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Pride, place, and identity: Jaime León's transcontinental exploration of identity through art song

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PRIDE, PLACE, AND IDENTITY:
JAIME LEÓN’S TRANSCONTINENTAL EXPLORATION
OF IDENTITY THROUGH ART SONG

by

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ABSTRACT

There are few publications at present addressing the topic of Colombian art song. In the past two decades, researchers have begun to discover and present pertinent, useful information about the development of song literature in this country beyond brief historical and regional context, but our understanding of the subject remains dim. Jaime León (b. 1921) is a virtual unknown in the music world. Yet his contribution to the development and placement of Colombian art song in the Latin American canon is undeniably invaluable. His 36 songs provide insight into Colombia’s artistic values and culture, poetic development, and folkloric and nationalistic tendencies, thereby elucidating the country’s position in the context of Latin America’s musical growth, particularly within the art song genre. This study explores the rich wellspring of his song output with respect to his compositional style, transcontinental artistic development, and unusual career trajectory. It also seeks to place him within the context of the evolution of Latin American art song genre in the twentieth century, including comparisons to selected continental contemporaries.
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INTRODUCTION

There are a mere handful of publications at present addressing the topic of Colombian art song. Only in the past two decades have researchers found and presented pertinent, useful information about the development of song literature in this country beyond brief historical and regional context, such as can be found in the Latin American musicological compendiums by Gerard Béhague and Nicolas Slonimsky. These older publications provide an adequate springboard for the interested modern researcher, but they remain outdated and brief in investigation, and virtually omit the art song genre as a whole. Simply put, our understanding of Latin American art song - past and present - remains dim. When it comes to Colombian art song, we are in the dark.

Jaime León (b. 1921) is a virtual unknown in the music world. Yet his contribution to the development and placement of Colombian art song in the Latin American canon is undeniably invaluable. His 36 songs provide insight into Colombia’s artistic values and culture, poetic development, and folkloric and nationalistic tendencies, thereby elucidating the country’s position in the context of Latin America’s musical development, particularly within the art song genre.

A small number of Colombian composers have registered on the historical map, perhaps most notably Guillermo Uribe-Holguín (1880-1971), director of Colombia’s Conservatorio Nacional for twenty-five years and a student of Vincent d’Indy. Holguín exemplifies Latin American composition’s most ubiquitous trend of the twenty-first
century: nationalism within a European romantic context. Very few Latin American composers appear to have successfully escaped the veil of 19th-century European Romanticism, and those who gained notoriety in the 20th-century achieved a palatable synthesis of progressive European technique combined with nationalistic thematic material and instrumentation. For the Central and South American continents and Caribbean nations, this “nationalistic” material drew largely upon the widespread blend of Iberian and French colonial, Afro-Hispanic, and indigenous cultural elements, along with folk influence that developed uniquely and individually not just on national levels, but within numerous specific regions throughout each Latin American nation. Among Latin America's celebrated names are Heitor Villa-Lobos, Alberto Ginastera, Carlos Chavez, and within the art song genre, Carlos Guastavino. With the exception of Guastavino, these composers achieved acclaim by means of large-scale orchestral works and adequate exposure throughout the United States and Europe, frequently aided by well-known advocates and friends like Aaron Copland, Serge Koussevitsky, and Darius Milhaud. Song composition is grossly underrepresented amongst this group, save a few well-known works such as Villa-Lobos' *Modinhas e Canções* and *Serestas*, as well as numerous settings by his teacher, Francisco Ernani Braga, who studied in Europe with Massenet and applied classical techniques to Afro-Hispanic dialects and rhythms in his


music. Ginastera is known for his *Cinco canciones populares argentinas*, and a number of Guastavino’s individual songs which have gained popularity among singers and pianists. This limited output represents the bulk of Latin American song represented in typical recital programming and discography. Recently, León’s songs have appeared in recital and recording thanks to the efforts of Colombian soprano and musicologist Patricia Caicedo, who in 2009 published two volumes of León’s songs, including translations, a brief biography, and short introductions to the poets set within. These volumes are extraordinarily helpful in the dissemination of León’s songs to the public and provide an excellent guide to pronunciation and an introduction to the lives of the composer and the poets whose texts he set, but they lack complete biographical information and in-depth compositional and textual analysis. Additionally, bringing light to this music is delicate; León himself has been reluctant to share and publish his compositional output. 4

Many of León’s better-known contemporaries, like Argentina’s Alberto Ginastera and Mexico’s Carlos Chávez, evolved through several compositional phases, eventually employing post-tonal techniques in addition to their conscious efforts to break from Western neo-Romanticism by fusing with the folk sounds of their respective nations. Both Ginastera and Chávez differ from León in those respects, and also in that they became extremely well known within their respective countries and internationally for their large symphonic works, many of which still appear on programs today. León’s

songwriting mostly lives within his own compositional realm - a method that employs extremely singable, prosody-based melodies, and lush, tonal harmonies peppered with jazzy chromaticism. The sound is neo-Romantic, breezy, and generally effortless. The songs maintain a quality of ease that evokes lullabies for a sleeping, crib-bound child, or serenades to a lover from beneath a veranda. This is not to say that the compositions are overly simplistic in construction; in fact, the structures within -- both harmonically and formally -- are clearly thought out. But his compositional emphasis is most certainly upon clarity of text, beauty, and freedom from constraint.

Unlike many of his Latin American contemporaries, León’s goal seems clearly not to push the art song medium forward through experimental compositional techniques nor to make efforts to put the region on the map by means of post-tonal or harmonically wild innovation. What León gives us in these songs is an emphasis on the music-text relationship, utterly venerating poetry we would most likely not hear otherwise. The texts, ranging from Christmas songs and lullabies to sentimental odes to the homeland, frequently highlight the nostalgia that pervades much of Colombian culture. Perhaps the composer’s greatest contribution is the exposure of the poetry he chose to set and the delicacy with which he set it. The fellow South American songwriter with whom he probably has the most in common is Carlos Guastavino, a comparison I will explore in Chapter 3.

Despite the dissimilarity in many regards of his work to some of his contemporaries, León’s approach is exemplary of one of the greatest through-lines in Latin American compositional tradition since colonization by the Europeans: aspiring to
European compositional standards while honoring the unique, varied cultural traditions of the region. Identity in Colombia, as with the rest of Latin America, is a major driving force in artistic and cultural development.\textsuperscript{5} Much like the nationalist artistic movements found in so many European nations - Italy, Russia, Germany - during the nineteenth century, most Latin American nations struggled with a search for artistic identity a century later.\textsuperscript{6} This movement was enriched further by the cultural intersection of indigenous people living in the region before Iberian colonization and the prevalent African slave trade throughout South America. Colombia is particularly interesting in its colonial and post-colonial musical development with respect to the geographical implications of its varied cultural influences. The evolution of the nation’s mestizo folk music tradition was directly affected by geography -- primarily by the Andes mountain range that bisects the country, as well as two coasts (Caribbean and Pacific). These powerful attributes lend many urban centers isolation and, in turn, isolate the rural areas even more. Béhague notes that despite clearly being an Andean nation, Colombia’s mestizo musical culture derives largely from the obvious intersection of Spanish, Pacific Afro-Colombian, and Caribbean elements.\textsuperscript{7} Slonimsky includes a quote by Emirto de Lima from his book \textit{Folklore Colombiano} in his chapter on Colombia that speaks to the perceived qualities found regionally in the nation’s folk music:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{5} Patricia Caicedo, ed., \textit{The Colombian Art Song, Jaime León: Analysis and Compilation of His Works for Voice and Piano, Vol. 1} (Barcelona: Mundo Arts, 2009), 34.

\textsuperscript{6} Béhague, 96-97.

\textsuperscript{7} Béhague, 159.
\end{quote}
In Colombia we find elements of the culture of three races that have passed through Latin America. Listening to the beat of a drum, one conjures up a picture of African slaves driven down the coast during an era now happily past. In the dolorous chants of the Indians of the Amazon region, there is the wistfulness of the aborigines, who express their yearning in the melancholy sounds of the flutes. And when a dapper boy, or a young lady of Santander or Cundinamarca, picks up a guitar and recites a sentimental ballad, one is transported as if by magic into ancient Spain. What a delight it is to recapture in these rhythms, chords, dissonances, accents, and gambols, the aura of the old romance, the passions and ardors of bygone days.  

While de Lima’s quote is a bit archaic in both perception and execution, it captures well the multi-dimensional feeling of Colombia’s folk sounds. Each of its regions is distinctly isolated by geography, but their music contains similar elements, as if they were given the same set of ingredients, but each yielded different yet familiar dishes by way of isolation and ingenuity.

Jaime León’s art song sound world taps into de Lima’s sentiment, both through writing style and choice of poetry. The folk elements he occasionally draws upon aid this endeavor and are grounded in conservative, European compositional technique in the tradition of the French mélodie, the German Lied, and the Spanish canción. He is not alone in the employment of these factors: countless composers have followed this formula, including Carlos Guastavino and Alberto Ginastera. However, León’s defining component -- which adds further dimension to his musical identity -- is the influence of American jazz and musical theater. In this way, it seems as though he has transcended his compatriots’ struggle to reconcile their varied regional culture with European formalism. Instead, León created a continent-spanning musical language that serves not only his

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8 Nicolas Slonimsky, Music of Latin America (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1945), 166.
heritage, but also his emblematically Colombian poetic choices, unique compositional voice, and international worldview.
CHAPTER 1
LEON'S LIFE

At the age of three, Jaime León Ferro moved to the United States for the first time. It was a journey he would come to know well over the course of his life and a key factor in his development as a composer. His travels between the United States and Colombia provided him, whether he realized it at the time or not, the makings of a unique compositional voice steeped in the heritages of both his native and adopted countries. Crisscrossing the Western hemisphere as a youth and touring as a conductor and répétiteur throughout the United States as an adult deeply informed the art song composition he began in the early 1950s and would return to again in the 1970s for the next twenty years.

