

Benet Casablancas Domingo (1956-)

Born in Sabadell (Barcelona), Benet Casablancas studied music in Barcelona and Vienna, where he worked with, among others, Friedrich Cerha and Karl-Heinz Füssl. He also has a degree in philosophy and a PhD in musicology, both from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. His works, distinguished with numerous commissions and awards (Ciutat de Barcelona, Musician's Accord of New York, Spanish National Recording Prize, Composer's Arena of Amsterdam, Fundación Juan March in Madrid, Juventuts Musicals de Barcelona, Òscar Esplà, Ferran Sors, finalist at the Prince Pierre of Monaco Foundation Musical Competition, etc.), have been performed regularly around Europe, Canada, the USA, Japan and Latin America by prestigious ensembles, soloists and conductors (London Sinfonietta, Ensemble Contemporain de Montréal, Ensemble 13 de Baden-Baden, Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne, Arditti Quartet, Leipziger Streichquartett, Trio à cordes de Paris, Deutsches Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre National de Belgique, NJO of The Netherlands, L'Hermitage State Orchestra Saint Petersburg, Perspectives Ensemble New York, Ensemble 10/10 Liverpool, The Tokyo Sinfonietta, Notabu Ensemble Düsseldorf, Nomad Ensemble Japan, Ensemble Modern Akademie, Grupo Encuentros de Buenos Aires, Ensemble Reconsil Wien, Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble, Zeitfluss Ensemble in Graz, Malmö Symfoni Orkester, London Philharmonic, Orquesta Nacional de España, Filarmónica de Gran Canaria, Sinfónica de A Coruña, Sinfónicas de Barcelona, Tenerife, Filarmonía de Galicia, Ciudad de Granada, Mallorca Islands, Castilla y León, Comunidad de Madrid, JONDE, etc.).

In 2008 he made his debut with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and his *New Epigrams* (published by Tritó) represented Spain at the SIMC World Music Days held in Vilnius. His works have been programmed in such emblematic concert halls like the Musikverein of Vienna, the London Barbican Hall, the Palais des Beaux-Arts of Bruxelles, the Miller Theatre at Columbia University New York, the Círculo de Bellas Artes de Madrid and the Palau de la Música de Barcelona. The 2007 was awarded the National Music Prize granted by the Generalitat de Catalunya. Early on in his career he began combining composition with teaching and research. An advisor for different institutions and patron of several foundations, he has published numerous historical and analytical articles (in *The New Grove*, *Arietta*, *Quodlibet*), and the book *El humor en la música: broma, parodia e ironía* (Reichenberger, 2000). He has been head of theory at a number of Spanish conservatories, educational director of the Catalan National Youth Orchestra (JONC) and associate professor at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra de Barcelona. He has also been a frequent member of the jury of several European composing and performing competitions and kept up a busy agenda as a guest professor at several international schools, between them and regularly, the Courses of Musical Specialization of the Universidad de Alcalá de Henares (Spain). In 2002 he assumed the direction of the Conservatori Superior de Música del Liceu (Barcelona), a post he now combines with his work in composition and research.

His wide-ranging oeuvre, covering the most diverse genres and formats, is marked by a quest for radical personal and aesthetic independence. The critics have highlighted his concern for balancing constructional rigour and expressive strength, dramatic character and whimsical register, in the framework of a discourse in which a progressively luminous harmonic language, rhythmic spirit, a growing timbral differentiation and instrumental virtuosism coexist. Recently he has published six new recordings by Naxos (piano, chamber and orchestral), Stradivarius, Tritó and Anemos. His most recent assignments include commissions from the Miller Theatre at Columbia University New York (Composer Portraits series), the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, the Ensemble 88 in Maastricht, the Ensemble Cantus Croatia (Zagreb Biennale), the Tokyo Sinfonietta, OSV Barcelona Symphony Orchestra and the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona (for the opera "Io", based on the original libretto by Rafael Argullol).



