

Music for a master of magical realism

BY CELIA WREN

The new composition “Romanzas de Riohacha” is not the kind of piece a musician can just toss off.

“You have to get in there and pull it out of your soul,” guitarist Ricardo Cobo says with relish of this new work for solo guitar by composer Javier Farias. “Romanzas de Riohacha” will anchor a musical homage to the late Gabriel García Márquez at the Enrique V. Iglesias Auditorium of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) on Dec. 3.

The time is right for a salute to García Márquez, the renowned Colombian writer, who died in April. But “Romanzas de Riohacha” is not a one-off tribute. It is part of a cycle of new music that Farias is composing to honor six Latin American writers who

have won the Nobel Prize in Literature. “Seis Miradas por Latinoamerica” (“Six Perspectives on Latin America”), pays tribute to García Márquez (Nobel winner in 1982), Gabriela Mistral (Chile, 1945), Miguel Ángel Asturias (Guatemala, 1967), Pablo Neruda (Chile, 1971), Octavio Paz (Mexico, 1990) and Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru, 2010).

A resident of Potomac, Md., who hails from Chile, Farias has been working with the IDB, Wake Forest University, and other entities on the cycle, which is rolling out through 2016. A goal is to release a CD.

Farias remembers being hooked as a boy by the García Márquez story collection “Big Mama’s Funeral.” Sincethen, Farias said by e-mail, he has been enthralled by the Colombian writer’s ability to “carry me to

distant and supernatural places, and, at the same time, in a masterful way, integrate the truth and reality of our Latin traditions and people.”

When it came to paying tribute to all six Nobel laureates, Farias decided to emphasize the guitar. He is a guitarist himself — and, besides, he says, the instrument has a central place in Latin American music.

“The Indigenous, European and African cultures all find expression in the guitar,” he said, adding that composers such as Heitor Villa-Lobos, Leo Brouwer and Atahualpa Yupanqui drew on this triple-stranded cultural legacy when molding their own aesthetics. “What I am basically doing is to extend this long tradition,” Farias said.

Most of the pieces are for solo guitar, but some complement the guitar with other instruments. One of the Neruda-themed compositions is a three-movement work for classical and electric guitar — a collaboration with Andy Summers of The Police, Farias says.

“Romanzas de Riohacha” takes inspiration from a passage in García Márquez’s memoir “Living to Tell the Tale,” in which the writer recounted a vivid, but possibly unreliable, childhood memory of hearing a blind relative sing. Farias says the composition is an attempt to recognize the childhood “imaginative world” that became a source of inspiration for García Márquez.

Cobo, who was born in Colombia and directs classical guitar studies at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, programmed the Dec. 3 concert, which will include works from the region

where García Márquez was born. Cobo said he structured the lineup so that it would build up to “Romanzas de Riohacha.”

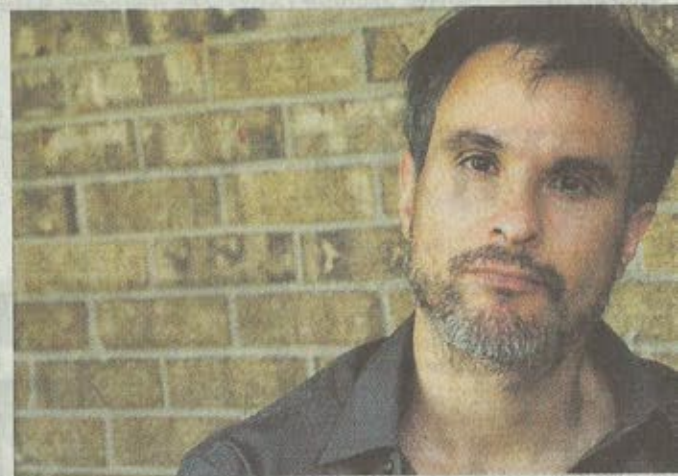
“The piece is an extremely haunting, lyrical, and, intense piece, with a lot of yearning,” Cobo said by phone. “It’s really unlike anything I’ve played.”

Art of the DMZ

Memory and imagination are themes that thread implicitly through “Romanzas de Riohacha.” Memory and imagination are among the forces fueling Korea’s Real DMZ Project, according to Seoul-based artistic director and curator Sunjung Kim. She was in Washington recently to give a presentation about the project, which showcases contemporary art works about, and in the vicinity of, the Demilitarized Zone separating North and South Korea.

“As Koreans, we try not to remember this [Korean] War and border. We try to forget about it,” Kim said in an interview at the Goethe Institut, which hosted her Nov. 17 presentation in cooperation with the Korean Cultural Center of Washington and the Goethe-Institut Korea.

The Real DMZ Project, which began exhibiting in 2012, combats such oblivion, Kim said. The project also creates a platform for reimagining the nature of the DMZ, which stretches roughly 150 miles and has been called the most heavily fortified border in the world. A soft-spoken woman dressed all in black, Kim said she didn’t want the project’s art “to talk about just political issues. It’s about how to rethink how to see this [DMZ] corridor” and



COURTESY OF JAVIER

Composer Javier Farias has written a tribute to the Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez, who died in April. It’s part of a cycle Farias is writing to honor six Latin American writers.

about brainstorming alternatives for a potentially more peaceful dispensation. “We have to think and prepare for the future,” she said.

The Real DMZ Project works with an annual group of about 10 to 15 artists, of whom about 30 percent are Korean. Some participants have created films or video art on themes related to the DMZ. Others have installed site-specific artworks in locations around Cheorwon County near the DMZ. For the 2014 edition of the project, German artist Florian Hecker created a sound installation in an evacuation shelter and Argentine-born Tomás Saraceno tinkered with a set of a public binoculars in the Cheorwon Peace Observatory, creating a swiveling artwork he called “DOF (Degrees of Freedom).” The Real DMZ Project has initiated an artist residency in Yangji-ri, a village that was founded as a propaganda settlement in the 1970s.

At the Goethe Institut, Kim showed several Real DMZ Project films, including Canadian-born artist Mark Lewis’s striking 14-minute-long “Tiger,” which

pans silently over the DMZscape before swooping in an underground bunker.

The Real DMZ Project exhibits four weeks a year at its venues, which have included an art center in Seoul. Kim is exploring the possibility of showing some works in Pennsylvania in 2015. Her D.C. presentation is part of the Goethe Institut event series “The Wall in Heads,” continuing through Dec. 15.

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Homage to Gabriel García Márquez. 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 26, at the Enrique V. Iglesias Auditorium, Inter-American Development Bank, 1330 New York Ave. NW. Free and open to the public (photo ID required). Visit iadb.org/culture

For more on the Real DMZ Project, visit www.realdmz.org (Web site in Korean and some English).

For more on the Goethe Institut event series “The Wall in Our Heads,” continuing through Dec. 15, visit www.goethe.de/washington

Wren is a freelance writer.

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