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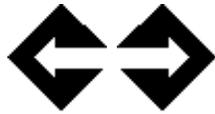
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Lovers and Rulers, the Real and the Surreal: Harmonic Metaphors in Silvio Rodríguez's Songs

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Abstract:

This article, which analyzes 136 of Silvio Rodríguez's over 500 songs and provides a close reading of seventeen, highlights musical patterns that recur in songs with similar themes across three periods: 1967-1970, when Rodríguez was censored; 1971-1989, when nueva trova became institutionalized; and post-1990, in Cuba's Special Period. Differing viewpoints and emotions are often set in different keys ("Debo partirme en dos" (1969)); songs with a political message are set in simple repeating patterns ("Resumen de noticias" (1969)); and many of his love songs are highly chromatic or harmonically unstable ("Ojalá" (1969)). Double-plagal progressions often signify fatalism and never-ending struggle ("Sueño con serpientes" (1974), "Reino de todavía" (1994)). Analyses are complemented by Rodríguez's comments regarding his creative process.

Key words: Silvio Rodríguez, nueva trova, analysis -- popular music, analysis – Schenkerian, ethnomusicology—popular music, Cuba, politics—Cuba

Introduction

Over forty years after starting his career as a professional musician, Silvio Rodríguez remains one of the most popular songwriters of the Hispanic world. One of the founders of the *nueva trova*^[1] movement, he has played to large stadium audiences in Spain, the Dominican Republic, Chile, Argentina, and other countries. Testimony to his enduring and widespread popularity includes attendance at his tours in Argentina and Mexico in 2005, where he sold out a four-concert engagement at Luna Park in Buenos Aires and played to an audience of over 80,000 in a free concert in the Zócalo of Mexico City (Vargas



2005). He has been decorated with several awards, including the Premio Latino a Toda una Vida (Lifetime Achievement Award) from the Academia de la Música española and the Premio Nacional de la Música of Cuba (*La Jornada* 2006).

Rodríguez and other *nueva trova* artists have inspired a number of books and articles addressing the history and sociopolitical background of the movement [Benmayor (1981), Fairley (1989), Díaz Pérez (1994a, b, 1995, 1996), Moore (2003, 2006)], Rodríguez's life [Casas (1984), Sanz (1992), Díaz Pérez (1993, 1995), Faulin (1995), Zapata (1996)], and song texts [Gutiérrez (1999), Shaw (2002)]. However, these works have not focused on the analysis of the music. Two analytical works-- Díaz Pérez's dissertation (1989) and León Ojeda's book (2005) --are also more focused on text or do not tie the analysis of the text to the music. Díaz Pérez's early work, which contains no transcriptions, focuses on compiling statistics on subject matter, text, and music under broad categories rather than the interaction of music and text in the songs; as mentioned above, her later work has concentrated on sociopolitical context and biography^[2]. While León Ojeda's book (2005) contains transcriptions, it is primarily focused on analyzing the meter, assonance, and rhyme of the text, with few comments on the music and harmony. Hence, despite Rodríguez's international popularity, there has not been a thorough study of the harmonies of Rodríguez's songs and their interaction with the text.

Such neglect is not unique to Rodríguez. While the individual musical style of many classical composers has been thoroughly studied, analytical studies of the musical idiolects of popular musicians have been relatively rare. Only in the past fifteen years has the field of analyzing popular music become more widely accepted, with the publication of such books as Everett's *The Beatles as Musicians* (1999) or Covach's *Understanding Rock* (1997). However, this mantle has yet to be taken up for the vast repertoire of non-Anglo-American popular music.

In Rodríguez's case, such a study could provide insights into his songs for two reasons. First, the songwriter's creative process integrates both text and music from the outset. As he has said repeatedly in interviews, he often does *not* write the lyrics first and then set them to music. Instead, he writes both words and music simultaneously, and in fact, the harmonies more often occur to him first, upon which he sets the words. As he puts it:

Casi nunca trabajo un texto primero. Generalmente yo le pongo texto a la música que hago. En muy pocas ocasiones lo he hecho a la inversa y me cuesta mucho trabajo (Zapata 1996: 40)^[3].

No tengo método fijo para componer. Lo más corriente es que lo haga a partir de lo que la guitarra me aconseja. A veces tomo notas – tanto musicales como literarias – y después las desarrollo. Uso bastante la grabadora, tengo un stock de temas musicales que ensancho casi cada día. Esto me ha permitido en ocasiones hacer una canción con una música archivada desde hace tiempo. . .(Casaus 1984: 220-1)^[4]

An example of a musical idea that predated the text is “O, Melancolía”:

Esa canción tiene tres temas. Y los tres me aparecían atractivos. Estuve tres meses angulando la vuelta a ver como la organizaba. No sabía que tema poner antes o después. Primero tuve que organizarla musicalmente. De poco había organizado todo, tuve la estructura completa de la canción, le escribí la letra. Para que no tuve toda la estructura, no pude escribir la letra completa, porque los tres temas tenían algo que los conectaban, pero no sabía que idea poner primero (Rodríguez 2006, interview)^[5].

Rodríguez's reputation as a “poet who sings” notwithstanding, such a process of composition strongly suggest that the harmonies play an equal, if not greater, part in providing meaning to his songs.

Furthermore, the harmonic setting of Rodríguez's songs presents an interesting case study, given his history and position vis-à-vis the Cuban government. As Moore (2003) and Díaz Pérez (1996) have discussed, the songwriter, along with other members of the *nueva trova* movement, underwent a metamorphosis from a singer admired by fans but antagonized by authorities in the 1960s to a cultural ambassador for the Cuban government in the 1970s. As Moore has observed, the *trovadores* wrote fewer songs openly criticizing the government following their co-optation in the 1970s, but Rodríguez's works have been more difficult to evaluate, given the metaphorical nature of his texts (Moore 2003: 23). However, as I will demonstrate in this paper, Rodríguez has used certain harmonic and melodic patterns to depict particular emotions and states in a consistent manner throughout his career. These harmonic patterns provide clues as to the meaning of the text; they are metaphors in their own right, complementing and enhancing the text. These same techniques are also reflected in his songs in Cuba's Special Period of the 1990s, when, as an internationally-oriented popular musician, he returned to a more open style of social criticism.