After moving to San Francisco at the age of three, the León family relocated to New York City shortly thereafter where Jaime began piano lessons with one Leo Holtz. He assimilated well into the life of an average American child, attending preparatory school in Newark, New Jersey where he went by his Anglicized name, James Leon. (He would revert to this appellation often while living in the United States.) At 16, León’s father took employment with an oil company in rural Cúcuta, Colombia, and León enrolled soon after at a boarding school in Bogotá, allowing him a far more comprehensive education and continued music lessons. Upon graduation, he attended the Escuela Nacional de Comercio and the Conservatorio Nacional de Música, where he

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9 Botero, 12.
studied piano with Lucía Pérez and Tatiana Goncharova de Espinoza, as well as music theory with Guillermo Uribe-Holguín, director of the Conservatorio Nacional and founder of the National Symphony Orchestra of Colombia. One of Colombia’s most prominent cultural figures of the twentieth century, Uribe-Holguín was a student of Vincent d’Indy alongside contemporaries Erik Satie and Joaquín Turina in Paris thirty years earlier. Regarded as one of the most influential Colombian composers of his generation, Uribe-Holguín’s compositional style was greatly influenced by his time in France; in fact, his song settings make use of largely French 19th century poets like Verlaine, Hugo, and Baudelaire, while his compositional style is considered heavily impressionistic with strong nationalist elements.10

Leon’s time at the Conservatory also provided him brief studies with Chilean pianist Claudio Arrau during his short residency there in 1941. This encounter, and possibly continued contact with Arrau, encouraged him to apply to the Juilliard School soon after.11 He matriculated in the fall of 1943, again under the name “James Leon.”

While at Juilliard, Leon studied piano with Carl Friedberg - one of Clara Schumann’s final students. It was perhaps with Friedberg that he began to seriously think about song and the human voice. From an interview in 2003, he says:

My teacher [Carl Friedberg] used to say, “The piano is not a percussive instrument.” And I had no idea what he was talking about. He would say, “This is a noble instrument. You have to sing. Have you ever heard a singer?” and quite frankly no I hadn’t, “Well go and hear a good singer. Listen how they phrase.”

10 Béhague, 161.

11 Botero, 11.
And he taught me to do the same at the piano. Not by pressure, no I never even suspected it. He was a brilliant man.\textsuperscript{12}

Soon after his arrival in New York, he took his piano department’s advice and joined a small quasi-amateur opera company called the Mascagni Opera Guild as a conductor, with help from a connection through his father. There, he rubbed elbows and polished his conducting chops at the podium amongst an orchestra of fellow Juilliard students and alongside Nicola Rescigno (who later co-founded both the Lyric Opera of Chicago and the Dallas Opera) and a young Julius Rudel. This led to a conducting fellowship studying with Edgar Schenkman at Juilliard after the completion of his piano studies. Around this time, a friend and colleague from Friedberg’s studio, Glauco d’Attili, provided him with a singular life-changing experience that would profoundly influence León’s future: the opportunity to play for Arturo Toscanini and watch him conduct a rehearsal at the Metropolitan Opera.\textsuperscript{13}

... I turned and looked down into the pit, and instead of a music stand, there was just a light - [Toscanini was conducting] from memory - all from memory. Not that his conducting from memory made me want to become a conductor, but that man was a genius. I will never get to that point, but I wanted to try it out. And I did. Then came the process of luck. I had a lot of luck.\textsuperscript{14}

At the age of twenty-six, León was surprised with an invitation to helm the podium of the Sinfónica Nacional back in Bogotá. Granted a withdrawal from Juilliard, he headed back to his native country for the prestigious conducting position, which lasted

\textsuperscript{12} Botero, 12.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 14.
from 1947-1949. He also served on faculty at his alma mater, the Conservatorio Nacional, teaching piano, choral conducting, and orchestral conducting during this period. His move back to Colombia was cut short, however, by the eruption of the Colombian revolution in Bogotá in 1948. Known widely as “La Violencia,” this ten-year period of civil war between the Colombian Conservative Party and the Colombian Liberal Party began with the assassination of Liberal Party presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán on April 9, 1948. The assassination incited ten hours of rioting at the cost of 5,000 lives. Scholars estimate that the death toll over the course of the decade-long war was between 200,000 and 300,000.

León left his position almost immediately and returned to Juilliard where he began post-graduate work in orchestral conducting with Dean Dixon, one of the first notable African-American conductors to rise to prominence in the twentieth century. But Dixon departed the school within a year due to what León implies was racial discrimination. Despite having given his debut with the New York Philharmonic the same year, Dixon left the United States altogether for guest conducting stints throughout Europe and Israel before finally settling as music director of the Goeteborg Symphony in Sweden. He would not return to the United States until 1970. This unjust event was the first of many acts of prejudice León would experience firsthand while working in the United States, profoundly affecting his beliefs in social justice and inequality. Of the experience, he says

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15 Botero, 15.

My conducting teacher was Dean Dixon, a very famous American conductor. Because he was black he was unfortunately never accepted in any of the orchestras [in the United States]. But he made his reputation in Europe. He was a great conductor, a fantastic teacher; the only problem is he had a little chip on his shoulder all the time. You can understand in the late 1940s; he was part of the whole cycle of refusal, as it were. He had a professorship at Juilliard that was discontinued because of that. It was something that I don’t want to remember. It was cruel, very cruel. But he made his career in Europe in Stockholm. He had his own orchestra, had a lot of records, a marvelous man.17

With Dixon gone, León decided to withdraw from the school a second time and return to Colombia once again with an incomplete degree. The return was short-lived: the country was still reeling from the throes of La Violencia, and after marrying his wife Beatriz, they relocated back to New York City. This would mark the start of León’s longest stay in one place to date; he would remain in the United States until 1972.

Beginning in 1950, León sought work as a professional conductor and pianist where he could, and soon he found his niche in the world of dance and theater. After applying with the Juilliard Placement Bureau for help finding employment, he took a job playing, accompanying, and teaching for a summer arts camp for adults in upstate New York. It was here that an immersion in song perhaps sparked his desire to marry his interests in piano and voice.18 The following fall, he wrote his first song, “Aves y ensueños,” with text by José Joaquin Casas.

Of his days as a young, hustling professional, León says

Let me tell you, the period between graduating and earning your living, that is hard... I defended myself in the market of earning a living. I was a good accompanist, and I earned money playing those jobs. It was a process like this:

17 Botero, 224.

18 Ibid., 17.
started to work with companies because I had a reputation of going through music very quickly. They called me tragonotas, “the note eater,” and that’s very necessary in New York. I was a very good accompanist for singers, one of my specializations was in that, and I also started to have students. So I was running from here to there.19

In the winter of 1952, León found employment accompanying and conducting for the Haitian Ballet while on tour through the American south. Again, he observed and experienced racism alongside his fellow artists and musicians:20

That was for me an education. I traveled with them [the ballet] in the south of the US. I was not familiar with the problems of the blacks. I had not really had contact with that. The Haitians, beautiful people, were put on a bus to do a tour in the south and I was their pianist. There were three of us who were white, myself, the driver and the director; everyone else was black, about 20 people total. We stopped in a place close to New Orleans to go to the bathroom and there weren’t any facilities at all [for the dancers]. There was a restaurant, a cafeteria; I bought 20 hamburgers, 20 coffees and everything else because they wouldn’t let them inside. And the guy at the counter asked me, —Are you going to eat this? We don’t serve niggers here. We got to New Orleans and the bus driver, the director and I were sent to one hotel and the others to a horrible little hotel on the other side of the tracks.21

Soon after the tour ended, he wrote a second song, “La campesina,” which explores themes of injustice in the text and exploits a popular Colombian folk dance rhythm and style, the bambuco. It is hard to know without proper documentation, but it is worth considering that the music on this tour may have had an influence upon León’s germinating compositional voice. At the very least, it is highly likely that the experience

19 Botero, 227.

20 Botero notes that in her interviews, León referred to this group as the “Haitian Ballet,” but that available documentation suggests the group could have been one of two touring ballet troupes from Haiti at the time, either the Afro-Haitian Dance Company or First Troupe Folklorique Nacionale, also known as Haiti National Folklore Group.

21 Ibid., 18.
of traveling with fellow Caribbean natives rang with warmth and familiarity in the composer. Like Colombia, Haiti’s musical identity is a mishmash of incredibly disparate elements, including a strong formal basis in French romanticism, Haitian voudou, Hispanic-American and French and Dutch Caribbean influence, as well as Haitian folk melody. León’s birthplace of Cartagena is deeply Caribbean, with all aspects of life and art steeped equally in Spanish colonialism and Afro-Hispanic influence; indeed, most major cities throughout the country, including the capital of Bogotá, are representative of this rich blend of origins, frequently with the addition of Amerindian components. Despite its varied roots, however, Colombia’s history of racism and struggles with discrimination mirror the United States’ own fraught history with the same issues. It seems undeniable that his experience witnessing discrimination against his fellow artists from a place so like his home would have struck the chord within him that produced “La campesina.” Incidentally, like much of Haitian and Afro-Caribbean folk music, the bambuco, a dance melody alternating between 3/4 and 6/8, has its roots in West Africa.

