

Luciérnagas

Written for Eighth Blackbird, and commissioned by the Carnegie Hall Co.

Luciérnagas is an example of a rather abstract composition that is otherwise based on a very concrete experience. A few months ago, I was working on the music for Pascal Rioult's choreography "El Mozote"—a story about the killing of hundreds of innocent Salvadorians at the hands of militiamen, when I came across a text by Carlos Henríquez, titled *Luciérnagas en El Mozote* ("Fireflies at El Mozote"). The text described the arrival of Henríquez and other workers of "Radio Venceremos" to the site where the massacre had taken place three years earlier. As the men reached the outskirts of the desolate village,

Henríquez writes that "...a dazzling spectacle made it clear to us that we had arrived at El Mozote: thousands of little lights began to twinkle. The intermittent dance of the fireflies illuminated the night, showing us the way to the town's ruined church. 'They are the souls of El Mozote!', said Padre Rogelio Poncel."

I was fascinated by the fact that the "dance of the fireflies" described above stayed on my mind not as a visual or narrative representation of a brutal—albeit strangely poetic—event, but as a powerful—and strictly musical—"picture": The sound of brief rhythmic punctuations that weave a sparkling, constant, yet unpredictable flicker. Like the *trompe-l'oeils* found in the visual arts, the outcome is a shared expression of that which is regular (or "predictable") and of the ultimately chaotic.

My "luciérnagas" are represented by tangible musical materials: ascending and descending scale-like gestures that only seem regular, but that are actually under constant transformation. Similarly, the general rhythmicity of the piece is marked by the use of *ostinati*, whose regularity is perpetually disturbed by the incisive action of various surface elements, such as displaced accents, dynamic interjections, and the juxtaposition of extreme registers: The highly organized but endlessly puzzling world of insect life.

©2000, Carlos Sanchez-Gutierrez

Fast, knotty ensemble writing, interspersed with droning "freeze frame" moments, makes Carlos Sanchez-Gutierrez's "Luciérnagas" an exciting and sternly evocative work...]

Josef Woodard, Los Angeles Times

Carlos Sanchez-Gutierrez's "Luciérnagas" may have sociopolitical overtones but, as the composer notes, it is also "strictly musical," and it is an entrancing world indeed.

The composer is not afraid of silence, nor of frequent loud climaxes, and easily evokes the visual display of fireflies. Solos by Duvall on marimba and a hard-pedaled piano by Kaplan were brief but compelling.

Martha Erwin, Richmond Times-Dispatch

Luciérnagas, by Carlos Sanchez-Gutierrez, proved to be another technical tour-de-force, with all kinds of unusual use of the instruments, capably executed by the players.

Keyboardist Lisa Kaplan played in, on and at the piano. Matthew Albert was all over his violin, from the lowest range to high harmonics. Cellist Nicholas Photinos was a strong and steady presence, while clarinetist Michael Maccaferri's tones were dark and sweet. Holding the whole effort together was percussionist Matthew Duval, whose work here (as elsewhere) was spine-tingling. He moved among the many instruments in his battery with great confidence and impeccable rhythm. The work built to a magnificent and unnerving climax that had the audience cheering and out of their seats.

Craig Smith, The Santa Fe New Mexican

Luciérnagas, a hard-driving quintet by Carlos Sanchez-Gutierrez of the SFSU faculty, practically burst with energy, its quick, darting melodies punctuated by tense, breath-holding solo trills [and] a brilliant marimba solo."

Joshua Kosman, The San Francisco Chronicle

Mr. Sanchez-Gutierrez offered quick, bright music in his "Luciérnagas" ("Fireflies"), in which fused lines for a mixed quintet were sent streaming, interrupted and brought to a fierce high point."

Paul Griffiths, The New York Times