

IMAGES OF BROKEN LIGHT

The magnetism of *Vent del capvespre* (Evening wind) captivates the listener from the very start. Each note, each gesture demands a form of listening that is clear of thoughts, an experience more physical than intellectual, bringing to mind Goethe's statement: "The more inaccessible a work of art is to our rational judgement, the more sublime it is."

It is not a study in the control of time or architectural form, nor a calculated development of discourse: it is a clear observation of the exact instant – neither before nor after– in which a sound is born, grows and is extinguished. The alchemy of sounds, placed with minute precision, goes beyond the perception of time to anchor itself in a place of deep and expansive horizons, a landscape that is inaccessible to reason, a face-to-face encounter with bright, vibrant harmonies.

Josep Maria Guix's particular way of composing can be defined as sculpting the work with love, voiding the sound material rather than filling it, as can be clearly heard at the start of *Vent del capvespre*. The dense layer of indeterminate sound does not set itself up in opposition to the flute melody but, rather, envelops it to form a single unit. It is as though the unpolished texture were the fertile terrain in which the gestation and miraculous birth of motifs and resonant chords originate, metaphor for an organism with a life of its own.

The preference for delicate expression is evident in the indications in the score –*very soft, almost inaudible, quiet motion*– and the work's dynamics, dominated by *pianissimo*. The result: an apparent contradiction between the immobility of the harmony and the activity of internal voices, which creates an energetic, vigorous stasis, not unlike Antoine Brumel's mass *Et ecce terrae motus*, so beloved by the composer.

Echo is a recurring phenomenon in the composer's catalogue and, with a display of prodigious skill, occurs at the start of the third movement, where a morphing of timbres connects the piccolo's penetrating tone to the crotales rubbed with the violin bow. The beauty of this passage can only be explained by a total separation from the ego, an abandonment of all mental speculation, and by the impeccable skill of sculpting time with sound. *Jardín seco* (Dry garden) too closes with a sliding echo of flute and clarinet, allegory of the gust of wind that stirs up dead leaves in a poem by Matsuo Basho.

Fernando Zóbel, a painter sympathetic to Josep Maria Guix's diffuse and diaphanous outlines, comments in his introductory course on contemporary painting that painting is a visual language, in which the first thing one must do is give observation a chance, contemplate reality, not glance over the surface but wait patiently with an open attitude so that the work reveals its essence to us. In the title piece, *Jardín seco*, different natural phenomenon, both sonorous –water, the bell, wind– and non-sonorous –the fall of a maple leaf displaying alternately one face and then the other, the sun's force above the willows– are illustrated with a precision that renders words superfluous.

Some examples: space suggested by two descending piano chords that lose themselves in the distance; Zen bells which ring ceremoniously criss-crossing the liquid sounds of the waterphone, a curious recently invented percussion instrument adopted by the composer (for whom research into colour is of the utmost importance); the simple melodies of chords that accumulate heterophonically, tracing circles in different layers to create something rich and complex out of what was, to begin with, simple.

The characteristic element known as *wind chimes effect*, a kaleidoscopic effect of trembling notes on instruments such as the piano and harp, conceals a special charm. Physically, a link exists between the chance nature of the clapper and the slowing down of white sound, a substratum containing all audible frequencies. Close listening to the partial notes allows them to be gradually assimilated, like the absorption of the sound of the sea's waves, or of a breeze through the branches of pine trees. Once again, it is a direct evocation of nature.

Issa Kobayashi writes "Slowly, the lake disappears in the mist... Evening falls," lines that capture the essence of a reality and are the point of departure for the first movement of *Slowly... in Mist* for trio and piano. The freezing of time –achieved by a minute and irregular repetition of B flat that gives an unexpected ecstatic effect– leads into a new world: that of the interior of the note, with its spectrum, harmonic relations and fluctuations of sound mass. The second movement, with an introductory ringing of bells from the piano, allows us to glimpse a remarkable melodic capacity that, with the experience of years, is becoming ever stronger in the composer's work. The third movement opens a fissure of circular time where cycles of arpeggiated figurations with resonances of partial notes in the chords evoke the "festival of water-drops from the tree" in the haiku that inspired it.

Llàgrimes de tardor (Evening tears), an expansive, placid elegy for violin and piano, journeys from the well-defined initial motif –in the manner of a musical

box– to an ending that is suspended and volatile, elevated, and addressed to Joseph Brodsky when he states that “a tear is an acknowledgment of the retina’s, as well as the tear’s, failure to retain beauty.”

Tres haikus (Three haikus) for violin and piano –whose first movement is constructed as a search for a *forte* resolution, masterly in its directionality– reveal an affinity for Olivier Messiaen’s luminous chords. The pieces use complex harmonic structures –six and seven note chords, avoiding triads– and create an interplay between pentatonic scales, intervals of perfect fourths and fifths and a certain degree of inharmonicity, while evoking sound landscapes that are captivatingly vivid.

The distribution of sound in the performance space is a significant aspect of Josep Maria Guix’s catalogue, both in terms of the physical placing of performers and the creation of imaginary virtual space. In *Stella* (Star), a miniature for piano based on *Cantiga 100* by Alfonso X and on the tenth song by Frederic Mompou, various metallic chords create an admirable auditory illusion of distance, of nostalgia for the infinite, of a call simultaneously found within oneself and beyond reach. The end, with its mechanical cyclical construction, brings to mind an innocence lost in childhood but, perhaps, regained in maturity.

Maximum expressivity and the containment of resources are evidence of the enormous skill employed in *Set haikus* (Seven haikus) for solo cello: the abandoning of pulsation, the *jeté*, melodies descending like falling petals, surprising contrasts between double chords and tremolo, and certain rhythmic motifs in the form of a curious morse code – a technique subsequently developed in *Tres haikus* for string quartet. Together they comprise a formidable arsenal of elements that form the backbone of a work of concentrated lyricism.

Beauty, the desired ideal, is inalienable for Josep Maria Guix, and in its pursuit he hones all the techniques and materials at his disposal: research into timbre through analysis of the acoustic spectrum, stand-out gestural innovations –*wind chimes effect*, *delay*, *heart beat effect*– organically blurred outlines, distribution of sound in real and virtual space, and non-discursive forms that begin and end in themselves, as if each note were unique and had been lovingly sculpted.

An attentive, unhurried listening –without which the beauty of this music cannot be grasped– makes it possible to perceive the absorbing power of the sound moment, intuition carefully worked with solid craftsmanship, humility

visible in the concise format of the works, and that immeasurable Absolute to which Antonio Machado's lines point: "Be prepared but don't set out, be patient; for art is long and, also, doesn't matter."

RAMON HUMET, COMPOSER