The back-and-forth nature of León’s formative years was unusual for a composer of his region and generation. Many of his contemporaries - Blas Galindo, Alberto


Ginastera, for example - traveled abroad to the United States or Europe, in many cases to the promised land of the Berkshire Music Center (later known as the Tanglewood Music Center), where Galindo and Ginastera both studied with Aaron Copland, and then returned to their respective countries with the tools they had gained. Perhaps it was the duality of his upbringing in both hemispheres that allowed León to be comfortable with constant change and uprooting. It is also clear that this geographic upheaval had an enormous influence on León’s compositional style, for amongst his art music settings of traditional folk dances like *bambucos* and *pasillos*, he also wrote works with titles like “Made in USA,” a piano prelude. While on tour with the Spanish Ballet led by Hurtado de Cordoba in the early 1950s, León conducted and choreographed arrangements of Albéniz fused with Lorca’s flamenco poems, which were well received during the Ballet’s European leg, but panned in New York.

This brief stint in León’s extensive touring career is important to note because it exposed him to such a fusion of artistic styles. Not only is the music from this tour related to his own Iberian heritage, but it also speaks to the conflation of styles as a medium for expression that became so central to León’s compositional songwriting style.

León went on to become the conductor of the prestigious American Ballet Theatre where he would stay until 1958. The company took him on tour across the United States, through Europe, parts of the Middle East, and Latin America, where the group

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25 Caicedo, 30.
26 Botero, 19.
27 Exploration of León’s compositional style in his art songs can be found in Chapter 2.
encountered the political strife and instability from which León fled just a few years before, both in Bogotá and Buenos Aires. The young conductor met challenges including understaffed and underprepared local orchestras in Guatemala City and Quito, run-ins with the military police in Bogotá, and curfew-induced cancellations in Buenos Aires. But the tour also provided him the rare opportunity to meet and even read through new scores by a few of his Latin American contemporaries, including Mexico’s Blas Galindo, Uruguayan Carlos Estrada, Peru’s Andrés Sas, and the internationally recognized Argentine composer Alberto Ginastera. Though at this point he had dedicated far less time to composing than conducting, these brief encounters with his Latin American contemporaries likely had less of an influence upon him than the North American music he was tasked with exporting to the continent of his birth and heritage. His time with the American Ballet Theatre allowed him to conduct Copland and Bernstein, amongst other more standard European repertory, and in his off seasons, León worked regularly conducting for musical theater productions, including Loesser’s Most Happy Fella, and for a slew of summer stock shows and revues for the Dallas State Fair, featuring heavy-hitters of the theater world like Kaye Ballard and film star Ginger Rogers. In an interview in 2005, León described his five summers there as “the most joyful of his career.”

In 1958, Nicola Rescigno, his old colleague from the Mascagni Opera, founded the Dallas Civic Opera and offered León the positions of chorus master and répétiteur. In their opening season, he acted as répétiteur for productions of Verdi’s La Traviata,
Cherubini’s *Medea*, and Rossini’s *L’italiana in Algeri*, the first two starring none other than Maria Callas. Of the experience, León says this:

Rescigno hired me as a repetiteur. I had no idea who was singing. It was *Traviata*. I sat at the piano and I hear this voice [asking me], “Do you know your score? I do not work with amateurs.” And that’s how I met Maria Callas. I sat at the piano and I swear I played like Horowitz. I swallowed that bitter pill of my own pride that I was not used to doing. And afterwards she did not excuse herself but she looked at me with something like incredulity. We didn’t become friends but I got to know the great artist. As a woman though, she was absolutely impossible. At her side was Teresa Berganza, a beautiful person, really tiny. She had just gotten married and she was crying because she missed her husband. Since we both spoke Spanish we understood each other. The director, a really young kid, was named Franco Zeffirelli. So I passed through stages like that. I could now say I had worked with Callas and it opened doors for me.³⁰

After years of uncertainty as a freelance musician, León’s efforts and connections began to reward him with steady conducting work for reputable companies. Throughout the 1960s, he music-directed productions varying from a world premiere opera by William Flanagan with libretto by Edward Albee to the Broadway premiere of Brecht’s *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Uli*, featuring incidental music by Jule Styne (of *Gypsy* and *Funny Girl* fame) and starring Christopher Plummer. He also conducted Cole Porter’s *Can-Can* and Bernstein’s *Wonderful Town* for the New York City Center Light Opera company, again working with Kaye Ballard. In 1965, he spent a two-week residency at the Paris Opéra Comique while on tour in Europe with the Harkness Ballet, primarily a touring company made up of many former Joffrey Ballet dancers stolen away by the founder, Rebekah Harkness.³¹ Shortly after, he worked with Atlanta’s Theatre Under the


Stars, where he conducted opera and theater luminaries Dorothy Kirsten, Richard Tucker, and Robert Merrill.  

A return in 1968 to the American Ballet Theatre, newly appointed the Kennedy Center’s resident company, as principal conductor brought León the opportunity to tour with the company to Japan, where they performed Copland ballets and Bernstein’s *Fancy Free* with choreography by Jerome Robbins for the Prime Minister, and again at the White House for President Nixon a year later at the visiting Prime Minister’s request. His final performance with ABT was a recent Duke Ellington composition, a ballet based on the history of the Mississippi River entitled *The River*, with choreography by Alvin Ailey and performed at both the Lincoln Center and the Kennedy Center.

The last person I worked with in the States before leaving was Duke Ellington. It was a composition of his called The River. We did it at the Metropolitan but it was not a success. It was not complete, or rather it was inconclusive. The idea was to do a history of the Mississippi river, its birth until its death passing through different epochs. Jazz in the United States is beautiful music but it [The River] was not well received at the first performance. Later the Kennedy Center opened with Bernstein’s Mass. The second night we opened with The River and it was a complete success. So I ended with a complete success in the States and then I went to Colombia.  

The fact that his parting experience with ABT came in the form of a “jazz” ballet has many implications -- not only does it nicely encapsulate Leon’s American career trajectory (conducting a jazz ballet in two of the United States’ most reputable concert halls), but it also highlights his immersion in blended genres (jazz, ballet, art music), a theme that appears consistently in his own composition. León’s songs do not exactly

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32 Botero, 26.

33 Ibid., 30.
incorporate "ballet" style, but they frequently reference dance forms and incorporate "jazzy" harmonies that can also be found in standard musical theater repertory.

In 1971, the young Orquesta Filarmónica de Bogotá approached León about taking on the position of music director there, a job that would also involve intensive restructuring of the organization, from strengthening its weak instrumental forces to revamping its programming and developing educational outreach.\textsuperscript{34} Despite, or perhaps because of, the massive overhaul the group required, León made the pivotal decision to take the job and return to Colombia. Though his career had undergone frequent uncertainty and dues-paying for the last twenty years in the United States, León's reputation in Colombia was extraordinarily well-regarded, and his return home was a triumphant one. His name had already circulated widely upon his initial return to Colombia twenty-five years earlier. Of that first return, he recalls

\begin{quote}
It got to a point where people knew me. There was a Colombian named Guillermo Espinosa he was a friend of my mother's - they were both from Cartagena - and he was the conductor of the old Sinfónica Nacional [in Colombia]. When I was a student he resigned his position to go to Washington, D.C. for a very grand post at the Union Panamericana, known today as the OAS. And they said from the orchestra: "Now who will conduct?" And Espinosa told them, "There is this Cartagenero with a lot of talent." "He lives in New York, and he could do the job." So the Colombian government contacted me. I asked for permission from Juilliard where I was enrolled, and they gave me permission saying, "This is a great opportunity for you and for us as well as an alumni of ours."\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

Colombian music critic Fernando Toledo noted upon León's return to Colombia that "the arrival of the new conductor—a loved and respected figure in all musical circles in the

\textsuperscript{34} Botero, 28.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 225-26.
country-marked the start of a period of transformation which culminated in the orchestra reaching the threshold of artistic and cultural maturity.\textsuperscript{36}

León’s decision to return in 1971 was definitive. After more than a thirty-year absence, the maestro found that Bogotá was a newer, safer, more cosmopolitan center than the one he had left so swiftly decades before. Also, the promise of his own orchestra was an offer too sweet to refuse after years of conducting for others’ organizations. The Colombian government agreed to ship all his material possessions from New York City to Bogotá, and with that, the maestro assumed a new life in South America, going so far as to cut all professional ties in the United States, despite an option to return to the ABT if he desired.\textsuperscript{37}

I had a leave of absence from the American Ballet Theatre until I finally resigned. I had one more year to go. I didn’t keep up my connections, I severed all my connections there in the United States, severed completely. I said, “Why live in two situations? Let’s live a new one.” And I’m not sorry. It wasn’t easy because the cultural shock of returning was tremendous, very hard.\textsuperscript{38}

León’s contributions to the orchestra’s re-energized programming greatly reflected his time as a conductor in the States; they included works by Copland, Gershwin, Roger Sessions and David Diamond, in addition to the standard repertory of Bach, Mozart, Mendelssohn, and Saint Saens, among others. More importantly, León made the progressive decision to bring several contemporary Colombian composers’

\textsuperscript{36} Fernando Toledo, ed. and Michael Sparrow, trans., \textit{Orquesta Filarmónica de Bogotá: 35 años tocando el alma de la gente} (Bogotá: Consuelo Mendoza Ediciones, 2002), 105.