In addition, the question of how a government can encourage or limit creativity is applicable to Rodríguez's case, as the government not only censored, then promoted him, but also provided him with training. While largely self-taught, Rodríguez benefited from musical training as part of the Grupo de Experimentación Sonora (GES) at the ICAIC film institute with Juilliard-trained composer and guitarist Leo Brouwer.^[6] This influence is evident in the refinement of harmonic techniques in his songs from the 1970s onwards, but

the impact needs to be assessed against Rodríguez's earlier style, which shows a familiarity with idioms from classical, rock, and Cuban music. Finally, given Rodríguez's popularity as a songwriter, recognition as a poet, and influence on other songwriters, it is worth analyzing how text and music complement each other in his songs for a fuller appreciation of their artistic merits.

This paper will demonstrate how the harmonies and melodies in Rodríguez's songs contribute to the narrative of the text, not only by painting specific words with harmonic surprise, but also by providing musical metaphors. These devices, which often occur in pairs, include multipartite structures of songs, where one key represents one emotion or point of view, and another key, usually a relative or parallel major or minor, representing an opposite emotion or viewpoint. In another example, Rodríguez contrasts chromatic passages, modal mixture, and unresolved dominants, which often convey uncertainty, against diatonic passages of unambiguous tonality to depict truth or certainty. His most overtly political songs are often the simplest harmonically, lacking the harmonic turbulence of his more personal songs. Such musical devices bear some resemblance to, say, the setting of question vs. answer in Schubert Lieder in different keys, or the concepts of opposition, markedness, and topics discussed by Hatten (1995, 2004); hence, I am using the word "metaphor" broadly, to encompass a range of devices that seem to capture some meaning.

I will first present an overview of Rodríguez's songs and my methods of analysis, followed by a discussion of his early musical career, influences, and training. To illustrate how text and music interact in Rodríguez's songs, I will then provide a detailed analysis of seventeen songs, grouped by chronology and general subject matter. First, I will analyze political songs from 1967 to 1970, where I define "political" songs as those that comment on political figures ("Fusil contra fusil," "La era está pariendo un corazón," "Ese hombre") or Rodríguez's position in that environment ("Debo partirme en dos," "Resumen de noticias"). Next, I will analyze songs from the same period on personal subjects, such as love ("Ojalá," "Te doy una canción," "Aunque no esté de moda") or personal inspiration ("Al final de este viaje"). I will then follow with analyses of songs from the 1970s, largely written after the institutionalization of the *nueva trova* movement in late 1972, which refer to natural or surrealistic phenomena ("Mariposas," "Como esperando abril," "Sueño con serpientes," "La gaviota"). Finally, I will analyze his songs from the 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union; these songs provide commentary on political or social situations ("El necio," "Reino de todavía," "Flores nocturnas," "Abracadabra").

The socio-historical context for each group of songs is described at the beginning of each of these chronological sections. The analyses of individual songs are included as clicks under their names. A summary at the end of each section reviews the musical devices used in each of these periods, with Rodríguez's comments about their source and usage. I will conclude by summarizing Rodríguez's methods of harmonic metaphor in the aggregate, reconciling these findings with the songwriter's creative process.

Overview of Rodríguez's songs and explanation of analytical methods

Rodríguez is said to have written well over 500 songs, of which 246 have appeared in at least one version in a commercial recording.^[7] [Table 1](#) compiles analyses of 136 songs, listed in order of the year of composition. These songs exhibit an eclectic mix of styles that are mostly international, but some are identifiably Cuban. Of the sample, sixty-one percent of the songs have been recorded in styles with foreign influence, such as folk reminiscent of early, acoustic Bob Dylan or Victor Jara (30%); rock or folk-rock, with the guitar played with a harder strumming style with the mannerisms of rock (18%); and slow songs with chromatic harmonies reminiscent of German Lied or Italian art song, which I have labeled "Canción" (13%). In addition, about fifteen percent of songs, mostly recorded in the 1980s, are perhaps best described as pop. The remaining twenty-four percent of songs are in styles reflecting traditional Cuban genres, such as *vieja trova* (labeled "Trova," 5%), *son* or *timba* (7%), bolero (6%), and Latin jazz-pop (6%).^[8] At least a quarter of the songs in the sample feature rhythmic patterns that are characteristic of Cuban music, such as the hemiola, *tresillo*, *clave*, *cinquillo*, and anticipated bass, and as will be evident in the transcriptions to be presented later, Rodríguez's vocal melodies often anticipate the downbeat^[9].

As for harmonies, Rodríguez's songs in this sample tend to use Western common practice as a base, with modifications of modal mixture. Among the sample, 80% of songs (108 songs) contain prepared V-I cadences at the end (or liaising with the beginning) of a key section, as in Western common practice; these songs also tend to feature modulations common in Western practice, such as those to the relative major or minor. In addition, six percent of songs have the V-IV-I cadence, common in Western popular music. Nine percent of songs are in the mixolydian mode, and ten percent feature VII-I or double plagal (VII-IV-I) cadences, as is common in rock music; there are also two examples of blues-like scales. On the other hand, occurrences of the

Phrygian mode associated with Spanish music are few; five percent of songs end on V, as is common in Latin music (Manuel 2002), but feature V-I cadences at key points elsewhere in the song. Of the songs recorded in Cuban styles, eighty-three percent feature V-I cadences. Within this framework, Rodríguez injects a fair amount of modal mixture, particularly by substituting the parallel major or minor for IV, or using II# (V/V) rather than ii; these harmonies, which are also common in Cuban *vieja trova* (as well as the Beatles), usually do not differ in function from their diatonic equivalents.

