the simple and elegant *For Ann (rising)*. Still, it is not the quality of the sounds in these works that makes the music so distinct, but rather how the sounds function in a larger musical context. In the first section of *META+HODOS* (written around the same time as the creation of *Collage #1*) entitled "The New Musical Materials," Tenney remarks, "*Any sound might occur* at some point in a piece of music, with a function there that is virtually independent of the constitution or structure of the sound itself, being determined instead by the larger musical context in which it occurs."[9] What is unmistakable about Tenney's music is the deep underlying concern for and exploration of process and form (the music's overall shape and structure) using any and all means. Although the processes may not be completely transparent, the unity and cohesion of the materials indicate that, indeed, some process is happening. Tenney continued to focus and concentrate on process and form using almost exclusively acoustic instruments (often generating pieces with the aid of a computer). The works on this CD are the result of early explorations of ideas that became integral to Tenney's work but with an expansive range of sounds that he would later limit. Tenney is considered by many as a true maverick with an adventurous attitude that did not relent as he grew older. Remarkably, these early, innovative works sound radical even to those born in the digital age.

Michael Winter

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Journal of the Society for American Music (2010) Volume 4, Number 4, pp. 533–535.
© The Society for American Music 2010 doi:10.1017/S1752196310000465

Tania León, *Singin' Sepia*. Bridge CD 9231.

Tania León's incorporation of varied artistic influences (such as Latin American music and jazz) within a dense, rhythmically charged framework yields a compositional style that is deeply personal and distinctly American. Born in Havana, León began to feel isolated in Cuba and chose to live abroad to fully realize her musical potential. She initially planned to immigrate to Paris, but she was awarded a free flight to Miami in 1967 through a lottery sponsored by the Freedom Flights program.[1] With limited resources, she settled in New York City working as a rehearsal pianist. Through a chance encounter, León began working for Arthur Miller, who had recently founded the Dance Theatre of Harlem. Within two years, she was asked to serve as the organization's first Music Director, a post she held from 1969 until 1980. It was this appointment that launched her multifaceted, international career as a composer, conductor, teacher, and administrator.

Although León composed several works throughout the 1970s, including four ballets for the Dance Theatre, it was not until the end of the decade that she

[9] *META + HODOS:* 8.

[1] The Freedom Flights program was begun by the administration of President Lyndon Johnson. Between 1965 and 1971, it provided free travel to Miami for 250,000 Cuban refugees.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196310000465 Published online by Cambridge University Press

developed her mature style, which has since remained essentially unchanged. This musical maturation resulted from a pivotal conversation with her father shortly before his death: Still residing in Havana, he told her that he had heard a recording of her music, but could not hear *her* in the music. Until that point, León had not considered allowing elements of Cuban music to inform her compositional style, which remained essentially within the classical tradition. This musical inspiration was furthered during a 1979 visit to her former home: "I felt an explosion inside of me . . . and I felt the sounds of my environment, the sounds of my childhood, starting to come back."[2]

The sounds described above by León characterize the selections heard on *Singin' Sepia,* the second of two commercial recordings devoted to her music.[3] The six included compositions span eleven years—from 1992 to 2002—and four of them, *Axon* (2002), *Bailarín* (1998), *Horizons* (1999), and *Singin' Sepia* (1996), are performed by the commissioning artist(s) or organization. Also included are *Arenas d'un Tiempo* (1992, for clarinet, cello, and piano) and *Satiné* (2000, for piano, four hands). Copious notes by Jason Stanyek supplement concise biographies of the composer and performers and the text of *Singin' Sepia.* (Perhaps the only notable omission from the compilation is a work representing León's contributions to the solo piano literature, for which she is well known.) The performances are exceptional, bringing to life the true essence of León's music; the quality of sound and attention to aural aesthetics is exemplary.

