



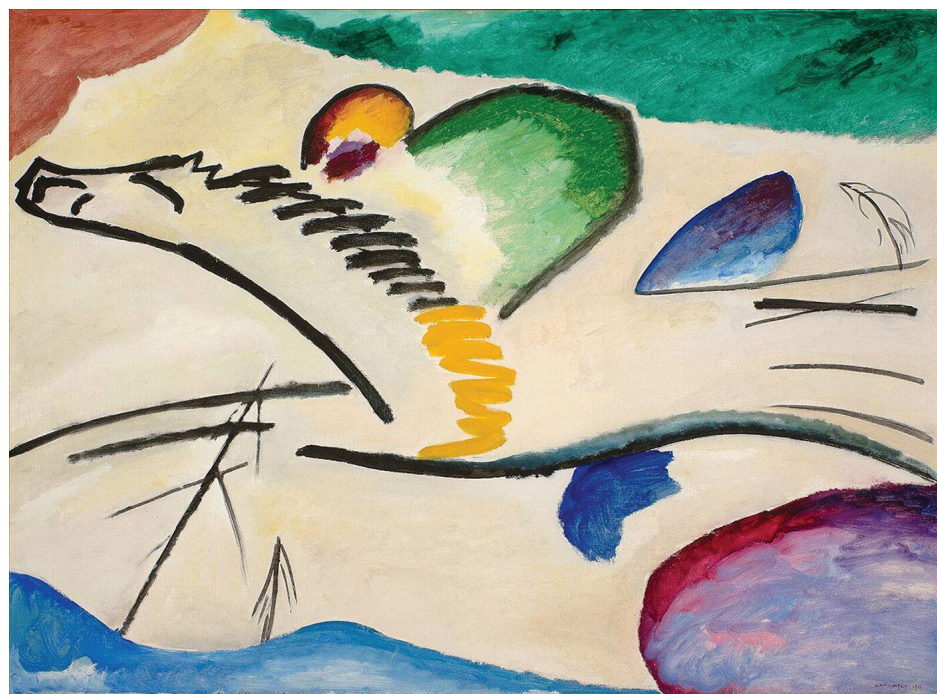
ROBERTO SIERRA

Kandinsky

Clarinet Sonata • Treinta y tres formas de mirar un mismo objeto

Continuum

Cheryl Seltzer and Joel Sachs, Directors



A CONTINUUM PORTRAIT • 11

Roberto SIERRA (b. 1953)

Kandinsky	19:57	19	IV. –	0:42
for violin, viola, cello and piano (2003)		20	V. –	0:35
1 Lyrisches (Lyrical)	1:43	21	VI. –	0:16
2 Improvisation 19	1:08	22	VII. –	0:38
3 Bild mit schwarzem Bogen (Picture with a Black Arch)	1:15	23	VIII. –	0:36
4 Improvisation 26	0:52	24	IX. –	0:13
5 Kleine Freuden (Small Pleasures)	1:20	25	X. –	0:38
6 Schwarze Striche I (Black Strokes I)	2:22	26	XI. –	0:51
7 Weisser Strich (White Stroke)	1:24	27	XII. –	0:53
8 Kleine Welten III (Small Worlds III)	2:24	28	XIII. –	1:05
9 Komposition VIII (Composition VIII)	1:36	29	XIV. –	1:04
10 Launisches (Capricious)	2:50	30	XV. –	1:20
11 Bunttes Ensemble (Colorful Ensemble)	2:37	31	XVI. –	1:57
		32	XVII. –	0:54
		33	XVIII. –	0:30
		34	XIX. –	0:31
		35	XX. –	1:35
Sonata for Clarinet and Piano	16:11	36	XXI. –	0:50
(2005–06)		37	XXII. –	0:36
12 Salseado	4:50	38	XXIII. –	0:34
13 Delicado y expresivo	5:23	39	XXIV. –	0:52
14 Enérgico	1:51	40	XXV. –	0:45
15 Veloz (with swing)	4:01	41	XXVI. –	1:04
		42	XXVII. –	0:15
		43	XXVIII. –	1:07
Treinta y tres formas de mirar un		44	XXIX. –	0:34
mismo objeto (Thirty-three Ways		45	XXX. –	0:31
to Look at the Same Object)	28:38	46	XXXI. –	0:34
for piano four hands (2005–08)		47	XXXII. –	0:55
		48	XXXIII. –	1:23
16 I. –	1:58			
17 II. –	0:47			
18 III. –	1:08			

Roberto Sierra (b. 1953)

Kandinsky • Sonata for Clarinet and Piano • Treinta y tres formas de mirar un mismo objeto

Continuum's long history with Roberto Sierra began in the early 1980s during a concert tour to the University of Puerto Rico, where he was working in the concert office. When we asked if we might see one of his compositions, he showed us his song cycle *Conjuros*, which we liked so much that we began programming it and ultimately recorded it. We also participated in the landmark premiere of his early opera *El mensajero de plata* at the Interamerican Festival in San Juan. Since then, Continuum has had the honor of premiering and recording numerous Sierra compositions written for us.

