Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra
By José Luis Domínguez

In September of 2019, I was in Chile as guest conductor of the Santiago Philharmonic Orchestra and the Ballet Company of the Municipal Theater of Santiago, performing the world premiere of my last large-scale composition: the Ballet “The House of the Spirits” based on Isabel Allende's novel. It was incredibly successful and widely praised by the orchestra, dancers, the public and the critics. It is with deep humility that I have received the recent news that the work was awarded as “Best Ballet 2019”. The Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra is a direct consequence of that experience.

Just after the first rehearsal with the orchestra, Jorge Pinzón, a great Colombian oboist and Principal Oboe of the orchestra, approached me, whom I have admired a lot since we worked together for the first time a couple of years ago. He told me with great enthusiasm that he was very impressed and excited about the work, and without much preamble he asked me to write him a concerto. I felt very privileged to be asked by an outstanding interpreter commissioning a work, and of course I agreed. As a composer it is very important for me to have a story or text on which to base a musical composition, so I asked him to help me find this base. It was his idea, after several days of rehearsals and conversations, to use literature from our Nobel Prizes as inspiration for this piece: Gabriel García Márquez and Gabriela Mistral. The fantastic idea fascinated me immediately, and we began to look for the literature of these our authors that we had read and felt a special impression. Jorge and I are very inspired by the idea of using the arts to show the brotherhood and unity of our nations.

The idea: Chilean composer, inspired by works of literature by a Colombian author and a Chilean author, played by a Colombian instrumentalist, with a world premiere in Colombia with a Colombian orchestra. Impossible to miss such an opportunity. My main activity is the orchestral conducting, and my agenda in the US after the ballet in Chile was very full, so I asked Jorge to give me a month before starting the composition. The work was written during the month of November 2019, a true marathon of work full of dedication and tremendously honored that an institution as important as the Philharmonic Orchestra of Bogotá would give the world premiere.

The concerto has four movements, each inspired by a work by our wonderful writers. They do not seek to describe or accompany the literary work itself, but to describe the subsequent feeling that I had left as a reader.

The first movement, "La Mala Hora" by Gabriel García Márquez, is a subtle introduction in which the musical motifs that will appear in the rest of the work are exposed. The oboe sings about harmonies extended on the string, with the spaced intervention of horns, harp and percussion that seek a more than rhythmic sound atmosphere. It is an almost silent meditation, clearly affected by the notable social criticism that the author makes about what a community can live together.

The second movement, “Doña Primavera” by Gabriela Mistral, is a kind of pastoral modest Allegro, which has somewhat contrasting sections in speed and tone given the author's emotional poetry.

The third movement, "The Sonnets of Death", also by Gabriela Mistral, is in musical terms the movement with more contemporary techniques. The oboe and the orchestra only play together in the last bars. It consists of brief orchestral introductions to three oboe free cadenzas.

The third cadenza lands in the most widespread and tonal orchestral tutti of the movement. The heartbreaking pain of the author's three sonnets is really overwhelming, and with much humility I have tried to describe with music the feeling that the reading leaves me.

The fourth movement, "Yellow Butterfly", is not necessarily inspired by "One Hundred Years of Solitude" by Gabriel García Márquez, where they make their appearance. It is rather a tribute to the author, whose work I admire deeply and have enjoyed reading and rereading during my life. Clearly the yellow flowers and butterflies are a vital symbolism for the writer, and I understand that yellow butterflies flew in his grandparents' garden and there were always yellow flowers on his desk. The movement is the most festive, vivacious, with a brief escape and development with more varied compass codes by the soloist. It has definitely medieval tints, perhaps in search of that heroic elegance of ancient harmonies.

I hope you enjoy the concerto, which was specially written for the Colombian oboist, Jorge Pinzón, The Philharmonic Orchestra of Bogotá, and for you, the Colombian public, a beautiful nation that has given me so much joy and affection in my career and that has always been in my heart.

Eternally grateful, an affectionate hug.

José Luis Dominguez.