

PROGRAM NOTES

These songs constitute an attempt to musically encapsulate what has been happening in Venezuela over the last two decades. I wasn't interested in depicting the cruelty and misery that Venezuelans experience daily, after all, a song cycle for soprano and piano cannot truly do justice to such hell. Also, I have always been hesitant to musically depict what is going on in Venezuela given that I haven't lived there in over 20 years.

Instead, these songs are exploring my relationship to Venezuela and Caracas, specifically, as an expatriate now living in the United States. I was first drawn to Adalber Salas Hernández's beautiful poetry because of its profound sense of place. Here was someone who seemed to experience his city as a physical entity that he carries with him everywhere he goes. Throughout the two poems here, there is a palpable sense that something profound has been lost. That the city that we grew up in no longer exists, it has either been washed away by the rain, or we have lost it by leaving it.

Because the two poems chosen are longer than those generally used in song cycles, I decided to split them into smaller sections. Part I is a setting of the poem XXXII *Ciudad perdida*, and is itself divided into four sections. Part II is a setting of the poem XXXIII from *La ciencia de las despedidas* and is divided into 2 parts.

Part I has a distinct Spanish flavor, with echoes of flamenco music, especially in the outer parts. This was done not only as a way to subliminally connect this music to the world from which it partially came, but also as a way to find a certain darkness and verve that would echo the loss depicted in this poetry.

Part II begins as a pop song, as though it's the music in the waiting room at an immigration facility. This banal music is meant to be in stark contrast with the lyrics that depict the intrusions to which immigrants are subjected upon entering a new land. As the question of the motive for travel keeps popping up, the narrator becomes more introspective and pensive, and we enter the interior world of this weary traveler. By the time we reach the second section, all echoes from this "hold music" are gone except for one last cruel reminder near the end. I dedicate this piece to all *caraqueños* who are now wandering the world still yearning for their Ávila mountain.

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TEXTS

XXXII (Ciudad perdida)

*la ciudad que se acerca
nos fue negada.*

SEVERO SARDUY

Llueve. En esta ciudad siempre llueve. El agua cae con una intensidad que sólo pertenece a las fábulas o los sueños. Cae seria, insistente, casi sólida, una tela hecha por manos sin ojos, saliva de una boca que nos cubre. Llueve sobre cada moneda que circula por los mercados, por los centros comerciales, en cada billete empapado de sudor y bilis. Llueve en los tribunales, en los ministerios, dentro de los archivos, entre las sentencias, las actas, los artículos, las enmiendas. Llueve en todas las listas. Llueve como si alguien intentara pedirnos algo, tal vez disculparse, y la voz se le desmenuzara en gotas.[*] En la calle, ángeles desdentados resbalan mientras van de puerta en puerta pidiendo limosna. Las tuberías no se calman, no paran de contar, obsesionadas con el fluir del tiempo que las atraviesa. En los cementerios, los muertos pasan la eternidad que les dimos arreglando filtraciones, reparando desagües. Las nubes no rezan por la salvación de nada ni de nadie: han sido bautizadas por los lugares comunes de la dicha.[*] Llueve: un ademan torpe cubre los edificios, les humedece la frente, les calla las ventanas. La memoria de la ciudad es un charco que va creciendo poco a poco, mojándonos las piernas, reblandeciendo nuestros huesos de papel. Recuerdos, como peces de piel opaca, nadan por ahí, contagiando de insomnio a quien los mire.

Nadie puede decir a ciencia cierta cuándo la lluvia perdió a la ciudad.[*] Escarabajos ruedan torpemente por las aceras, zamuros vigilan el tráfico en sus horas de ocio, cuando dejan de redactar leyes y toman un descanso. Arañas tejen los andamios por los que caminamos ahora. Los perros predicán. Sobre las fachadas de las casas, crecen breves escamas grises, anodinas. Llueve sobre la historia de la ciudad, manoseada y dispersa, imposible ya de reunir. Llueve sobre las cabezas de los santos que escupen hacia arriba, que andan armados y haciendo milagros de plomo y cerveza. Llueve bajo el techo del palacio de gobierno; el musgo, verde como una caricia, crece sobre los bustos de los próceres, en sus uñas, en sus párpados cansados de tanta proclama. El repiqueteo se confunde con el ruido de los cabellos que brotan de las autopistas, inmanejables como quebradas. Llueve sin vacilación, sin que alguno de nosotros se pregunte por qué perdimos tan fácilmente estas calles, a quién se las entregamos. O cómo se llamará la ciudad, ahora que la humedad ha desteñido su nombre, de qué será sinónimo, cuándo se parecerá a la misericordia.

