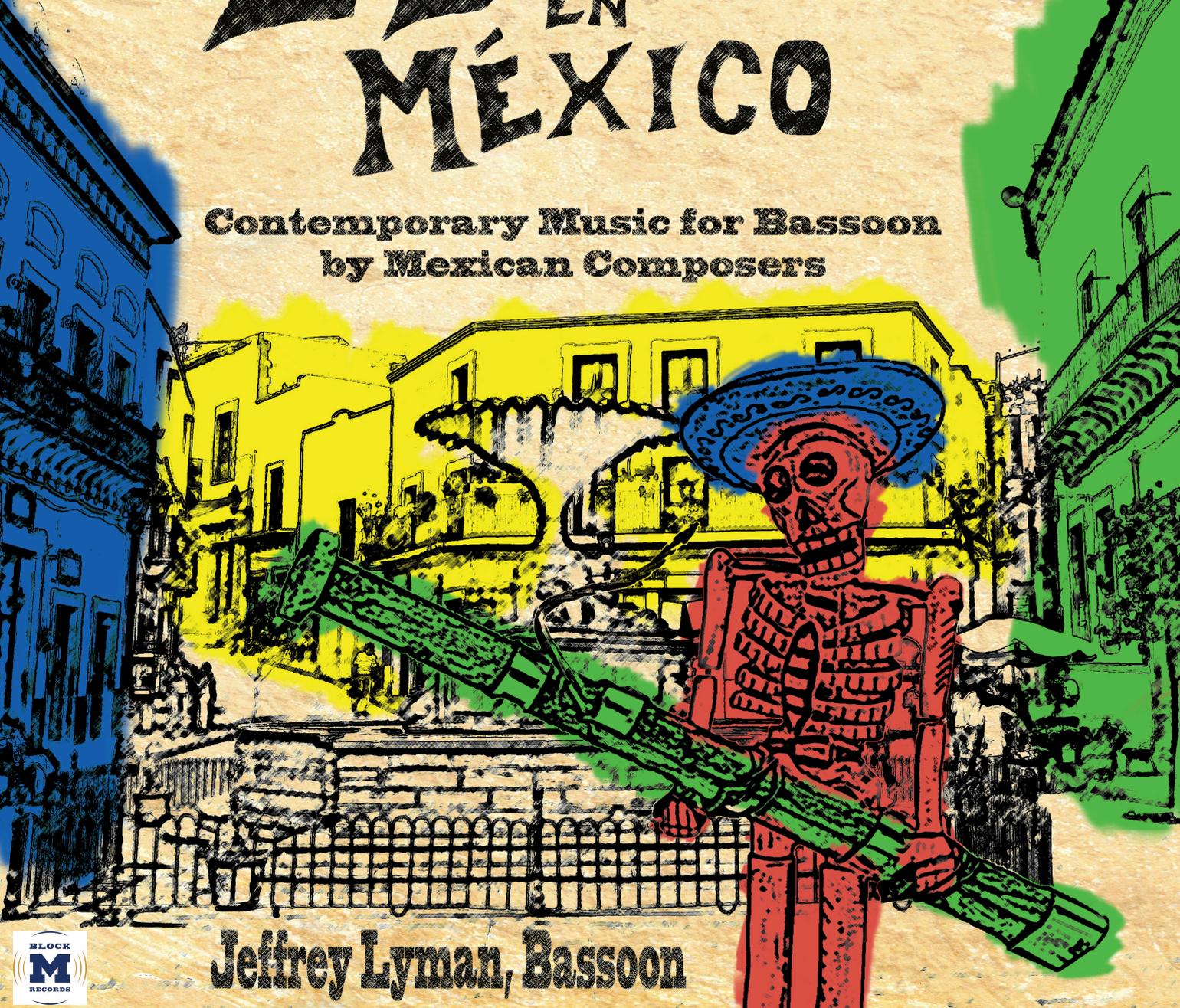


EL BAJÓN EN MÉXICO

Contemporary Music for Bassoon
by Mexican Composers



Jeffrey Lyman, Bassoon

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Stephen West, bass

Daniel Pesca, piano

Amy Porter, flute

Nancy Ambrose King, oboe

Joseph Gramley and Elliot Beck, percussion

Enrique González-Medina Cinco canciones tijuánenses, Op. 27 (2004, rev. 2007)

