

# P o e t i c   E n c o u n t e r s

Composition portfolio

Erika Vega

B L A N C O	(2019)
<i>The Love Song</i>	(2019)
<i>Ceci n'est pas un duo</i>	(2019)
L A C O Y OTADA	(2020-21)
<i>Queen Alice</i>	(2020-21)
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## Introduction

Instruments need to be listened to very carefully to discover the voices they hold. This is how astounding worlds of sounds are revealed, and it is up to both imagination and reason to give shape to that new sonic reality.  
— Mario Lavista<sup>1</sup>

The following part of the submission includes the prefaces of each of the ten compositions in the portfolio. I describe the logic behind my approach and how it is grounded in formal construction. Before going into each composition, I would like to briefly explore the artistic motivation driving these works and potential connections among them, both within individual pieces and across the portfolio as a whole. This preliminary discourse offers a more casual exploration of my compositional choices.

An essential aspect of the thesis resides in its practical dimension, wherein research is the foundation for the compositional process throughout each stage. Throughout my five-year DPhil journey, I witnessed how my research has been embedded in my creative practice. During this time, I produced an extensive array of pieces spanning dance, film, and theatre, writing for different instrumentations, solos, and small and large ensembles (not all of which were DPhil-related). This is an aspect of my music, the interrelation between different media, either the translatability between different semiotic systems, as with poetry, literature, and visual arts, or within a multimedia construction, like dance, cinema, and theatre.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Alonso-Minutti, Ana. Mario Lavista: Mirrors of Sounds. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2023, p.123.

While the dissertation is focused on studying compositions that do not present any literal text, my music portfolio includes both vocal and instrumental compositions that are diverse in aesthetics but mainly explore convergences between music and text. Additionally, the dissertation presents contrasting examples of intersemiotic translation between music and literary text, highlighting their relevance within any artistic practice. However, in my own practice, I allowed for a more intuitive convergence of this approach.

My compositions are centred around the exploration of timbre, colour, and texture, employing meticulous attention to detail through the extended techniques of the instruments. My approach is predominantly intuitive, crafting sonic gestures that evolve and refine over time. Formally, I am inclined to draw inspiration from literature or poetry, using them as foundational elements in my composition process. I integrate literary structures, formal techniques, aesthetic considerations, phonetic constructions, and narratives, ensuring a continuous dialogue and interplay between these two semiotic systems.

# 1

## B L A N C O (2019)

Instrumentation: voice and piano

Duration: 13'30''

Based on the homonym poem by Octavio Paz

Written for and premiered by Sarah Maria Sun

Premiered in October 2019 at Festival Vértice  
UNAM, Mexico City

B L A N C O was composed during my first year as a doctoral student at Oxford University. At that time, I was examining Boulez' *Third Piano Sonata* and the Mallarmean poetry when I received a commission from UNAM to create a new piece for Sarah Maria Sun. Before this, I had never ventured into composing for voice, yet as I listened to Sarah's performances, I found myself interested in the nuanced timbral expressions of the voice—specifically, her unique vocal timbre.

During the creative process, the imagery of Octavio Paz' *Blanco* (1967) and the accompanying epigraph, which acknowledges Paz' indebtedness to the Mallarméan aesthetic, came to mind. Recognising the intertextual potential of the thread that interwove Mallarmé, Boulez, and Paz, I chose *Blanco* as the foundation of my composition. This confluence of influences provided a foundation for my composition, guiding me to explore the intersection between poetic imagery, musical expression, and vocal performance.

Derived from Octavio Paz' poem, B L A N C O is a six-movement composition that draws inspiration from the Mallarméan constellation poem, the idea of the graphic space as a representation of sound and silence. In Paz' *Blanco*, the author's epigraph immediately evokes a Mallarméan essence: "Avec ce seul objet dont le Néant s'honore", (with this single object with which Nothingness is honoured). Acting as a metaphor for the blank, unmarked space, emptiness, and void, B L A N C O embodies the discontinuity, accentuating pauses, hesitations, and silences while also playing with the cadence of discourse through fluctuations in tempo (see Figure 1). This dispersal of elements, with its emphasis on pause, hesitation, and silence, as well as the alternation between speeding up and slowing down the discourse, draws parallels to the typographic variations that structure Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés*.

In his poem, Paz offers the reader the possibility of multiple interpretations, exploring variations in typography and the arrangement of graphic space to represent silence (see Figure 3). Paz explains that the poem can be read in four different ways: as a whole or as three separate columns, each divided into eight, six, and eight poems, respectively. Each column is organised around the number four: the four elements (left), four colours (centre) – yellow, red, green, blue – and four emotions (right). Similarly, the movements of B L A N C O can be performed in different orders or as individual miniatures, offering multiple potential interpretations.

