

Program notes
by Elisenda Fábregas

Imitació del foc (Imitation of fire) is a song cycle for tenor and piano based on four poems in Catalan by Bartomeu Rosselló-Pòrcel (1913-1938), a Spanish Balearic poet, who wrote in Catalan. He died of tuberculosis at the age of 24. He has a brief oeuvre but dense. His mature work, *Imitation of fire* (1938) turns him into the first Mallorcan poet who fully belongs to the twentieth century. Once the influence of the Mallorcan School has been overcome, the poetics of this last book are influenced by the generation of 1927, as well as by the avant-garde and specifically surrealism. There are also echoes of his interest in Spanish Baroque literature, along with a neo-populism similar to that of García Lorca or Rafael Alberti. In Rosselló-Pòrcel work is notable the presence of the symbol of fire, and related words, such as fire, flame, fire, ash, charcoal burning and bonfires. The use of this symbol is not purely ornamental, but it reveals a deeper sense. The fire for Roselló is purification, the struggle of opposites, light, life, rise, movement and perpetual change, immateriality and mystery. This vision of the fire connects Rosselló-Pòrcel directly with a pre-Socratic philosopher, Heraclitus, who found in fire an overcoming of all processes of change that view reality.

The four poems selected in this song-cycle come from the collection *Imitacio del foc* and *Quadern de sonets* (an earlier work).

- I. *Inici de campana (Bells start tolling)* from *Quadern de sonets*, written in 1934
This opening piece starts brilliantly with tolling bell-like sounds calling for the parishioners. The spiritual symbol of church bells can be associated with the creative power, poetry and its followers. Rossello's poem describes the poet in the evening hearing church bells and settling at dusk into his home as a metaphor for internal search.
- II. *Escolto la secreta... (I listen to the secret...)* from *Imitacio del Foc, Arbre de Flames*. In this poem the poet explores the relation between himself and death when he "listens attentively to the secret harmony of the air and the ardor that trembles from great free waters." The music is intimate and personal evoking the inner life and reflections of the poet.
- III. *Pluja brodada (Embroidered rain)* from *Imitacio del foc, Fira encesa*, written in 1938, is a poem in which the poet extols and personifies the rain, a natural element, in a precious manner, first reminding us of the sound of rain in a graphic manner. At the beginning of the poem the rain 'dances' joyously but little by little takes on a restless character. The music evokes the sound and moods of the rain; the timbric sound on the rain is portrayed by sparkling arpeggios in the higher register of the piano.
- IV. *Ardent himne (Ardent hymn)* from *Imitacio del foc, Arbre de Flames*, written in 1938. This poem states the dichotomy between the poet and the angel. The text is imbued with action and extraordinarily dynamic power, with fire contrasting with angels ('homes alats') and the night, portraying a vision of the world as a fight between contrary and opposite forces that need each other to exist.

**Lyrics by
Bartomeu Rosselló-Pòrcel (1913-1938)**

I. “Inici de campana”
(Quadern de Sonnets 1934)

Inici de campana
efimer entre els arbres
—fora porta— de tarda.

La pols dels blats *apaga*
un or trèmul en punxes
blanquinoses de plana.

L'àmbit vincla i perdura
comiats d'enyorances d'avui mateix.
Desvari de *vies* solitàries.
Argila i calç.
Finestres de la casa tancada,
quan torno, d'horabaixa,
girant-me adesiara.

II. “Escolto la secreta...”
(Imitació del Foc de ‘*Arbre de Flames*’)

Escolto la secreta
harmonia de l'aire
i l'ardor que tremola
d'unes grans aigües lliures.

Ales i dansa!
Déus que ara passen i canten altes músiques!
Llum dels ulls sagrats i verges!
Estic sol en aquestes ombres
i sento caure ones de sang,
enmig d'una alba trista i aspra.

III. Pluja brodada
(Imitació del foc de ‘*Fira Encesa*’, 1938)

Balla damunt la terra i s'afina,
la fina esgarriada.
Brilla, renovellada, neta.

Irisa el gris.
Rebota miralls d'ella mateixa,
perdurable de vidre,
despòtica de pedra.

Xarxes lleus, febres primes l'agafen,
l'extenuen, agonitzant de corbes,
embriaga de puntes.

I ella perfila curts laberints de fretura,
brins d'aigua, rams de vent,
fugacitats d'agulla.

I. Inicio de campana

Inicio de campana
efímero entre los árboles
-fuera puerta- de tarde.

El polvo de los trigos apaga
un oro trémulo en pinchos
blanquecinos de llanura.

El ámbito dobla y perdura
despedidas de añoranzas de hoy mismo.
Desvarío de vías solitarias.
Arcilla y cal.
Ventanas de la casa cerrada,
cuando vuelvo, de tarde,
girando me de vez en cuando.

II. “Escucho la secreta...”

Escucho la secreta
armonía del aire
y el ardor que tiembla
de unas grandes aguas libres.

Alas y danza!
Dioses que ahora pasan y cantan altas músicas!
Luz de los ojos sagrados y vírgenes!
Estoy solo en estas sombras
y siento caer ondas de sangre,
en medio de un amanecer triste y áspero.

III. Lluvia bordada

Baila en la tierra
y se afina, la fina estremecida.
Brilla, renovada, limpia.

Irisa el gris.
Rebota espejos de ella misma,
perdurable de vidrio,
despòtica de piedra.

Redes leves, fiebres delgadas la cogen,
la extenuan, agonizando de curvas,
ebria de puntas.

Y ella perfila cortos laberintos de penuria,
hebras de agua, ramos de viento,
fugacidades de aguja.

IV. ARDENT HIMNE

(Imitacio del Foc, de “*Arbre de Flames*”)

Aquestes són les hores de sols velocíssims,
i ara cavalquen uns homes de llargues cabelleres,
per damunt les escales del vent, cavalls de somni.

S'eleven a fogueres abrivades,
mouen el fum vermell i la tenebra roja
i empenyen els reflexos de l'incendi.

Arriben a les nits que bateguen de foc,
corren per diamants cremats, arena, cendra.
Per les ones roents del paradís,
volen damunt les flames afuades.

Homes alats de llargues cabelleres combaten
amb l'espasa del vent i de la llum.

IV. Ardiente Himno

Estas son las horas de soles velocísimos,
y unos hombres de largas cabelleras cabalgan ahora,
por encima de las escaleras del viento, caballos de
sueño.

Se elevan a hogueras azuzadas,
mueven el humo encarnado y la tiniebla roja
y empujan los reflejos del incendio.

Llegan en las noches que laten de fuego,
corren por diamantes quemados, arena, ceniza.
Por las olas candentes del paraíso,
vuelan sobre las llamas aguzadas.

Hombres alados de largas cabelleras combaten
con la espada del viento y de la luz.