


WILLIAM ORTIZ *Rumbeando en la Melangolla*¹. *Yo fui la más Callada*². *Trio Concertante en 3 Realidades*³. *Nací*⁴. *Brisa Urbana*⁵. *Songs of Coconut*⁶. *Tamboleo*⁷. *Rito Ceremonial of the Church of the Spanglish Nación*⁸. *Bombazo: Dancing in the Heat of Ogún*⁹ • ¹David Carter (cl); ¹Ricardo Coelho de Souza, ⁷Dave Kemp (perc); ¹Nelson González Bareto (db); ²Ilca Lopez (mez); ²Diana Figueroa, ⁴Ernesto Busigó, ⁹John Zeff, ⁹Samuele Bergamini (pn); ³German Dmitriev (vn); ³Lera Matveeva (va); ³Elisey Vasiliev (vc); ⁴Nicole Samara Ortiz, ⁸Camila Otero, ⁸Gabriele Timofeeva, ⁸Amaya Ortiz (sop); ⁵Katherine Herrero (fl); ⁶Amarilis Pagán-Vila, dir; ⁸Emanuel Olivieri, cond; ⁶Camerata Coral de Puerto Rico; ⁸O Camerata Filamónica • CENTAUR 4071 (65:29 )

Puerto Rico-born William Ortiz-Alvarado has been featured on Centaur once before, a disc reviewed by multiple commentators in *Fanfare* 23:1 (sadly, I was not one of them). Although Ortiz studied in Puerto Rico, he moved to Buffalo for further education; one of his teachers was Morton Feldman, although it would be difficult to guess that from the very attractive, well-crafted music here.

The title of the disc is *Antidogma* and reflects a vital part of Ortiz' thought process. He intends to provide vocal and musical "graffiti," in response to the elevation of actual graffiti into art by the Haitian-Puerto Rican artist Jean-Michel Basquiat (who died far too early because of a heroin addiction). Certainly, Ortiz's *Rumbeando en la Melangolla* bursts with energy. Scored for clarinet double-bass and percussion, there is a feel of modern jazz here, the music as eclectic a mix as that of Puerto Rico itself. David Carter's clarinet hops, staccato, against the delicious off-beats of Ricardo Coelho de Souza's percussion (conga, vibraphone and cymbal). The neologism "Melangolla" of the title refers to the melting pot of influences around the geographical area of Puerto Rico. The music is sometimes hectic, but never overloaded (bassist Nelson González Bareto certainly has a lot to do, too, the double-bass part agile and exciting). The performance is a miracle of controlled vivacity.

The earlier song *Yo fui la más callada* (2003) is to a text by Julia de Burgos, it is a song that has elements of a dramatic scena about it. Mezzo Ilca Lopez is fervent in delivery, while pianist Diana Figueroa is a marvellously responsive pianist. The underpinning of longer lines with characteristic rhythms works well. Even earlier is the *Trio Concertante en 3 Realidades*, for string trio (violin, viola, and cello): this dates from 1995. The three "realities" of the title are: the anti-dogma of Afro religiosity, an Afro-Caribbean transformation of hip-hop; the second is a tropical idyll that mourns the victims of AIDS; and the third "reality" combines domestic Puerto Rican lullaby with the Western tradition as exemplified by Paganini. The first movement, "Bailando con los santos," is complex yet approachable. German Dmitriev, Lera Matveeva and Elisey Vasiliev work beautifully together. Recording venues and dates do vary from piece to piece, and this one (Krosnoyarsk, Russia) is too dry, too airless. A pity, as Ortiz's piece is well constructed and includes some brilliant timbral contrasts. The slow beat of the central "Idyllo Tropical" similarly finds the cello pizzicatos robbed of resonance; the payback is linear transparency between the upper instruments for this touching lament for those victims of AIDS. Finally, "Música doméstica,," that rather odd juxtaposition/fusion of lullaby and virtuosity. It includes a marvellously witty moment when a famous lullaby melody appears unadorned; similarly, a Paganini snippet everyone will know makes a clear appearance (hint: the players have to sing, too).

Two songs frame the trio: after, we hear *Nací* (1989). The text was gifted the composer on the occasion of a first-born by Etnairis Ribera, and the music is appropriately warm and welcoming. Soprano Nicole Samara Ortiz has a pure voice which needs (and receives) little vibrato. Interesting to follow that with quite a modernist solo flute piece, *Brisa*

Urbana (2020), a work that utilizes a number of extended *flute* techniques. Katherine Herrero is the expert performer (her beat box imitation is almost as impressive as her nimble playing!).

The three songs of *Songs of Coconut* (2009) are themselves a melting pot. This set should be a required piece for all advanced choirs: the writing is alert, chock-full of fun, and alive. Here, the recording (made in San Juan) is a good combination of dryness and body: it allows all detail to shine but does not steal any presence. The music is eminently approachable and well performed throughout (just a touch of shrillness to the upper female voices in the final song).

Percussion is a vital part of South American expression, and Ortiz offers a piece for one percussionist, *Tamboleo*. The performer is asked occasionally to vocalize as well as perform on various drums; solo percussion works can be difficult to sustain and here the piece's strength lies in its brevity.

With its references to "Spanglish," the *Rito Ceremonial* declares a pluralism that extends to its religious references: Gregorian Chant mixes with an Our Father in the Taino language; Afro deities are also cited. There is something of a South American post-Orff about this; no bad thing, as the music is absolutely fascinating in its unpredictability.

From Santa Maria to Santería: the final piece, written in 2021, references Santería's "Iron Warrior," Ogún (there is also something decidedly Oedipal about his story). The composer has transferred the traditional drums, and their dialogs, to two pianos, expertly performed by John Zeff and Samuele Bergamini. There is a Minimalist, Glass-like, tendency to this piece; the title refers to a specific type of drum. A fine, and imaginative, way to close the disc. Zeff and Bergamini play together as one mind. Fabulous.

The only minus here, really, is the variable recording quality between pieces. William Ortiz is a most imaginative composer, and well worth investigating. **Colin Clarke**

Four stars: William Ortiz is a most imaginative composer, and well worth investigating.
Recommended