**3.- de la percepción**  
**espressivo, timeless (♩=60)**

*1*  
 S. *p* *5* *5*  
 ON the strings  
 elbow keep the elbow all the movement  
 Pno. *mp* *8va*  
*Reo. sempre*

**capriccioso ♩=82**  
*sotto voce mp* *mf* *p* whispered at the given pitch  
 es mi crea - cion es - to que ve - o

*2*  
 S. *sotto voce mf* *p* *3* *3* whispered  
 la per-cep- ción es con cep ción  
*mf* emphasizing every syllable  
 sub-yec-to  
 ob-yec-to  
 ab-yec-to  
 ab-suel-to  
**espressivo, timeless (♩=60)**  
*p* *5* *5*  
 Pno. *mp* *8va*

**capriccioso ♩=80**  
*3*  
 S. *f* *8'*  
 a-gua  
*leggero virtuoso mf* *pp* *mf* *mp* *f* *tendre p*  
 de pen - sa - mien - tos mm soy la crea cion de lo que  
 Pno. *very fast gliss on the strings w/fingertips sfz* *8'*  
*slap on the strings w/palm of the hand p sfz*

Figure 1. Vega, B L A N C O, a fragment of the third movement.

el comienzo  
el cimientto  
la simiente  
latente  
la palabra en la punta de la lengua  
inaudita                      inaudible  
impar  
grávida                      nula  
sin edad  
la enterrada con los ojos abiertos  
inocente                      promiscua  
la palabra  
sin nombre                      sin habla

Figure 2. Paz, *Blanco*, first verse.

Audio: <https://soundcloud.com/erikavega/b-l-a-n-c-o>

# 2

## The Love Song (2019)

Instrumentation: violin and viola

Duration: 12'

Based on the poem: *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1915) by T. S. Eliot

Written for and premiered by Aperture duo Linnea Powell and Adrienne Pope.

Premiered in March 2019 at UCLA, California.

*The Love Song* is an instrumental piece comprising seven movements based on T. S. Eliot's poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1915). The poem is a central figure in the piece's narrativity through metaphor.

In *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, Eliot masterfully employs a stream-of-consciousness technique, delving deep into the psyche of Prufrock. Through this method, he captures the essence of a dramatic interior monologue, unveiling the protagonist's melancholy and introspective dilemmas with vivid clarity. Eliot's artistry shines through his deliberate use of repetition and punctuation, heightening the intensity of Prufrock's inner turmoil. Moreover, the varied rhyme schemes and meter employed by Eliot contribute to a deliberate pacing that draws the reader into the intricate labyrinth of Prufrock's thoughts and emotions, compelling them to navigate the complexities of his existential journey.

The formal construction reflects on some of the rhetorical devices in the poem that arise from a narrative conception; the link between narration and perception provides a metaphorical dimension to the music. I employed a motivic construction as the foundational material for the piece, utilising it as a motif that undergoes permutations across various movements (Figure 3). Repetition stands out as a defining feature within "Prufrock," showcasing various forms that collectively underscore the speaker's ambivalence and doubt. Notably, one of the most renowned refrains in the poem recurs in lines 13–14 and 35–36:

"In the room, the women come and go  
Talking of Michelangelo."

## 2. Talking of Michelangelo

**Energico** ♩=112

The musical score for "Talking of Michelangelo" is written for Violin (Vln.) and Viola (Vla.) in 12/8 time. The tempo is marked "Energico" with a quarter note equal to 112 beats per minute (♩=112). The score begins at measure 17. The Violin part starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *s.p.* (sotto piano) marking. The Viola part also starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *s.p.* marking. Both instruments play a repetitive rhythmic motif consisting of eighth and sixteenth notes. Dashed lines connect the two parts, showing they play the same material. The word *simile* appears above the Violin part and below the Viola part, indicating the continuation of the motif. The Violin part concludes with an *a.s.p.* (accelerando sotto piano) marking and a forte (*f*) dynamic.

Figure 3. Vega, *The Love Song*, second movement.

Eliot employs repetition in these fragments to mirror Prufrock's obsessive and circling thoughts, emphasising his sense of familiarity and ennui with life's mundane routines and interactions. The repetition of "known them all" underscores Prufrock's exhaustive experience and weariness with the passage of time, as he recounts the monotonous rhythm of his days

measured out by mundane actions like stirring coffee with spoons. The repetition of "how should I presume?" reflects his hesitation and uncertainty about his place in the world.

“For I have known them all already, known them all:  
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,  
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;  
I know the voices dying with a dying fall  
Beneath the music from a farther room.  
So how should I presume?”

I wanted to capture Prufrock's internal turmoil and obsession by employing repetition, highlighting his inability to break free from the cyclical patterns of his thoughts and actions. This recurrent obsession is depicted through motivic permutations in rhythm, texture, and colour, initially introduced in the first movement and further intensified throughout the second, third, and fifth movements.

**1. Let us go then, you and I**  
**7 Molto ritmico  $\text{♩} = 112$**   
**4**

Violin

Viola

Vln.

Vla.

Figure 4. Vega, *The Love Song*, first movement.

In the fourth movement, I quoted Marin Maris' *Couplets de folies* as a nod to intertextuality. However, in the subsequent seventh movement, I took a creative departure by distorting and articulating the original sound into a spectrum of white noise. Achieving this effect involved shifting the bow motion across different positions along the fingerboard, detailed in each system's graphics below (Figure 5). This musical transformation is a metaphor for the epigraph drawn from Dante's epigraph in "The Love Song."

The introductory stanza references Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*, forging a symbolic connection between Count Guido, trapped within the Eighth Circle of Hell, and Prufrock, entangled in an equally tormenting existence on Earth. This juxtaposition illuminates Count Guido's unreserved speech, echoing Prufrock's candid self-expression throughout the poem.

## 16 7. Till human voices wake us, and we drown

Dreamlike and free

Violin (Vln.) staff: flautando, col legno, flautando. Marking: mp.

Viola (Vla.) staff: flautando, col legno, flautando. Marking: mp.

Bowing diagrams below the staves show the movement of the bow across the fingerboard, with a '3' indicating a triplet.

Meno moso, surrealistic

Violin (Vln.) staff: col legno, flautando, col legno, flautando. Marking: mp.

