

11-21-2017

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Recommended Citation

Romero, A. 2017. A Glimpse into Quiroga's Musical Roots. *College Talk* (50):1-1. 21 November 2017. (URL: <http://aromerojr.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/1019.Quiroga.Article.pdf>)

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A Glimpse into Quiroga's Musical Roots

Dr. Aldemaro Romero Jr. *College Talk*

"At the music conservatory, I was told that popular music is not music, and that's one of the things that connected me with your dad, Aldemaro Romero. He could do classical, Bolero, so I felt connected because I felt 'there's someone who had the same problem that I did.' I felt like classical music is, of course, beautiful, but I needed something else."

That is how Selene Quiroga, an artist recently invited to Baruch College, explains why she crosses the borders between classical and popular music, as she did in a concert titled "Aldemaro Romero: Venezuelan Fiesta" where she performed as a pianist and as a vocalist.

Selene graduated as a classical pianist from the National Conservatory of Music Juan Jose Landaeta in her hometown of Caracas, Venezuela, where her professional path as a pianist was an uncommon one. On one side, she performed alongside Symphonic orchestras, including the Orquesta Sinfónica Municipal de Caracas, Orquesta Sinfónica Juvenil de Chacao and the Orquesta Sinfónica Gran Mariscal de Ayacucho. On the other side, she was a part of the original Venezuelan productions of the musicals Jesus Christ Superstar, The Producers, and Annie, while also performing as an actress on TV spots and touring Europe with one Latin America's top Ska (Jamaican) bands, Desorden Publico.

Selene's greatness comes from her ability to adapt to different audiences. "When I travel to Europe, I perform a different kind of music than what I would usually perform in Venezuela or in the U.S. I must say that in different locations Venezuelan music is always found interesting. So, to be able to share our music in the world is great."

Selene's interest in music transcended the stage. She published *Mapa de un Alma* (Map of a Soul), a biography of the greatest Venezuelan pianist and Steinway artist from the nineteenth century, Teresa Carreño. Selene also earned writing and composing credits for the Micro Musical *Prêt-à-Morté*, selected to be a part of the Miami and New York City Micro Theater

Festivals, in which she also performed as a singer and actress.

Her debut album is a tribute to the Venezuelan composer Aldemaro Romero, who happens to be my father. She says the music, "aims to honor, in a very personal way, the work of this versatile musician, whose ability to break barriers allowed Venezuelan music to evolve to a different stage. Selections of the repertoire from this album were recorded for Spirio, Steinway & Son's new high-resolution player piano."

"This is my first album about Aldemaro Romero, and I thought it was a good way of starting, because I am using his heritage, where the typical Venezuelan music will open so many doors. He was a composer that I like and I

always admired. So, that's a common thing in the audiences, but it's difficult to compare since I play different repertoires in different places."

Like many other musicians, Selene has more than one idol. "Teresa Carreño is my hero. She was a Venezuelan pianist born in 1853. She was basically a world-known artist in a time where women just didn't work. She was an artist, from the piano brand Steinway & Sons and she basically was a rock star for her time."

In addition to her many talents Selene is a composer as well. "My main focus is to compose popular songs, but I've also composed academic music for flute and for small formats. I like to use different media to express myself. Sometimes it's music, sometimes it's words, so I write poetry,



Cover of Selene Quiroga's upcoming CD to be released in February 2018.

sometimes it's painting. It's pretty demanding, and composition is something that you really have to devote to."

Selene also knows that that demands on a performer can be pretty daunting when compared with those of a composer. "I probably feel more pressure as a classical pianist than as a composer. As a composer, I always feel very free, so thank God, I don't have that fear and that anxiety over my shoulders. I fear more when it comes to being a classical pianist, but not with composing. Probably because I haven't been composing with very classical structures. But the academic work I've composed, I haven't been putting that pressure on myself. I just express what I need to say and usually it works."

One many wonder where Selene's inspiration while composing comes from. "Usually I don't have the song right from the beginning with a structure. I have to develop a structure and that's what experience gives you, the ability to develop structures easier, to do bridges and things that will help to basically form the song or the piece. I basically start with a feeling, a mood, an idea, a melody or maybe a chord progression, it depends."

When asked which was one of the favorite songs that she performed for her upcoming album, she said "Quien." Her reason for this choice is because, "This is a beautiful song with lyrics and music of course, but it's not very well known. It's a song that I discovered in Venezuela when I was actually doing a show about Aldemaro Romero, your father. One of my colleagues at the show sang the song with the orchestra and I was amazed. It's so beautiful, the lyrics. And I also admire that Aldemaro was able to write his own lyrics. That's not something a lot of people can do with good taste; he wrote beautifully... It's a very strange structure, but it's just so beautiful. I love the song and I did the arrangement with a lot of love so I love the final result, so I really like that song."

Aldemaro Romero Jr. is the Dean of the Weissman School of Arts and Sciences at Baruch College of the City University of New York. The radio show on which these articles are based can be watched at: <https://vimeo.com/238764268> He can be contacted via Aldemaro.Romero@baruch.cuny.edu