1. El amor tiene prisa (Poesía de Alfonso García Cortez) 1:39
2. De preferencia (Poesía de Rosina Conde) 1:20
3. Tango (Poesía de Roberto Castillo Udiarte) 1:52
4. Qué fue de la ciudad (Poesía de Alfonso García Cortez) 3:02
5. Al menudo (Poesía de Francisco Bernal) 3:24
6. **Eugenio Toussaint** Trio (2000) for flute, oboe and bassoon 6:54
7. **Manuel Enriquez** De Acuerdo (1993) for bassoon and piano 6:25
8. **Ramón Montes de Oca** Laberinto de espejos (1990) 6:56
9. **Mario Lavista** Responsorio in memoriam Rodolfo Halffter (1988) 10:57
10. **Rodrigo Sigal** Twilight (2001) 13:33

Notes by Jeffrey Lyman

There could hardly be a more obscure tale in music history than that of the introduction of the bassoon into the New World. As one of the least familiar of the orchestral woodwind family members, one would not expect it to have had any substantive role in the introduction of western music to the Spanish colonies. Curiously enough, years before the first music composed specifically for the bassoon appeared in Germany and Italy in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, the instrument was already being heard, taught and (eventually) manufactured in the churches and settlements of colonial Mexico.

According to bassoonist and historian Maggie Kilbey, "the first definite reference to the instrument [in Spain] was in 1556 when some fagotes were brought from the Low Countries, but thereafter it was known as the bajón (plural bajónes), baxón or baixó." The instrument was used almost exclusively in church music as a way to double voice parts, or in the case of convents, to replace the male vocal parts outright. The year 1588 marks the first time a bajón was used in the cathedral in Mexico City, namely by the bajonista Lorenzo Martínez, and the cathedral kept bassoonists on their regular payroll for many decades to come.

In addition to the cathedrals in Mexico City and Puebla, the Spaniards built several smaller missions further north in what are now the states of Arizona and New Mexico. The missionary Fray Roque de Figueroa, was an expert singer, organist, cornett player and bajonista, and is reported to have ministered to the Zuñi. Another missionary, Fray Alonso de Benavides (ca. 1579-ca. 1635), came to Santa Fé in 1626 and brought with him several music texts and a consort of instruments including a bajón. In 1672, further to the west in what is now Arizona, the "Ácoma Pueblo had a 'most excellent large organ, one of the best in the Holy Custody. Also, a set of chirimías with its bassoon and trumpets.'"

As the years passed, more bajón players from Spain arrived in Mexico City, and several natives learned the instrument and joined the cathedral rosters. Throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries, the bassoon continued to play an important role in the

Spanish missions. In 1800 in what is now Tumacacori, Arizona, the Franciscans started construction on what would prove to be one of the last of the missions built in the US. Its small choir loft was only able to hold about 8 to 10 singers and a similar complement of musicians. The Tumacacori historic site records that oboes, bassoons, trumpet, flute and zither were the instruments used in the church, and that many of the musicians trained for performance there were members of the Pima community.

It was in fact a Pima musician living in the early 17th century whose nickname gave the title to this recording project. At the end of March in 1608, Padre Eusebio Kino, a missionary who worked throughout what is now southern and southeastern Arizona, was engaged in the Battle of Gaybanipitea. A group of about 600 Hocomes, Sumas, Mansos and Apaches fought against a smaller number of Sobaipuri and Pimas who were allied with Kino and the Spanish missionaries. On the morning of March 30, the Apache group killed the Pima captain "El Bajón" and forced the rest of the Spanish contingent to retreat.

In the 19th century, as secular music groups developed in theaters throughout Mexico, the bassoon retreated into its more typical role as the bass voice of the orchestral woodwind section. Little mention of bassoonists, bassoon pedagogy or composition can be found in Mexican musical history books until the 20th century, when attention would once again focus on the instrument. Composers such as Carlos Chávez and Silvestre Revueltas included the bassoon in some of their most famous chamber and orchestral works, but it was their students and disciples who brought it back into prominence via solo pieces, chamber music and even electro-acoustic collaborations. This collection offers a cross-section of some of the most unique music for bassoon from the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

The *Cincocancionestijuanenses* (2007) of Enrique González-Medina offer upon first hearing what most listeners would expect when imagining the sound of bassoon music from Mexico. The songs are nostalgic meditations on the composer's home state of Baja California and of the city of Tijuana in particular. The immediacy of the language hides an expert craftsmanship, full of humorous wordplay in songs such as *Elamortienepresa* and *Udiarte's Tango*, balanced by an exquisite simplicity of melody and harmony in *Quéfuedela ciudad*.

