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# **Borges y el Espejo**

for soprano and computer  
(1992)

Alejandro Viñao

ENTRY 2

# " Borges y el Espejo "

for soprano and computer  
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**Alejandro Viñao**

Borges y el Espejo was commissioned by the Groupe de  
Musique Experimentale de Bourges

The computer part was produced at GMEB and re-mixed in  
London

Premiere: Bourges Festival of Electroacoustic Music, France,  
June 8th, 1992. Performed by Frances Lynch.

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**DURATION: 12 minutes**

*Borges y el Espejo* (Borges and the Mirror) is a song-like chant from a fictional culture. I imagined this culture as one which had developed technology in spite of having remained rural. This improbability accounts for the ritualistic and at times monodic nature of the singing, coupled to a computer part which seeks not to harmonize or orchestrate the songs but rather to extend the phrasing and timbre of the voice beyond its natural acoustic means.

Our culture has used each new technological development to further its original musical concerns: harmony, large scale form and timbre. My imaginary culture too, used technology to develop its rural and ethnic singing tradition. Based on this idea, I developed an imaginary singing style, with its own melisma, its own ornamental identity, the identity of a chanting 'tradition' that I invented. In this tradition, the tune of each chant is less important than its ornaments, which can have a much stronger musical profile. Such a tune is difficult to remember. We recall the 'style' of the phrasing but not the phrase itself. The computer is also part of this imaginary style. The vocal sounds it manipulates

and the new timbres it creates are articulated and 'performed' in a way which is consistent with the chanting style of the singer. When the computer takes the vocal sound and transforms them into new timbres, it does so following the 'stylistic constraints' of this imaginary culture.

I based the invented singing style on the traditions of different Eastern musics and in particular on one Turkish/Ottoman classical song which I specially like for its beautiful use of melisma and glottal vibrato.

The composer strongly recommends that *Borges y el Espejo* be performed from memory and without a score on stage. The aesthetic nature of the piece with its ethnic, imaginary ritualistic origin require a true 'performance' and not a 'reading'. The soloist, regardless of how familiar she may be with the piece, will always deliver the piece in a different way if she has a music stand and a score between herself and the audience.

### About the score

Much of the music written in the last 40 years has been notated in order to show with precision the complexity of the musical ideas behind a piece. The score of *Borges y el Espejo* has been notated seeking to achieve the exact opposite effect. The score is presented as a precise set of instructions for performance. In the computer part any information that is not absolutely necessary for the performance of the piece has been deliberately left out so that the score will look to the player a great deal more simple than it really is. Since the score is accompanied by a Training Cassette it is hoped that much of the information about performance will be conveyed through the cassette rather than through the score. Since the collapse of Common Practice and its corresponding tonal system the conventional score has become only partially effective in conveying a precise set of instructions for performance. The performer MUST study the score of *Borges y el Espejo* TOGETHER with the training Cassette.

### About conventions in notation

a diamond notehead in the computer part indicates a note with inharmonic overtones and/or imprecise fundamental pitch.

an X notehead in the computer part indicates a percussive note with indeterminate pitch.

an arrow pointing up/down next to a notehead indicates a microtonal interval. There are many instances of microtonal intervals in the piece but only in the computer part. They are indicated in the score only when it is necessary for the singer to take them into account, to avoid 'drifting' with the computer part. The singer is never asked to sing microtonal intervals.

### About the text

I wrote the text in *Borges y el Espejo* to suite the musical needs of the piece and used some words taken from the Ottoman song mentioned above. Although these words are originally in Turkish I used them as words of an imaginary language.

### About articulation

The following types of trills and vibratos are marked in the singer's part :

1\_ **Vibrato (vib).** A moderate standard frequency vibrato. It is marked in the score as slow vib., fast vib., or simply vib. This vibrato is more restrained than an Operatic vibrato.

2\_ **Operatic vibrato.** A broad frequency vibrato commonly used in performances of 19th Century Italian operas. (e.g. Sutherland, Domingo, Pavarotti, etc.)

3\_ **Baroque trill (Bar. trill.).** This refers to amplitude vibrato commonly used in early music and it is produced with the diaphragm and not with the glottis. It is in fact a diaphragmatic trill.