(Photo: Juan Lucas)

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NEW VIDEOS

* FINLAND PRÉMIÈRE of "Impromptu": [YouTube - Kristiina Junttu; Casablancas Impromptu, Sellosali 12.10.2010](#)

* WP of "Dove of Peace. Homage to Picasso": <http://www.liverpoolphil.com/4411/royal-liverpool-philharmonic-orchestra/benet-casablancas-dove-of-peace-part-1.html>

Ensemble 10/10 perform Benet Casablancas' Dove of Peace: Homage to Picasso at the Cornerstone, Liverpool, on Wednesday 19 May.

The piece -the last one premiered by the author- was commissioned by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic for Ensemble 10/10

* MAKING OF de "Dove of peace. Hommage to Picasso"

<http://www.liverpoolphil.com/4626/royal-liverpool-philharmonic-orchestra/the-making-of-dove-of-peace-hommage-to-picasso.html>

In May 2010 Ensemble 10/10 performed the world premiere of the new Clarinet concerto, "Dove of Peace: Hommage to Picasso" by the acclaimed Spanish composer Benet Casablancas. Watch this short documentary about the work's relevance and background, and links to Picasso: Peace and Freedom at Tate Liverpool (21 May to 31 August 2010). This video include interviews with the key representatives involved with the commission, including Benet Casablancas, Andrew Cornall, Artistic Director of Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Christoph Grunenberg, Director of Tate Liverpool.

LISTEN AND WATCH

* World Prémière of '*Four Darks in Red*' in New York

<http://www.tv3.cat/videos/2740690/La-musica-de-Benet-Casablancas-a-Nova-York>

* World Prémière of '*Seven Scenes from Hamlet*' in Londres (BBC SO, R. Fearon, J. Pons)

<http://www.tv3.cat/videos/767299>

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BENET CASABLANCAS

(Born 2 April 1956 Sabadell, España)

Benet Casablancas studied in Barcelona and at the Vienna Academy of Music with Friedrich Cerha and Karl Heinz Füssl, and he graduated in Philosophy in Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona (1982). He has also a PhD in musicology. His music, firmly rooted in the great modernist tradition, is notable for its great individuality, structural complexity and extraordinary richness of textural detail. Rooted in the formal techniques of serialism, in the 1990s he became more concerned with harmony and texture. His wide-ranging oeuvre covers the most diverse genres and formats, increasingly drawn towards the orchestral field. Critics have highlighted his concern for balancing constructional rigour and expressive strength, dramatic character and whimsical register, in the framework of a discourse in which coexist a progressively luminous harmonic language, rhythmic spirit, timbral differentiation and instrumental virtuosism. He has received many awards: Premio Nacional Disco Ministerio de Cultura de España, Premio Nacional de Música de la Generalitat de Catalunya, Premio Ciudad de Barcelona, Composer's Arena Amsterdam (Gaudeamus), Musiciens's Accord New York, Premios Ferran Sors, Oscar Esplá, Jeunesse Musicales, etc. In 2002 he was appointed Academic Director of the Conservatorio Superior de Música del Liceo in Barcelona. His music has been presented at the most important international festivals: Holland Festival Amsterdam, Musica Strasbourg, ISCM World Music Days Vilnius, Biennale Düsseldorf, Spanien Modern Wien, Theatre Miller New York, Atempo Caracas, Weimar, Bruxelles, Antwerpen, London Barbican Hall, Paris, Lausanne, St. Petersburg, Warzawa, Montréal, München, Vancouver, Bolonia, Buenos Aires, México, Stockholm, Malmö, Lima, Rotterdam, Tokio, Frankfurt, Nápoles, etc. Recent commissions include: Miller Theater New York, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Ensemble Cantus Croatia (Zagreb Biennale), Ensemble 88 Maastricht, Barcelona OSV Symphony Orchestra and Tokyo Sinfonietta.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- 1982** Graduated in Music and Philosophy. Moves to Vienna to study with Friedrich Cerha
1990 Begins the "Epigrams" collection, that marks a decisive point for his musical language
2000 Doctorate in Musicology by the UAB. He publishes the book "El Humor en la Música"
2002 Academic Director of the Conservatorio Superior de Música del Liceo
2007 National Music Prize of the Generalitat de Catalunya
2008 Diverse "Composers Portraits" in Vienna's Musikverein. Madrid, Barcelona and Girona.
The "New Epigrams" represented Spain in the ISCM World Music Days of Vilnius and the BBC Symphony Orchestra plays in London the UK Prémiere of "Seven Scenes from Hamlet"
2009 Holland, Sweden, Belgium and Spain Prémieres of "Alter Klang. Impromptu for orchestra after Klee". World Prémière of his "String Quartet nr. 3" by Arditti Quartet. Recording of his complete works for strings. He publishes two more monographic CDs (Chamber and Orchestra) in NAXOS.
2010 "Composer Portrait" in Theatre Miller at Columbia University New York. New commissions from the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Ensemble 88 Maastricht and Zagreb Biennale 2011.
He begins working on the operas "Io" (WP prev.: Gran Teatro del Liceo de Barcelona, Season 2013-2014) and "Kwaidan", based on three Japanese ghostly tales (Koizumi Yakumo (小泉八雲))
2011 Egypt, "Alexandrina Contemporary Music Biennale II" (Cairo, Alexandria; London Sinfonietta).
Zagreb Biennale (Ossian Ensemble Canterbury), "Festival Encuentros" de Buenos Aires.