[*] Denotes a break in between songs, to be performed *attacca*.

XXXII (Lost City)

*the approaching city
was denied us.*

SEVERO SARDUY

It's raining. It's always raining in this city. The water falls with an intensity that can only belong to fables or dreams. It falls seriously, insistent, almost solid, a cloth made by hands with no eyes, saliva from a mouth that covers us. It rains over each coin that circulates in the markets, around the shopping malls, in each bill soaked in sweat and bile. It's raining at the courthouse, at the ministries, in the archives, between the sentences, the acts, the articles, the amendments. It's raining in all the lists. It's raining as if someone were trying to ask for something, or maybe say sorry, and their voice fades into droplets.[*] On the street, toothless angels slip as they walk by going door to door begging for money. The plumbing doesn't calm down, it doesn't stop counting, obsessed with the flow of time that courses through it. In the cemeteries, the dead spend the eternity we've given them fixing leaks, repairing filtrations. The clouds don't pray for the salvation of anyone or anything: they've been baptized by the common places of speech.[*] It's raining: a clumsy gesture covers the buildings, it dampens their forehead, shuts their windows. The memory of the city is a puddle that grows bit by bit, flooding our legs, softening our paper bones. Memories, like fish with opaque skin, swim around there, infecting anyone who sees them with insomnia.

No one can say for sure when the rain finally lost the city.[*] Beetles clumsily roll down the sidewalks, vultures watch the traffic in their off hours, when they're not writing laws, and take a break. Spiders weave the scaffolding where we now walk. The dogs preach. On the façades of the houses, short grey anodyne flakes are growing. It's raining on the city's history, worn and dispersed, impossible to reunite again. It's raining on the heads of the saints who are spitting upwards, who are armed and granting miracles of lead and beer. It's raining under the roof of the government palace; the moss, green like a caress, grows on the busts of the founding fathers, in their nails, in their eyelids tired from so many proclamations. The tapping blends into the noise of the hair growing from the highways, unwieldy like waterfalls. It's raining without pause, none of us asking ourselves why we lost these streets so easily, who did we hand them over to. Or what will the city be called, now that the humidity has stretched out its name, what will it be a synonym for, when will it look like mercy.

XXXIII (Salvoconducto)

Aquí tiene mi pasaporte. Sí, mi visa está vigente. Tengo los papeles que lo confirman. ¿Motivo del viaje? Personal. No, no transporto alcohol o tabaco. No, no llevo conmigo alimentos sin pasteurizar, materiales orgánicos, curiosidades insalubres. No he estado recientemente en una granja: no recuerdo la última vez que estuve en una granja. No poseo licencia para portar armas de fuego. Nunca he tocado una. En mi bolso de mano no hay botellas con más de 300 ml de contenido. ¿Motivo de viaje? Viajo por las mismas razones que todo el mundo: por ingenuidad, por creer lo que dicen los libros, que hay un lugar donde no me alcanzará mi nombre, donde podré tomarlo finalmente en vano. No, en mi equipaje no hay látigos, esposas, vibradores, arneses. Tampoco documentos imprescindibles para la paz de alguna nación. No traslado especies animales o vegetales; dejé las plantas carnívoras en la infancia. Los órganos que llevo están pulcramente guardados bajo mi piel, algunos prematuramente cubiertos por el óxido y la grasa. ¿Todas estas pastillas? La circulación no puede quedarse estática, no puede haber sangre perpleja en las venas; la respiración no puede estancarse en la tráquea como un puño de bruma: me rompería los dientes y el paladar. ¿Motivo de viaje? [*]

