⁶ I did a tour with her in the Soviet Union; she was a graduate of the Tchaikovsky Conservatory. A fantastic singer—she did lots of opera and concert work. *Pequeña, pequeñita* has also been sung by Martha Senn and orchestrated. It is very good for a recital, especially

⁵ Jaime León is referring to the poem “Cancioncilla” by Eduardo Carranza. The song was sung at his daughter Maria Mercedes Carranza’s funeral in 2003.

⁶ León refers to the entire song cycle not the individual song “Pequeña, pequeñita.”

for a young audience that understands the language. It cannot be translated, I hate translations. I guess you can translate it for the program, so they get the meaning. I experienced that in Russia. They understand English but aside from that very little of any other language. Spanish is completely unknown. All of our programs were basically Spanish-language music so they had a translation in Russian.

León's other music

I have a Mass that has already been performed five times in Colombia. It is not a liturgical mass but it has all the parts of the Catholic Mass and it's in Latin. It's got modern harmonies, some American harmonies, a little bit of jazz and so forth. People love it. That Mass was written when I was in Popayán for the festival there. They asked me to write something for their choir. I wrote it for chorus, soprano and mezzo. It's been given by the OFB twice. Once I conducted and the other time Francisco Rettig did. It's a beautiful work. It's very American. It doesn't have the liturgical aspect though; it's more Romantic.

The Acceptance of Classical Music in Colombia

In the 1970s interest was down, the orchestra [OFB] had just been founded, but it rose in category and acceptance by the public to the point that the Universidad Nacional where the Filarmónica still performs is packed on Saturday afternoons. Of course there is very little money involved; you pay a 1,500 pesos entrance fee [about \$0.75]. But at this moment, as you know, one orchestra [Sinfónica Nacional] has been cancelled because the government said, "it's much too expensive for us." And they're right. For instance the Sinfónica brought

in maybe 300 people on a Saturday night.⁷ To begin with, going to the Teatro Colón is dangerous at night because you're mobbed by people outside, it's difficult.⁸ So they decided to shut the orchestra down and let the private enterprise, like in the United States, take hold of this and that's what they're doing. There is a private organization, Amigos de la Sinfónica, you donate, a certain amount of money and you get a percentage off of your income tax, like in the U.S. Of course nothing is patronized by the government. There is a foundation for the arts; now it's all privately owned. I'm involved now with this thing with the Ministry of Culture as a consultant. We went through the first phase and we heard 250 instrumentalists, it was amazing to try and form an orchestra of eighty-six. We still need about twenty-five more. The last phase will be August, 2003.

Musicianship and Music Education in Colombia

It's very, very poor. That's one thing I noticed. The talent is tremendous here. A balance of fine people with a lot of talent, but know-how? Nothing. There is no schooling. That conservatory that Holguin founded has another name now. Times have changed. It's another generation, they're in for more pop music where the money is rather than classical music. Pop music is where the money is.

One of the main things in conducting is to control an instrument. You must be very good at it. I was a pianist so I got into Julliard that way. But they lack pianism here, in other words technique. You have to be able to read orchestral scores at the piano. You have to

⁷ There are two orchestras in Bogotá, the Sinfónica Nacional and the Orquesta Filarmónica de Bogotá.

⁸ Teatro Colón is a major performance hall for classical music in Bogotá.

develop that ear for dictation and ear training. There's a lot of talent but there is no education. No education.

I would love to give a masterclass, but I don't like to push myself on other people. If someone comes to me with a program I can help them because my goodness look at my repertory. I've got everything here [León motions to the wall of scores in his personal music library]. Yes that's the main problem in Colombia. Well not just Colombia. Ecuador has tremendous amount of talent. The further south you go, you get into more sophisticated countries like Chile, magnificent Argentina, Brazil, Montevideo, Uruguay—they are way up in talent. As for the Caribbean islands, Puerto Rico has a fantastic orchestra, plus Cuba. And then of course the United States. As for the northern countries in Europe, Russia is unbelievable. They way people respond to opera there for example. Opera is very cheap for us. For them it's expensive. A ticket over there will cost you \$2.50. For them it would be maybe like 30-40 rubles which means something like 2-3 days of food or maybe more. But they love just to sit outside of the theatre because the TV and radio broadcasts the opera so people can listen. The best restaurant in Moscow is in the opera house at the Bolshoi. It's very cheap. People can get into the restaurant at intermission that's why they wait outside, but then they get thrown out when the intermission ends. As for the future here in Colombia? Well, I'm done. I've spent fifty-three years of my life doing it and I'm retired now. Fifty-three years conducting is a long time. I'm into writing now, every day.