KEY WORKS

- Five Interludes -Quasi variazioni-** (1983; string quartet)
Mouvement for trio (1987; vl., vc., pno.)
Seven Scenes from Hamlet (1989; chamber/symphony orchestra)
New Epigrams (1997; chamber orchestra)
Three Epigrams (2000; orchestra)
The Dark Backward of Time (after Shakespeare) (2005; orchestra)
Alter Klang (after Klee) (2006; orchestra)
Darkness visible (2009; orchestra)
Impromptu (2009; piano)
Four Darks in Red (after Rothko) (2010; chamber orchestra)
Dove of Peace. Homage to Picasso (Chamber Concert nr. 1 for Clarinet and Ensemble; 2010)
Sis Glosses (after Cees Nooteboom) (2010; sextet)

SELECTED RECORDINGS

Epigrams, String Trio, Introduction, Cadenza and Aria, String Quartet nr. 2, New Epigrams, Album Leaf, Two Notations, Aphorism, Three Epigrams

Various performers (London Sinfonietta, Arditti Quartet, Barcelona SO, BCN 216, etc.).

EMEC/Fundació Música Contemporània E-068 (2005)

Five Interludes for String Quartet, Two Piano Pieces, Three Piano Pieces, Scherzo, Mouvement for Trio, Little Night music, Two Songs, Celebration

Various performers. Columna Música 1CM0112 (2004)

Piano Music (Three Bagatelles, Tombeau, Three Divertimenti for piano duet, Album Leaf, etc)

Jordi Masó, Miquel Villalba. Naxos 8.570757 (2008)

The Dark Backward of Time, Love Poem, Intrada on the name of Dalí, Epigrams, Postlude

Barcelona Symphony Orchestra, Ofèlia Sala, cond: S. Mas. Naxos 8.579002 (2010)

Seven Scenes from Hamlet and other chamber works

Ensemble Barcelona 216, cond: M. Valdivieso. Naxos 8.579004 (2010)

Complete Music for Strings

Arditti Quartet. Autor/Tritó (2010)

Seven Scenes from Hamlet and other orchestral and vocal works

Orquesta de la Comunidad de Madrid, cond: J.R. Encinar. Stradivarius (2010)

Darkness visible and other orchestral works

Orquesta Nacional de España, cond: Josep Pons. Anemos/Inaem (2010)

Chamber Miniatures

Plural Ensemble. Verso (2011; in forthcoming)

The Complete Piano Trios

Trio Kandinsky. Columna Música (2011; in forthcoming)

The Chamber Concerts

Modus Novus. Verso (2011; in forthcoming)

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<http://hemeroteca.abc.es/nav/Navigate.exe/hemeroteca/madrid/d7/2009/10/18/024.html>

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Trías, E. "El humor en la música", El Cultural. Madrid: El Mundo, 4.7.2001

Van der Waa, F. "Kwakkelend. Spanje-programma van Holland Festival krijgt kleur". Amsterdam: De Volkskrant, 25 de juny de 1991