Porque yo ya no soy yo ni mi casa es mi casa. Usted, con sus insignias y su uniforme, su himno y su juramento a la bandera, no termina de entender que un país es un puñado de palabras robadas. Y algún día hay que devolverlas. Eso hago justo ahora: dejo las palabras por donde puedo, donde me permiten, aunque ya tengan un sabor rancio. Pago una deuda con estas palabras legañosas, que parpadean bajo la lámpara cenital. En la ciudad donde nací, cada quién tiene sus deudas y siempre hay alguien que las cobra. Allí, los milagros son un peligro como cualquier otro, una bala perdida, un desastre natural. Allí, todas las pieles madrugan con la misma resaca inocente. ¿Motivo del viaje? Porque en los lugares donde nadie habla mi lengua el cuerpo es una desaparición: hay una transparencia que gangrena de golpe la carne, ninguna sílaba me carga, nadie puede verme. Pero no viajo sin equipaje. Mi ciudad está hecha de papel: se dobla y se guarda en el bolsillo, tiene la forma de un cuaderno, de un tacto cómplice. En ellas los santos atracan, transmutan el agua en ron, manejan motos empire y duermen su mínima eternidad dentro de las estatuas de arcilla. En mi ciudad, llevamos nuestros muertos en el bolsillo; no se los puede abandonar eb casa, desaparecen, se van an más allá o los roban para venderlos—no dejan a cambio ni un montoncito de sal—. No es realmente una ciudad: es una fiebre lenta que se como el valle, trasnochada, colérica. ¿Motivo de viaje? Desde hace años sueño con una ballena que me traga, me alberga durante meses detrás de sus dientes de yeso, en la noche blanda de su estómago, para finalmente escupirme en costas extrañas.

[*] Denotes a break in between songs, to be performed *attacca*.

XXXIII (Safe passage)

Here's my passport. Yes, my visa's valid. I have the papers to confirm it. The purpose of my visit? Tourism. No, I'm not transporting any alcohol or tobacco. No, I don't have any unpasteurized products, organic materials, or unsanitary trinkets. I haven't been to a farm recently; I can't remember the last time I did. I don't have a license to carry firearms. I've never touched a gun. In my carry-on luggage there are no bottles over 300 ml in volume. The purpose of my visit? I travel for the same reasons as everyone else: out of innocence, or because I believe what I read in books, that there's somewhere out there where my name won't reach me, where I can finally take it in vain. No, there are no whips, handcuffs, vibrators, or harnesses in my luggage. Or documents essential to some nation's peace. I'm not transporting animal or vegetable species; I left my carnivorous plants behind in childhood. Any organs I carry are neatly tucked away under my skin, some prematurely coated in rust and fat. Oh, these pills? Circulation can't stay static; I can't have any baffled blood running through my veins; my breath can't stall in my throat like a fist of fog: it'd shatter my teeth and palate. The purpose of my visit?[*]

Because I'm no longer myself and my house is no longer my house. You, sir, with your badges and your uniform, your anthem and your pledge of allegiance, you'll never understand that a country is a handful of stolen words. And someday they must be returned. That's exactly what I'm doing right now: I'm leaving the words wherever I can, wherever they'll let me, even if their taste has soured. I'm paying off a debt with these bleary words, which blink in the zenith lighting. In the city where I was born, everyone has their debts and there's always someone to collect them. There, miracles are a danger like any other, a stray bullet, a natural disaster. There, all skins wake with the same innocent hangover. The purpose of my visit? Because in the places where no one speaks my language the body is a disappearance: there's a transparency that suddenly gangrenes my flesh, no syllable can restore me, no one can see me. But I don't travel without a suitcase. My city is made of paper. I can fold it up and stuff it in my pocket; it's shaped like a notebook, like a knowing touch. There, the saints brawl, change water into rum, drive Empire motorcycles, and sleep off their trifling eternity in clay statues. In my city, we carry our dead in our pockets. You can't leave them at home; they disappear, they tear off into the beyond or are stolen for resale—they don't leave so much as a little pillar of salt in exchange. It's not really a city; it's a slow fever that eats at the valley, haggard, furious. The purpose of my visit? I've spent years dreaming of a whale that swallows me up and shelters me for months behind its plaster teeth, in its belly's soft night, before it finally spits me out on unfamiliar shores.

