

Program notes
by Elisenda Fábregas

Imitació del foc (Imitation of fire) was commissioned by tenor Isaí Jess Muñoz and pianist Oksana Glouchko, funded by a University of Delaware Research Grant. It was premiered at the University of Delaware, Gore Recital Hall, March 12, 2018.

Imitació del foc (2018) is a song cycle for tenor and piano written by Catalan/American composer Elisenda Fábregas. It is based on four poems by Bartomeu Rosselló-Pòrcel (1913-1938), a Spanish Balearic poet, who wrote in Mallorquin, a dialect of the Catalan language. Rosselló-Pòrcel died of tuberculosis at the age of 24, and although he has a brief oeuvre, his poetry has great depth of feeling and can be interpreted from many different perspectives. The early work of Rosselló-Pòrcel's has an early influence from the Mallorca School and his mature work, such as *Imitation of fire (1938)*, is influenced by the generation of 1927 and the Spanish avant-garde, specifically the surrealist school. There are also echoes of his interest in Spanish Baroque literature, along with neo-populist characteristics similar to that of Federico García Lorca or Rafael Alberti.

In Rosselló-Pòrcel's poetry, the symbolic presence of *fire*, and related words, such as flame, ash, charcoal burning, and bonfires is noteworthy. The use of this symbol is not purely ornamental, but it has a deeper meaning. The 'fire' for Roselló signifies purification, the struggle of opposites, light, life, rise, movement and perpetual change, immateriality and mystery. This personal meaning of 'fire' connects Rosselló-Pòrcel directly with Heraclitus, a pre-Socratic philosopher who found in fire a symbol of the constant change that creates our reality.

The four poems selected in this song-cycle come from the collection *Imitació del foc (1938)* and *Quadern de sonets (1934)*.

- I. *Inici de campana (Toll of the bell)* from *Quadern de sonets (Notebook of Sonnets, 1934)*. This opening song starts brilliantly with tolling bell-like sounds as if calling parishioners to attend church service. The spiritual symbol of church bells can be associated with the calling on a higher creative power, and in this poem the tolling of the bells at dusk is a metaphor for the creative urge that leads the poet into an inner search.
- II. *Escolto la secreta... (I hear the secret...)* from 'Arbre de Flames' (*Tree of flames, 1938*). In this poem the poet explores the relation between himself and death, as when he "listens attentively to the secret harmony of the air and the ardor that trembles from great free waters." The music set to this poem is intimate and personal, evoking the inner thoughts of the poet.
- III. *Pluja brodada (Rain Embroidered)* from *Fira encesa (Fair lit, 1938)*, is a poem in which the poet extols and personifies the rain as a natural element in a descriptive manner. The music starts with the rain 'dancing' joyously and progressively taking on a restless character. The music evokes the sound and moods of the rain, such as the colorful and sparkling arpeggios in the higher register of the piano.
- IV. *Ardent himne (Ardent hymn)* from *Arbre de Flames (Tree of flames, 1938)*. This poem describes the dichotomy between the poet and the angel. The text is imbued with action and extraordinary dynamic power, contrasting the word 'fire' with angels ('homes alats') and the night, portraying a vision of the world as a fight between contrary and opposite forces that by necessity have to coexist.

Lyrics by
Bartomeu Rosselló-Pòrcel (1913-1938)
Spanish and English translations by Elisenda Fàbregas

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...

(Arbre de Flames, 1938)

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

(Fira Encesa, 1938)

Balla damunt la terra i s'afina,
la fina esgarrifada.
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.
Baila en la terra

I. Inicio de campana

Inicio de campana
efimero 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 brodada

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

(Arbre de Flames, 1938)

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.

English translation

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
comiat 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...

(Arbre de Flames, 1934)

Escolto la secreta
harmonia de l'aire^[SEP]
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

(Fira Encesa, 1938)

Balla damunt la terra i s'afina,
la fina esgarrifada.
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. Toll of the bell

(Notebook of Sonnets, 1934)

Toll of the bell
ephymeral between the trees
-outside door – in the afternoon.

Wheat dust extinguishes
a tremulous gold in whitish
pinnacles of plain.

The field doubles and endures
farewells of yearnings from today.
Davastation of solitary ways.
Clay and lime.
The windows of the home are closed,
When I return, in the afternoon,
turning me from time to time.

II. I hear the secret...

(Tree of Flames, 1938)

I hear the secret
harmony of the air
and the ardor that trembles
from great free waters.

Wings and dance!
Gods who now pass and sing high music!
Light of the sacred and virgin eyes!
I am alone in these shadows
and I feel drops of blood waves,
amidst a sad and bitte dawn.

III. Rain embroidered

(Fair lit, 1938)

It dances upon the earth
and sharpens, the thin chilling.
Shines, renewed, clean.

She erases the gray.
She reflects mirrors of herself,
enduring like glass,
despotic like stone.

Light networks, slender fevers take her,
exhaust her, agonizing in curves,
tipsy from drunkenness.

She outlines short labyrinths of hardship,
water strands, wind branches,
evanescent needles.

IV. Ardent Himne

(Arbre de Flames, 1934)

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. Ardent Hymn

(Tree of Flames, 1934)

These are the hours of racing suns,
where long-haired men, ride now
over the wind stairways, horses from dreams.

They rise to bonfires,
they move the incarnated smoke
and reddish darkness
and push the reflections of the fire.

They arrive on evenings that strike with fire,
Running over burnt diamonds, sand, ash.
Through the roaring waves of paradise,
they fly over sharpened flames.

Long-haired winged men
fight with the sword of the wind
and the light.