Viana, A. "El Humor en la Música, by Benet Casablancas", Humor. International Journal of Humor Research (Editor in chief Salvatore Attardo). Mouton de Gruyter (Berlin. New York; Book reviews Humor 16-1 (2003), pp. 110-116

BENET CASABLANCAS: HIGHLIGHTS (November 2010)

PREMIERES and NEW PERFORMANCES (October-December; selective list)

- * FINLAND Premiere: "Impromptu", for piano solo, Kristiina Junttu, piano (Helsinki, Oulu, Hämeelinna, Sello-sali, Tampere)
- * ITALIAN Premiere: "Lamento", for piano solo, Hyo-Sun Lim (Imola, Italy)
- * WORLD Premiere: "Octet", Ensemble Orquesta de Cadaqués, cond. Jaime Martín (Auditorio de Girona, Festival Temporada Alta)
- * SPANISH Co-Premiere (Zaragoza and Alicante): "Four Darks in Red" (commissioned by Miller Theatre at Columbia University New York), Orquesta de Cámara del Auditorio de Zaragoza (Grupo Enigma), cond. Juan José Olives.
- * WORLD Premiere: "Six Glosses on texts by Cees Nooteboom", Ensemble 88 in Maastricht, cond. Taco Kooistra (Maastricht, Maastricht, St. Jan; Den Bosch, De Toonzaal; Heerlen, Schunck)
- * New Performance: "Retablo on texts by Paul Klee", Festival de Tres Cantos de Madrid
- * New Performances: "Epigrams", Ensemble Barcelona 216, cond. Ernest Martínez-Izquierdo, Festival Ensembles (Círculo de Bellas Artes de Madrid, Auditorio de Zaragoza, Palau de les Arts de Valencia)
- * FRENCH Premiere: "Mouvement for trio", Festival "Aujourd'hui Musiques" de Perpignan (France)
- * JAPAN Premiere: "Introduction, Cadenza and Aria", Ensemble Nomad, Tokyo Opera City Recital Hall

In forthcoming (from first semester 2011 onwards):

- * CROATIA Premiere: "Dove of Peace. Homage to Picasso", Chamber Concert nr. 1 for Clarinet and Ensemble ISCM World New Music Days 2011 (Ossian Ensemble in Canterbury, Zagreb, 4.2011)
- * New Performance: "Jo tem la nit", for choir (Coro de la Orquesta de la RTVE, Madrid, 2.2011)
- * GERMANY Premiere: "Three Epigrams for orchestra" (Deutsches Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Cond. Josep Pons, Bilbao and Barcelona, 5.2011)
- * EGYPT Premiere: "New Epigrams", Alexandrina Contemporary Music Biennale (The London Sinfonietta, cond. Diego Masson, Alexandria, Biblioteca Alexandrina, 26.4.2011; Cairo, Opera House, 27.4.2011)
- * EGYPT Premiere: "Epigrams" for six players, Alexandrina Contemporary Music Biennale (Barcelona 216, cond. José María Sánchez Verdú, Alexandria, Biblioteca Alexandrina, 28.4.2011; Cairo, Opera House, 29.4.2011)
- * JAPAN Premiere: "New Epigrams" (The Tokyo Sinfonietta, cond. Yasuaki Itakura, Tokyo Bunka Kaikan, 1.7.2011)
- * New Performance: "Jo tem la nit", for choir (Coro Madrigal, cond. Mireia Barrera, Barcelona)
- * WORLD Premiere: "Chamber Concert nr. 2 for Horn and ensemble (ISCM World New Music Days, Zagreb, Radovan Vlatkovic, Cantus Ensemble, cond. Berislav Sipus, Vatroslav Lisinski Great Hall, 5.2011)
- * BARCELONA Premiere: "String Quartet nr. 3" (Arditti Quartet, L'Auditori de Barcelona, 5.2011)
- * ARGENTINA Premiere: "Six Glosses after Cees Nooteboom", "Epigrams", "Introducción, Cadenza y Aria" (Festival Encuentros de Buenos Aires, Rosario, Córdoba, 4-13.8.2011)
- * AUSTRIAN Premiere: "Introducción, Cadenza y Aria" and "Haiku for Trio" ('KLANGSPUREN Festival of Contemporary Music', Plural Ensemble, cond. Fabián Panisello (setember 2011, Absa, Tirol, Austria)
- * Commission for a new work WORK: "Jubilus", by Diego Fernández Magdaleno, Homage to Jordi Savall (Autumn 2011, Barcelona and Madrid)
- * New Performance: "Alter Klang. Impromptu for orchestra after Klee" (Orquesta Nacional de España, Nacho de Paz, Festival Internacional de Música de Alicante, 8.2011)
- * USA Premiere: "Four Drafts for Strings" (The North/South Chamber Orchestra, New York City, november 2011)
- * SPAIN Premiere: "Dove of Peace. Homage to Picasso", Chamber Concert nr. 1 for Clarinet and (Modus Novus, Joan Enric Lluna, cond. Santiago Serrate, Madrid, 27.2.2012)
- * BARCELONA Premiere: "Alter Klang. Impromptu for orchestra after Klee" (Barcelona Symphony Orchestra, Josep Pons, L'Auditori de Barcelona, 2.3.2012, 3.3.2012, 4.3.2012)
- * WORLD Premiere: "Darkness visible. Nocturne for Orchestra" (The London Philharmonic, cond. Vladimir Jurowski, Barcelona, Palau de la Música Catalana, 27.2.2012)
- * Commission for a new WORK for symphony orchestra by Barcelona OSV Symphony Orchestra (Season 2011-2012, Barcelona, cond. Rubén Gimeno)
- * Commission for a new WORK for a Trio and Speaker by Trio Arbós: "El Libro de la muerte", on texts by Canetti, Bernhard and Kafka (Season 2011-2012, Spain, Austria, Germany)
- * Commission for a new OPERA by Gran Teatre del Liceu: "ÍO" (Libretto by Rafael Argullol; Season 2013-2014, Barcelona, Madrid)