Viola (Vla.) staff: col legno, flautando, col legno, flautando. Marking: mp.

Bowing diagrams below the staves show the movement of the bow across the fingerboard, with a '3' indicating a triplet.

Figure 5. Vega, *The Love Song*, seventh movement.

Audio: <https://soundcloud.com/erikavega/the-love-song>

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAudRYd-ufg>

Sadly, the third movement was not played in the audio or video.

**Ceci n'est pas un duo (2019)**

Instrumentation: violin and piano

Duration: 10'

Awarded the Henfrey Price for Composition at  
the University of Oxford 2019

*Ceci n'est pas un duo* is inspired by surrealist artist René Magritte, renowned for challenging reality's boundaries through word-image juxtaposition. As a student residing in Brussels, I noticed how Magritte's surrealism was ingrained in the collective culture.

In this work, my artistic premise aimed to examine the parallels between music perception and reality, focusing on the physical attributes of sound, notably the intricate spectrum of overtones. Drawing inspiration from Magritte's exploration of conflicting elements, I endeavoured to construct a musical landscape where instrument boundaries dissolved and perceptions underwent a subtle shift. To achieve this, I utilised harmonics in the violin and piano as a formal device, exploiting their expressiveness and directional qualities.

The composition aimed to integrate these instruments structurally, with sounds and textures emerging from each given equal weight and importance. Whether unfolding simultaneously or in nuanced interplay, the violin and piano are in constant dialogue, heightening the sense of collaboration and tension. The piano is meticulously prepared to designate the nodal points on the strings. Harmonics are produced by delicately touching the string and promptly releasing it after striking, allowing the resonance to reverberate freely.

Figure 6. Vega, *Ceci n'est pas un duo*, piano preparations.

Ultimately, I aimed to emancipate both instruments, enabling them to evolve and interact according to the composition's requirements. By harmonising their expressive potential, I endeavoured to craft a musical experience reflecting the surreal ambiguity and intrigue inherent in Magritte's art.

**There is no audio:** This piece was rehearsed at the contest but was not performed.

**L A C O Y O T A D A (2020-21)**

Instrumentation: flute, clarinet in Bb, bass clarinet in Bb, trumpet, two percussionists, piano, three violins, cello, double bass.

Duration: 10'

Commissioned by CEPROMUSIC ensemble (Center of Experimentation and Production of Contemporary Music).

Mexican premiere September 2021

UK premiere by ISIS ensemble, February 2022

LA COYOTADA, for ensemble, serves as a homage to one of the key figures of the Mexican Revolution, Pancho Villa (born Doroteo Arango, 1878-1923). Inspired by Paco Ignacio Taibo's literary work *Pancho Villa, una biografía narrativa* (Pancho Villa, a narrative biography).

Born in La Coyotada, a village in the State of Durango, Villa's legacy as the "Centauro del Norte" resonates throughout Mexican history. From his origins as a bandit to his rise as a general, Villa's image embodies a multifaceted narrative shaped by popular culture and collective memory over the course of the twentieth century.

Foregrounding the interplay between memory and perception in musical creation, LA COYOTADA intends to capture the essence of Villa's story. Drawing from the rich tapestry of Mexican history and culture, the piece aims to evoke the spirit of resilience, rebellion, and revolution embodied by Pancho Villa, inviting listeners to embark on a journey through the intricacies of his legacy.

In its formal construction, the composition revolves around the idea of material deconstruction, a transformative process that unfolds gradually, guiding the listener through an intricate musical journey. Structured into three main type sections, each marked by shifts in tempo, harmony, and character, the piece unfolds across a series of thirteen continuous movements.

### 1. *Nostalgico meditativo and Tranquillo e immobile*

This category is characterised by a rich sonority of a high-timbre palette and metallic timbres while modulating the timbre through changes in instrumental textures. On the one hand, it is constituted by sustained low-register sounds; on the other, it weaves a tapestry of harmonics in the strings and multiphonics in the woodwinds.

The piece features a seminal ascending motive played on the strings and coloured by the pizz on the piano strings, tubular bells, and flute keyclicks. It is permuted along the piece:



Figure 7. Vega, *LA COYOTADA*, seminal motive.

The following figure shows the harmonic material used in this category:



Figure 8. Vega, *LA COYOTADA*, harmonic material.

## 2. *Inquieto, preciso* and *Presipitato energico*

The second category showcases rapid and energetic microtonal rhythmic motifs, featuring *arpeggios*, *ricochets*, and *tremolos* in the *sul ponticello* position alongside the utilisation of woodblocks. Due to its microtonal character, this category presents a stark contrast to the harmonic material found in the first category. Furthermore, the piano undergoes preparations to alter its timbral qualities across various registers, enhancing the gestural elements of the percussions:

- High-spectral "woodblock" effect to complement the woodblocks and bongos.

The musical score is divided into three staves: Perc. I, Perc. II, and Pno. (Piano).  
Perc. I: Features a series of rhythmic motifs, including a 'Wood blocks' section with a '6' (sextuplet) and a 'p' (piano) dynamic.  
Perc. II: Features a series of rhythmic motifs, including a 'Bongos' section with a 'pp' (pianissimo) dynamic and a '6' (sextuplet).  
Pno.: Features a series of rhythmic motifs, including a 'ON strings fast gliss' section with a 'f' (forte) dynamic and a 'ON keys' section with a 'p' (piano) dynamic. The 'ON keys' section is marked with a '6' (sextuplet) and a 'f' (forte) dynamic, and is labeled '(woodblock effect)'.

