



Judith Carman

ABBREVIATION KEY: Diff = difficulty level; V = voice; P = piano; E = easy; mE = moderately easy; M = medium; mD = moderately difficult; D = difficult; DD = very difficult; Tess = tessitura; LL = very low; L = low; mL = moderately low; M = medium; mH = moderately high; H = high; HH = very high; CR = covers range; CS = covers staff; X = no clear key center.

**A SOUTH AMERICAN
COLLECTION
NEW SONG PUBLICATIONS
NEW EDITIONS**

LA CANCIÓN ARTÍSTICA COLOMBIANA [THE COLOMBIAN ART SONG]: Jaime León: Analysis and Compilation of His Works for Voice and Piano, Vol. 1 and Vol. 2. Prologue, Research, Compilation and Edition by Dr. Patricia Caicedo. Mundo Arts Publications, 2009.

This second publication in the series *Latin American & Spanish Vocal Music Collection*, researched, compiled, and edited by Patricia Caicedo, expands the

Journal of Singing, November/December 2009
Volume 66, No. 2, pp. 227-237
Copyright © 2009
National Association of Teachers of Singing

opportunities for American singers to explore the riches of Latin American art song. The first publication, *The Latin American Art Song: A Critical Anthology and Interpretive Guide for Singers* (reviewed in the November/December 2006 issue of *Journal of Singing*) gave us much information about the history of Latin American art song, and an introduction to the works of several composers from various periods. *The Colombian Art Song* concentrates on just one composer, Jaime León, presenting all but three of his song compositions.

Jaime León was born in Cartagena, Colombia, in 1921. When he was three years old his family moved to the United States, settling first in San Francisco and later in New York where he began his music studies. After graduating from high school in 1937, he returned to Colombia and enrolled in the National Conservatory of Music of Bogota where he studied piano. In 1943 he entered The Juilliard School of Music, studying piano with Carl Friedberg and Joseph Levine, and later composition and orchestral conducting. After two years as conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Colombia, he became Dean of the National Conservatory of Colombia and filled numerous musical posts in his native country. In the 1950s and 1960s he worked in the United States as Assistant and later Principal Conductor of the American Ballet Theater Orchestra, as well as holding positions in Atlanta and with the Dallas Civic Opera Company. These volumes of León's songs have been published in time for the 2009 Barcelona Festival of Song, at which Maestro León was honored with the performance of many of his works.

This scholarly edition contains information about the entire series from

Mundo Arts; a Foreword by Dr. Robin Moore, editor of the Latin-American Music Review; a Foreword by Dr. Daniel Sheehy, director of the Smithsonian Latino Center; a Preface by Dr. Caicedo that includes an introduction to the works of Jaime León, a biography of the composer, a chronology of his life and works, a list of songs, a section on the composer's relationship to the poets of his songs; short biographies of the poets; an Interpretive Guide and a Spanish Diction Guide that takes into account Colombian pronunciation differences; the poetic texts with English translations; phonetic transcriptions of the texts; and the musical scores themselves. Both volumes have the complete front material. A recording of all the composer's songs is in preparation. The only drawback to the physical part of this publication is the binding, which prevents the book from staying open on the piano rack.

There are thirty-three songs in all, seventeen in Volume 1 and sixteen in Volume 2. Many of the songs have never been published and are being made available for the first time. Since there are so many songs, this review will not consider them individually but will focus on León's style of song composition.

León's musical life and work connect him to the musical cultures of South America, Europe, and the United States, and he became acquainted with the folk music of each culture. The rhythms, melodies, and harmonies of these folk idioms, combined with the influence of Gershwin and American music theater, form the basis of León's compositional style.

One finds melodies with short conjunct phrases, often using the pentatonic scale, that are repeated throughout the song while the harmonies and figurations of the piano parts change

beneath them. The vocal range encompasses the staff with occasional high notes, and most of the texts are set melodically rather than according to word stress, although there are some songs that make effective use of recitative. None of the songs present any real difficulties in the vocal line, but many are strophic, and the singer must be skillful in interpretation of the texts and the expressive use of vocal color.

The piano parts are largely patterned with much use of arpeggiated seventh chords in various configurations. Harmonically, traditional keys predominate with liberal use of color chords, the whole tone scale, parallel structures, and unusual tonal shifts. The debt to American theater music, especially the music of Gershwin, is evident in many of the songs. Most of the piano parts are not difficult, and many have interesting rhythmic structures.

The composer was very much concerned with the relationship between text and music. "Poetry and music are a community, they form an intimate embrace that cannot be separated . . .

because poetry in and of itself has a certain rhythm that I follow with music . . ." (quoted in the front material, 34). The subject matter of the poems ranges from various types of love poems to children's songs, of which the composer was very fond, and Christmas songs. In Volume 1 there are two lovely lullabies ("Canción de cuna" and "Cancioncilla"), and Volume 2 has a cycle of children's songs to poems of Ecuadorian poets. Also in Volume 1 is a peasant woman's sad song in the rhythm of the Bambuco, a Colombian folk dance ("La campesina"). The Christmas songs have lovely bell imagery.

Three songs in Volume 1 show different aspects of the composer's style. "Vago Soneto" (Hazy Sonnet) evokes the drifting of smoke, to which the poet likens his surroundings and thoughts, in a mixture of gently rising and falling lines and hovering chords while the voice floats the text on simple rising and falling phrases. "La casa del lucero" (The House of the Bright Star) paints a picture of evening in a valley where there is a house in which

a child lives. Every evening the Milky Way descends to put the wakeful child to sleep before returning to the bright star. The slow tempo and floating chords in 3/2 underlie the simple, flowing vocal line. "Letra para cantar al son del arpa" (Lyrics for Singing to the Sound of the Harp) is a longer song with a soaring vocal line that ascends to high A⁴ several times. Marked *Allegro Vivace*, the song rushes along ecstatically in arpeggiated piano figurations and glissandos under the high lying vocal line. A slower middle section provides contrast before returning to the climactic ending.

An especially lovely love song is "Todo pasó" (It's All Over) that expresses the sorrow of lost love in gently flowing F[#] minor with occasional polyrhythms between voice and piano that reflect the pain of the one left behind. Also in Volume 2 is a cycle of four Christmas songs (*Ciclo de Canciones de Navidad*): "Villancico de la estrella" (Star Carol), "El asnillo y el buey" (The Little Donkey and the Ox), "Cancioncilla de navidad" (Little Christmas Song), and "Villancico de las campanas" (Bell Carol). All are lovely, and the bell imagery in the fourth song is very effective.

Patricia Caicedo has once again added new song possibilities to our repertoire for study and performance. Her work in bringing the richness of South American song to our attention is greatly appreciated, and we look forward to more publications in the future. These volumes should be in all music libraries and available to American and European voice teachers and students.

NEW SONG PUBLICATIONS

ABORN, LORA (1907–2005). *SONGS FOR CHATKA. Nine Nursery Rhymes.*

Sing & See

see your voice,
hear the results

THE NEW TOOL FOR SINGING TEACHING

- **Sing & See** allows singers to instantly see what their voice is doing while they sing - pitch, dynamics, and timbre.
- **Sing & See** allows students to adjust singing technique - and to see the impact of their improvements as they practice.
- **Sing & See** gives teachers a tool that lets them show students their voices - seeing can help to make hearing more clear.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT OUR WEBSITE :
www.singandsee.com