Commissioned by and dedicated to Sparks & Wiry Cries for María Fernanda Brea

Ciudad perdida

for Soprano and Piano

Adalber Salas Hernández

Reinaldo Moya
(BMI)

Part I. Ciudad perdida

1.

Intense, incandescent ♩ = 132

Soprano staff: X

Piano accompaniment: X

ossia, the figurations on the grand staff are preferred, but the pianist need not be dogmatic about the patterns. It is acceptable to "improvise" a different figuration using the given notes. If doing so, do not make the figures too regular.

Intense, incandescent ♩ = 132

Grand staff piano accompaniment with dynamic marking *f*.

2 *f* Intense. In the style of flamenco

Soprano staff with lyrics: L lue _ ve. _

Piano accompaniment: X

Grand staff piano accompaniment with dynamic marking *mf*.

Words: "Ciudad perdida," from *Salvoconducto* (2015); "(Poema XXXIII)," from *La ciencia de las despedidas* (2018); and Copyright © Adalber Salas Hernández. Used by permission.

3 ad lib. like an incantation

Musical staff with lyrics: Lue _____ Lue ve. _____

Piano accompaniment for the first system, including treble and bass clefs.

4

Musical staff with lyrics: En es - ta ciu - dad siem - - - pre

Piano accompaniment for the second system, including treble and bass clefs.

5

Musical staff with lyrics: llue - - - ve -

Piano accompaniment for the third system, including treble and bass clefs.

6

el a - gua ca - e _____ con u - na in - ten - si -

Musical score for measures 6-7. The vocal line starts with a quarter rest, followed by a half note 'el', a quarter note 'a', a quarter note 'gua', a quarter note 'ca', a quarter note 'e' with a long horizontal line underneath, a quarter note 'con', a quarter note 'u', a quarter note 'na', a quarter note 'in', a quarter note 'ten', and a quarter note 'si' with a '3' above it. The piano accompaniment features a treble clef with a key signature of two flats and a bass clef with a key signature of one flat. A large slur covers the piano accompaniment across measures 6 and 7.

7

- dad que so - lo _____ per - te - ne - ce a las fá - bu - las

Musical score for measures 7-8. The vocal line continues with a half note '- dad', a quarter note 'que', a quarter note 'so', a quarter note 'lo' with a long horizontal line underneath, a quarter note 'per', a quarter note 'te', a quarter note 'ne', a quarter note 'ce', a quarter note 'a', a quarter note 'las', a quarter note 'fá', a quarter note 'bu', and a quarter note 'las' with a '3' above it. The piano accompaniment continues with the same key signature and a large slur across measures 7 and 8.

[7]

o a - los sue - - - ños.

Musical score for measure 8. The vocal line starts with a quarter note 'o', a quarter note 'a', a quarter note 'los', a quarter note 'sue', a quarter note '-' with a long horizontal line underneath, a quarter note '-' with a long horizontal line underneath, and a quarter note 'ños.' with a '3' above it. The piano accompaniment continues with the same key signature and a large slur across measure 8.

mf

11 **A**

Ca - e se - - ria, in - sis - ten - - te, ca - si

A

12

só - li - da, u - na te - la he - cha por ma - nos sin

13

o - - jos, sa - li - va de u - na

14 **ritardando**

port.

bo - - ca que nos

ritardando

15 **B** Slower, gentler ♩ = 96

cu - - bre.