Figure 9. Vega, *LA COYOTADA*, piano preparations.

- A resonant low-spectral "gong" effect to complement the glockenspiel and bowed crotales, aligning the piano's timbre with the percussive palette of the ensemble.

Perc. I: Glockenspiel, 3 measures, *pp*, *mp*

Perc. II: Crotales, bowed, 3 measures, *mp*

Pno.: (gong), 3 measures, *sfz*, 3 measures, *sfz*

Figure 10. Vega, *LA COYOTADA*, piano preparations.

Very fast scrape ON the strings  
(at the low register).  
With a coin or the fingernails.

Slow scrape on the string  
(at the low register).  
With a coin or the fingernails.

Mute the strings with  
right-hand-palm firmly  
before or after the dampers.

Prepare the strings with the blu-tack  
at the proper node (3rd partial) to get  
a "gong" effect.

Damp the strings with blu-tack  
to get a "woodblock" effect

palm

Slap on the strings  
w/palm of the hand  
at the lowest register.

sounding pitch

notated pitch

Pno.

Figure 11. Vega, *LA COYOTADA*, piano preparations.

**1. *Come un eco di vecchia musica, Espressivo and Lontano, senza tempo.***

Belonging to a set of static and ethereal auditory experiences, these timbres are characterised by their subdued nature, fluctuating duration, white and airy noise, and extreme registers. Frequently overshadowed by louder elements, their resonant qualities emerge gradually as the louder sounds dissipate, and the resonances decay over time.

In this section, four techniques of white noise are explored on the strings:

- *Circular bow*, the bow motion shifts from the bridge to the fingerboard, the pitch is still perceptible.
- *Bridge* is produced by playing on the side of the bridge (see Figure 8).
- *Muting strings*, is produced by muting the strings with the left hand in the high register.
- *Blow into the instrument*, through the F-holes.

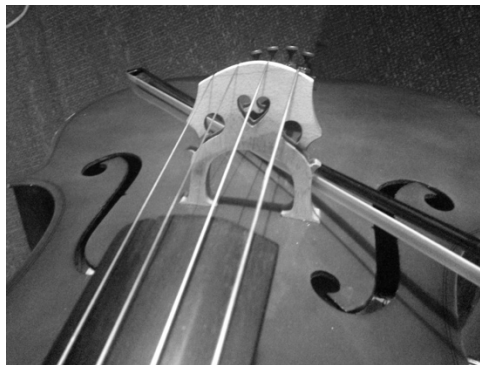


Figure 12. Vega, *LA COYOTADA*, white noise graphical example.

Towards the end of the piece, this journey of destructive-creative movement fades into emptiness. Employing extended instrumental techniques, the music gradually transitions into ethereal white noise and airy textures, evoking a sense of vast emptiness akin to the metaphorical expanse of a desert landscape, where the echoes of Villa's battle in Chihuahua's

desert resonate. In this final moment, the listener is enveloped in a meditative state, contemplating the profound silence that follows the tumultuous journey of deconstruction. Through its exploration of sonic textures and thematic depth, the composition invites reflection on the cyclical nature of creation and dissolution, leaving an indelible imprint on the listener's consciousness.

137 freely

Fl. whistle tones *p* whistle tones

Cl.

Perc. I *p* *p* *p*

Perc. II

Pno. pizz *mp* *p* pedal sound *sfz* *Ped.*

Vln. I freely blow into the instrument

Vln. II blow into the instrument

Vln. III bridge blow into the instrument

Vla. bridge

Vc. bridge muting strings

Cb. bridge

Figure 13. Vega, *LA COYOTADA*, m.137-144.

**Audio:** [https://mega.nz/folder/QEATTCIA#HnONftG5j\\_szP3yqlQzMMQ](https://mega.nz/folder/QEATTCIA#HnONftG5j_szP3yqlQzMMQ)

**Queen Alice (2020-21)**

Instrumentation: mezzo-soprano, flute and cello

Duration: 10'

Based in *Alice Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll.

Dedicated and premiered by TRIO ATEM

Finalist at the Henfrey Composition Prize 2021

I was honoured to be a finalist at the Henfrey Composition Prize 2021. This year's competition stood out from its predecessors by giving us the unique opportunity to work on a new chamber piece and guide it through every stage of its development. After the composers' selection process, we embarked on three intensive workshops over a six-month period. We had the opportunity to compose, revise, and workshop our compositions alongside the exceptional musicians of Trio ATEM while also receiving invaluable feedback from composer Judith Weir. As the final workshop drew to a close, we seized the opportunity to make any last-minute adjustments to our scores before a final concert performance and recording session.

My initial contact with the whimsical world of *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (1871) occurred in 2008. Carroll's work's unbridled creativity and layered absurdity resonated with me, stirring a sense of imaginative virtuosity that I always wanted to set to music. When composing the vocal piece, I turned to Carroll's text not to convey its story but to harness the intrinsic musicality of its language. I chose fragments and disjointed lines, extracting them not for their semantic content but for the phonetic interest. The phonetics of language are a wellspring for vocal exploration, offering a dimension of sound and a phonetic palette.

When making a vocal composition for the second time, I approached the task with a measure of uncertainty, especially when addressing the vocal techniques. However, collaborative efforts with Nina Whiteman, who brings her dual talents as a composer and performer, led to unexpected yet welcome discoveries, particularly about the unconventional techniques for the voice. The ideas from our workshop sessions grew more fascinating, evolving into integral parts of the finished composition. The piece culminates with the performers interpreting a selection of cherished, bewildering excerpts from Lewis Carroll's *Alice Through the Looking Glass*.