The album opens with *Bailarín (Dancer),* for solo guitar, performed by David Starobin, for whom the piece was written in 1998. This brief and engaging work serves as an appropriate beginning, highlighting León's unique use of Latin American rhythms, one of the most salient aspects of her musical vocabulary. Although the references to the source-sounds are clear, when combined with harmonic and melodic language not indigenous to Latin America they assume the character of filtered images, rather than clear aural pictures.

In *Axon,* the combination mentioned above becomes a conversation, as violinist Mari Kimura brilliantly engages in a virtuosic call and response with an interactive computer. Brief sounds of a Latin American percussion ensemble present a stark contrast to the violin and are interspersed with sampled a cappella voices borrowed from *Batéy* (1989), which León wrote in collaboration with pianist Michel Camilo.

The piece for which the album is titled, *Singin' Sepia,* is in many respects the highlight of this recording. Scored for soprano, clarinet, violin, and piano four-hands, it is performed by the New York–based chamber ensemble Continuum with Tony Arnold, soprano. Some of León's most substantial works have been inspired by her collaborations with notable writers, including Margaret Atwood and Wole Soyinka, and this piece sets five poems of Rita Dove, former Poet Laureate of the United States and winner of the 1987 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry.

[2] Information in this paragraph is taken from an interview with Tania León by the author, 13 December 2005.

[3] The first, entitled *Indígena,* features León as conductor of the title track (Composers Recordings CRI662, 1994).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196310000465 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Tony Arnold adapts her considerable technique to the complex melodic language that is a hallmark of León's compositional style. Extreme intervallic leaps and infrequently repeated pitches create a framework of highly chromatic passagework and jagged melodic contour. Plentiful ornamentation consists mainly of grace notes and glissandi. Arnold goes well beyond an accurate performance: Carefully nuanced tone color and vibrato enhance the texts with subtlety and elegance, from the short bursts of buoyant rhythm in "Wiring Home," to the anguished soulfulness of "Persephone Abducted."

Perhaps the most striking aspect of León's cycle is its musical continuity. Although musical settings of poetry often invite clear division and internal structure, León remains true to her typical, through-composed approach: Phrase divisions are not clearly articulated, and changes in texture, tempo, centricity, and instrumental color rarely occur simultaneously. Rhythm is the primary generator of form, typically through unexpected changes and carefully placed silence. In "Wiring Home," the first five stanzas speak of moving, "though your knees flush red as two chapped apples," and León juxtaposes halting, rhapsodic gestures in the soprano, clarinet, and violin, with brief dance-like passages in the piano. Suddenly, the dance halts and silence isolates the final stanza: "Staring: ambushed by a window of canaries bright as a thousand golden narcissi."

The album concludes with *Horizons,* a complex score that exemplifies features commonly found in León's music: formidable technical demands, contemporary harmonic language, improvisatory jagged melodic lines, dense rhythmic layering, and colorful orchestration. Momentary atonality, chromaticism, and functional harmony are on equal footing, and all interact within an essentially tonal framework. The piece is given a superb performance by the North German Radio Symphony under the direction of Peter Ruzicka. The recording will likely be welcomed by León's followers, since only two of her works for orchestra (*Carabalí* [1991] and *Batá* [1985, rev. 1988]) have previously been commercially recorded, both on a 1995 release by the Louisville Orchestra.[4] *Horizons* is autobiographical, depicting León's departure from Cuba and the beginnings of her new life in the United States through the image of herself as a bird in a flock, seeing the horizon from a different point of view.

The journey that inspired *Horizons* helped to shape a humanistic philosophy that informs all of León's compositions, in which there are no demarcations of gender or race, and where the contributions of individuals transcend geographical and social boundaries. Her background and environment directly affect her compositional process, and the source-sounds inform and permeate her music without overshadowing its complexity. This unique approach is clearly illustrated by the works presented on *Singin' Sepia,* a recording that should be of equal interest to those new to León's music and to those who know it well.

James Spinazzola

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[4] *First Edition Recordings: The Louisville Orchestra,* LCD010.

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