Eugenio Toussaint of Mexico City has built a career that straddles the jazz and classical music worlds, having worked with artists as varied as Herb Alpert, Paul Anka and his own jazz band Sacbé to the percussion ensemble Tambuco and the Cuarteto Latinoamericano. He has worked closely as both composer and producer with the Mexico City Wind Quintet, and penned his Trio for flute, oboe and bassoon in 2000 for the Mexico City Woodwind Trio. It is a playful contrapuntal romp in which each instrument imitates the other in a series of rhythmic and folk inspired rounds.

An entirely different approach to woodwind writing is found in *DeAcuerdo* (1993) for bassoon and piano by Manuel Enríquez. Enríquez was born in 1926 in the state of Jalisco and along with his predecessors Chávez and Revueltas is credited with helping to establish and validate an avant-garde compositional tradition in Mexico, completely independent of any folk or nationalistic implications. Having studied violin at the Juilliard School with Ivan Galamian and composition with Peter Menin, during his time abroad he was also strongly influenced by the Darmstadt school and eventually purged his music of any referential elements, preferring instead to concentrate on musical expression via architecture and contemporary compositional techniques.

DeAcuerdo utilizes several "extended techniques" in the bassoon, in particular multi-phonic (dissonant chords produced with specialized fingerings), glissandi and flutter-tonguing. The work is organized into three brief sections: a fantasia of brusque, almost combative statements by both instruments, a dramatic second movement for piano solo that closes with a plaintive bassoon melody colored by a series of multi-phonic chords, and finally an energetic and playful staccato scherzo.

Extended techniques lend both an air of modernism and primitivism to the exotic *Laberinto de Espejos* (Maze of Mirrors, 1990) of Ramón Montes de Oca. Montes de Oca was a student of Mario Lavista at the Conservatorio Nacional de Música, and prior to that he studied composition at Southern Oregon State College. As one of the directors of the Festival Internacional Cervantino, he was a champion of new music in Mexico, and greatly encouraged young composers from across the country.

Laberinto de espejos, like *DeAcuerdo*, utilizes contemporary performance techniques that add to the dark and mysterious atmosphere of the music. However, effects like pitch bending, wide vibrato oscillations and even multi-phonic are techniques

known and used by players of traditional woodwind instruments around the world. So who is to say what is modern, what is old, what is an “extended” technique and what is traditional? Each reflects the other in this Maze of Mirrors.

Responsorio in memoriam Rodolfo Halffter has already established itself in the bassoon repertory as a work of lasting importance, due in no small measure to its captivating sound world and expressive language. Mario Lavista wrote the work in 1988 in tribute to his friend and colleague Rodolfo Halffter, a Spanish composer who moved to Mexico after the Spanish Civil War and who was influential in popularizing composing with serial techniques.

The unusual instrumentation of *Responsorio* (bassoon solo, two bass drums, two sets of orchestral chimes) is unique in the repertory, and was inspired by Lavista’s fondness for Verdi’s *Messa da Requiem* and by “the composer’s memories of some funeral processions witnessed in remote Mexican villages, in which the small band accompanying the coffin has a bass drum that beats a funeral drone.” (Note by Juan Arturo Brennan from the INBA compact disc *Cuaderno da Viaje*.) The wailing and mournful quality of the opening exploits the upper register of the bassoon just as Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich and Stravinsky did so often and so well, but with a new and unprecedented emotional depth. About this music for the dead the composer wrote, “I think that the music’s role at that moment is to help the human soul to separate from the body. Such separation is not easy because that soul has inhabited that body for a long time. When the body dies, the soul must find a path to leave it behind, and the music helps in the search of such a path.”

While many of the works in this collection explore traditional and modern compositional techniques, Rodrigo Sigal’s *Twilight* may be the first electro-acoustic work for bassoon composed by a Mexican composer. Sigal composed the piece in collaboration with the American bassoonist Wendy Holdaway, who is a member of the Mexico City Wind Quintet and principal bassoonist of the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional. Holdaway also commissioned the works by Montes de Oca and Lavista heard earlier in this collection, as well as many other solo and chamber works for bassoon.

The electronic component is comprised primarily of bassoon sounds recorded and processed by Sigal, then shaped into what the composer describes as “four continuous movements exploring the same number of different types of twilight (civil, nautical, astronomical, true night.)” *Twilight* was commissioned by the Spanish Ministry for Culture (MEC) and composed at LIEM-CDMC in Madrid, Spain and at London City University’s Electroacoustic Music Studios.