Given that many of the songs are in an international style, and that the harmonies generally feature V-I cadences or modal practices also found in Anglo-American popular music, I have found it most useful to take the analytical methods used for rock, as described by Everett (1999) and Covach (1997), as a starting point for examining the harmonies in Rodríguez's music. Such methods are informed by Western common practice but also allow for harmonies that are a result of modal mixture and do not fit into the major or minor scale. In particular, I have adopted the Roman numeral system to denote harmonies, as does Everett (1999: 309-313), despite the fact that the harmonies in Rodríguez's songs do not always have the same function as in Western common practice. Using Roman numerals has one clear advantage over chord names: a single song often has multiple recordings in different keys, as Rodríguez has been transposing his songs down over the years (Rodríguez 2006, interview). Roman numerals are one way of preserving the usefulness of the analysis, given changes in absolute pitches.

For each song analyzed in depth, I have provided the chord charts and lyrics of the whole song, along with transcriptions of key moments. I have set the key, harmonies, melody, and rhythms according to a particular recording, which I have noted on the chord chart^[10]. In addition to the chords, the charts note the occurrences of perfect and imperfect authentic cadences (PAC and IAC, respectively) as well as half cadences (HC)^[11]. Finally, as Rodríguez has said that he purposefully includes unexpected harmonies, sequences, and inflections to highlight words (Rodríguez 2006, interview), I have created a color-coded guide to these harmonic surprises: harmonies lying outside of the primary scale or mode of the song are highlighted in **green**^[12], while deceptive cadences are in **yellow**.

Rodríguez's songs follow a wide variety of forms, which I have analyzed using Covach's definitions as a guideline (Covach 2004). Such labeling of different sections of a song was deemed appropriate, as many of Rodríguez's songs have international influences; on the other hand, only four percent of the songs in the sample follow the bipartite pattern of many traditional Cuban forms, where the first theme is generally not reprised once the song has

moved on to the second theme. Just over half of the songs in the sample are in the verse-chorus format or a variation therein. However, some of the choruses do not follow some conventions of the format; in particular, the original text of the chorus is often not repeated in its entirety in the second chorus (e.g. in “Te doy una canción”). In such cases, I have labeled as the chorus the most dramatic section of the song, usually involving the highest melodic pitches, loudest dynamic, and a strumming style reminiscent of power chords in rock, often with a text that mentions the title^[13]. Variations of the verse-chorus format include the insertion of a pre-chorus, a relatively short section that serves as a transition from verse to chorus; a lift, a build-up to the pre-chorus; or a bridge, a contrasting section that often modulate and often end in the dominant, returning to the verse or chorus. Seventeen percent of songs contain bridges without choruses or refrains; as a bridge is not the primary focus of a song, the verse-bridge song is distinct from a verse-chorus song. Nine percent of songs contain refrains, which are song hooks embedded at the end of a verse, often with the text of the song title, but are too short or not sufficiently differentiated from the verse to be choruses (e.g., “I Want to Hold Your Hand” by the Beatles, “Y nada más”). Strophic songs without choruses, bridges, or refrains are also a common format, making up eighteen percent of the sample; many of these songs tell a story or state a philosophical point of view.

As many of Rodríguez's songs are highly polysemic and metaphorical, their texts are highly difficult to categorize. Nonetheless, about half of the songs in the sample appear biographical in nature, referring to his childhood, loves, moods, everyday occurrences, family, or role as a songwriter. About a quarter contain commentary on political events, socioeconomic circumstances, or Rodríguez's position within these contexts. About nine percent are about specific individuals, including political figures, musicians, artists, and acquaintances, whereas about nineteen percent are philosophical in nature. All translations of lyrics are mine, unless otherwise noted; in cases where a word has two or more meanings that are relevant to the song, I have noted them in parentheses. Likewise, all interpretations of the meaning of the texts are mine, unless otherwise noted.

Rodríguez's musical training and early career

Rodríguez was born into a musical family: his grandmother and mother were amateur singers with a repertory of Spanish and Cuban songs, and his uncle played bass in the jazz band Mambí and wrote songs. As a toddler, he took to

singing along with the radio, and at the age of three, he participated in the song contest "Buscando estrellas" by the radio company CMQ, singing the Mexican bolero "Viajera" (Díaz Pérez 1995: 13). At the age of seven, he studied piano, music theory, and solfège for several months at the Conservatory La Milagrosa in Havana, where he earned high marks and learned to play a simplified version of Ernesto Lecuona's "La Malagueña." However, because of family instability and a penchant for more boyish activities, these lessons did not continue (Díaz Pérez 1995: 17).

In 1964, as a seventeen-year-old in military service, Rodríguez bought an old guitar and was taught some chords by fellow young amateurs. He quickly took to writing his own songs and singing them to other soldiers in the barracks; he eventually came to perform in official military festivals (Díaz Pérez 1995: 43-44). By 1966, he had already written songs with political messages, such as "Por qué," about racial discrimination in the United States, and "La leyenda del águila," about the Vietnam War.

After being discharged from military service, Rodríguez continued to hone his songwriting skills in association with a group of young poets who gathered at Coppelía in Havana, participating in joint concerts. He quickly became a well-known songwriter. In 1967, he debuted on television in the "Caras nuevas" section of the television program "Música y Estrellas," and in 1968, he became the central figure of the short-lived program "Mientras Tanto" (Díaz 1995: 67, 80). From February 1968 onwards, he, Pablo Milanés, and Noel Nicola were featured in monthly concerts in the Encuentro de la Canción Protesta at the Casa de las Américas, under the leadership of Haydée Santamaría. Some of these performances were televised (Díaz Pérez 1995: 92-93).

By the late 1960s, Rodríguez had already written an impressive list of songs, including many for which he remains most famous. Such songs include "Fusil contra fusil" (1968) and "La era está pariendo un corazón" (1968), which exhibit several of the hallmarks of his songwriting technique. Without the benefit of formal training, he had written songs that are harmonically complex, such as the chromatically expressive "Esta canción" (1967) or the harmonically varied "La familia, la propiedad privada y el amor" (1968). Essentially self-taught, he drew upon diverse influences including *vieja trova* singers such as Sindo Garay and María Teresa Vera, boleros such as those by César Portillo de la Luz and Marta Valdés, Western rock such as the Beatles, Italian song, and classical music, such as symphonic music by Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, Rachmaninoff, Mozart, and Vivaldi (Rodríguez 2006, interview).