*Queen Alice* unfolds in four movements, performed one after the other without pause. While the movements are not contrasting, the third one stands apart, offering a solo for a bass flute that draws inspiration from Mario Lavista's *Canto del Alba* (1979) for amplified flute. Lavista's composition is notable for its lyrical solo passages of multiphonics, whistled tones, and overtones.

My aim was to create a timbral interplay between the voice and instruments—the flute and cello—by defining distinct categories of sound. Initially, the cello and flute serve to amplify the vocal effects, enhancing them to achieve a greater depth of expression (Figure 14). Second, the flute echoes the voice, with the flautist vocalising into the instrument (Figure 15). A third element involves a solo bass flute of multiphonics (Figure 16). The underlying harmonic structure of the piece is intentionally irregular and richly chromatic.

## 2.- Looking glass insects

Ritmico, quasi meccanico  $\text{♩} = 72$

4

Fl. *1* *Flute* jet whistle [ch] ram inspire-exhale into flute [a-ah] jet whistle tongue pizz [ch-k] tongue pizz [ch-k] speak into the fl. unison w/sop. They cant be bees, nobody ever saw bees a mile off *f*

M-S. [ch] what are emphasize what are those creatures inspire deeply exhale dreamlike, They cant be bees, nobody ever saw bees a mile off *f*

Vc. ricochet col legno tratto sul A col legno crea - tures ma-king ho - ney down there there emphasize *f*

*sfz* *p* *mp* *mf* *f* *pp* *f* *sfz*

Figure 14. Vega, *Queen Alice*, second movement.

Fl. speak into the fl. unison w/sop. *f* They cant be bees, nobody ever saw bees a mile off

M-S. emphasize *f* They cant be bees, nobody ever saw bees a mile off

Vc. a.s.p. *sfz* *p*

Figure 15. Vega, *Queen Alice*, second movement m.6.

### 3.- Wool and water

**Meditativo senza tempo** (♩=56)

Bass flute

B.Fl. 1

pp pp mp pp p mf p mf

10 B.Fl. p mf p p singing mp

Figure 16. Vega, *Queen Alice*, third movement.

**Audio:** <https://soundcloud.com/erika-v-64758700/queen-alice>

**Better audio quality:** [https://mega.nz/folder/QEATTCIA#HnONftG5j\\_szP3yqlQzMMQ](https://mega.nz/folder/QEATTCIA#HnONftG5j_szP3yqlQzMMQ)

**Cuentos Rulfianos (2022)**

Instrumentation: solo piano

Duration: 11'30''

Based on the *El Llano en Llamas* by Juan Rulfo

Written and premiered by Edith Ruiz

Supported by the National Fund for Culture and Arts of Mexico

*Cuentos Rulfianos* is a suite of six miniatures for piano solo, each inspired by the stories in *El Llano en Llamas* (The Burning Plain, 1953) by Juan Rulfo. In this work, I explore the notion of narrative temporality, a feature in Rulfo's literature that is reflected within the musical discourse through stylistic and aesthetic contrasts. Each movement corresponds to a different story, and the musical result is the narrative evocation that each story elicits in me. Musically, this evocation is represented in timbral textures, exploring different piano techniques performed on the strings and the keyboard.

The six miniatures of *Cuentos Rulfianos* differ in structure, style, character and narrativity. They are performed continuously, pausing between the II and III movements for the pianist to put on the gloves (Figure 17) and the IV and V for a rest. Despite the change of character between each movement, the pianist must maintain a sense of continuity, a dramaturgical curve. Wearing the gloves and taking them off must give a theatrical touch to the intentionality. Figure is a table displaying the basic features of each movement.







Movement	Tempo	Music	Technique	Graphic
I. Acuérdate	Preciso, agitato	E	ON keys  Continuous rhythm	
II. No oyes ladrar a los perros	Oniric, timeless	Chromatic	ON strings ON keys  Keys depressed silently to play gliss and pizz on the strings	
III. La cuesta de las comadres	Dark, with a sense of mystery	Diatonic	ON string ON keys  Gloves in both hands  Clusters, glissandos and repetitive attacks	
IV. Diles que no me maten	Timeless, like in a trance	E	ON E string ON keys  Harmonics, four indicated nodal points.	
V. Luvina	Crystalline, energetic	Ab	ON keys  Rhythmic on quasi-tonal material	
VI. En la madrugada	Berceuse	C	ON keys  Minimalist	

Figure 17. Vega, *Cuentos Rulfianos*, overall structure.

## 2.- No oyes ladrar a los perros

Oniric, timeless ♩=60

gliss w/ft.  
ON strings

1. rh.

Lh. depress keys silently

*pp* *mp* *sfz*

Freely

pizz stick

*p*

*Red.*

Wear the gloves

Figure 18. Vega, *Cuentos Rulfianos*, second movement.

Video: [https://mega.nz/folder/QEATTCIA#HnONftG5j\\_szP3yqIQzMMQ](https://mega.nz/folder/QEATTCIA#HnONftG5j_szP3yqIQzMMQ)

# 7

## Rarámuri (2022)

Instrumentation: solo cello

Duration 12'

Technical requirements: amplification, a conventional mic can be placed near the instrument, or a contact mic can be fixed to the instrument's belly.