Slower, gentler ♩ = 96

B

pp gently rocking

Not too slow, contemplative, yet tense $\text{♩} = 88$

p

En la ca - - - lle, —

Not too slow, contemplative, yet tense $\text{♩} = 88$

6

án - ge - les — des - den - ta - - - dos — res - ba - - - lan —

11

— mien - tras van de puer - ta en — puer - ta — pi -

17

- dien - do li - mos na. — Las — tu - be - rí - as

23

no se cal - man, no pa - ran de con - tar,
 in relief, like a clock, or a leaky faucet

p

28

ob - se - sio - na - das con el flu - ir del tiem - po

33

que las a - tra - vie - sa.

pp a whisper

En los ce - men - te - rios,

ppp

los muer - tos pa - san la e - ter - ni - dad

que les di - mos a - rre - glan - do fil - tra - cio -

Fast flourishes in an otherwise desolate landscape ♩ = ca. 140

ad lib. recitativo

f *dramatico*

Fast flourishes in an otherwise desolate landscape ♩ = ca. 140

Llue - - - ve:

f

8va

Rec.

2

un a - de - man tor - pe

f

8va

Rec.

3

cu - bre los e - di - fi - - - - cios,

mf

8va

Rec.

4

les hu - me - de - ce la fren - te, les ca - lla - - las ven -

mp

8va

p

Rec.

5

- ta - - - - nas.

pp
Red.

6

A *p less intense*
La me - mo - - - ria de la ciu - dad

A
pp
Red.

7

es un char - co que va cre - cien - do po - co a - co, mo - ján - do - nos las

parlando

Red.

8

pier - - nas, re - blan - de - cien - do nues - tros

slower accel. the next 2 arpeggios

Red.

B

mf

hue - sos de pa - pel. Re - cuer - dos,

B with a bit more presence and even threat

11 *mf* *Led.*

p

co - mo pe - ces de piel o - pa - ca,

pp sub.

ppp liquid and free

13 *mf* *Led.*

na - - - dan por a - hí

mf like before

14 *p* *Led.*

con - ta - gian - do de im - som - nio a quien los mi - re.

p gentle

15 27

mf dolce 3

na - die pue - de de - cir a cien -

pp 8^{va}

Red.

16

- cia cier - ta cuan - do la llu - via

mf like before

Red.

17

per - dió a la ciu - dad.

mp *pp sub.*

p 3 3

Red. *pp* *Red.*

[17]

(Red.) *mf like before* attacca

Red. faster decel. slower decel.

Fast, frantic $\text{♩} = 72$

Musical score for measures 1-5. The piece is in 3/4 time with a tempo of $\text{♩} = 72$. The key signature has two flats. The score includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. Dynamics include *p*, *sfz*, *mf*, and *p*.

6

Musical score for measures 6-10. The piano accompaniment continues with dynamic markings of *sfz* and *mf*.

11

Musical score for measures 11-15. Measure 11 features a section labeled 'A' with a 4/4 time signature change. Dynamics include *f*, *f*, *f*, and *meno f*. The instruction *f almost shouting* is present. The vocal line includes the syllable 'Es'.

16

Musical score for measures 16-20. The vocal line continues with the lyrics 'ca - ra - ba - - jos'. The piano accompaniment features dynamic markings of *f* and *f violent*.

20

— rue - dan tor - pe - men - - te —

The musical score for measures 20-24 consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a treble clef with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The lyrics are "rue - dan tor - pe - men - - te". The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a bass line with accents in the left hand.

25

por las a - ce - - - ras, — za - -

The musical score for measures 25-29 continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are "por las a - ce - - - ras, — za - -". The piano accompaniment maintains the eighth-note pattern in the right hand and the accented bass line in the left hand.

30

- mu ros — vi - gi - - -

The musical score for measures 30-34 continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are "- mu ros — vi - gi - - -". The piano accompaniment continues with the eighth-note pattern and accented bass line.

35

- lan — el trá - fi - co —

The musical score for measures 35-39 continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are "- lan — el trá - fi - co —". The piano accompaniment continues with the eighth-note pattern and accented bass line.

en sus ho - ras de o - - cio

ad lib., slower

cuan - do de - jan de re - dac - tar le - yes y to - man un des - can - so,

slow arpeggio

Red.

B A tempo

B A tempo

poco p *f*

f

A - - ra - - - -

6

mp

pe - - rros pre - di - can.

mp

(*Red.*) *Red.* *Red.* *Red.* *pp Red.*

mp

So - bre las fa - cha - das

mp

(*Red.*) *Red.* *Red.*

mp

de las ca - sas, cre - cen bre - ves

pp

Red. *Red.* *Red.*

mp

es - ca - mas gri - ses, *ad lib. arpeggio*

mp *f*

(*Red.*) *Red.* *Red.* 5

Part II. *Poema XXXIII*

1.