NEW RECORDINGS (2010)

Darkness visible and other orchestral works

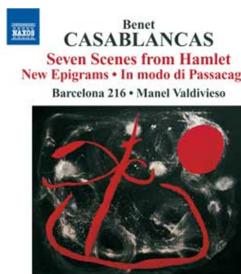
Orquesta Nacional de España, cond: Josep Pons. Anemos/Inaem (2010)

NEWS: Nomination for the 15th edition of the "Premios de la Música"



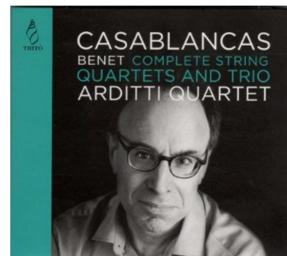
Seven Scenes from Hamlet and other chamber works

Ensemble Barcelona 216, cond: M. Valdivieso. Naxos 8.579004 (2010)



Complete Music for Strings

Arditti Quartet. Autor/Tritó (2010)



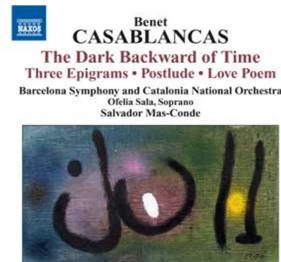
Seven Scenes from Hamlet and other orchestral and vocal works

Orquesta de la Comunidad de Madrid, cond: J.R. Encinar. Stradivarius (2010)



The Dark Backward of Time, Love Poem, Intrada on the name of Dalí, Epigrams, Postlude

Barcelona Symphony Orchestra, Ofelia Sala, cond: S. Mas. Naxos 8.579002 (2010)



The music of Benet Casablancas, by Jonathan Harvey

We hear a lot from politicians (particularly from across the Atlantic) about 'old' Europe at this time. For them it is a term of disapproval, of tiredness and ineffectiveness. For some of us Europeans (including the French foreign minister) it is a term of pride. It means the wisdom of experience and profound culture, so profound that we can, if we wish, wear it lightly; but it will still be there, guiding our behaviour from below like the unshowy current of a deep river.

