

DARKNESS VISIBLE -Nocturno para orquesta- (2010)

La presente pieza, con una duración aprox. de 14: culmina la producción orquestal reciente del autor, que comprende *asimismo* “*The Dark Backward of Time*“ (basada en “*The Tempest*“ de Shakespeare, 2006) y “*Alter Klang. Impromptu para orquesta a partir de Klee*“ (2007, obras que, salvaguardando la individualidad y personalidad específica de cada una de ellas, comparten algunas características tanto técnicas como expresivas, conformando una trilogía presidida por el uso dúctil y versátil de la orquesta, prevaleciendo un alto grado de diferenciación tímbrica y textural. Cualidades que nos acercan al aspecto quizá más crucial y determinante relativo a la reformulación del pensamiento armónico y de sus implicaciones respecto al desarrollo del discurso. “*Darkness visible*“, la última realización sinfónica del autor hasta la fecha, profundiza *asimismo* en la exploración del misterio insondable de la noche, siendo concebida como un nocturno de amplias proporciones, cuya inclinación hacia los ambientes quietos y de texturas enrarecidas se ve turbado puntualmente por páginas más agitadas y de expresión vehemente, iluminadas por súbitos destellos de luz.

El título de la obra proviene de unos intrigantes versos incluidos por John Milton en su obra cumbre “*El Paraíso Perdido*“, y que fueron citados a su vez por el gran poeta luso Fernando Pessoa en uno de sus textos más visionarios.

“A dungeon horrible, on all sides round,
As one great furnace flamed; yet from those flames
No light; but rather darkness visible
Served only to discover sights of woe,
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes“

(John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Llibre i, línia 62)

“Es la primera luz, que no es más que oscuridad visible. Es el fin, porque es descubrir con la vista que se ha nacido ciego.“

(Fernando Pessoa, *La hora del diablo*)

Estructuralmente, la obra se desarrolla en forma de arco sin solución de continuidad, que integra diversas secciones contrastantes, con inclusión de un importante proceso climático central, confiriendo una particular relevancia a disposiciones de gran refinamiento tímbrico y transparencia casi camerística, que da lugar a intervenciones de los diferentes solistas de la orquesta, especialmente las maderas, sostenidas por texturas muy elaboradas, con un uso sistemático de los divisi de la cuerda en todos sus registros, pero con cierta preeminencia por sus tonalidades más graves y lejanas.

La presente obra está dedicada a Lourdes Antrás Aubry

INSTRUMENTACIÓN

2 Flautas (2ª también Piccolo y Flauta en Sol), 2 Oboes (2º también Corno inglés), 2 Clarinetes en Sib (2º también Clarinete Bajo en Sib), 2 Fagotes, 4 Trompas en Fa, 3 Trompetas en Do, 3 Trombones (tenor-bajo), Tuba, Timpani, Percusión (2 ejecutantes) Violines I, Violines II, Violas, Violonchelos, Contrabajos (mínimo: 12, 10, 8, 8, 6)

BENET CASABLANCAS

ORCHESTRAL WORKS

by Yvan Nommick

Benet Casablanças (Sabadell, 1956) ranks among the most substantial and recognised composers in the Spanish musical scene. His music is now enjoying increasing international circulation, is performed both in Europe and in the United States, Canada, Latin America and Japan by prestigious performers (London Sinfonietta, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie, Arditti Quartet, Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne, Orquesta Nacional de España, Belgium National Orchestra, NJO Netherlands, L'Hermitage State Chamber Orchestra, Malmö Symfoni Orkester, etc.), and has been distinguished with several awards (Musician's Accord of New York, Premio Ciudad de Barcelona, Premio Nacional del Disco from the Spanish Ministerio de Cultura, Composer's Arena of Amsterdam, finalist at the Prix Prince Pierre in Monaco, Premi Nacional de Música de la Generalitat, etc.). Recent commissions include those by the Miller Theater in New York (Composers Portrait), The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Ensemble 88 in Maastricht, Cantus Ensemble in Zagreb, and The Tokyo Sinfonietta. Along his career Casablanças has developed an intense, earnest, demanding, and rigorous compositional activity, which he has been able to carry on side by side with his dedication to musicology – his study *El humor en la música. Broma, parodia e ironía* (*Humour in music. Jokes, parody, and irony*, Reichenberger, 2000) has been a remarkable success – as well as to teaching: as of 2002, he is the Director of the Conservatorio Superior de Música del Liceo in Barcelona.