\textsuperscript{37} Botero, 232.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 232.
works to his audience, including those of Lelio Olarte and Jesús Pinzón Urrea. During his tenure there, the orchestra even began a Resident Composer’s program, inaugurated by 1976 by Francisco Zumaque, who contributed orchestral arrangements of Colombian popular music. Olarte incorporated bambuco, guabina, and pasillo forms into his music, while Pinzón Urrea was known for applying aleatoric and spectral techniques to traditional and popular Latin American musical forms.39

His work with the Orquesta Filarmónica de Bogotá would bring the organization great expansion and many accolades, including an association with the Ópera de Colombia, an in-house music school, and two Ondra awards for outstanding cultural program in 1972 and 1973 for its educational TV program Música para todos. In turn, his association with the orchestra brought him positions as orchestra director for the Ópera de Colombia, director of the Banda Sinfónica Nacional, and artistic director of the Colombian Cultural Institute’s opera festival.40

Around this time, León returned to song composition after a twenty-year hiatus, his most recent song, and only his third, having been composed in 1952. Perhaps it is not terribly surprising that he found himself composing for voice again having been recently associated with so many singers and surrounded by opera. In 1977, he took a trip back to the United States to make a recording of Latin American song with Colombian soprano Carmiña Gallo at Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. The recording features four of León’s songs amongst a varied collection also including songs by

39 Botero, 31-32.

40 Ibid., 33.
Guastavino and Villa-Lobos.

In addition to teaching conducting and piano privately, León spent most of the 1980s and 1990s focused on song composition. By 1992, he completed thirty-six songs for voice and piano set exclusively to texts by Colombian and Ecuadorian poets. He traces the germination of the idea to write songs on many of these poems back to a single volume of poetry he received from a friend in the 1950s. It was a book dedicated to poets of Colombia, and he became particularly enamored of the work of Eduardo Carranza, who would become a favorite source of text for his song composition. Ten of his 36 songs are set to Carranza’s poetry, and he had the good fortune to meet the poet on a flight to Buenos Aires years before. In addition to Carranza, León set texts by Colombians José Asunción Silva, Luis Carlos López, Daniel Lemaitre, Antonio Llanos, José Joaquin Casas, Eduardo Castillo, Isabel Lleras Restrepo, Dora Castellanos, Maruja Vieira, Alfredo Gómez Jaime, Rafael Maya, and Candelario Obeso. His treatments of Ecuadorian poetry include poets Aldalberto Ortiz, Rigoberto Cordero y León, Jorge Carrera Andrade, Renan de la Torre, and Francisco Delgado Santos, whose texts he set at the introduction and enthusiasm of his friend, Beatriz Parra, Ecuador’s most celebrated soprano.41

It does not seem that Jaime León set out with a career trajectory in mind when he began his musical study in earnest as a young man, nor can his career as a composer be divided into the stylistic and chronological periods typically applied to one. Rather, his peripatetic existence -- bouncing between jobs as a conductor, pianist, and teacher for

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41 Botero, 36.
decades and across oceans -- indicates his career was a product of timing, wits, and good fortune, all leading him to the moment when he could finally settle down into an environment and routine that would usher in the last phase of his musical work: composition.
Jaime León’s real compositional motivation and relationship with Colombian poetry emerged in the 1950s when a musician friend from Colombia came to New York and gave León a book of Colombian poetry. It included a section of poems by Eduardo Carranza, whose texts the composer would set more frequently than any other poet.

Luis Antonio Escobar, a composer, arrived in New York in the sixties and he gave me an anthology of Colombian poetry. There was a part of it with poems by Eduardo Carranza. The years passed, I returned to Colombia and during the administration of Betancur there was a festival of Colombian music held in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Among the invitees were myself and others. Well we [Carranza and León] met on the plane. “Have you written my music?” [Carranza asked] I said, Yes. “Well why haven’t I heard it? I promise you, I replied. But I never did and he died.42

León set poetry written exclusively by South American poets, favoring those of his native country and Ecuador. We frequently encounter recurring subjects and themes that are common both within Latin American and Spanish art song: children’s stories and lullabies, Christmas songs and villancicos,43 and texts expressing nostalgia for the past or longing for love and homeland.

The South American continent has produced no dearth of impressive literary figures, and many of these writers and poets are amongst the most recognized throughout the world, including Chile’s Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral, Ecuador’s Jorge Carrera

42 Botero, 103.

43 Though the villancico originated as a musical and poetic form in fifteenth century, the term has since simply come to mean “Christmas carol” in both Spain and Latin America.
Andrade, Argentina’s Jorge Luis Borges, and Colombia’s León de Greiff, José Asunción Silva, and Gabriel García Márquez, to name only a few. Amongst the poets whose works León chose to set, there are diplomats, professors, journalists and literary critics. Several were members of major Colombian literary movements, one was a priest, another a composer, and almost all are members of the Colombian Academy of Language. Additionally, León set a few lauded Ecuadorian poets, including an award-winning editor of children’s books and Adalberto Ortiz, an incendiary Ecuadorian poet whose works provide singular first-hand commentary on Afro-American identity and life in Ecuador.

The poet León set more than any other was Eduardo Carranza. Carranza was not an average poet. He was a poet, political activist, and cultural attaché abroad, whose wide-spanning networks reached from Chile to Spain. Born in Apiay, Meta on July 15, 1913, he became the first Colombian llanero-poet to become a prominent literary figure in not only Colombia, but the across the South American continent and as far as Europe.45

While teaching at the Colegio del Rosario in Bogotá, he published poems in the periodical El Tiempo, in addition to completing his first book of poetry, Canciones para iniciar una fiesta (“Songs to start a party”) in 1936.46 His poetry circulated in tandem

44 Meaning “plainsman,” the term is applied to Colombian and Venezuelan cowboys or herdsmen. Carranza was from this rural, undeveloped region, unlike many of his peers who grew up in affluent cities.


46 Ibid., 35.
with his reputation as a fervent, outspoken political activist in the 1930s, at the same time
that he became associated with the literary movement *Piedra y Cielo* (Rock and Sky), a
progressive group of poets who eschewed the stale concreteness of the eighteenth century
for an emphasis upon symbolism and imagery, and for whom Carranza acted as an
occasional unofficial spokesperson.47

From September of 1939 to March 1940, Bogotanian poet Juan Lozano y Lozano
compiled, edited, and published seven short anthologies of poetry under the banner title
*Cuadernos de Piedra y Cielo*, or “Notebooks of Stone and Sky.” The volumes contained
seven of Colombia’s most forward-thinking, maverick living poets, each attempting to
shed the cloak of stodgy romantic style, which had been celebrated since the height of
Spanish-American modernism in Colombia with the works of Guillermo Valencia (1873-
1943) and José Asunción Silva (1865-1896) (incidentally, three of whose poems León
chose to set as well). The notebooks contained works by Jorge Rojas, Carlos Martin,
Arturo Ramírez Camacho, Tomás Vargas Osorio, Gerardo Valencia, Darius Samper, and
Eduardo Carranza. Associated with the movement but not included in the publications
were Arturo Aurelio and Antonio Llanos, another poet set by Jaime León.48 Shortly after
the publications appeared, Carranza wrote an incendiary article in *El Tiempo* rebuking the

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47 Beatriz Restrepo Restrepo, “Piedra y Cielo a contraluz,” *Boletín Cultural y

48 Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda, “García Márquez: Piedra y Cielo me hizo escritor,”
*Cromos.com.co*, June 28, 2011, under “Textos Memorables,”
http://www.cromos.com.co/especial-95/articulo-141825-piedra-y-cielo-me-hizo-escritor
prevailing poetic traditions that held sway over Colombia in the twentieth century, calling Valencia “a poet without human perspective... just a good poet,” and “a stolid architect of idiomatic material who turned his back on his own time and people.” This damning portrayal of one of Colombia’s greatest literary treasures met major backlash from the country’s literary conservatives.\(^{49}\)

While Carranza’s condemnations, amplified by the criticisms of other poets in the movement, appeared outwardly hostile, in reality the *piedracielistas* sought to create and endorse a new poetic language for Colombia, a language that would celebrate the nation’s beauty, diversity, and imagination without alienating the lower classes. Gabriel García Márquez, inarguably Colombia’s most internationally acclaimed cultural export of the twentieth century, would attribute his early fascination with poetry and his desire to pursue the art of writing to his discovery of the *piedracielistas* as a youth.\(^{50}\)

The *piedracielistas* and Carranza may have been more forward thinking in the development of their artistic field than León was in song composition, but their heavy use of imagery and emphasis on metaphor as primary poetic devices make for an excellent match with León’s compositional strengths. In truth, it is clear when surveying León’s song output that his chosen texts favor the goal of beauty, in words, melody, and harmony, over stretching the boundaries of the art song form.

The tendency to place such heavy importance on aspirations of beauty and conveyance of the text through melodic treatment and harmonic function in art song is a

\(^{49}\) Restrepo.

\(^{50}\) Cobo Borda.
standard of compositional technique that can be traced at least as far back the
development of the German Lied and French mélodie in the nineteenth century, initially
with composers like Schubert and Gounod and later with Schumann and Wolf, Debussy
and Ravel.