Written in collaboration with and premiered by Katharina Gross

Premiered at the Gaudeamus Musiekweek, September 2022

The Rarámuri, also known as the Tarahumara, are an indigenous community residing in the Mexican state of Chihuahua. They are renowned for their proficiency in long-distance running, a skill encapsulated in their name, which means 'those who run fast'. Rarámuri captures the essence of the relentless, enduring nature of the Rarámuri's traditional runs. The idea of running is explored musically by a continuous rhythmic pulsation that explores all the possible textures a single attack can unfold.

Rarámuri explores the notion of repetition that transitions through variations in timbre, texture, and attack, triggering a wide spectrum of resonances and subtle overtones using the instrument's resonant qualities. The piece is structured in three main sections, each marked by a specific set of techniques. This approach generates a steady rhythmic pulse that underpins the work's complex sonic fabric. The techniques employed include tapping, circular bowing, spiccato, col legno, and string rubbing with a superball (rubber mallet).

The composition opens with the consistent pulse through friction on the wooden surface of the instrument, creating a white noise that allows the underlying pitch to filter through. Subsequently, it is layered with tapping that reverberates from the instrument's corpus to the strings, tracing a path from the nut down the fingerboard and the bridge. Both hands tap as if it were a percussion instrument (Figure 19), and each contact point introduces a new timbral quality, enriching the piece's acoustic palette.

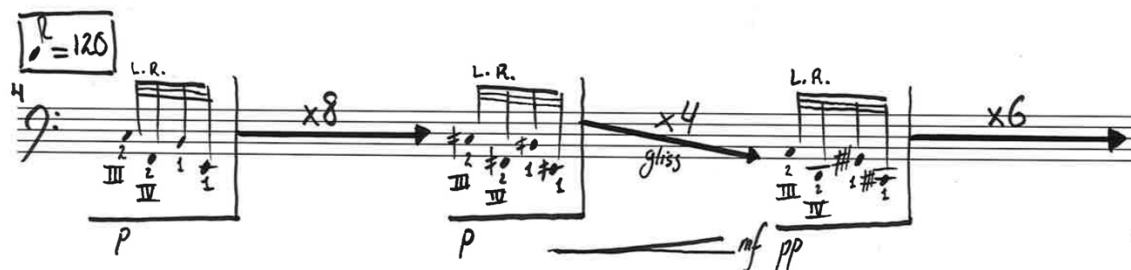


Figure 19. Vega, *Rarámuri*, system 4.

In the second section, the performance introduces the combination of a superball and a triangle beater. The superball is bounced at different striking points while keeping the fundamental harmonic (Figure 20). Then, the beater replaces the harmonic, creating a 'fuzz' effect that blurs according to the pressure. The interaction is detailed through graphic notation, which indicates the pressure and movement of the stick, ensuring precision (Figure 21).

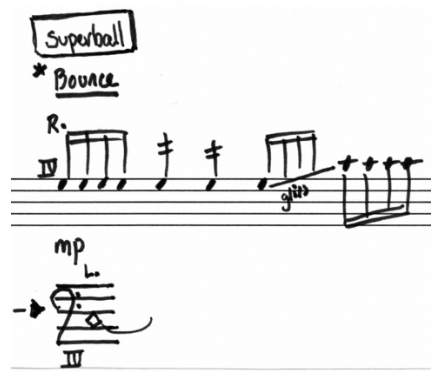


Figure 20. Vega, *Rarámuri*, system 18.

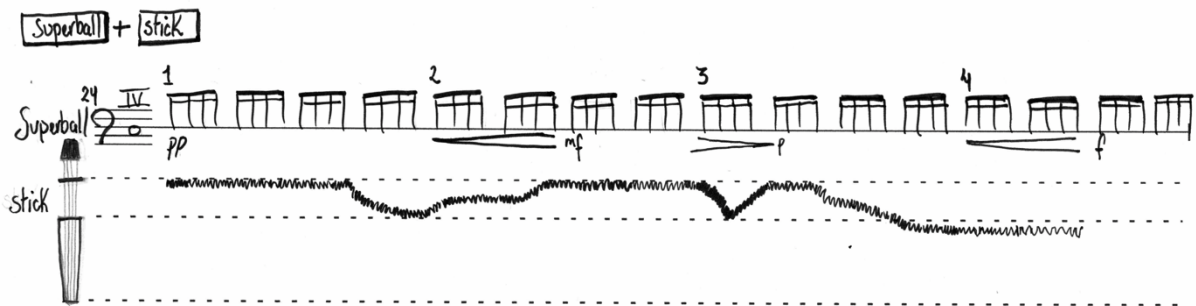


Figure 21. Vega, *Rarámuri*, system 24.

The last part of the piece explores spiccato and bouncing bow techniques, letting the instrument's overtones resonate and adding an ethereal layer of sound (Figure 22).

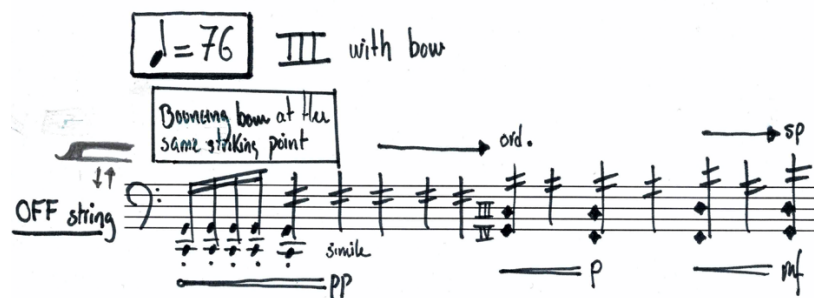


Figure 22. Vega, *Rarámuri*, system 31.