Conflicts with authorities

During this time, Rodríguez ran afoul of some authorities in the cultural ministries. As he recounted:

En aquella época yo tenía muchos problemas con algunos sectores de la cultura . . . estuve suspendido de la radio, de la televisión, no se me llamaba a actividades. . . en todas aquellas manifestaciones se veía la penetración enemiga: fue la época de la ofensiva revolucionaria . . . (Díaz Pérez 1995: 112-113)^[14]

This *ofensiva*, launched in 1968, was a nationalization of all economic activities as Cuba adopted a system modeled on the Soviet Union, on whose aid it had become dependent; the movement was accompanied by an ideological atmosphere that was intolerant toward dissent. From 1968 to the early 1970s, Cuban intellectuals and artists found themselves prone to being blacklisted or sent to labor camps (Moore 2006: 147-149). Music associated with the United States, particularly rock, was viewed as decadent for its association with capitalistic or alternative lifestyles, and was censored (Moore 2006: 150). Accordingly, Rodríguez was suspended from radio and television broadcasts for his acknowledgement of the influence of the Beatles on his style, in addition to his appearance and the alleged meaning of his songs (Díaz Pérez 1995: 87-88). He was rumored to have spent time at the Unidad Militar de Ayuda a la Producción, an organization whose purpose was to re-educate individuals of “alienating behavior” on revolutionary principles (Díaz Pérez 1996: 237).

Such difficulties were a large contributor to Rodríguez's leaving Cuba for a trip on the fishing boats *Playa Girón* and *Océano Pacífico* from September, 1969, to January, 1970. As Rodríguez put it:

En los últimos dos años había trepado a una montaña rusa vivencial que me había conducido casi a la locura, y el hilo del que pendía mi existencia se tensaba peligrosamente (Rodríguez 1996: 12)^[15].

This trip appears to have played an important role in the consolidation of his musical style. He was allowed on the boat not to fish, but ostensibly to entertain the fishermen. Isolated in the middle of the ocean with memories of the country, past loves, and struggles, this time of reflection allowed him to be extremely productive. In his five months at sea, he wrote sixty-two songs, many of which remain among his most popular today (Rodríguez 1996: 226). As I will demonstrate, these songs show a considerable command of harmonic, motivic, and rhythmic techniques, some which recall those in

classical and rock music, and others which are delightfully experimental.

Songs of political commentary, 1960s

- [“Fusil contra fusil”](#); in *Cuando digo futuro, Memorias, and Érase que se era*
- [“La era está pariendo un corazón”](#), in *Al final de este viaje*
- [“Ese hombre”](#),^[16] in *Expedición*
- [“Debo partirme en dos”](#), in *Al final de este viaje*
- [“Resumen de noticias”](#), in *Al final de este viaje*

Summary: early political songs

Rodríguez's early political songs show several aspects of his self-taught style. Several songs are set in a multipartite structure, with each section representing different points of view, often featuring differing keys, motives, or rhythms. For example, in “Debo partirme en dos,” the songwriter's point of view is set in G minor, while the parodic refrain reflecting the public's expectations is set in Bb major. In “Ese hombre,” he contrasts a phrase in the dominant against one in the tonic, and a phrase with two juxtaposed rhythms against one with a steady bass, to lend musical differentiation to two points of view. Such contrast is a hallmark of songs by *vieja trova* artists such as Sindo Garay and María Teresa Vera, who often set sections of bipartite songs in different keys, and Rodríguez had admired similar contrasts between sections in the Beatles (Rodríguez 2006, interview).^[17] This technique was already a conscious part of Rodríguez's style:

Las canciones mías no son equilibradas. Son conscientemente desequilibradas. Hay tiempos que yo empiezo en una forma y termina en otra. Como un recitativo y termino con algo rítmico. Muy intencionalmente para establecer dos maneras, dos estadios (Rodríguez 2006, interview).^[18]

Harmonically, the songwriter often uses modal mixture, sometimes in momentary word-painting (as with iv in “para reírme” in “La era está pariendo un corazón” or the Neapolitan in “Debo partirme en dos”) and sometimes for a Picardy third ending (“Fusil contra fusil”). Such mixture, particularly the use of iv for IV, also occurs in songs by the Beatles (“Nowhere Man”) and by Garay (“Perla Marina,” “A Mantanza”), as well as the Italian opera that is said to have influenced such *vieja trovadores* (e.g., “Di quell'amor,” *La Traviata*). Rodríguez also avoids stereotypical progressions, as shown in the insertion of iii rather than V at “porvenir” in “La era está pariendo un corazón.” These features have continued to be hallmarks of his style in later decades.

On the other hand, as illustrated in “Resumen de noticias,” Rodríguez had already found usefulness in simple and repetitive harmonies. As he explains, he purposefully keeps the music more simple in songs with a message:

Generalmente estas canciones con mensajes son musicalmente más simples, menos trabajada, por motivos de mensajes. Hay menos búsqueda de cosas musicales. “Resumen de noticias” puede ser una de estas canciones. No me interesaba cantar musicalmente sino encontrar un esquema armónico, donde podía meter una cantidad de versos. En esos casos tengo más interés en las palabras que la música. Estos son los casos donde hay un predominio del texto en la canción (Rodríguez 2006, interview).^[19]

Rodríguez employed similar repeating patterns in songs such as “Testamento” (1975), which he wrote to sing to Cuban soldiers in the Angolan War; “Días y flores” (1975); “Canción urgente para Nicaragua” (1980), and “Cita con angeles” (2003).

Stylistically, many of these songs owe a debt to 1960s Anglo-American rock. Songs such as “Fusil contra fusil” and “Y nada más” (1965) use the VII-I progressions and common-tone third progressions common in rock of this period. The choruses of songs such as “Debo partirme en dos” have the stereotypical features of a rock chorus, such as a higher tessitura than the verse and fully voiced, strummed chords, the acoustic equivalent of the power chord. There are also several references to folk-rock of the 1960s: the simple strumming style of the guitar in “Playa Girón” (1969) or unedited versions of “Ese hombre” are reminiscent of early Bob Dylan, while the picking style, descending-fourth harmonies, and descending bass lines in “Y nada más” (1965) and “¿Qué hago ahora?” (1969) recall the Byrds. As described in the following section, Rodríguez's songs about love or personal situations from the same period share these stylistic and harmonic characteristics; however, these harmonies are often more complex, with more frequent modulations and chromatic or modal substitutions.