With early instruction from a teacher like Guillermo Uribe-Holguín, whose own
study included a lengthy stay in France with Vincent d’Indy at the Schola Cantorum
during the Belle Époque, it is without question that León’s training included this
approach to writing art song. Uribe-Holguín’s compositional output is regarded as a
synthesis of French impressionist style and technique with rhythms and melodies “native
in derivation.” 51 Frequent use of folk dance melodies and rhythms pervade his writing,
including the pasillo and bambuco. Notable folk-derived exemplary works include his
three hundred piano pieces Trozos en el sentimiento popular, Op. 22-71, Tres danzas
(Joropo, Pasillo, Bambuco), Op. 21, and the Second Symphony, Op. 15, which borrows
directly from Colombian folk dance sources. 52 The nationalistic bent in Uribe-Holguín’s
works keep him from falling under the banner of ultra-conservatism ascribed to his
teacher d’Indy, but without it, his style would likely not have elevated him into the
echelon of the most influential in his native country. With that in mind, it seems very
probable that this mannered European-Colombian fusion of styles impacted a young
León in his concepts of composition. 53

51 Slonimsky, 172.

52 Béhague, 162.

53 Jann Pasler, “Deconstructing d’Indy, or the Problem of a Composer’s Reputation,”
Upon examination and analysis of Jaime León’s thirty-six-song output, it is clear that his compositional intent and style is rooted in nineteenth and early twentieth-century European technique. The songs generally live within the realm of solid tonal harmonic function, employing chromaticism, occasional recitative, decisive motivic development, and word painting to accentuate the text. It is in the additional use of intermittent jazz harmonies and Colombian folk elements that León transcends square rehashing of nineteenth-century European art song ideals. These components may not seem potent enough to elevate his output to greater recognition on their own, but he utilizes them to such great effect that the result is a distinctly unique voice in the genre of Latin American art song.

What follows is a brief examination of León’s compositional style and treatment of text through examples, with regard to his varied influences, including Colombian dance forms and folk melodies, elements evocative of American jazz and musical theater, as well as nods to the German *Lied* and French *mélodie*.

Each song is remarkably representative of his hybrid style, for instance ascribing a specific directive like *In modo di Bambuco* (“in the style of the *bambuco*), a pervasively rhythmic dance in triple meter, to a song that breaks for a declamatory recitative mid-song and halts before the ending with a *lento* section (“La campesina”).

“La campesina” (“The Peasant Woman,” 1952) is León’s second song attempt and is by far his most popular setting, most likely because it is based upon a relatively simple folksy melody and is in the style of one Colombia’s most popular folk dances, the

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19th-Century Music 30, no. 3 (Spring 2007): 231.
aforementioned bambuco. Incidentally, it is the composer's least favorite. In an interview he said, "[it] is the song that has been the biggest hit. I don't know why; at the very least it is the ugliest of the songs that I have written!". The text, by Isabel Lleras Restrepo, describes an old peasant woman sluggishly ambling down the road at the end of a long day toiling in the fields. The song uses the pervasive syncopated rhythm in triple meter of alternating eighth and quarter notes as an ostinato in the left hand of the piano accompaniment while the vocal line follows the irregular phrasing of the poetry, creating tension between the melody and accompaniment. The figurative struggle between the two is representative of the physical struggle the title character of the poem experiences as she stumbles down the road after a hard day of working, while intimating that her hard work, like the fate of the impoverished everywhere, will never end. Lleras Restrepo wrote the poem during a time of great political unrest in 1936, while her brother Carlos Lleras Restrepo led the Colombian Liberal Party in decrying the violence promulgated by the conservative Colombian government and attempted to speak out in support of the poor, oppressed, and disenfranchised. Her brother would become the President of Colombia in 1966. As noted previously, León may have felt a connection to the social injustice described in this poem in tandem with his own experiences witnessing racial discrimination and social injustice on the road through the American south with a Haitian ballet troupe.

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54 Botero, 236.

55 Ibid., 93.
EXAMPLE 2.1 “La campesina” mm. 1-7

Caminando con lánguida pereza
Asoma por el recodo del camino
Ya terminó el trabajo campesino
En la hora en que el Angelus se reza.

En sus pupilas brilla la tristeza
Que abunda en el paisaje vespertino
Medita en su monótono destino
Y resignada inclina la cabeza.

Entonando un cantar que es una queja
Por detrás de los árboles se aleja
Apoyada en su rama de bejuco.

Se pierde su figura dolorosa
Pero queda la raza que solloza
En las dolientes notas del bambuco.

Walking with listless sluggishness
She appears by a bend in the road
The farm work has already ended
In the hour in which the Angelus is prayed.

In her eyes gleams a sadness
that is abundant in the evening countryside.
She ponders her monotonous fate
And resigned she bows her head.

Intoning a song that is a moan
Behind the trees she walks out of sight
Leaning on her bejuco branch.

Her suffering figure is gone,
But the people who remain cry out
In the sorrowful notes of the bambuco.  

Other occurrences of dance themes include the use of a seguidilla in the setting of José Asunción Silva’s “Serenata” (“Serenade, 1977), as well as a waltz in “La casa del lucero” (“The house of the bright star, 1992). León’s setting of “Serenata” is in keeping with the seguidilla poetic form of the text, and he maintains syllabic 7-5-7-5 patterns

56 All translations are by the author.
through use of dotted rhythms and triplets.\footnote{Botero, 107.}

The ethereal Carranza lullaby "La casa del lucero" ("The house of the bright star," 1992) utilizes a slow, lilting waltz in 3/2 to lull the child to sleep. This is the only lullaby he sets that uses triple meter. In fact, León is not frequently beholden to the overarching theme of his lullabies; in more than one case he allows the multi-dimensional texts to guide his melodic and rhythmic development. "Tu madre en la fuente" ("Your mother in the fountain," 1989) is an \textit{allegro} march in 3/4 and 5/4 in which a mother implores her daughter to sleep and dream for the honor of her father in the war. Carranza’s poem, written in 1945, could be a reference to the Second World War or the escalation of civil unrest leading up to \textit{La Violencia}. The poem is a vague but haunting look at the strife endured by a mother whose husband’s fate in battle is unknown.

\begin{verbatim}
Tu madre en la fuente
tu padre en la guerra.
Duérmete mi niña
que azulas la tierra.

Tu madre en la fuente
recoge la estrella.
Tu padre en la guerra
lleva la bandera.

A tu madre, en sueños,
alcanza la estrella.
A tu padre, en sueños,
sostén la bandera.

Azul de la fuente,
azul de la guerra.
Mi niña dormida,
azul de la tierra.
\end{verbatim}

\begin{verbatim}
Your mother at the fountain
your father in the war
Sleep my daughter
Who makes the earth blue.

Your mother at the fountain
gathers the star.
Your father in the war
Carries the flag.

For your mother, in dreams,
reach the star.
For your father, in dreams,
hold the flag.

Blue of the fountain,
blue of the war.
My sleeping daughter,
blue of the earth.
\end{verbatim}
In an interview in 2005, the composer stated that this was his favorite song composition, and it is clear that one of his greatest strengths is in the interpretation of vague, metaphoric poetry like that of *piedracielista* Eduardo Carranza. Through use of three distinct themes, one a march in 5/4 representing the war, the second a representation of the fountain in 3/4, and the third a placid, slow, and repetitive 3/4 marking the internal thoughts of the third poetic stanza, León manages to decode the poet’s message. The composer also noted that “there are two phases: singing to the girl and thinking about her husband and their situation.”

In stark contrast to “Tu madre en la fuente” is the Carranza lullaby “Ojuelos de miel” (“Bright eyes of honey,” 1992) which utilizes a shimmering repeated sixteenth-note figure in the piano and colorful use of the pentatonic scale that recalls the later songs of Debussy. The song, like “Tu madre en la fuente,” is not confined to the expected, quiet affectation so common of the lullaby. In fact, the piano sweeps grandly with arpeggiated figures and the tessitura reaches above the staff with forte markings. It is more of a celebratory ode to the beloved child than a tool to shush it to sleep.

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58 Botero, 191.

59 Ibid., 192-3.
EXAMPLE 2.2 “Tu madre en la fuente” mm. 7-8, mm. 3-5, mm. 23-25

Tu madre en la fuente tu padre en la

Poco meno mosso

A tu madre en
Two other Carranza settings, “Canción” (“Song,” 1989) and “Vago soneto” (“Vague sonnet,” 1992 or earlier), are excellent examples of León’s ability to capture the poet’s hazy but evocative use of imagery. In “Canción,” he makes excellent use of the action of the text, bringing the “flying song” to life through a swift tempo marking and sweeping arpeggiation in the piano accompaniment.

Una canción está volando de flor en rama, de rama en flor; la mece el aire de verano en olor de flor y de amor.

Hoja de árbol decembrino, una canción tiembla en lo azul y un pajarillo picotea la mano abierta de la luz.

Mi alma sonríe a las cosas apoyada en un tenue balcón hecho de aroma y de silencio en la casa de la ilusión.

Las nubes, las nubes de oro van por el cielo sin razón,

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A song is flying from flower to branch, from branch to flower; the summer air wafts scented of flowers and of love.

Leaf of an evergreen, a song trembles in the blue and a bird pecks the hand open to the light.

My soul smiles at things supported on a tenuous balcony made of perfume and silence in the house of illusion.

The clouds, the clouds of gold move across the sky without reason.

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Footnote: Four of León’s songs are undated, but they are believed to have been completed between 1976 and 1992. Botero, 202.
igual que vaga sin sentido
por la música el corazón.

just as the heart wanders senselessly
to the music.