Hand No-arco	Superball No-arco	Bow
Tapping and Rubbing	Rub, bounce  Harmonics, fuzz effect	Spiccato and bouncing  Natural harmonics
<p>All the dynamics are as they sound</p> <p>Quarter tones <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">bb b d b # # #</span></p> <p>Strings I, II, III, IV L. left hand fingers  R. right hand</p> <p>sp sol ponticello asp alio sol ponticello st sol fasto ast alio sol fasto ord ordinario</p> <p> rub on the body of the instrument with 4 fingers</p> <p> top on the instrument, or not, or bridge</p> <p> note as high as possible</p> <p> with nail ON the bridge</p> <p><u>ON not</u> <u>Behind not</u> percussive places <u>ON bridge</u> <u>Behind bridge</u></p>	<p>materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1 Superball 2.4cm</li> <li>- 1 Steel triangle beater (stick) 15cm approx.</li> </ul> <p>techniques superball:</p> <p>Rub all along the body of the instrument or ON the string</p> <p>Bounce a controlled bouncing ON the string</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the rhythm is indicated</li> <li>- the precise pitch is indicated</li> </ul> <p>techniques stick:</p> <p>the stick is in contact with the string while the superball is making the string vibrate except for the system #30.</p> <p>the pressure of the stick is indicate as the following:</p> <p>~~~~~ - very loose, the vibrations make the stick bounce, producing a fuzz effect</p> <p>~~~~~ - medium pressure, the fuzz and glissando are audible</p> <p>~~~~~ - strong, only the glissando is audible</p>	

Figure 23. Vega, *Rarámuri*, characteristics of the three main sections.

In *Rarámuri*, repetition transcends minimalist aesthetic conventions, instead embodying a perpetual cycle of motion to induce a trance-like state. This concept of repetition is not static but dynamic, engaging in a constant process of variation and transition. It acknowledges that subtle changes are at work even within the most apparent loop, rendering each iteration a unique event of musical evolution.

In this context, repetition serves as a journey, not a destination. It's an ever-evolving spiral where each return to a theme carries slight variations—subtle shifts in dynamics, articulation,

and texture—that accumulate to create a transformation over time. Through this process, the cello becomes both the medium and the messenger of this philosophical concept, using the instrument's resonant qualities to delve deeper into the spiritual or emotive space that repetition with variation can inhabit.

## **Appendix**

I would like to briefly discuss an aspect of collaborating with performers and the relationship this composition entailed with Katharina Gross. In certain contexts, direct collaboration between composers and performers may be atypical. The conventional processes of music have emphasised the composer's vision and the composition's independence as a finished work. This means that composers tend to work in isolation, conceiving ideas and making decisions independently.

Contrastingly, the emergent collaborative dynamic between composers and performers disrupts this traditionalist perspective, advocating for a reconceptualisation of musical composition as a multidimensional process. Sound and timbral exploration become essential in the compositional methodology within this reconceptualisation. This collaborative venture is undertaken in an environment characterised by reciprocity. The resulting composition is a coalescence of the intrinsic artistic expressions of both the performer and the composer. This is the case of *Rarámuri*, the result of the close collaboration between Katharina Gross and me.

Video: <https://youtu.be/4I76KAofhig?si=4zUW8HUI77jmvWM>

**No oyes ladrar a los perros (2019-22)**

Instrumentation: large ensemble and organ

Duration: 12'30''

Based on the homonym tale by Juan Rulfo

Premiered by LA Phil New Music Group

Conductor: Paolo Bortolameolli

World premiere: Walt Disney Concert Hall,  
February 2023

Commissioned by the LA Phil

*No oyes ladrar a los perros* (Don't you hear the dogs barking) evokes the notion of time and space in Rulfo's writings. In musical terms, analogous phenomena can be heard, perception opens up, and the auditor is invited to cross the threshold into a oneiric atmosphere with a visual sense. The role of memory and perception is fundamental in the development of the non-linear musical narrative. The music narrative manifests itself in the way time is perceived, unravelling alternative perspectives.

The creative journey of this composition occurred in two main phases. The early phase, spanning 2019 to 2020, was dedicated to contemplating the synergy between Juan Rulfo's narrative world and my own musical expression. Concurrently, my theoretical explorations deepened, and I recognised the imperative to solidify this literary-musical link. The postponements offered an unexpected chance to thoroughly re-envision the work in 2022.

In revising *No oyes ladrar a los perros*, I ventured into new creative territories, particularly in finessing the tonal subtleties and achieving a harmonious balance between the ensemble and the organ. A pivotal aspect of this re-evaluation was the nuanced reinterpretation of textual motifs within the music, a process which necessitated a detailed reassessment of Rulfo's innovative narrative techniques, such as nonlinear storytelling and stream-of-consciousness narration, stylistically known as magical realism. My objective was to forge a composition that paid homage to Rulfo's body of work and engaged listeners in a unique experience of time and space. This reimagined approach aimed to delve into the intricate relationships among language, sound, and the listener's perception, challenging and expanding their notions of identity and the passage of time.

The notion of intersemiotic translation significantly influenced my approach to composing a musical piece based on a text. Specifically, when composing instrumental music inspired by a text, intersemiotics provided me with a structured framework for comprehending how a text can be translated across different media. Moreover, it explores the intricate relationship between the text and the music in a dynamic and multifaceted manner. Rather than simply translating the text into a musical representation, adaptation, illustration, or interpretation of its content, I sought to engage with the text, drawing inspiration from its underlying meaning, time, narrative, and aesthetic qualities to conduct my compositional choices.