Benet Casablancas' music is like that. The past is worn lightly, but it guides from deep down. He has absorbed well the culture of old Europe. There is the wit of Haydn, the polyphony of Schoenberg's third period, the period when he particularly drew on the clarity of Classical phrase structure while at the same time starting a revolution in music. The past was profoundly present to him, even though people, to his dismay, called him a disruption in music. His teaching showed this clearly, he burrowed deeply under the ground.

Casablancas writes with a similarly guided classic polyphonic clarity that is uncommon these days. There are many strands simultaneously and they all echo each other loosely, parodying and transforming as they go. They combine in coherent harmonies and bounce off chords played by, say, the piano or grouped choirs of sound, so that there is a constant play between line and chord.

The clarity is further enhanced by the symmetries and balance of the phrase structures. Often closure is effected by the clearest sound in atonal music - silence. At any rate, a change of texture will appear quickly and decisively long before anyone gets tired of a set-up. That's why, perhaps, he is so fond of the epigram form - and most of his movements are short. The epigram states an idea briefly, punchily, with wit even. It leaves something to be desired, some mystery to do with unpacking its meaning. This is the music of someone who does not wish to labour points: they should be made concisely and then be done with. A musician talking to intelligent, cultured fellows - 'old' Europeans.

The vitality and energy of his work is well-known - sudden switches of direction within a very short span give a superbly exhilarating and exuberant quality in the fast movements. The slow movements, though, particularly ones like the second of the 'New Epigrams', or the second of the 'Three Epigrams for orchestra' are similarly changeable, but in another altogether different vein. They are softer and more veiled; the bright Spanish light is nocturnal and one hears more blend than brilliant blare. The polyphony here takes on a hierarchical aspect. That is to say, some layers become principal, others are ornamental, decorative. Texture is complex rather than multi-polyphonic (wherein all parts are more or less equal). Atmosphere and mood are subtle and suggestive rather than classically clear, harmonics appear, giving non-tempered pitches. One willingly acquiesces in landscapes of the imagination, with birdsong, perhaps. Even here the form, of the phrases, of the sections, of the movements, remains clear, the attention gripped; but not quite 100% is given, we know there is more to it, below the surface.

I am grateful for Benet Casablancas' music: and I have no doubt that his students are also grateful for such an imaginatively cultured sensibility in their midst, one with whom the continuities of Western culture will be safe in their spiralling evolution.

Jonathan Harvey (13 Feb. 2003)



[Published in: 'Sibila'; Sevilla, 2004]

Música del claroscuro

Un verano, hace diez años, me dediqué al extraño ejercicio de leer toda la tragedia griega que hemos conservado –Esquilo, Sófocles y Eurípides- como si fuera un solo libro. Fue una lectura fascinante que dejó numerosas huellas en el camino. Podría llenar muchas páginas con su recuerdo. O, por el contrario, sólo una que aludiera a la siguiente pregunta: ¿qué luz es propia de la tragedia o, más precisamente, en qué luz transcurren las tragedias? No es en la oscuridad, como podría suponerse ni tampoco desde luego, en la claridad. Su luz es el claroscuro y ese claroscuro resume a la perfección, con un único trazo, el espíritu de la tragedia.

He recordado esta impresión de aquellos días de enloquecida lectura al escuchar con atención, y con continuidad, la música de Benet Casablancas. Había oído, por supuesto, varias de sus obras en diversa épocas pero esta vez las escuché repetidamente a lo largo de una semana. ¡El claroscuro!, iera música del claroscuro!

Evidentemente la música de Casablancas no se identifica con la tragedia, aunque en ocasiones tiene gran fuerza trágica y a menudo –con marcada ironía- tragicómica. Me refiero al paralelismo con aquella luz que, en mi percepción, va acompañado de la paradoja de juzgar el sonido en términos visuales. Pero tengo una justificación: no hay para la música un término que se ajuste al admirablemente matizado chiaroscuro de Leonardo da Vinci.

Sin embargo, el claroscuro al que me refiero no es pictórico –ni fruto de traducir la música en pintura-sino acústico. Para mí la característica esencial de la música de Casablancas es el claroscuro. Si se prefiere la imagen topográfica: música en la encrucijada, música desde la encrucijada.