The folklore and popular music of the Caribbean have been the driving force in Roberto Sierra's music since his student years in Europe, when he became convinced that the survival of Latin American art depended upon the preservation of the roots and essence of its cultural identity. To this end, he increasingly incorporated into his works the music of his heritage. Like Bartók and his explorations of Hungarian folklore, he did not usually quote traditional material, but assimilated it into his personal style, which is deeply rooted in Western classical and modern music. As heard in his earliest music from 1982 to 1991 on Continuum's *Roberto Sierra – New Music with a Caribbean Accent* (Naxos 8.559263), the composer evokes and ingeniously transforms the folk traditions and popular music of his Afro-Cuban heritage, treating his sources freely and imaginatively.

In the decade 1993–2002, Sierra's strong compositional voice is propelled by the innovative use of serialism, polyrhythmic canons, simultaneous varying tempos, and elaborate layered textures, as heard on Continuum's New Albion recording *Turner: Chamber Music of Roberto Sierra*. The presence of Afro-Cuban drumming is in some works very assertive and elsewhere defers to a more subtle Caribbean atmosphere. In other works, as in *Turner*, the Caribbean element is absent, as Sierra explores colors, textures and moods in his reflection on the great British painter, and in *Cancionero Sephardí* in which he largely uses

the texts and melodies of ancient Sephardic song, sometimes making adjustments to suit compositional needs.

In the present recording, *Kandinsky*, Sierra continues to be captivated by the music of his Caribbean roots, but his language has extended to other domains. One remarkable feature of Sierra's compositional career has been that he constantly reinvents himself. Each work is, in a significant way, new terrain. Even if his style – such as the Afro-Cuban sources – may be familiar, the structure and process of the composition is new. Recently, Sierra surprises us by even turning to 19th-century classical music as a model and to some popular music distant from the Caribbean. But Caribbean motifs do make unexpected appearances at strategic points!

Kandinsky for violin, viola, cello, and piano (2003) was inspired by paintings of the Russian-born pioneer of abstract, non-objective art, Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944). It was written a year after *Turner* (2002), Sierra's first musical homage to a great artist. The composer, a lover of the visual arts, says:

“These two painters share in common a wonderful sense of color and form, elements that inspired me in the composition of the two works. *Kandinsky* originated in a commission from the McKim Fund of the Library of Congress to write a work for violin and piano. After writing three movements *Lyrisches*, *Schwarze Striche I*, and *Launisches*, I decided to add other instruments – viola and cello – and employ the four in different instrumental combinations and as soloists. The bold strokes, colors and capricious nature of Kandinsky's paintings are translated in the rhythms, melodies and harmonies of my work. The character of the individual movements range from the intimate (as in *Schwarze Striche I*) to the bold and virtuosic (as in *Improvisation 26*).”

Sierra ordered his selection of paintings in chronological order, with a majority from 1911–13 in Kandinsky's earliest abstract period. In both *Turner* and *Kandinsky*, Sierra avoids literal musical analogues in favor of imaginative responses which evoke fresh and

sometimes surprising impressions of the paintings. Kandinsky, himself an amateur cellist, and very musically oriented in his aesthetic thought, also sought associations with progressive artists interested in breaking down barriers isolating the arts. He taught at the Bauhaus (Dessau and Berlin, 1922–33) which espoused the unity and interplay of the arts, and he was regarded as an important theorist. Usually we think of his contemporary musical counterpart as Arnold Schoenberg. Roberto Sierra universalizes Kandinsky by welcoming him to the world of salsa!

The *Sonata for Clarinet and Piano* (2005–06) was commissioned by Joan Sears. The composer comments that it “forms part of a group of works that I have written for the clarinet since the 1980s. Common threads in all these works are the rhythmic and register (timbre) explorations in conjunction with the highly agile and expressive qualities of the clarinet. The first movement follows a traditional Sonata Allegro formal scheme, and the following slow movement exposes two simple elements, a steady rhythmic unison in both instruments that is contrasted by florid passages. The third movement is a *scherzo* in uneven metrics, which precedes the wild boogie that closes the work.”