Songs of love and personal inspiration to 1970

- [“Ojalá”](#) (1969, in *Al final de este viaje, En vivo en Argentina*)
- [“Te doy una canción”](#) (1970, in *Mujeres, En vivo en Argentina*)
- [“Aunque no esté de moda”](#) (1969, in *Al final de este viaje*)
- [“Al final de este viaje en la vida”](#) (1970, in *Al final de este viaje en la vida*)

Summary: personal songs up to 1970

In these personal songs, Rodríguez uses many of the same techniques as in his political songs. As with “Debo partirme en dos,” “Aunque no esté de moda” and especially “Ojalá” have multiple sections of different moods set in different keys. As with “La era está pariendo un corazón,” modal mixture, particularly with iv, is used to paint words momentarily, as in “sonrisa perfecta” in “Ojalá” or “papeles recordandote” in “Te doy una canción.”

A striking feature of these personal songs is the marked contrast between stable tonics, often punctuated by perfect authentic cadences, and unstable harmonies to set different aspects of the text. The verse of “Ojalá,” addressing memories of a lover, vacillates between D major and D minor, while the chorus, about forgetting, has its C major tonality confirmed by repeated authentic cadences. Similarly, the hopefulness of “Al final de este viaje” is made clear by its perfect authentic cadences in the tonic (A major), interrupted only by the chromatic passage of the bridge. In the chorus of “Te doy una canción,” the constant shifting between I (F major) and vi (D minor) set positive and negative aspects of the memory of a person.

Particularly interesting are the chromatic and diminished chords in “Aunque no esté de moda” and “Al final de este viaje.” Rodríguez attributes the chromatic and diminished chords of “Al final de este viaje” to the *vieja trova* of Manuel Corona, Miguel Matamoros, and Sindo Garay; indeed, “La canción de la trova,” his tribute to Garay, owes much to this style (Rodríguez 2006, interview). These artists frequently used diminished chords as applied dominants, neighbor chords, or passing chords which added momentary color without straying far from the harmonies of the tonic. Such is the function of the diminished chords in Rodríguez's “Esta canción” (1967), “Historia de la silla” (1969), “La vergüenza” (1970), “Rabo de nube” (1978), “El trovador de barro negro” (1980), “Ángel para un final” (1977), and “El sol no da de beber” (1981).

However, I believe the use of diminished chords in “Aunque no esté de moda” and “Al final de este viaje” differs in function or rhythmic emphasis from those songs. Rodríguez also noticed a difference: “Los trovadores hicieron tres o cuatro acordes disminuidos de abajo, pero yo lo hice por arriba. Pero me dije, funciona. Increíble” (Rodríguez 2006, interview).^[20] This ascending motion provides the sequence a different harmonic and semantic function from the usual descending-chord sequence of boleros.^[21] In terms of rhythmic emphasis, Rodríguez lingers for a full measure on the diminished chord at “Desnudémonos pues como viejos amantes” in “Aunque no esté de moda,” even though it has a passing function; as previously mentioned, in the bridge

of “Al final de este viaje,” he pauses at the unrelated chords of bVI and VI# during the chromatic climb. In addition, the goal harmony for both chromatic passages is VI# (F# major), which is not diatonically related to the tonic (A major), while the harmonic goals of diminished chords in the other songs named above are V or I.

Both passages set a text that expresses excitement, which was also associated with rising chromatic runs in Mozart and other classical music. While not verbalizing the typical topos associated with diminished-chord sequences in classical music, Rodríguez acknowledges: “Ninguna otra música me influenciaba más fuerte que la música clásica. Yo escuchaba la música clásica desde niño del radio CMBF” (Rodríguez 2006, interview).^[22] However, he also believes that he may have picked up some of these topoi of classical music indirectly through *vieja trovadores* and bolero players, who listened to classical music and Italian opera, imitated their musical characteristics, and incorporated them into their music, citing the chromaticism of Sindo Garay’s “Germania,” which shows the influence of German Lied (Rodríguez 2006, interview).

Whichever the original source of inspiration, Rodríguez’s harmonies in these personal songs are more volatile and elaborate than in his political ones, and the songwriter, unrestrained by neither institution nor academy, experimented with a wide variety of chord progressions to depict the more complex emotions referenced in “Al final de este viaje” or “Ojalá.” Following the institutionalization of *nueva trova* and musical education at ICAIC, his harmonic language appeared to become somewhat more conservative, adding chromatic neighbor or passing chords but not straying so far from the diatonic range.

Songs of the 1970s: allusions to nature and surrealism

The 1970s brought several important events in Rodríguez’s career. Upon his return from his boat trip in 1970, Rodríguez rejoined the Grupo de Experimentación Sonora of ICAIC. This organization gave him some legitimacy as a film composer and offered him an opportunity to make recordings, take classes in music theory, and collaborate with other musicians. The group included singer-songwriters Pablo Milanés, Noel Nicola, and Sara González, as well as guitarists Sergio Vitier and Pablo Menéndez, (Díaz Pérez 1994b: 194). As Brouwer recalls, neither Rodríguez, Milanés, nor Nicola knew how to read music at the time. He designed an intensive course on the techniques of music that crammed perhaps six to eight years of training

into about a year and a half. Juan Elósegui taught solfège; Federico Smith, who had arranged several of Rodríguez's songs for orchestra in 1967, taught harmony and counterpoint; Jerónimo Labrada taught electroacoustics; and Brouwer taught form, orchestration, and aesthetics (Díaz Pérez 1994b: 194).