Like the ambient music in the waiting room to hell ♩ = 116

Like the ambient music in the waiting room to hell ♩ = 116

p

with a pop music voice, chest-voice

mp coy

4

A - quí tie - ne mi pa - sa - por - te Sí, mi

more lyrically, legato

7

vi - sa es - tá vi - gen - te. Ten - go los pa - pe - les que lo con - fir - man. ¿Mo - ti - vo del

10

via - je? Per - - so - nal.

13

No, no trans - por - to al - cohol ni ta - ba - co No, no lle - vo con - mi - go a - li -

16

- men - tos sin pas - teu - rizar, ma - te - ria - les or -

18

- gá - ni - cos cu - rio - si - da - des in - sa - lu - bres. No he es - ta - do re -

21

- cien - te - men - te en u - na gran - ja: no re - cuer - do la úl - ti - ma

23

vez que es - tu - ve en u - na gran - ja. No po - se - o li - cen - cia pa - ra por - tar

26

ar - mas de fue - go. Nun - ca he to - ca - do u - na. En mi bol - so de ma -

29

- no no hay bo - te - llas con más de tres - cien - tos mi - li - li - tros de con - te - ni - do

32

B *legato* 3 ¿Mo - ti - vo del via - je?

B *p* *pp* *ppp*

p *pp* *ppp*

Red. *Red.* *Red.*

48 poco rit.

Introspective ♩ = 100

p melancholy sound in huge contrast to opening of the song

35

Via - jo _____ por las mis - mas _____ ra -

pp *ppp*

pp *pp*

(*Ad.*) (*Ad.*)

Ad lib.

in these sections, "ad lib." always means free, but also slower, around ca. 80

38

- zo - nes _____ que to - do el mun - do: _____ por in - ge - nui - dad _____ por cre -

Ad lib.

pp *pp* m.d.

(*Ad.*) (*Ad.*) (*Ad.*)

41

A tempo

ad lib.

A tempo

- er lo que di - cen los li - bros _____ que hay un lu - gar _____

A tempo ad lib. A tempo

pp m.d. *pp*

(*Ad.*) (*Ad.*)

Moderato, gentler, without a hint of irony $\text{♩} = 80$ *mp*

Por - que yo _____ ya no soy yo ni mi ca - sa

Moderato, gentler, without a hint of irony $\text{♩} = 80$ *mp*

p
Red.

5

_____ es mi ca - sa. Us - ted, con sus in - sig - nias

Red.

9

ad lib.

y su u - ni for - me, su him - no _____ y su ju - ra - men - to a - la ban-

Red.

12

-de - ra, no ter - mi - na de en - ten - der que un pa - ís es un pu -

Red. *Red.* *Red.*

15

rit **A** A tempo ♩ = 80

- ña - do de pa - la - bras ro - ba - das. Y al - gún dí - a hay que de - vol

rit **A** A tempo ♩ = 80

Red. *Red.* *Red.* *Red.*

19

- ver - las y e - so jus - to ha - go a - ho - ra:

Red. *Red.* *Red.*

de - jo las pa - la - bras por don - de pue - do, don - de me per-

Red. *Red.* *Red.*

-mi - ten aun - que ya ten - gan un sa - bor ran - cio.

Red. *Red.*

Pa - go u - na de - u - da con es - tas pa - la - bras le - ga - ño - sas, que par - pa-

Red. *Red.*

-de - an ba - jo la lam - pa - ra ce - ni - tal. *ritardando*

Red. *Red.* *ritardando*

35 **B** A tempo ♩ = 80
mf growing more intense

En la ciu - dad don - de na - cí, ca - da quién tie - ne sus de - u - das

B A tempo ♩ = 80
mp with more determination

Red.

38

y siem - pre hay al - quien que las co - bra. A -

Red.

41

- llí los mi - la - gros son un pe - li - gro co - mo cual - quier

poco cresc.

Red.