Andando con pies de suspiro
La tarde escucha esta canción
Y en la dulce rama de acacia
Se posa vaga y ronda flor

Walking on feet of sighs
The afternoon listens to this song
And on the sweet branch of the acacia
Rests an idle, round flower

Toma en tu mano celeste
mi corazón, mi corazón,
y extravíalo en la floresta
de la música sin razón
igual que vuelta esta canción
de flor en rama, de rama en flor.

Take in your celestial hand
my heart, my heart,
and lose it in the forest
of music that has no reason
just as this song flies
from flower to branch, from branch to flower.

The poetry, written in 1941, embodies the mystery and seductive qualities of
the nature that hearken back to the German Romanticism of Goethe (1749-1832),
Eichendorff (1778-1857), and Heine (1797-1856). Carranza was a fervent proponent of a
fresh poetic language that moved away from the simple, concrete style popular in
nineteenth-century Colombia, and the soulful, imagery-laden vocabulary that emerged in
his mature writing calls to mind the celebration of spirituality, ambiguity, and deep inner
yearning that appeared in reaction to the order and simplicity of the Enlightenment in
Europe.61

León divides the poem into basically an ABA form featuring two individual
melodies, one that “represents the canción (song),” and one that “represents the alma
(soul).”62 The song’s opening melody is a septuplet figure of repeated stepwise motion

61 Robert Spillman and Deborah Stein, Poetry Into Song: Performance and Analysis of

62 Botero, 188.
that is juxtaposed against the flying arpeggiation of the piano in a chromatically altered F minor.

**EXAMPLE 2.4 “Canción” mm. 1-5**

When the speaker refers to “my soul,” the new melody is presented in with a slower tempo and heavy chromaticism in the vocal line, which is mirrored in the more static, chordal motion of the piano, and moves to a vague E major tonal center, unstable chromaticism illustrating the “tenuous balcony... in the house of illusion.”
EXAMPLE 2.5 “Canción” mm. 16-17

The third section returns to the flying A theme, then eases into a *lento* recitative with static accompaniment at the first and only imperative line of the poem, “take in your heavenly hand/my heart, my heart,” before flies away again “from flower to branch, from branch to flower.”

EXAMPLE 2.6 “Canción” mm. 57-59
“Vago soneto” elucidates Carranza’s literally “vague sonnet” by more straightforward means, through the use of one distinct, text-derived melodic motive, as well as jazz-like chromaticism and harmony. A scalar melody utilizing León’s frequent syncopated dance rhythm beginning on a stressed eighth note is riddled with half-steps evoking the rising *humo* (“smoke”), the central character of the poem.

EXAMPLE 2.7 “Vago soneto” mm. 1-3, mm. 5-7

This rhythm is likewise well suited to the prosody of the Spanish language, with its heavy penultimate syllabic stress.
Es la mano del humo la que escribe el epitafio de esta bella tarde. Y es el rostro del humo el que sonríe como quien llega de un hermoso viaje.

La Luna se anticipa en los jazmines. Como un aroma se evapora el valle. Y entre los dedos de la lejanía es la rosa del humo la que se abre.

Es la boca del humo la que calla. Y es la frente del humo la que sueña para mis ojos este vago mundo.

En su rama el primer lucero canta. Sólo se oye fluir sobre la tierra mi corazón que sube como el humo.

It is the hand of smoke that writes the epitaph of this beautiful afternoon. And it is the face of smoke that smiles like one who has arrived after a lovely journey.

The Moon advances among the jasmine. Like a perfume the valley evaporates. And between the fingers in the distance it is the rose of smoke that opens.

It is the mouth of smoke that quiets. And it is the brow of smoke that dreams for my eyes this vague world.

On its branch the first bright star sings. The only sound flowing over the earth is my heart that goes up in smoke.

The melody evolves with the introduction of minor thirds added to the stepwise motion, and the piano doubles the voice to provide stability under the chromaticism and amongst the dissonant, quick harmonic rhythm, which modulates from F-major to A-major, with a strong dominant pull. Here, the vocal line gives way to a dramatic, Cole Porter-like interlude that prepares an exposed vocal section in which the poem finally leaves the descriptive world of the waning day and refers to the first person, "... and it is the brow of smoke that dreams/for my eyes this vague world."
EXAMPLE 2.8 “Vago soneto” mm. 11-24

La luna se anticipa en los jazmines como un aroma se evapora el valle.
Y entre los dedos de la lejanía es la rosa del...
Another setting that explores the application of a more jazz-like sound world is “Canción del boga ausente” (“Song of the absent boatman,” 1990). A very well-known poem throughout Colombia, it is a particularly surprising choice for León to skip Colombian folk-influence and dive into distinctly more internationally flavored harmonic functions, particularly considering the poem’s regional dialect, which León insists must be preserved.65 The poem, written in 1877 by Candelario Obeso (1849-1884), is well in keeping with the mindset of its troubled, short-lived author. He was the illegitimate

65 Botero, 199.
product of a relationship between a white lawyer and landowner and his black laundress in the isolated town Mompós, Colombia, a community situated on an island in the great Magdalena River at its juncture with the Cauca. Like Adalberto Ortiz, Obeso’s Caucasian parentage afforded him an excellent education and the means to launch a successful career as a black man in the racially discriminatory post-colonial era. He excelled in languages and made his living largely as a literary translator. Nonetheless, despite these gifts, misfortune followed him throughout life, from frequent arrests to a perpetually broken heart. It is with this voice that Obeso wrote “Canción del boga ausente,” and with it he manages to shed light on the isolated, arduous lifestyle of the river-bound people of his hometown.

Qué triste que tía la noche,
La noche qué triste etá;
No hay en er cielo una estrella.....
Remá, remá, remá

La negra del alma mía,
Mientras yo brégo en la már,
Bañado en sudo por ella,
¿Qué hará? ¿Qué hará?

Tar véz por su zambo amado
Doriante suspirará,
O tar vé ni recuerda...
¡Llorá! ¡Llorá! ¡Llorá!

Las hembras son como toro
La rostra tierra desgraciada;
Con acte se saca er peje
Der má, der má!...

How sad is the night,
The night, how sad it is;
There isn’t a star in the sky.....
Row, row, row.

The black woman of my soul,
while I toil in the sea,
bathed in sweat for her,
What is she doing? What is she doing?

Maybe for her beloved zambo painfuly she will sigh,
or maybe she doesn’t even remember me....
Cry! Cry! Cry!

Females are like everything
on the face of this disgraced earth;
with cunning one gets the fish
from the sea, from the sea!


67 Zambo is pejorative slang for a person of African or Indian descent.
Qué oscura está la noche,
La noche qué oscura está;
Así no se cura la ausencia...
Bogá, bogá, bogá ...

How dark is the night,
The night, how dark it is;
Absence is not cured that way....
Row, row, row...

The song opens with an eerie, semi-static syncopated figure of one and a half measures in D-minor, which is repeated three more times and linked by an ascending arpeggio in the left hand. This repetition gives the impression of the rowing paddles of the text, and the entrance of the static vocal line creates tension through triplet figures and the tight range of a third.

EXAMPLE 2.9 “Canción del boga ausente” mm. 7-11

The second stanza introduces a conflation of the triplet theme and the syncopation of the rowing in the piano, while the vocal line breaks free from its monotony into a syncopated melody of its own. As the narrator becomes more and more agitated by the thought of his love having forgotten him, the piano’s left hand gives way to a descending
F-minor scale, broken by leaps to the new tonic. Despite the new tonal center, the constant use of diminished triads, ninths, and non-chord tones lends a distinctly jazz-like ambience. The constant offbeat entrances and syncopation carefully and accurately reflect the syllabic stress of the text while maintaining a smooth, flowing vocal line that reflects not only the flowing of the water beneath the boatman, but also the tension and pain he feels.

In general, León gravitates towards dense poetry rife with images of nature that metaphorically exemplify the emotions of the heart, as in Maruja Vieira’s “Más que nunca” (“More than ever,” 1981).

Porque amarte es así de dulce y hondo como esta fiel serenidad del agua que corre por la acequia derramando su amorosa ternura sobre el campo.

Because loving you is as sweet and deep as this faithful serenity of water that runs through the channel spilling its loving tenderness over the countryside.

He seizes the opportunity to illustrate the text in the music, frequently using the piano accompaniment for word painting as opposed to using the actual vocal line. He is extremely gifted at evoking a mood for a song in just the first few bars of piano introduction; in fact, he often employs lengthy Schumann-like introductions, interludes, and postludes to further steep the listener in the mood he wishes to convey. His setting of the Spanish language is intuitive and natural, but it is in the piano that the evocation of mood, story arc, and text painting more commonly occur. These compositional tendencies are clear from the beginning, with his first song, “Aves y ensueños” (“Birds and dreams”), in which the slow, dense block chords of the dream drown out any last
chirp of the departing birds, the vocal line declaiming hopelessness on a repeated, syllabic G.