Although the group was originally formed in April, 1969, with Rodríguez as an original member, it had not been fully operational at the time Rodríguez left on the *Playa Girón* due to a lack of instrumental musicians (Rodríguez 2006, interview). When he returned and re-entered the group, classes had already been in operation for a few months. Having missed these initial classes, he admits to having had difficulty following the classes in music theory, particularly as he did not know how to notate music at the time:

Yo no entendía las clases de armonía y contrapunto. Las mejores clases yo me las perdí porque no estaba de la altura de estas clases. Yo tenía que empezar por saber lo que era la música. Tenía una idea (de) la escritura musical, pero muy pobre. Tuve que empezar por escribir mi propia canción. Cuando yo supe escribir mis propias canciones, allí me ocurrieron otras cosas. Pero mientras que yo no supe escribir, no me ocurrieron. Y estudiaba Xenakis. Muy duro. Entonces una persona que no sabía escribir una melodía no iba entender Xenakis. Imposible. Yo me sentía inútil. Y sentía que no podía realmente entender lo que me estaba diciendo, si yo no sabía escribir una melodía. (Rodríguez 2006, interview).^[23]

Nonetheless, Rodríguez believes he learned some valuable lessons at ICAIC, particularly the notation of his own songs and the analysis of forms. However, he also felt that many of the techniques he learned had already been part of his style:

Yo creo que lo más útil que yo tengo del Grupo Sonoro es haber aprendido a escribir mis canciones. También aprendimos la música de serialismo, la música electrónica, a componer como colectivo, a repartir una obra de veinte, treinta minutos, a analizar el desarrollo de la forma. Por ejemplo, el segundo movimiento de la séptima de Beethoven. Conocer esas cosas es muy útil. Pero yo me di cuenta de que yo hacía esas cosas ya de antes (Rodríguez 2006, interview).^[24]

A second important event was the institutionalization of nueva trova. By the mid-1960s, Latin American countries such as Chile and Argentina had already developed movements of song called nueva canción, whose socially conscious texts, simple acoustic arrangements, and inclusion of folk elements held much in common with nueva trova. As early as the mid-1960s, such artists were featured in pan-Latin American song festivals in Havana, sponsored by the Consejo Nacional de Cultura (Díaz Pérez 1994b: 85-86); Víctor Jara, Isabel and Ángel Parra, and Inti Illimani performed at the Casa de las Américas in Havana in the early 1970s (Díaz Pérez 1994:229). From 1971, Chilean nueva canción artists including Jara traveled all around Latin

America as cultural ambassadors to the socialist government of Salvador Allende, and Cuba was a part of their itineraries (González 2006).

Moore believes that the desire of the government to find common cultural ground with other Latin American countries, particularly Allende's Chile, helped to make *nueva trova* more acceptable. As in Chile, Cuban *nueva trova* artists came to be invited to international festivals in Latin America; by the mid-1970s, these singer-songwriters were featured in annual festivals in Cuba. *Nueva trova* was officially institutionalized as the Movimiento de la Nueva Trova (MNT) by 1973, complete with a registry of members, a board of directors, dedicated performance spaces, and organized events (Moore 2006: 154-155). Rodríguez's *Días y flores* (1975), produced by the state recording company EGREM, was the first widely distributed LP by a nueva trova artist (Moore 2006: 156); two songs from this album will be analyzed in this section.

According to Moore, the lyrics of the *nueva trovadores* began to change as the artists moved from a small fan base to wide exposure in the media and sponsorship from highly-ranked government officials (Moore 2006: 156-157). Indeed, in Rodríguez's works of the 1970s onwards, texts with anti-imperialistic or nationalistic references may be more common than previously. Such songs include "Madre" (1972), a protest over the war in Vietnam; "Me acosa el carapávida" (1979), about imperialism; "Canción urgente para Nicaragua" (1980), professing solidarity with the Sandinistas; "El tiempo está a favor de los pequeños" (1982), a song of similar spirit for El Salvador; and "El Mayor" (1973), an elegy for national hero Ignacio Agramonte y Loynaz.^[25] A more noticeable change are the songs that seem to encourage a behavioral ideal, such as the collectivity espoused by "Vamos a andar" (1978) or "No hacen falta alas" (1984).

Another feature of Rodríguez's lyrics from the 1970s onwards was the use of metaphorical texts. While metaphors and allegories can also be found in his earlier songs (e.g. "Historia de las sillas" (1969)), some songs from the 1970s have poignant texts referring to natural (or surreal) phenomena that could be read to be metaphors for something else. For example, in "En el claro de la luna" (1974), the singer refers to his beloved goddess of fortune, evoking images of moonlight, sun, wind, and waterfalls, but dreams of freedom and that which he cannot say. Similarly, the initial verses of "Yo digo que las estrellas" (1975) refer to the beauty of the stars before giving way to a message against those who believe they are more important than they are.

In this section, I will provide an analysis of four songs referring to natural or surreal phenomena that may serve as textual metaphors for other concepts. These include

- [“Mariposas”](#) (1972), from Rodríguez's days at ICAIC;
- [“Como esperando abril”](#) (1975) and
- [“Sueño con serpientes”](#) (1974), from his first album, *Días y flores*; and
- [“La gaviota”](#) (1976), about the Angolan war.

Summary: songs of the 1970s

The songs of the 1970s show a continuity of Rodríguez's harmonic techniques, coupled with refinement. As in the earlier examples, these songs are also often multipartite, but with different keys more clearly representing opposing ideas expressed in the sections, such as fantasy/light (C major) and reality/blindness (C minor) in “Como esperando abril” or seagull/life (E major) and death (C# minor) in “La gaviota.” Whereas rapidly shifting harmonies represented volatile emotions in the love songs, they represent changes in perceptions in these songs, symbolizing shifting clouds in “Como esperando abril,” shifting thoughts in “Mariposas,” or the taking of life in “La gaviota.”

Particularly skillful in these songs, particularly “Mariposas” and “La gaviota,” is the avoidance of an authentic V-I cadence. In “La gaviota,” the lack of authentic cadences lends a sense of inconclusiveness to the song--save for the moment of death, which gets the only authentic cadence in the song. Similarly, in “Mariposas,” the emerging of the butterflies from the dark is announced by an authentic cadence, while the rest of the song flutters from key to key. Earlier examples such as “Aunque no esté de moda” had also avoided authentic cadences, but these later songs show greater discipline in saving these authentic cadences for dramatic moments in the text. These later songs also share with “Aunque no esté de moda” (as well as “Debo partirme en dos”) an ending on a chord other than the tonic; compared with the earlier examples, these later songs resolve more naturally by looping back to the beginning, rather than with power-chord endings, as in the earlier songs.