Current Composing

I get up quite early in the morning (and of course I can't make any noise because of the neighbors), but around nine o'clock in the morning I'm in my studio scribbling away. All the scores that you see in this apartment, that is my penmanship. I don't like the computer. I like to write in the old style and I have good penmanship, it's very clear, and I enjoy myself writing. I have a good ear for music, so I can write music while listening to something else. Beatriz puts on her music and it doesn't bother me. I concentrate; it's fun. I have written pieces for piano. I have two piano compositions that I've recorded called *Remembranzas*. I took our music, well-known music from Colombia, and wrapped it around new harmonies for two pianos. It's been recorded. My Mass has now been accepted too. I have another piece for orchestra called *Variations on a Theme by Bizet from Carmen*, plus lots of piano pieces and, so far, more than twenty songs and two song cycles.

The Current State of Composition in Colombia

Let me be very honest. I don't think there's much composition at this moment of serious music. In popular music, yes, and that's where the money is. That's the whole solution to the problem of making money in music. A Concerto isn't going to get you anywhere. But write a nice *bambuco*, well, the *bambuco* is out of style actually. There is a new style of music. I've seen it on TV. They invented a new kind of rap. It's with sounds that the body produces. You pound your chest and blow your cheeks. That's the new thing coming out and pretty soon the records will come out. They'll make millions out of that.

Shakira and Juanes, that's all they write about. Do you like it? Does it move you? Not one paragraph about the Filarmónica.

Relationships with Other Musicians in Colombia

We see the conductor of the Filarmónica, Francisco Rettig, quite often. At one time there were more but they all left. I miss companionship in music where I can discuss a piece with someone and they can tell me that I'm wrong. I want to be told: "I don't like what you do." Otherwise your head gets very big and you start to feel like a Beethoven. No really, I mean that very sincerely. You must accept criticism from people who know. Not from people who don't know, but people who know.

Do you want to know something that happened to me early in life? The consensus opinion at Juilliard was that I was not a pianist. To be told that straight in the face was terrifying because I thought: "My God, I am the world's greatest pianist!" You have to be modest. They taught me modesty and they taught me how to play—how to be a musician. Here in Colombia everyone is grandiose; the boy who leaves the conservatory is intolerable.

Programming for the Symphony and Opera

Well it's no different conducting-wise. Strangely enough the orchestra without singers is much more demanding. No matter what, singers never watch the conductor anyway; they live in another world. It is the same with dancers. But hey, I live in another world. If they don't follow me, that's their problem!

Balancing European and Latin American Repertoire

I never thought of it that way. Music to me is just music. I'm not a specialist, but I like Romantic music, Tchaikovsky, Brahms, Schumann, that's my forte, and North American music. I brought into Colombia a lot of Copland, Gershwin, Roger Sessions, and David Diamond. All of these people had never been heard of before and I brought their music to Colombia. For example, the Gershwin Piano Concerto was performed for the first time here with my friend, pianist Teresa Gómez and myself conducting. I also did selections from *Porgy and Bess*. It's a masterwork, a beautiful story. It has moments of great tenderness and also much violence.

American Music

They have not had authentic culture in the U.S.; it is all imported. Only jazz and blues—those are original expressions there. It's all imported, but it is the best what they import from all over the world. Fortunately or unfortunately after WWII the greats arrived; Stravinsky, Hindemith and all of those. And there they wrote their great works, the war refugees. The U.S. opened doors.

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