Se van las tardes del azul verano,  
se van con él las raudas golondrinas  
Gone are blue summer afternoons  
gone with them are the swift swallows

EXAMPLE 2.10 “Aves y ensueños” mm. 9-15

León uses a variety of compositional techniques to emphasize declamation of the text, including recitative (often explicitly directed in the score), monotone passages to convey mood and to evoke the sound of the spoken voice as in “Aves y ensueños,” even resorting to spoken text.
EXAMPLE 2.11 “Los maderos de San Juan” mm. 10

Recitativo

EXAMPLE 2.12 “El muñeco dormilón” mm. 26-31

(Hablado)  

Con ritmo

In addition, León explores poetic themes common in both Spanish and Latin American art song, including a four-song cycle of villancicos, a cycle of six children’s songs, as well as five different lullabies. Another prevalent theme in León’s selected texts is sentimental nostalgia. Two songs are devoted to the memory of León’s coastal birthplace of Cartagena. “A mi ciudad nativa” (“To my native city,” 1977) by Luis Carlos López (1879-1950) is a tribute to the lamplit, colonial seaport city of the nineteenth
century, cleverly composed in the style of a slow *cumbia*, an extremely popular dance that originates in the Atlantic coastal regions of Colombia. "Evocación" ("Evocation," 1990) is a sleepy serenade to the old city by Daniel Lemaitre (1883-1962) (a songwriter well-known throughout Colombia in his own right)\(^{68}\) that also invokes the tinge of sadness one feels when recalling a place well loved and left behind.

\(^{68}\) Caicedo, 35.
CHAPTER 3
LEÓN IN CONTEXT

There are a number of challenges in placing Jaime León within the context of the development of the Latin American art song in the twentieth century. For many years he lived outside of the region, and composition was not his primary focus for the majority of his career development. This contributes to his somewhat small compositional output over the course of far fewer years than many of his Latin American contemporaries, and the difficulty involved in acquiring scores of his music. Additionally, the relative lack of comprehensive research on Colombia’s development in the field of art music further obfuscates the national lineage in which he belongs. Nonetheless, the quality of his work merits him a place in the region’s musical history and certainly within the development of the art song in Colombia.

In order to give perspective to León’s place on the spectrum of Latin American art song evolution, it is helpful to compare him to his continental peers with regard to career trajectory, stylistic development, and worldwide influence. For the purposes of this study, I have narrowed primary comparison to two of Latin America’s most well known composers of art song, both incidentally from Argentina. Their provenance is not surprising, given the country’s serious commitment to cultural and artistic development from as early as its colonial period. 69 With Brazil, Argentina led a successful movement

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to synthesize local artistic traditions with studied European ideals in South America during the 1800s and into the twentieth century. These two nations served as models for the rest of the continent as they developed their early nationalist movements and gained exposure beyond their borders through the international triumphs of composers like Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959) and Alberto Williams (1862-1952). Both Villa-Lobos and Williams were educated in European compositional technique, but they each injected their works with the unique flavors of their national folk music. A generation later, this trend reached its zenith, affecting both of León's Argentine contemporaries Carlos Guastavino and Alberto Ginastera.

In many respects, the Latin American composer with whom Jaime León has the most in common is Carlos Guastavino (1912-2000). While far more prolific -- he wrote some six hundred songs -- Guastavino's harmonic language is unapologetically tonal with singable, catchy melodies evocative of nineteenth-century Spanish song. The Argentine composer went so far as to mock progressive harmonic function and compositional techniques, saying:

Long live atonality! Long live dodecaphony! Long live musique concrète! That is crap... those are clunkers, they are lies, they are falsehoods, they are... Music, authentic music is harmony, melody, and rhythm, perfect to-na-les. This is the only way of making music. ⁷⁰

With this tonally conservative foundation, Guastavino fleshed out his compositional style by adding folk-derived rhythms and original, earthy melodies that reflect the accessible

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qualities of the poetry he set. He developed a lengthy and prolific collaboration with Argentine poet León Benarós in 1963, producing sixty-plus songs together. One such collaboration, the song cycle “Flores Argentinas” (“Argentine Flowers,” 1969), is exemplary of Guastavino’s typically deft handling of prosody and lyrical melody, and his fondness for texts on elements of nature.\(^7\) In addition to local poets, he also set renowned poets from abroad, including Chile’s Gabriela Mistral and Spain’s Golden-Age picaresque master Francisco de Quevedo.

Unlike Jaime León, Guastavino began composing in earnest as a young man after studying chemical engineering at university. He began taking private piano and composition lessons, and eventually began a career as a concert pianist. His early works from the 1940s earned him acclaim from within Argentina, and in 1948 he received a grant from the British Council to study in London for two years. His brief stay there was largely spent touring Great Britain and Ireland performing his songs and works for piano.\(^7\)

Guastavino blossomed as an artist in the 1940s during the height of Argentina’s nationalist compositional movement. His songs from this period are his most frequently performed and recorded, a somewhat inconsequential fact given that the composer never really left composing in a nationalist style behind, even after it fell out of favor a decade or so later. Numerous recordings include the early songs “La rosa y el sauce” (“The rose


\(^7\) Kulp, “Guastavino, Carlos.”
and the willow,” 1942) and “Se equivocó la paloma” (“The dove erred,” 1941). Over the past three decades, his discography has gained far more exposure through recordings by luminaries like Elly Ameling, Teresa Berganza, José Carreras, and José Cura. In addition to art songs, he wrote three sonatas for guitar, many canciones escolares (school songs), choral pieces and arrangements of his songs, and solo piano pieces. By far, however, his songs for voice and piano garnered him a reputation outside of Argentina.

Like León, his songs evoke a deep nostalgia for his native country, its people, and its natural beauty. This quality pervades his songwriting throughout his entire career. From his cycle 4 Canciones Argentinas (1949) to his 12 Canciones populares (1968) and Pájaros (Birds, 1974), Guastavino remains faithful to Argentine poetic themes and interprets them through a melodically driven, tonally lush lens. Nationally inspired texts include references to the Argentine Pampas ("El sampedrino (Canción pampeana)" and "Pampa sola," 1968), the vineyards of Mendoza ("Mi viña de Chapanay," 1968), and the milonga ("Milonga de dos hermanos," 1963, with text by Jorge Luis Borges), a musical form and dance style similar to the habanera originating in Argentina and Uruguay.

Guastavino and León share much in common by virtue of their concentration on the composition of song; additionally, each flirts with a “popular” sound despite writing foundations that are firmly within the art music genre. Undoubtedly, it is largely the folk element that injects this popular quality. Guastavino tempers his folksy, lyrical melodies with piano accompaniments functioning within clear, traditional harmony that recall the works of Spanish composers Enrique Granados (1867-1916), Manuel de Falla (1876-1946), and Joaquín Turina (1882-1949). On the other hand, León generally favors folk
rhythms to melodies, and his harmonic language owes more to American musical theater of the twentieth century than Spain, obviously due in great part to his long stay in the United States and his career conducting for theater and dance productions.

Though not a transplant like León, Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983) spent significant time in the United States studying, teaching, composing, and gaining mentors and acquaintances of immense stature in America. Along with Villa-Lobos, the Argentine powerhouse is perhaps Latin America’s most successful composer-export, at least in terms of prestige and continued appearance in programming outside his continent. His international exposure began very early in his career after receiving major attention when an orchestral suite of his ballet Panambi (1937) was performed at the Teatro Colón while he was still a student at the National Conservatory of Music in Buenos Aires. A year afterward, in 1940, American dance impresario Lincoln Kirstein commissioned a ballet from Ginastera for his American Ballet Caravan, Estancia (1941), a work that would exemplify the composer’s first stylistic period, which he called “objective nationalism.”

Ginastera’s compositional output falls easily into three or four stylistic periods, unlike both León and Guastavino, whose works generally remain stylistically static over the course of their careers. His early works explore native gauchesco and criollo themes like Guastavino, but his application of these themes varies immensely in genre and


74 Ibid. Though Ginastera conceived of this stylistic periodization himself, he defined it in three periods well before he finished composing, hence researchers have created a fourth period to represent his late works.
explores polytonality, pandiatonicism, and non-functional harmony. Notably, he incorporated a chord derived from the typical open tuning of the gaucho guitar (E-A-d-g-b-e'), thereby symbolizing the figure of the horseman while also evoking a reordered Argentine pentatonic scale (E-G-A-B-D). Works from this period include ballets (Panambi and Estancia), works for solo piano including Obertura para el “Fausto” criollo (1943), and almost all of his song output, including his most famous work for voice and piano, 5 Canciones populares argentinas (1943). It was also during this time that he began teaching composition, which he would continue off and on for the rest of his career.

The cycle 5 Canciones populares argentinas is dedicated to Carlos López Bachardo (1881-1948) and admittedly modeled after Bachardo’s 5 Canciones argentinas al estilo popular (1935). The songs are a combination of simple melodic material, folk rhythms, and progressive tonal harmonic practice. Each song is subtitled in the genre of the movement: 1) chacarera, a dance, 2) triste, a melancholy Peruvian tune, 3) zamba, a folk dance of Indian origin in 6/8, 4) arrorro, a lullaby, and 5) gato, a dance similar to the competitive gaucho feet-stamping dance called the malambo. Ginastera surpasses Bachardo’s interpretation of these traditional movements by employing dissonances, non-

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75 Both gauchesco and criollo are literary and cultural references to Argentine gauchos, the residents and horsemen of the South American pampas, Gran Chaco, and Patagonian grasslands, often loosely equated with the North American cowboy of the nineteenth century.

76 Schwartz-Kates.

functional harmonies, and deviations into polytonality.

From 1945-47, he visited the United States on a Guggenheim Fellowship during which he visited Juilliard, Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and the Eastman School of Music and studied composition with Aaron Copland at Tanglewood, who would remain a friend and stylistic influence for many years.