If we had to define in few words Casablanças' qualities as a composer, we would highlight six features: his impeccable technique, originality, lack of dogmatism and self-demanding nature, plus the constructive rigour and communicability of his works. It is fitting to emphasise that this communicative power of his music does not imply easiness because his writing is highly elaborate even in its minutest harmonic, polyphonic, timbric, and textural details; and yet the global form, immaculate as it is, manages to seem spontaneous and speaks to the listener's sensitivity. The three last symphonic Works (his catalog includes not less than 14), composed between 2005 and 2010, lead us to sonorous worlds of great lavishness and expressivity, of vigorous contrasts and subtle timbric treatment. All three compositions converge on one point: the relatively important presence of the night – night, with its fathomless mystery and abrupt flashes of light; night, which inspires contemplative states but can also give rise to thoughts filled with anguish.

DARKNESS VISIBLE

Composed in 2008-2010, *Darkness visible*, subtitled "Nocturne for Orchestra", is dedicated to the composer's wife Lourdes Antràs Aubry. In writing this work, Casablanças received generous assistance from the Entitat Autònoma de Difusió Cultural (EADC) of the Generalitat de Catalunya. *Darkness Visible* has so far never been performed in public, so this recording represents the first opportunity to listen to and gain an acquaintance of this work. With *Darkness visible*, Casablanças has made a

significant contribution to the genre of nocturne music for orchestra, which has been graced since the end of the 19th century by essential works. Let us recall some of them: among others, Debussy's *Nocturnes for Orchestra and Chorus* (1897-99); Schönberg's *Verklärte Nacht* (1899, plus two string orchestra versions from 1917 and 1943); the two *Nachtmusiken* that make up the second and fourth movements of Mahler's Symphony no. 7 (1904-5); *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* for piano and orchestra by Falla (1909-16); *Jardin du sommeil d'amour*, the sixth movement in Messiaen's *Turangalîla Symphonie* (1946-48); and Dutilleux's *Timbres, Espace, Mouvement ou La Nuit Étoilée* (1976-78). The work's title, *Darkness visible*, comes from a verse in Milton's magnum opus *Paradise Lost* (1667), later taken up by Fernando Pessoa in his impressive story *The Devil's Hour*, where a tragic devil defends his own existence and tries to justify it on philosophical grounds. The composer quotes these words from Pessoa: "It is the first light, which is nothing more than darkness visible. It is the end, because it means discovering with your eyesight that you have been born blind". Casablanca's music, of course, is not programmatic, but here we see it evolves from an idea, an image, or perhaps an idea-image: the visible darkness that crystallises his imagination, fertilises his writing and finds, by means of exacting compositional labour, its correspondence in the world of sounds. *Darkness visible* probes deeper into the nocturnal aspects of *Alter Klang*. Written for a leaner orchestral cast, it is a work of great colour lavishness and refined timbric writing, wherein the strings are constantly split. As in the rest of Casablanca's orchestral works, timbre is not a mere cloak of musical discourse but an integral, indissoluble part of the musical ideas expressed: melodic, harmonic, and polyphonic discourse is intimately related to orchestral texture. The chamber-like treatment of the orchestra is highly striking, especially in the woodwinds, but also in the brass, percussion, and strings in certain episodes, which lends a certain transparency to these most intricate textures composed by overlaying several strata. Within a largely coherent global sonority we can hear, if we prick up our ears, the night's thousand murmurs in its most mysterious hours and feel the great diversity of emotions aroused by this world of twilight.

A work in a single movement, *Darkness visible* also forms a great arc like *Alter Klang*, only in this case there is no division into contrasting episodes. The expansive discourse develops without a break: certain melodic and rhythmic figures exposed in the initial bars become the organic elements that ramify and nourish the whole work, both in its spatial (the orchestral texture) and temporal (the melodic-polyphonic development) dimension, thus giving it great unity. Likewise, harmony becomes a powerful cohesive factor, since many of the melodic lines come from the horizontal display of vertical aggregates; for this reason, as in *Alter Klang*, harmony and counterpoint are two facets of the same musical process. The ecstatic atmosphere of the initial pages prevails in *Darkness visible*, but wrenching feelings and screaming also appear there as expressive *chiaroscuros* that are transformed, in the composer's own words, into "sudden flashes of light". The work's final bars, where the flutes take on a leading role, resume the ambience of the piece's beginning; this time, however, not to usher in a dynamic discourse but rather to dissolve into the quietude of magical harmonies.

translated by Miguel Schmid