As it happens, he failed to mention that the enormous challenges posed by his limitless melodic and rhythmic imagination require players who are prepared to put in a lot of time. Many of the musical obstacles are especially formidable for the pianist, who frequently has to play in two simultaneous tempos, cleverly notated so that the contrasting layers of time can be accurately coordinated, thus permitting no excuses for inaccuracy. Yet those temporal relationships must not sound as if they are laboriously calculated, but must convey the sense that the pianist’s hands are functioning in two different worlds, each of them natural and above all, musical. The same is true in the stunning slow movement, a kind of nocturne. Here, incredibly intricate ornamental melodies must move at almost impossible speeds in order to sound like hovering clouds of sound, almost motionless in their effect. Again, however, the pianist is often given a second stream of melody in a different tempo to be played simultaneously. While much of the *scherzo* is in rhythmic

unison between the players, the rhythms require a strong feeling of the intricate swing of Caribbean mixed meters. Even trickier metric counterpoint also returns from time to time in the *scherzo*; the intrusion of those events is always very clear in the context of the basic rhythms. To stabilize the *Sonata* in the classic manner, its final movement is texturally and harmonically the clearest, and filled with wonderful melodies. The “wild boogie-woogie,” however, is definitely the ultimate challenge to both players’ endurance.

Treinta y tres formas de mirar un mismo objeto (‘Thirty-Three Ways to Look at the Same Object’) for piano four hands (2005–08), Sierra’s longest chamber work to date, was composed for Cheryl Seltzer and Joel Sachs, who premiered it at Cornell University in 2008. At nearly 30 minutes it is also one of the most substantial works in the special repertoire for two performers at a single piano, a genre graced in the past especially by Mozart and Schubert, and of interest to 20th- and 21st-century composers for the combination of intimate, subtle forms of expression along with maximum virtuosity and color over the entire range of the keyboard. *Treinta y tres formas* is a set of 33 small pieces, combining the traditions of the theme-and-variations (as cultivated so imaginatively by Beethoven) and of the character-piece piano cycles of Robert Schumann.

There is, however, no theme in the traditional sense, no recurring melody. The “object” that is being observed on its way through the work is a six-note chord (“hexachord”), heard at the opening. Indeed, the first piece comprises only these six notes. Each movement contains the “object,” even when it is projected by its absence – that is, when all notes *other* than that six-note chord are present. Each piece or variation is built on a distinct rhythmic/melodic motif projecting a clear profile and mood. The work unveils the almost limitless possibilities of developing minimal material with maximum variety and imagination. In some instances this development takes place quickly, resulting in very short variations that are grouped together without pause to form larger units. The listener is advised not to be distracted by trying to keep a running tally of the movements.

For those listeners familiar with Sierra’s previous music, this composition at the outset will seem to signal a new path. The language is eclectic and may evoke a past century, rather than any trace of the Puerto Rican heritage that is at the heart of Sierra’s musical soul. The half-way point, *XVI*, is marked by the reappearance of the proclamatory opening piece, now slightly altered harmonically. This structural point opens the gate for the Caribbean world to make a strategic entrance! First only as a fleeting hint in *XVIII*, more prominently in *XX*, and increasingly thereafter. In *XXVIII* it becomes a high-pitched ostinato *clave*, pulsing relentlessly while a

completely free bass and tenor melody gives the last gasp of Sierran-Romantic rhapsodic passion. From then until the end, the phenomenal energy of Caribbean dancing is in full command, roaring this monumental work to an explosive conclusion. It is as he promised: when the composer was still writing the work, he told us that it would have a bang-up ending. “You’ll have been working hard and will deserve huge applause.”