Ginastera’s second stylistic period incorporates contemporary techniques into nationalistic themes. He incorporated, for example, traditional dance rhythms into movements that derive formal, harmonic, and melodic structure from single motivic cells. This inclination toward strict, mathematical, formal construction gave way to full-fledged serialism and dodecaphony in his third stylistic period. In 1962, he was asked to direct the newly formed Latin American Center for Advanced Musical Studies at the Instituto Torcuato di Tella in Buenos Aires, which promoted the instruction of twentieth century compositional techniques and boasted a roster of visiting faculty that included Aaron Copland, Olivier Messiaen, Iannis Xenakis, Luigi Nono, and Luigi Dallapiccola. It is highly likely that this exposure influenced the development of his later compositional style. Ginastera’s evolution into his third, Second Viennese School-inspired “neo-Expressionist” period was met with critical acclaim and spawned high-profile commissions that led to premieres by the Juilliard String Quartet (String Quartet No. 2, 1958) and the New York City Opera (Don Rodrigo, 1964). His three operas -- Don Rodrigo, Bomarzo (1967), and Beatrix Cenci (1971) -- include serialism, extended vocal techniques, microtones, sound clusters, and aleatoric and spatial effects.78

78 Schwartz-Kates.
His fourth period (1976-1983) is described as his “final synthesis,” and it is marked by his efforts to unify indigenous Latin American elements with progressive compositional techniques. These efforts are exemplified by the massive orchestral work *Popol Vuh* (incomplete, 1983), a retelling of the Mayan creation story in seven movements, which utilizes the “integration of primitive melody and kaleidoscopic sound colour.”

Alberto Ginastera’s evolution and periodization of compositional style follows the model of most influential composers of art music in the twentieth century. He was highly critical of his own work and seemed to constantly reevaluate his process with the goal of forward-thinking development in mind. One can hear Ginastera’s steps away from traditional harmonic function in his songs despite his ability to stay within the folk-inspired template. Nor did he confine himself to short-form works; by the end of his career, his compositions became grander in concept, scale, and instrumental forces. Neither León nor Guastavino share this model. Their nearly singular devotion to the composition of song within the realm of comfortable post-Romantic tonality serves their goals well, especially with regard to sensitive text setting, conveyance of mood, and formal structure.

Analysis of Ginastera and Guastavino’s songs leads to the conclusion that they are equally successful in achieving a strong nationalist sensibility while maintaining (and evolving, in Ginastera’s case) their individual compositional voices. Jaime León’s

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79 Schwartz-Kates.

80 Ibid.
nationalist sentiment is not quite so obvious. While dance rhythms are prominent, melodies folk-like at times, and texts exclusively Colombian and Ecuadorian, the fabric of León's sound is layered beyond the hybridization of nationalistic and traditional European components. One can hear an element of otherness in his songs that under closer examination reveals itself to be not Colombian or European in origin, but more similar to American musical theater. This transnationalist element is integral to León's compositional voice and distinguishes him from his peers. His ability to absorb harmonic progressions and modified formal structures reminiscent of a Gershwin show tune and adapt them for both a simple lullaby to a sleepless child ("Cancioncilla," 1976) and an impassioned portrait of a nineteenth century boatman (the previously discussed "Cancion del boga ausente") demonstrates not only an impressive capability to seamlessly integrate disparate styles, but also intimates a musical identity that is without match among his continental peers.

There are certainly other notable Colombian composers from the last century or so worth promoting and researching further, including Jacqueline Nova (1935-1975), Blas Atehortua (b. 1933), and Francisco Zumaqué (b. 1945). Each of them is highly successful in their own right and can be found in brief blurbs in current music reference materials. From an earlier generation, both Guillermo Uribe Holguín and Adolfo Mejía (1909-1973) warrant attention. Both Nova and Atehortua studied under Ginastera and Nono at the di Tella Institute and are known for the use of aleatoric and serialist techniques, as well as experimentation in electroacoustic composition. Zumaqué, who contributed orchestral arrangements to the Orquesta Nacional de Bogotá under Jaime
León’s direction, studied in Paris with Nadia Boulanger, where he twice won the Grand Prix de Composition in 1971 and 1973. He is known for his efforts in uniting art music and popular music traditions in Colombia, notably conflating two well-known dances rhythms, the *cumbia* and *mapale*, into a style called “macumbia,” which he frequently uses in large band arrangements and chamber ensembles.\(^{81}\)

In terms of growth and evolution of the archetypal art song in Colombia, however, Jaime León’s efforts are undeniably fascinating and meritorious. His thirty-six songs deserve a closer look and firmer place in the canon of the genre, both in Latin America and internationally. By virtue of their adroit construction, exhibition of little known poetry, and natural fit for both voice and piano, the songs make a superb addition to the piano-vocal repertory.

It seems as though León’s successful compositional venture, just another angle in a multi-faceted career, was happenstance. The taking up of song composition on a whim after receiving a gift of a volume of poetry does not appear to have factored into his long-term career plans, but instead provided a needed outlet for the man of many musical trades. Perhaps he sums up the experience best:

> It comes from the poetry.... It comes unconsciously. I read the poem and that’s all. There is certain literature or poetry that immediately strikes me with music.... [For me] Composing is unconscious.... It comes out naturally, from living in the U.S., in Colombia, and conducting musical theatre, ballet, and opera. I sit down at the piano, and I start getting ideas, and then I write it.\(^{82}\)


\(^{82}\) Botero, 234.
CONCLUSION

The majority of Jaime León’s art song output is now available outside of Colombia, thanks to recent efforts by the singer-musicologist Patricia Caicedo and Spanish publishing house Mundo Arts. His works are beginning to be performed outside of his native country, singers and pianists are recording his songs, and students are being introduced to them in university and masterclass settings. The modest celebration of his compositional work is starting to spread overseas. This is excellent progress for the Colombian art song. León’s songs are certainly worthy of attention by nature of their beauty, singability, and rich reference to an unusual conflation of compositional styles, and his unusual career trajectory is a fascinating study in development and integral for understanding how his style came to be. But Jaime León should be celebrated on a larger scale as an important ambassador for art music culture on an international level.

When I began my search for a research topic, I knew I wanted to write about Latin American song, in large part because the repertoire I was familiar with from the region was exciting and well-written, but also because I saw a serious void in its study. Sifting through options, mostly Brazilian and Argentine composers, I found a single Jaime León song in Kathleen Wilson’s anthology The Art Song in Latin America. As a Colombian-American singer, the temptation to dig deeper into Colombian art song was inevitable, though there was concern that the quality might be underwhelming. Luckily, the discovery of Jaime León’s music went far beyond my expectations. Besides being

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generally lovely and a good fit for my voice type, the songs reminded me of the rhythms I grew up dancing to in my grandparents' house. That it could also easily sound like a part of any recital program was nothing short of astounding, and gave me my first glimpse into the depth of Leon's abilities at multicultural synthesis.

In many ways, León's international career is reflective of Colombia's trend to seek cultural legitimacy by looking outward while remaining fiercely proud of its heritage. In a century marred by interminable civil war and an international reputation for violence, the nation has succeeded in breaching this clouded perception through the arts. Unlike many of its neighbors -- who remain ambivalent or even antagonistic toward outside perception -- Colombia has sought approval and friendship with the United States and much of the Western world despite its two-dimensional image as a Third-World, drug-industry-controlled country. Without reservation, the people of Colombia eagerly celebrate when their dance styles, popular music, and wildly successful cultural exports -- from Nobel Prize-winner Gabriel García Márquez to pop musicians Shakira and Carlos Vives -- succeed on an international level. It seems appropriate that a proponent of art music like Jaime León should be given a place in these ranks, especially considering he spent a majority of his life abroad in a country that greatly influenced his work and whose acceptance Colombia seeks.

The maestro cum composer demonstrates adept ability to fuse native elements with European art music tradition and American mid-century popular style. Perhaps the most intriguing implication of his work as an iconic assimilator of styles is that he managed to do so no matter where he was. Curiously, his most folk-inspired song, "La
campesina,” was written while he was living in the United States in the 1950s. Also worth noting is that while other composers in South America were searching for unique voices of identity in their home countries, struggling to reconcile the disparate elements of their native styles with European art music tradition in order to achieve cohesion, Jaime León found his identity precisely by being somewhere else. This really speaks to the identity of South America as a whole: nationalistic fusion borne of extraction from one’s homeland. It is truly a metaphor for the cultural development of the entire continent.

It is my sincere hope that the songs of Jaime León reach a greater worldwide audience and inspire deeper research into the genre of Colombian art song. They are exemplary of all the hallmarks of well-executed song composition while also serving as a platform for the exposure of little-heard Colombian and Ecuadorian poetry. And beyond purely academic analysis, they are beautiful. They bring light to a unique cultural corner of the world that is eager to share its artistic heritage. Through the synthesis of native poetry, art song compositional tradition, nationalistic elements, and an American theatrical bent, Jaime León provides us with a view into an overlooked and overshadowed treasury of Latin American repertoire.
REFERENCES


Elissa Alvarez was born in Houston, Texas on 29 June 1982, the daughter of Elizabeth and Eduardo Alvarez. Following graduation from Klein Oak High School in Spring, Texas, she matriculated at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. She completed her Bachelor of Music degree in voice performance in 2004, followed by her Master of Music degree in voice performance in 2006 at the same institution. Elissa began her candidacy for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts at Boston University in September of 2007. While pursuing this degree, she worked closely with the university's collaborative piano department, participated in productions and performances with BU's Opera Institute and Symphony Orchestra, and formed fruitful working relationships with student and faculty composers. Since moving to Boston, she has performed professionally with Coro Allegro, the Newburyport Choral Society, the Xanthos Ensemble, the Handel and Haydn Society, and in numerous recital collaborations.

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