Resulta extraordinario que logre hacer fructificar un equilibrio tan tenso. Cuando la tiniebla amenaza brota la llama, en el peligro de la violencia aparece una repentina ternura. En sus últimas obras Benet Casablancas ha acentuado su maestría para habitar las encrucijadas. Era notable en New Epigrams (1997), es sobresaliente en Tres Epigramas para orquesta (2001) o en Celebració (2001).

Pienso que ese juego esencial de Casablancas, un duelo en el claroscuro, es posible gracias a su doble dominio de la técnica y de la tradición. Tiene, a este respecto, el gusto por la arquitectura diáfana de los mejores compositores recientes de Schönberg a Ligeti o Lutoslawsky. En todas las artes me gusta este sentido dirigido a la cristalización del caos. Casablancas posee este sentido espacial.

Su técnica es apropiada a una determinada perspectiva de la tradición. A diferencia de otros compositores contemporáneos Casablancas reconoce la música como cultura, como subsuelo de diálogos. En consecuencia integra caudales creativos de otras artes, como demuestra en Set Escenes de Hamlet (1988-89). Sobretodo, no obstante, es capaz de conversar con la propia tradición musical. Casablancas ha comprendido que la vanguardia siempre ama desesperadamente la tradición y que en ese amor desesperado radica la auténtica actitud vanguardista. Esto le ha alejado de dogmatismos modernos y ecletticismos postmodernos.

La música del claroscuro: el gozo del intersticio, esas horas sutiles de la experiencia en que la respuesta a un enigma no puede ser, afortunadamente, más que otro enigma.

Rafael Argullo

UK Prémie de "Seven Scenes from Hamlet" by BBC Symphony Orchestra

- Review in *Tempo*, Journal of Cambridge University Press, por Malcolm Miller

The new venue Music which develops and counterpoints, rather than merely illustrates, Shakespeare's play provides the original appeal of the Set escenas de Hamlet (Seven scenes of Hamlet) by the Spanish composer Benet Casablancas. It received a thrilling UK première by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, with the actor Ray Fearon as reciter, under the dynamic baton of Josep Pons. He was making his impressive UK concert debut at a capacity Barbican Hall on 24 October 2008, the concert being broadcast live on Radio 3. With its unusual format of seven recitations followed by seven orchestral reflections, Set escenes de Hamlet – conceived first in 1989 for chamber ensemble – displayed rich, finely wrought contrapuntal textures, with plenty of dramatic excitement and affecting lyricism. Casablancas's idiom, often redolent of Henze's sumptuous translucence, Boulez's intricacy and even Birtwistle's weightiness, also echoes a Bergian expressionism. That attests to his twin influences, which, like those of Roberto Gerhard, stem from the Second Viennese School (he studied with Friedrich Cerha) and the 'Spanish tradition' of Falla – whose fiery ballet *El amor brujo* (with an authentic Flamenco singer, Ginesa Ortega), formed the sunny Spanish context in the remainder of the programme alongside Turina's colourful *Danzas fantásticas* and Ravel's *Rhapsodie Espagnole*.

The music is divided into seven aphoristic responses to Shakespeare's tragedy, compressed ingeniously into seven soliloquies, all but the first by Hamlet. The 'Prologue', Horatio's encounter with the King of Denmark's ghost, gives rise to suitably eerie shimmering textures for celeste, string harmonics, undulating woodwind, and overlapping solo melodic figures. The second interlude's searing, effervescent energy reflects Hamlet's anger at his mother's remarriage in explosive gestures balanced by the contrapuntal clarity of oboe and violin solos, while expansive drum-rolled dissonances prepare the three portraits: Hamlet, Ophelia and Yorick. The profundity of 'To be or not to be' is rendered in a throbbing double fugue; lyrical subjects and sprightly countersubjects dovetail like insects crowding on a watery leaf, with a climactic percussion interruption before the subjects scamper into silence. The unusual structural rapport of text and music was demonstrated in the 'Ophelia' movement, where Ray Fearon's ever-characterful racy recitation, ending in the line 'Get thee to a nunnery', was counteracted unexpectedly by the elegiac slowness of the solo flute melody, taken up by bass clarinet and low strings. A finde-(19th)-siècle nostalgia pervades what the composer described, in the pre-concert interview, as the work's 'great Adagio'. Yet it also conveys Hamlet's abrupt aggressiveness towards Ophelia – who, significantly, receives the most intense music, as shown in the eloquent string quartet threnody which ends the sixth movement 'Yorick. Burial of Ophelia'. Here music and text come together for the first time in a Melodrama, with clear hints of Sprechgesang and film music, in such clichéd gestures as tense chords after 'Alas, poor Yorick'. Yet overall the purely musical level of discourse is persuasive, as in the sizzling scherzo, 'Party of Players', in which Hamlet teases out the truth from the play-within-a-play, evoked in a dancing web of musical quotations (including an Elizabethan jig). The explosive climax, however, is the highly-charged finale: this encapsulates how the music is comment rather than illustration, in that its brass-led eruption after the poignant words 'The rest is silence' potently resists the words' overt meaning to the last.