A harmonic feature that seems to have begun appearing more frequently during this period was the double-plagal cadence, a sequence of falling fourths. As discussed in the overview of Rodríguez's works, plagal cadences, either as a single IV-I or a double (VII-IV-I), are central to only a minority of Rodríguez's works.^[26] While not fixed on a single sentiment, double-plagal cadences in Rodríguez's oeuvre seem to occur to describe non-actionable themes, or never-ending or suspended situations, such as a memory (“Mariposas,” “Hoy mi deber” (1979) at the thought of a lover), reincarnation (“Mariposas”), enchantment (“Mujeres” (1975)),^[27] or a never-ending struggle

("Sueño con serpientes"). In addition, several songs that use single IV-I or V-IV-I cadences carry an air of fatalism, resignation, or weariness, such as "Y nada más" (1965), "Ese hombre," "Días y flores," "Me quieren" (1996), and "Cita con ángeles" (2003).

Rodríguez believes he picked up plagal progressions from music of the Cuban countryside (la música campesina) or Renaissance music.^[28] Nonetheless, the more direct inspiration for the double-plagal may have been the Beatles, whose *Rubber Soul*, *Sergeant Pepper*, and *Abbey Road* are particularly admired by Rodríguez:

Yo fui un gran admirador de los Beatles, sobre todo la época cuando me estaba formando como compositor. No me gustó las primeras canciones de los Beatles. Ellos empezaron a gustarme desde *Rubber Soul*. Escuché *Revolver*, *Sgt. Pepper*, y *Abbey Road*—¡por favor, *Abbey Road*! Es una obra maestra. Y *Sgt. Pepper* también es muy sofisticado, en el arreglo de voz y las armonías (Rodríguez 2006, interview).^[29]

In particular, he recalls with enthusiasm the VII-I and IV-I progressions in the first Beatles song he liked, "We Can Work It Out":

La primera canción que me encantaba fue "We Can Work It Out." Me gustaba cómo se pasa desde Do mayor a Si bemol y Fa, en vez de ir a Sol. [NB: La canción se toca en Re, pero la progresión armónica es I-bVII-I-IV-I] Me gustaba esa manera de manejar de tonalidades, de no hacer lo habitual. (Rodríguez 2006, interview).^[30]

These plagal cadences continue to appear in Rodríguez's songs of similar meanings in several examples from the 1990s, as will be discussed in the following section.

An outgrowth of Rodríguez's experience in ICAIC was the increased number of references to classical music in Rodríguez's songs after 1970, particularly in the orchestration and the nature of the introductions. Examples include the introduction on the piano to "Oh, melancolía" (1987), which quotes the beginning of the second movement of Beethoven's "Pathétique" piano sonata; the harpsichord in "Que ya viví, que te vas" (1976); the diminished chord sequences in the harp in "Rabo de nube" (1978); the strings in "Hay quién precisa" (1979); the chromatic piano accompaniment in "Mi lecho está tendido" (1982); and the *a capella* chorus of "Entre el espanto y la ternura" (1988). At times, the orchestration seems quite pictorial, as in the high strings and flutes floating overhead like clouds in "Como esperando abril," while the harmonies rising stepwise in "La gaviota" musically picture a seagull climbing into the air.

Along with this greater sophistication in the use of harmonies, cadences, and

orchestration, Rodríguez's harmonic style appears to have become more conservative during this period. While chromatic or non-diatonic chords continue to appear in songs of the 1970s (and in fact, in expanded variety), as in the transition of "Como esperando abril" or in "Rabo de nube," they generally seem to be used more sparingly or purposefully than in songs such as "Al final de este viaje" or "Aunque no esté de moda." While more polished, the later songs could be heard as lacking the exuberant sense of experimentation of the above-named earlier songs. Perhaps this streamlining was part of the natural process of refining a style, but one might wonder if the weight of the academy inhibited him from experimentation. In an interview in *El Caiman burbudo* of Havana, Rodríguez said that he had at first resisted joining ICAIC because he feared that so much knowledge would lead him to lose his spontaneity (Gutiérrez 1999: 179-180). The techniques and theories may also have been initially intimidating; in the same interview, Pablo Milanés claimed that he was so traumatized by Brouwer's classes that he couldn't write songs for a year, which echoes Rodríguez's sense of feeling "useless," quoted previously. Gutiérrez has also remarked that Rodríguez's output fell off sharply during the 1970s (Gutiérrez 1999: 180).

Perhaps such observers would debate as to whether training led Rodríguez to a more skillful construction of songs but with a loss of urgency. Nonetheless, Rodríguez's own account perhaps summarizes best the integration of inspiration, training, and work in his creative process:

Yo no pienso mucho, yo te confieso. A veces, pienso. Pero no siempre. Y cuando estoy componiendo, primero actúo y después (pausa) pienso. Realmente yo no pienso, "ahora voy a hacer este diseño." Jamás, no. Yo nunca he hecho las canciones así. Con el grupo aprendí esas cosas, pero esas fueron cosas que uno aprende para olvidarlas. Y hay que olvidarlas por cierto, porque la música sería un desastre, lo que sale no es música. No se puede hacer música por libro. Se hace por...yo creo en la inspiración. Pero claro, también yo creo en el trabajo, porque después de la inspiración a veces en una canción hay un detalle, que en un momento en que encuentra que hay una sorpresa, un cambio, o esa sonoridad de que pronto aparece. Por eso entonces tiene que haber todo que está alrededor de cómo tu inserta eso dentro de una, y allí. Si, hay que trabajar, trabajar mucho (Rodríguez 2006, interview).^[31]

Rodríguez in the 1990s

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 caused a severe economic crisis in Cuba, as subsidies and imports of oil, paper, iron ore, and other raw materials from its former trade partner dried up. Severe power and material shortages led to a plummeting of manufacturing output, halts in transport, and shortages

in food and other necessities; such hardships led to tens of thousands of Cubans leaving by raft to Florida (University of Miami 2006). Under such duress during this “Special Period,” the Cuban government legalized the use of the American dollar, opened the country to foreign tourists, and allowed self-employment in some fields. These changes brought about such social problems as a widening of differences in wealth among the population, as those with relatives outside of Cuba benefited from remittances, and an increase in prostitution catering toward tourists (de la Fuente 2001: 317-334).

