

# The Boston Musical Intelligencer

*a virtual journal and essential blog of the classical music scene in greater Boston*

Lee Eiseman, publisher; Robert Levin, advisor; David Moran, assisting editor; Bettina A. Norton, emerita editor

MAY 9, 2017

## Euro-Latin Confluence Flows

(by Stephanie Susberich)



Laury Gutiérrez (file photo)

Blending Old and New World Latin, African, and European sounds, engaging its audience with the entertaining and complex results, [Rumbarroco](#) played a benefit for Venezuela's Niño Jesús Daycare a couple of weeks ago (May 6) at United Parish Brookline. The Latin-Baroque fusion ensemble featured a virtuosic lineup: Daniela Tošić, mezzo; Yi-Li Chang, violin and viola da gamba; Juan Carlos Ruiz, tenor and guitars; Kirsten Lamb, bass; Zayra Ocasio, percussion; Laury Gutiérrez, viola da gamba and cuatro.

The anonymous 17<sup>th</sup> century *Ah! de las Mazmorras* (Ah, From Your Dungeon), to text by Sor Juana Inès de la Cruz (1651-1695), may also have been composed by

her. Beginning in its original form with viola da gamba, it soon took on Rumbarroco-arranged Venezuelan rhythms, harmonies, and instruments after the first bridge. Bass, percussion, and four-string bandola—a cross between guitar and oud—improvised over the bridge's harmonic progression, landing the song into a joropo-infused arrangement of the original complete with cuatro accompaniment, which included zumba que zumba progressions and rhythms native to creole Venezuela.

Contemporary composer Luisa Elena Paesano's *Gavan con revueltas* proceeded in the opposite manner from the opener, taking a modern Venezuelan song and playing it on early-music instruments. The juxtaposition of genres, instruments, and sonorities highlighted the various cultural influences.

The ensemble transformed the instrumentation for the Venezuelan Modesta Bor's (1926-98) ("Ribereñas" (Riverbanks), "Mariposa del aire" (Butterfly of the air), and "Canto a la Vida" (Song to Life), as mezzo-soprano Daniela Tošić, tenor Juan Carlos Ruiz) and early-music instruments (violin and viola da gamba) melded early-music improv with current performance practice. The animated atmosphere culminated in the traditional folksong "El Monigote" (the Rag Doll). Rumbarroco added early-music and Baroque ornament to contemporary composer Diana V. Saez's 2007 arrangement. Zayra Ocasio's stirring percussion accompaniment brought tears to the eyes of some Venezuelans in the audience, who reminisced during intermission about how it returned them to childhood.

In Beatriz Corona's *Corazon Coraza* (Armored Heart), which uses suspensions and techniques typical of Baroque madrigals, the ensemble performed with two viola da gamba and two voices in a 17<sup>th</sup>-century style, then added bass and percussion. *Besame Mucho* by Consuelo Velazquez (1916-2005) followed. Rumbarroco played Esther Rojas's arrangement for two viola da gamba and voice, Tošić's dark mezzo blending lusciously with the mellow gamba sonority while an Afro-Peruvian Lando rhythm provided structure.

The exciting *Für Elena* by contemporary Diana Arismendi, based on a folia harmonic progression typical of the Baroque, showcased an intriguing free interplay among violin, viola da gamba, and bass, ending with an extraordinary cadenza by violinist Yi-Li Chang. It also explored the instrument's range and potential, containing elements of Bach partita performance while also grasping at Rumbarroco's infusion of montuno salsa rhythms, dynamically proffered by Ocasio.

The favorite, Saez's *Plena*, involved audience vocal participation, virtuosic bass improvisation, and fireworks percussion. Gutiérrez explained that the plena is a type of popular genre from Puerto Rico that sings praise to the Virgin and takes its name from the text ("plena de gracia").

Who knew that Venezuelan folk instruments and salsa beats could so aptly complement Baroque violin and viola da gamba? Rumbarroco's innovative mergings of musics excited a sonorous soundsphere.

**Stephanie Susberich is a soprano and composer living in Somerville. She writes about music on her blog, [www.sopranointhecity.com](http://www.sopranointhecity.com)**

<https://www.classical-scene.com/2017/05/09/euro-latin-confluence/>