*No oyes ladrar a los perros* is further discussed and analysed in Chapter 5 of the thesis.

Audio: <https://soundcloud.com/erika-v-64758700/no-oyes-ladrar-a-los-perros>

Better audio quality: [https://mega.nz/folder/QEATTCIA#HnONftG5j\\_szP3yqlQzMMQ](https://mega.nz/folder/QEATTCIA#HnONftG5j_szP3yqlQzMMQ)

## Leonora, 5 historias de ensueño (2023)

Instrumentation: guitar orchestra, eight parts

Duration: 16'

Based on the short tales by Leonora Carrington

Dedicated and premiered by Jugendgitarrenorchester  
Baden-Württemberg, August 2023

Supported by the National Fund for Culture and Arts of  
Mexico

The final two compositions in my portfolio were created for a guitar ensemble and a guitar quartet. It is rare to have the opportunity to compose for an unusual instrumentation, an opportunity I greatly appreciate. The guitar is an intricate and eclectic instrument; it demands a profound comprehension of its idiosyncrasies, especially for those who don't play it. My initial foray into writing for this instrument was in 2017, a process which began with purchasing a 'basic guitar'. I found it essential to physically interact with the instrument to experience its potential, effectively intervene the instrument with objects, and find new sounds.

*Leonora, 5 historias de ensueño* (2023) is a 16-minute-long piece of five movements composed for an eight-part guitar orchestra based in the book *Historias de ensueño: Leonora Carrington para niños* (Dream stories: Leonora Carrington for children 1930-1970). The piece embodies a confluence of fantasy and reality inspired by Leonora Carrington's short tales. The composition traverses a sonic landscape as surreal and captivating as Carrington's visual art.

Throughout her childhood, Leonora listened to the fantastical stories told by her Irish nanny: fairy tales, legends, and tales of creatures from Celtic folk villages. She later materialised these stories through her writings and artwork. This way, she allowed her dreamy world of fantasy to reach anyone who wished to know it. Her book for children brings these stories to life, ranging from funny to terrifying and phantasmagorical, such as a skeleton that reads the newspaper and jokes around, a costume party with mysterious guests, and an island located in the middle of an avenue where noisy vehicles pass by day and night.

Exploring various guitar techniques such as percussion, tapping, scraping, and natural harmonics. The pieces evoke the otherworldly atmospheres and dreamlike sequences characteristic of Carrington's work, inviting the audience into a realm where the mystical intertwines with the everyday.

The *Leonora, 5 historias de ensueño* movements:

- I. Las vacaciones del esqueleto (The skeleton's vacation)
- II. Conejos blancos (White rabbits)
- III. Et in bellicus lunarum medicalis ("How to start a pharmaceutical business)
- IV. Las hermanas (The sisters)
- V. Historia del cadaver feliz (Story of the happy corpse)

Dedicated to and premiered by the talented young musicians of the *Jugendgitarrenorchester Baden-Württemberg* in August 2023. *Leonora, 5 historias de ensueño* stands as a bridge between the worlds of children's literature and music.

**Video:** <https://youtu.be/DKIt75OVlvY?si=Nmfwstbow4P7nsD>

# 10

## **La polca de los osos (2023)**

Instrumentation: guitar quartet

Duration: 3'

Based on the homonym novel by Margo Glantz

Dedicated and premiered by ALEPH Gitarrenquartet

Supported by the National Fund for Culture and Arts of Mexico

*La polca de los osos* is written for and dedicated to the ALEPH Gitarrenquartet on its 30th anniversary. The piece is inspired by the homonym book by the Mexican writer Margo Glantz; she invites us on a journey through different literary moments. It brings the panorama of sensuality and pleasure from Sade to Bataille, Kawabata to Simone de Beauvoir. Then, we contemplate memory strategies in classics such as Proust, Flaubert, Rimbaud, Claude Simon or Marguerite Duras. The musical work explores the idea of the metanarrative, a sonic kaleidoscope underpinned by the spirited, passionate, fun, and reckless at times but, above all, addictive and brilliant book.

*La polca de los osos* explores the concept of the metanarrative, creating a sonic kaleidoscope that mirrors the multifaceted nature of Glantz's narrative. The music is a reflection of the book's spirit—energetic, passionate, and entertaining, yet occasionally audacious. It captivates much like the source of its inspiration, becoming an addictive and luminous narrative exploration through sound.

dedicated to ALEPH Guitarrenquartett  
**La polca de los osos**

Erika Vega

**Molto ritmico** ♩=96

The musical score is written for four guitars (Guitar I, II, III, IV) in 4/4 time. The tempo is marked 'Molto ritmico' with a quarter note equal to 96 beats per minute. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score includes various dynamic markings: *p* (piano), *f* (forte), *pp* (pianissimo), *mf* (mezzo-forte), and *sim.* (sustained). Fingering is indicated by circled numbers 1-4. Fret positions are marked with Roman numerals VII, XII, and IX. The score shows intricate rhythmic patterns, including many triplets and sixteenth-note runs. Measure 9 begins with a new system of staves.

Figure 24. Vega, *La polca de los osos*, m. 1-16.

Video: [https://mega.nz/folder/QEATTICIA#HnONftG5j\\_szP3yqIQzMMQ](https://mega.nz/folder/QEATTICIA#HnONftG5j_szP3yqIQzMMQ)