

Javier Alvarez (b. 1956)

Temazcal (1984)

Publisher: Black Dog Editions

Duration: 8'

Recordings:

Papalotl: Transformaciones Exóticas, CD-SDL-390, performed by Luis Julio Toro

Recovery/Discovery, CD-SAM-0801, performed by Joby Burgess

Notable Performance: <http://youtu.be/RTqW9KwFwSQ>, performed by Alessandro Valiante

Instrumentation:

Maracas and Electroacoustic Track

Program Notes:

Temazcal is a work for solo maracas and electroacoustic track accompaniment by Mexican composer Javier Alvarez. Written in 1984 for Luis Julio Toro, this work required virtuosic *zoropo* maraca performance techniques as well as substantial creative improvisation. Named after the Meso-American sweat lodge of the Nahuatl (*tema* – “vapor”; *calli* – “house”), Alvarez guides the listener through a journey modeled after this ancient ritual in search of rejuvenation. Not only is this work one of the first formal solos for maracas, *Temazcal* set the precedent for many electronic percussion works to come.

Javier Alvarez is perhaps one of the most influential composers to emerge from Mexico in the 20th century. Trained as a clarinetist and composer at the National Conservatory of Music in Mexico City under Mario Lavista, Alvarez went on to study at the University of Wisconsin, the Royal College of Music, and obtained his doctorate at the City University in London. His music has been performed by many new music ensembles across the globe including the Mexico City Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony New Music Ensemble, and the LA Philharmonic New Music Group. After serving as dean of the prestigious Conservatorio de las Rosas in Michoacán, Javier Alvarez currently resides in Yucatan as a freelance composer.

Other works featuring percussion: *Ki Bone Gaku* (1984), *Asi el acero* (1988), *Música para piel y palangana* (1993), *Nocturno y Toque* (1997), *Shekere* (2001), *Estudio #5* (2002), *Recycle Loops* (2002), *Mantis Walk in Metal Space* (2003), *Días como Sombra* (2010), *Metal de Corazones* (2012)



Francisco Perez
Spring 2014

Javier Alvarez Temazcal

notes by Francisco Perez

- Temazcal origins
 - Derived from Nahuatl word “temaz-calli” (“vapor”; “house”)
 - “Enter to die, return for rebirth”
 - Meso-American sweat lodge
 - Made with branches or bricks
 - Covered in *frasadas* or natural materials (clay, mud, etc.)
 - Complete darkness is essential
 - Pit at center used for hot coals
 - Long ceremony
 - Four Levels of the temazcal ceremony
 - *Agua - mi sangre,* *Water - my blood,*
 - Tierra - mi cuerpo,* *Earth - my body,*
 - Aire - mi aliento,* *Air - my breath,*
 - Fuego - mi espíritu.* *Fire - my spirit.*
 - Shaman then welcomes the participant to a new life and rejuvenation
- *Temazcal* Background
 - Written in 1984 for Luis Julio Toro
 - Alvarez and Toro met at the Royal College of Music in London
 - Luis Julio Toro
 - Venezuelan flutist
 - Grew close to Venezuelan folk *llanero* traditions
 - Played the maracas
 - *Joropo* Maracas
 - Three type of *joropo* styles
 - *Joropo tuyero* – central; *maraquero* sings
 - *Joropo oriental* – coastal; virtuosic
 - *Joropo llanero* – plainlands; virtuosic
 - No early formal training in Venezuela/Colombia
 - Knowledge passed down traditionally
 - Apprentices imitated the masters of the instrument
 - Notation
 - No standard notation
 - First formal piece to spotlight maracas as soloist
 - Works like *Ionisation* used maracas as general sound – no substantial inflection
 - Visual Aspect
 - Unlike many instruments, maracas are not immobile.
 - Maraqueros traditionally danced with music
 - Alvarez commentary
 - “...I imagined a piece where the player would have to master short patterns and combine them with great virtuosity to construct larger and complex rhythmic structures which could be juxtaposed, superimposed and set against similar passages on tape, thus creating a dense polyrhythmic web...”
- Structure
 - *Water* (0:00 – 1:35) – tape introduction

- 0:00 - composed of modified, recycled, and sped up original harp music
 - 0:34 – random bass and pizzicatos with extra noise “burning sounds”; drone begins to rise in pitch
 - 1:20 – Pizz. and bass note at same time; serves as cue for upcoming entrance (4 hits/15” left)
 - *Earth* (1:35 – 4:12) – performer entrance
 - 1:35 – maracas enter with harp rhythms
 - 1:54 – bamboo drum sounds enter as rough 16ths; 2:13 swell
 - 2:18 – 2:22 – Metallic guaguancó interruption
 - 2:27 – 2:31 – 2nd Metallic guaguancó interruption
 - 2:34 – 2:40 – 3rd Metallic guaguancó interruption; rise then fall
 - 2:54 – 3:03 – interruption with three rises
 - 3:03 – tape maracas enter
 - 3:09 – 3:21 – 2.5 falls/rises
 - 3:48 - 4:00 – four falls
 - *Air* (4:12 – 4:31)
 - Begins with bass drone and first true duple rhythms
 - Rhythmic diminution between maracas and track
 - First hint of stability (over halfway through the piece)
 - Explicit dialogue between performer and track; first true rest since maracas entered
 - “In and out of consciousness in the temazcal”
 - *Fire* (4:31 – 6:39)
 - Begins with similar altered folkloric harp music from introduction
 - Maracas indicated to gradually become independent from harp plucks as tension grows
 - 5:05 – metallic falls are reintroduced; total of 8 falls
 - 5:29 – Final long phrase; most chaotic; cicada and bird sounds added
 - Performer indicated to “use all possible combinations and patterns at your disposal and capability”
 - *Rejuvenation* (6:39 – 8:03)
 - 6:39 – Climax; loudest point of tape
 - Score indicates performer to play horizontally into gradual relaxation of them
 - 7:06 – Original folkloric harp music fades in
 - “Healed state”
 - Basis of previous material
 - 4 octaves higher; faster
- Bibliography
 - “The Confluence of Folkloric Maraca Performance and Contemporary Artistry: Accessing the Past, Present, and Inspiring the Future” diss. by Jeremy Muller, UMI3504113, accessed on ProQuest.
 - “Programming and Performing in Contemporary Percussion Music: A Performers Exploration of How, Why, and When” diss. by Federico Manzanilla, UMI3178864, accessed on ProQuest.
 - <http://www.brad-meyer.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Tamazcal-Clinic.pdf>
 - Temazcal walkthrough: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NfDTElfmUk>
 - Temazcal history: <http://www.aztecgardens.com/temazcal.html>