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*European-Egyptian Contemporary  
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### **Benet Casablanca Domingo – Words to the Biennale/Festival.**

Spain Mediterranean Gust 2011 –Gust of Honour – Catalan Contemporary Music



“I love particularly the context of this big celebration, because I believe that the artistic work –and music specially!- can do a very important contribution to the cause of improving communication and enrichment between different countries and people, opening up new horizons for the expression of new ideas, feelings and shared experiences. In this sense, as a citizen living near Barcelona, I consider all the mediterranean people truly as a community of brothers with common roots and strong historical and cultural links in the past, in the present and I hope –with renewed impulse- in the future!

I congratulate the Alexandrina Contemporary Music Biennale and its promoters for making all this possible. I am

sure that it will be successful in reinforcing this kind of exchange, creating and developing a great forum that will help to develop reciprocal knowledge between Mediterranean people, as well as link Europe to the Middle East region. Spain has certainly an important role in this point. I feel very grateful for giving me the opportunity to participate in such an exciting project.”



### **Benet Casablanca (1956)**

Born in Sabadell (Barcelona), Benet Casablanca 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, 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, Leipziger Streichquartett, Ensemble Modern Akademie, Deutsches Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Orchestre National de Belgique, NJO of The Netherlands, Malmö Symfoni Orkester, Orquesta Nacional de España, London Philharmonic Orchestra, etc.). In 2008 he made his debut with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and his *New Epigrams* 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 and the Miller Theatre at Columbia University New York. In 2007 he was awarded the National Music Prize granted by the Generalitat de Catalunya. Early on his career he began combining composition with teaching and research. 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 several Spanish conservatories, educational director of the Catalan National Youth Orchestra 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, among which, 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). 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 virtuosoism coexist. His works have been recorded by Naxos, Stradivarius, Anemos and Tritó. 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 Maastricht, the Ensemble Cantus Croatia (Zagreb Biennale) and the Tokyo Sinfonietta.

**BCN 216 & London Sinfonietta Performing The Two Master Pieces of B.Casablancas Epigrams, New Epigrams.**

## **EPIGRAMS**

The brief, inspired *Epigrams* (1990) is the first of Casablancas' incursions into the dense, richly contrasted universe of epigrammatic composition, with all its tonal subtleties. It has since been followed by *New Epigrams* (1997) for chamber orchestra, the symphonic *Tres Epigramas* (2001) and, by way of a corollary, the piano suite *Siete Epigramas* (2000–03). All of these are marked by what critics have referred to as “an extreme density and sophisticated timbral elaboration that constantly plays with contrast”, “his rhythmical refinements and colouristic surprises”, “his resolutely complex and luxuriant writing”, “a sound idiom with a surprising musculature that verges on the orchestral”. So condensed does the music become that its many potential trajectories are no sooner sketched out than they become transformed, creating a fertile whirlwind of sensations, references and surprises. Some of the procedures employed here, as well as aligning themselves stylistically with the Vienna of Wittgenstein so beloved of the composer, anticipate a personal idiom: melodic lines that explore an instrument's entire register and emphasise particular notes over and over again, a tendency to build maximum variety and virtuosity into the individual discourse, *perpetuum mobile*-like episodes and the inclusion of ecstatic

passages. The three-part structure is classical in design, two lively outer movements flanking a slow central movement.

## **New Epigrams”**

*New Epigrams* (ca. 10:30), was written in June 1997 to be recorded by the London Sinfonietta (cond. E. Colomer) and sponsored by the Sabadell City Hall. The term *epigram* refers to a classical literary form which features an ingenious sentence, quite often with a moral or ethical meaning or even playful or humorous. In the context intended here it describes a piece with a highly concentrated musical content within very concise temporal structures. All of these aspects come together in the series of works by this composer, all of which use the word epigram in their titles: *Epigrams*, for six performers, *Three epigrams*, for symphony orchestra, *Seven epigrams*, for piano, and the *New Epigrams*. The first movement’s dramatic, almost violent, intensity creates a strong contrast to the second movement’s mysterious, night-time atmosphere, calmer in terms of accentuation but also deeply disquieting, supported by refined and rich contrapuntal textures within a predominantly static climate, which dissolves into nothing. The work ends with music of playful nature; a scherzo of sudden, explosive accents, taking up the dynamic character of the first one with its joyous trills, luminous and brilliant sonorities, and at the same time reaching a pronounced virtuosity during the piece; the piano’s relevance here gives it a *finale concertante* kind of feeling. In the words of Jonathan Harvey, “Casablanca writes with a...classic polyphonic clarity that is uncommon these days...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...are softer and more veiled; the bright Spanish light is nocturnal and one hears more blend than brilliant blare...Texture is complex rather than multi-polyphonic...One willingly acquiesces in landscapes of the imagination, with birdsong, perhaps.”

This is one of the composer’s most widely known pieces. Since its public premiere in Barcelona that same year by the Teatre Lliure Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Josep Pons, the *New Epigrams* have been widely performed throughout all Europe and USA, e. g. Festival Musica Strasbourg (Teatre Lliure Chamber Orchestra, 1999), XVI International Festival de Alicante (Grupo Enigma, 2000), Biennale für Neue Musik “Öhren auf Europa” of Düsseldorf (Notabu Ensemble für Neue Musik, 2003), Saint Petersburg (L’ Hermitage State Chamber Orchestra, 2003), La Tour-de-Trême (Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne, 2004), Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble (Ohio, 2007), II Spanien Modern (Wien Musikverein, Grup Barcelona 216, 2008), Vilnius and Zagreb (ISCM World Music Days, Ensemble Cantus Croatia, 2008), Composer Portrait at Miller Theatre at Columbia University New York (Perspectives Ensemble, 2010) and Madrid (London Sinfonietta, Museo Reina Sofía, 2010).



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