4\_ **Ethnic vibrato (Ethnic vib.).** This is a frequency vibrato articulated using the glottis and is the same as the Mongolian vibrato I used in my piece *Chant d'ailleurs*. The *Borges y el Espejo Training Cassette* contains examples of ethnic singers producing this vibrato and an imitation by a western soprano (Frances Lynch)

which the performer may take as a reference. Frances Lynch premiered *Borges y el Espejo* and *Chant d'ailleurs*.

5\_ **Articulate with glottis (glottis).** A trill produced with the glottis, also known as goat trill.

### About phrasing

Slurs indicate phrasing and therefore breathing in those places where the text alone is not enough. The performer must try to follow as strictly as possible the indicated phrasing and must not breath during a phrase encompassed within a broad slur even if the text seems to suggest otherwise. Some singers may not be able to deliver some long phrases without breathing in between, in which case they must try to conceal the breathing point.

This is particularly important in the case of long sustained notes which are followed by a glottal trill and end in some melismatic short phrase.

### **About the computer part.**

The computer part is notated as a mere outline to give precise cues to the singer. It must not be taken as an accurate representation of the music played by the computer. Such representation would be impossible within the limitations of conventional music notation. In many cases the notation of the rhythms in the computer part have been deliberately simplified to look like the rhythms in the soprano part.

Most of the sounds played by the computer have been created using an actual human voice as a departing sound source.

#### Synchronicity between the singer and the tape.

A click-track is recorded in a separate track of the digital tape recorder (PCM) that contains the computer part. The singer has 2 alternatives:

- a) she may receive the click-track via headphones.
- b) she may receive the click-track via a small light box (see equipment requirements) concealed on stage on the floor. The light box converts the down beat of the click-track into a red light blip and the other beats into green

light blips. This is by far the best option since it spares the singer the very unmusical experience of having to sing while wearing headphones and listening to a click-track.

### **About the performance.**

The singer and the computer are equally important and the computer sound must never be diffused as an accompaniment. The singer must blend with the computer as much as possible so that it is not often possible to tell which is which.

The overall sound must be warm and reverberant. In most concert halls it will be necessary to add artificial reverberation to the voice and the computer part (fairly long pre-delay and rev. time). For this reason, the computer part has been mixed deliberately 'dry' so that the same reverberation can be added to both computer and voice. If a multi-speaker system is available, the performer at the mixer must make sure that the voice and the computer always share the same speakers and their sound is at all times projected from the same point in space. Nevertheless, the

performer at the mixer is free to explore the different possibilities of displacement of sound in space offered by the sound diffusion system and the concert hall provided he is careful not to alter the stereo image in the computer part.

### **Equipment requirements**

- 1 high quality condenser directional microphone.
- 1 reverberation unit
- 1 PCM digital tape recorder. (Both NTSC and PAL standards are available)
- 1 Click to light converter box. Provide by the composer.
- 1 small mixer.
- Amplifier and speakers.

# Borges y el Espejo

Alejandro Viñao  
1992

♩ = 68  
click-trak= ♩

2

Soprano

Computer

(drums)

♩ = 65

4

♩ = 62

♩ = 60

6

♩ = 62

Musical score for measures 6-7. The treble clef staff is empty. The bass clef staff contains triplets of eighth notes. Dynamics include *p*, *mf*, *pp*, and *f*.

8

10

Musical score for measures 8-11. The treble clef staff has rests. The bass clef staff features a glissando and various rhythmic patterns. Dynamics include *f* and *mf*.

12

♩ = 90

14

Musical score for measures 12-15. The treble clef staff has rests. The bass clef staff contains sixteenth notes, triplets, and a crotale. Dynamics include *f*, *ppp*, *f*, *p*, and *f*.

22  $\bullet = 85$        $\bullet = 90$       24  $\bullet = 85$

26  $\bullet = 65$   
close to microphone  
no vib. *p*      28 *mf*  
baroque vib.      gel- sin

**30**  $\bullet = 55$  **imitating the computer**

*f* **gliss** **gliss** **baroque vib.** **gliss**

dam— da— dar— gi— nim—

(crotale)

**3**

**32**  $\bullet = 80$  **close to mic.** **34**

*mp* **ethnic vib.**

(a) — da — dam —

der— din be — ni —

**36** **ethnic vib.**

(i) — de —

li — de —

**gliss**

38

li ey le di i Za-hi - dem

40

der din be - ni e

eth. vib. eth. vib. eth. vib. no vib.

42

♩ = 85

ethnic. vib. co - ra co