Cheryl Seltzer and Joel Sachs
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Roberto Sierra

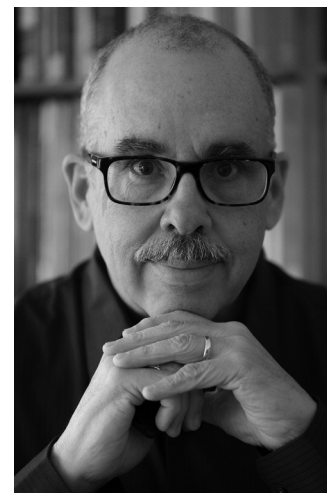


Photo: Virginia Sierra


Roberto Sierra (born 1953 in Vega Baja, Puerto Rico) received an unusually broad education at the National Conservatory in San Juan, the University of Puerto Rico, the Royal College of Music in London, the University of London, the Institute for Sonology in Utrecht, and the Musikhochschule in Hamburg, where his teacher György Ligeti credited Sierra with influencing his own music by introducing him to Afro-Caribbean drumming. Returning to San Juan, he served as chancellor of the National Conservatory until an appointment as composer-in-residence at the Milwaukee Symphony brought him to the mainland in 1989 and launched his career. He was soon named professor of composition at Cornell University, where he is Old Dominion Foundation Professor in the Humanities. Among his awards are the American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Music (2003), election to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2010), and the Tomás Luis de Victoria Prize 2017, Spain’s highest honor to a Spanish or Latin American composer. Sierra’s compositions, published primarily by Subito Music, are commissioned, performed, and recorded by major orchestras, ensembles, and soloists in the Americas and Europe.

Continuum®

The internationally renowned ensemble Continuum, directed by Cheryl Seltzer and Joel Sachs, has created a unique role through its pioneering retrospectives – 135 different concerts in New York City from 1967 to 2011, focusing on individual masters of the 20th and 21st centuries and on major themes. Acclaimed for its global perspective in introducing exceptional composers, hardly known in the US, Continuum also has presented concerts and mini-residencies for decades at colleges, universities, for music societies, and in other contexts throughout the United States. The ensemble has toured frequently in Europe, the former Soviet Union, South America, Mexico, and Central and Eastern Asia, and has appeared at major festivals around the world, including eight visits to Mongolia. These activities earned the group the Siemens international award for Distinguished Service to Music, and four ASCAP Chamber Music America Awards for Adventurous Programming. Continuum has an extensive discography including portraits on Naxos of Cowell, Crawford Seeger, Erickson, Felzer, Ives, Kirchner, Nancarrow, Sierra, and Thomson. It has also recorded for nationwide American radio broadcast, as well as for stations in the UK, Germany, France and Slovakia, and has made films for CBS-TV and the educational network.

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Also available from Continuum



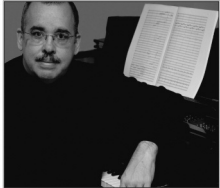
**Roberto
SIERRA**

New Music with a Caribbean Accent

Vestigios rituales • Conjuros • Trio tropical

Continuum

Cheryl Seltzer and Joel Sachs, Directors



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8.559263



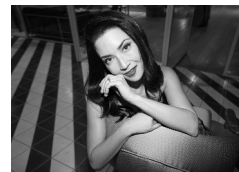
Violinist **Renée Jolles** enjoys an eclectic career as a soloist, chamber artist, and pedagogue. She has premiered hundreds of works, including the first US performance of Schnittke's *Violin Concerto No. 2*. She is a member of the Jolles Duo, Continuum, Intimate Voices, the Bedford Chamber Players, the New York Chamber Ensemble, and is concertmaster of the GRAMMY® Award-winning Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. Festival appearances include Marlboro, Cape May, Bowdoin, Portland Bach, Bach Virtuosi, Rockport, High Peaks, Lone Star Young Artists, and CMC East. She appears prominently on Continuum's Oleg Felzer recording (Naxos 9.70258). A Juilliard graduate, Jolles is Professor of Violin at Eastman School of Music where she inaugurated Eastman's celebrated Holocaust Remembrance Concert series.

Photo: Matt Dine, courtesy Orpheus Chamber Orchestra

Canada-born violist **Stephanie Griffin** is based in New York City. Founder of the Momenta Quartet, she is also a member of the Argento Chamber Ensemble and Continuum, as well as principal violist of the Princeton Symphony, and a member of the viola faculty at Brooklyn and Hunter Colleges. She has received composition fellowships from the Jerome Foundation and the New York Foundation for the Arts, and was a fellow at Music Omi. Griffin holds a DMA degree from The Juilliard School, and has recorded for the Tzadik, Innova, Naxos, Aeon, New World and Albany Records labels.