Casablancas's Easterly fusion of operatic and symphonic discourse represents an innovative genre which speaks with intimacy and power; one hopes his more recent works – they include another inspired by the Bard, *The Dark Backward of Time*, based on *The Tempest* – will reach UK audiences soon.

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<http://journals.cambridge.org>



UK Prémie de "Seven Scenes from Hamlet" (BBC Symphony Orchestra, cond. J. Pons; London, Barbican, 2008)

VIDEO: <http://www.tv3.cat/videos/767299>

WORLD PREMIERE of “Dove of Peace. Homage to Picasso” in Liverpool

- Review in *Tempo*, Journal of Cambridge University Press, por Helen Thomas

The new venue forms the core of the recently opened Capstone Building at Liverpool Hope University, part of a sustained investment in the creative and performing arts helping to regenerate the Everton district. Alongside the Turnage works and Mark Simpson's Nur Music for oboe and ensemble two world premières were presented to an almost full house in the Hope Theatre: Alacrity by Michael Small and Dove of Peace: Homage to Picasso by Benet Casablancas.

Dove of Peace was commissioned from Catalan composer Benet Casablancas by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic at the suggestion of Ensemble's co-founder, clarinettist Nicholas Cox. The first performance coincided with the opening of Tate Liverpool's exhibition 'Picasso: Peace and Freedom' and included the projection of four Picasso drawings onto a screen behind the performers. The music is a virtuosic chamber concerto for clarinet and ensemble conceived as a continuous five-movement span lasting 20 minutes. It traced a journey from idyllic pastoralism through a period of conflict to reach a central lyrical section. An increasingly scherzo-like mood then escalated into a climactic allegro and the work finished with a transcendent epilogue. As such the piece might be read as a temporal realization of the tensions and resolutions that are also implicit in the cold-war iconography of Picasso's doves. This thematic link became more explicit when Casablancas introduced topoi of war and peace: the opening bird-call motifs, the trumpet fanfares in the second section and the final passage. Which includes snatches of children's folksong. At whatever level of reference one chose to hear this piece, Casablancas's mediation of modal and modernist aesthetics produced music of expressive intensity and structural rigour. The harmonic trajectory begins with highly chromatic clusters that are elaborated through decorative melodic lines. The intervallic relations within these clusters form a kaleidoscope of dissonant and consonant intervals as the different pitch combinalions are explored and discarded. Sometimes the privileging of pitches through doublings or subtle instrumental groupings highlights modal or triadic tonal features amidst the chromatic conflict. This process reaches a 'peaceful' resolution with the oscillation of C and D major triads towards the close.

Dove of Peace: Homage to Picasso was scheduled to be performed live the following day at Tate Liverpool. Unfortunately the installed art had filled the envisaged performance space but instead a recording of this performance was relayed during the show.

(*Tempo*, 2011)



“Una inmensa paloma blanca salpica
con la cólera de su duelo la tierra”
Pablo Picasso (Paris, 31 de marzo 1952)



Benet Casablancas



Nicholas Cox

VIDEO: <http://www.liverpoolphil.com/4411/royal-liverpool-philharmonic-orchestra/benet-casablancas-dove-of-peace-part-1.html>