

## Program Notes by Elisenda Fábregas

*Portraits II* was commissioned by the Soli Chamber Ensemble and it was premiered on January 18, 2000, at Ruth Taylor Concert Hall at Trinity University in San Antonio. The San Antonio-Express News wrote: “*Its tonal harmony, traditional forms and romantic sensibility mark ‘Portraits II’ as conservative, but the composer’s individuality shows through in yearning dissonances, quirky juxtapositions of thematic material and a pervasive sensuality not unlike that of her native Barcelona.*”

The title *Portraits II* comes from a piano solo work of the same title (*Portraits I*) and both share the first piece, *Image*. *Portraits II* includes four pieces representing a range of emotions: passion and lyricism in *Image*, unpredictability and playfulness in *Capriccio*, tenderness and lightheartedness in *Cantilena and Dance*, and vitality and decisiveness in the *Finale*.

*Image (I)* includes two themes which are characterized by the melodic ascending leap of a ninth. After their exposition these two themes collide in a dissonant manner in the *Agitato* and climax fortissimo in the high register of the *Grandioso* section. The piece finishes in pianissimo with the second theme gradually disintegrating itself in fragmented descending motives ending with a question mark.

The *Capriccio /Lento (II)* is unpredictable with constant changes of mood and tempo. There are twelve changes of tempo in this short piece. Two contrasting themes, one *leggiero* and fast first played by the piano, and one slow and lyrical first played by the clarinet and the violin are developed motivically throughout the piece.

The *Cantilena and Dance (III)* starts with a lyrical theme in the cello and then followed by a second lyrical theme in the clarinet. This first theme is then treated in imitation and varied texturally. Freedom comes back when all the instruments bring up a rhythmic variation of the head motif of the second theme in the *Allegro ballabile e con spirito* section. Repeated notes add insistence, rhythmic activity and a dance-like quality. Ascending subsequent sequences in each instrument build excitement and momentum, and abundant syncopations, repeated notes and changes of meter lead to a climax with all the instruments in unison. The joyful atmosphere then calms down with a fermata before the piano features the lyrical second theme.

The *Finale* is brought about without interruption bringing back the main theme of *Image* (first movement) with its characteristic leap of ninth. While the piano insistently repeats an ostinato rhythm, the violin, clarinet and cello alternate playing the first theme or parts of it. The exciting atmosphere is enhanced by climbing half a step up. The texture thickens and reaches a climactic point with the piano’s ascending and descending scales until it stops in a short fermata. Then abruptly a rhythmic and dissonant ostinato in the piano accompanies the second theme from *Image* first in the clarinet, then the violin and the cello. The texture continues to thicken until the end with many changes of meter in fortissimo.