Photo: John Gurrin



Winner of the Naumburg Chamber Music Prize, cellist **Kristina Reiko Cooper** performs internationally as a soloist and chamber musician. She has toured with the Tokyo Yomiuri Orchestra and recently made her Carnegie Hall solo debut with the Tel Aviv Academy Orchestra. Festival performances include Musicians from Marlboro, the Aspen Music Festival, Bang on a Can All-Stars and the World Expo. She has recorded Roberto Sierra's *Cello Sonata* with Continuum, a recital DVD, and her current solo album, *Around the World with Love*. Kristina is Visiting Professor at Tel Aviv University in Israel. Her BM, MM, and DMA are from The Juilliard School.

Photo: Alan Shafransky

Clarinetist **Moran Katz** has won top prizes at international competitions in Beijing, Freiburg (Germany), and Texas, and has performed as a soloist in chamber concerts and toured with Continuum extensively in the US, Europe and Mongolia. She received BM and MM degrees and an Artist Diploma from The Juilliard School. Katz was a member of Ensemble ACJW (now known as Ensemble Connect) – a program of Carnegie Hall, The Juilliard School, and the Weill Music Institute – performing chamber music at Carnegie Hall and bringing classical music to students in the New York City public schools. She is on the faculty of Vassar College.



Photo: Gittings



Photo: Rosalie O'Connor

Conductor and pianist **Joel Sachs**, co-director of Continuum, has appeared in hundreds of Continuum performances in the US, Europe, Asia, and Latin America, and appears on all Continuum recordings, primarily on Naxos. He has also conducted orchestras and ensembles throughout Europe, Asia, and Latin America, recorded in Mexico and Iceland, and held new-music residencies internationally. Sachs founded and conducts the New Juilliard Ensemble, produces and directs Juilliard's annual Focus! Festival, and directs the school's concerts at MoMA Summergarden. Sachs is the biographer of American composer Henry Cowell (Oxford University Press) and a professor of music history at The Juilliard School. He received Columbia University's Alice M. Ditson conductor's award for service to American Music.



Photo: Nan Melville

Cheryl Seltzer, pianist, has been co-director of Continuum since co-founding it in 1966. Active in contemporary music since studying at Mills College with composers Darius Milhaud, Leon Kirchner, and Lawrence Moss, she also holds graduate degrees in musicology from Columbia University. She made her professional debut with the San Francisco Symphony, has participated in the Marlboro and Tanglewood Festivals, and appears as soloist and ensemble performer in contemporary and traditional music. She has recorded extensively for Naxos, and for other labels including Bridge, New Albion, TNC, Vox, Nonesuch, CRI, and Musical Heritage Society, among others. She is an officer of the Stefan Wolpe Society and the Dwight and Ursula Mamlok Foundation.

Roberto
SIERRA
(b. 1953)

Kandinsky – Chamber Music

- 1–11** Kandinsky for violin, viola,
cello and piano (2003)* **19:57**
- 12–15** Sonata for Clarinet and Piano
(2005–06) **16:11**
- 16–48** Treinta y tres formas de mirar
un mismo objeto (Thirty-three
Ways to Look at the Same Object)
for piano four hands (2005–08)* **28:38**

*WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

Continuum®

Cheryl Seltzer and Joel Sachs, Directors

Renée Jolles, Violin 1 2 4–7 10 11

Stephanie Griffin, Viola 3–5 7 9 11

Kristina Reiko Cooper, Cello 2 4 5 7–9 11

Moran Katz, Clarinet 12–15

Cheryl Seltzer, Piano 1 2 5 6 8 10 11 16–48

Joel Sachs, Piano 12–48

A detailed track list can be found on page 2 of the booklet.

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Reinhold and Hsiang John Tu • Engineer: David Merrill

Editor: David Merrill with Cheryl Seltzer and Joel Sachs

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Cover painting: *Lyrishes* by Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944)



AMERICAN CLASSICS

Puerto Rico-born composer Roberto Sierra is internationally renowned for his integration of Caribbean music with the Western idioms he acquired during studies in Europe. The character of *Kandinsky* ranges from the intimate to the bold and virtuosic, responding with fresh and surprising impressions to a selection of Wassily Kandinsky's unique paintings. The *Clarinet Sonata* explores the intricate swing of Caribbean mixed meters and instrumental colors in a work of stunning expressiveness and virtuosity. Sierra's longest chamber work to date, *Treinta y tres formas de mirar un mismo objeto*, was composed for Cheryl Seltzer and Joel Sachs, and is also one of the most substantial works in the repertoire for two performers at a single piano.

This recording was made possible in part by grants from the New York State Council on the Arts, a State Agency, and Cornell University.

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Playing
Time:
64:55