For some musicians, the Special Period led to better opportunities, as tourists provided a new market for some genres of music. In addition, the Cuban government became more open to performers' selling their recordings overseas, often through international music companies. The removal of penalties for owning foreign currency in 1993 also made it easier for musicians to keep more of their receipts from recording and touring overseas (Moore 2006: 168). While Rodríguez's albums had already been licensed and marketed internationally since the late 1970s, these changes in restrictions (as well as the reduced economic resources of Cubans) helped to tilt the composition of his overall fan base more in favor of Spain and other Latin American countries rather than the Cuban market. Accompanying this opening of the music market to foreigners--both tourists in Cuba and international fans--were song texts by a new generation of trova artists and timba players that more openly expressed individual opinions regarding Cuba's social problems (Moore 2006: 241-246).

In his 1990s triptych *Silvio* (1992), *Rodríguez* (1994), and *Domínguez* (1996) and the album of outtakes from those sessions, *Descartes* (1998), Rodríguez addresses many of the problems that grew out of the Special Period, such as prostitution (“Flores nocturnas” (1991)), the dollarized economy (“Paladar” (1996)),^[32] tourism (“La desilución” (1992)), and the difficulties in integrating capitalist aspects into a socialist framework (“Reino de todavía” (1994)).

- [“El necio”](#) (1991, in *Silvio*)
- [“Reino de todavía”](#) (1994, in *Domínguez*)
- [“Flores nocturnas”](#) (1991, in *Rodríguez*)
- [“Abracadabra”](#) (1992, in *Silvio*)

Summary: songs of the 1990s

Rodríguez's songs in the 1990s from the Special Period show a return to texts that comment on Cuba's internal crises—a contrast from his political songs of the 1980s, which were often directed at American imperialism.^[33] Musically,

however, these songs largely show a continuation and refinement of patterns already established in earlier periods. With a repeated-tone melody in the verse and a leaping melody in the chorus, the structure of "El necio" is reminiscent of "La era está pariendo un corazón"; both songs express feelings of sadness and defiance. Repeated harmonic patterns are used to convey a single idea in anthem-like style, as with the chorus of "El necio," which recalls "Días y flores." Common-tone progressions highlight words in "Flores nocturnas" as in "Mariposas"; both songs involve fleeting situations.

Particularly interesting is the use of harmonies in "Abracadabra." The modal ambiguity of the verse provides an apt depiction of sorcery, particularly when contrasted against the tonal clarity used to frame Rodríguez's view in the chorus. In this way, "Abracadabra" reflects a similar device as "Al final de este viaje," where tonal clarity also serves as a metaphor for mental or spiritual clarity. In addition, "Abracadabra" demonstrates how Rodríguez uses modal ambiguity to depict magic or uncertain situations, with its conflict between sharp harmonies centered on C major and flat harmonies centered on C minor in the verse.

A similar pattern occurs in "La primera mentira" (1969), an allegory set in an enchanted forest. The chords of the verse are E-C#-Eb-C-A-G#m-F#m-B-E or I-VI#-bI-bVI-IV-iii-ii-V-I; what might have been a standard I-vi-IV-ii-V-I progression is altered by the insertion of the unrelated harmonies Eb (bI) and C (bVI), creating a juxtaposition of sharp harmonies with flat harmonies as heard in "Abracadabra." Similarly, the opening progression of "Trova de Edgardo" (1992), dedicated to Edgar Allan Poe, is C-Ab-F-Bb-G-C, with the melody in parallel major thirds to the bass; what might have been a standard I-IV-V-I progression is made jarring by two flat harmonies, Ab (bVI) and Bb (bVII). Rodríguez recognized the similarities and explained:

("La primera mentira" y "Abracadabra") hablan de cosas ambiguas y especulativas. "Abracadabra" habla del mal uso de la creencia y del poder para hacer daño. Pero eso debe ser el contrario. Si tiene un poder, si tiene un Dios, o si tiene un don que da la naturaleza, tiene que usarlo para hacer bien, no para hacer mal. Y "La primera mentira" habla de que todos, los que quieren ser buenos y los que son malos, que todas tienen frustraciones. Las dos canciones tienen algo que ver, porque hablan de los desvalidos de lo que es ser humano. Y quizás por eso sea tan insegura la tonalidad, como que no se sabe dónde están las cosas, o dónde estamos. Y encontré esas formas de expresar musicalmente y lo hice. Es probablemente uno de los casos donde me ocurría la música primero, y la música me ha sugerido la temática. La ambigüedad me ha sugerido lo que tiene que decir el texto.^[34]

While Rodríguez's songs of the 1990s show continuity in the use of harmonic patterns, they nonetheless reflect a shift in the style in which they are set.

After releasing orchestrated versions of his songs in *Rabo de nube* (1980), *Unicornio* (1982), *Tríptico* (1984), *Causas y azares* (1986), and *Oh, melancolía* (1988), Rodríguez returned to a simple guitar accompaniment in his 1990s quadriptych.^[35] Perhaps in keeping with this return to simplicity, these albums also include songs set in the style of traditional Cuban genres, such as “Trova de Edgardo,” “Rosana” (1997, son), and “Paladar” (1996, bolero). While Rodríguez had referenced Cuban genres in earlier decades (e.g. “Causas y azares” (1986, timba), the setting in traditional genres in acoustic instruments lends “Paladar” and “Rosana,” which refer to contemporary problems in Cuba, a touch of wistful nostalgia.^[36] Conversely, references to rock, as was common in Rodríguez's earlier songs (“Fusil contra fusil,” “Debo partirme en dos”), are relatively few during this period, with “El necio” being one of the few examples.^[37]

Musical metaphor in Rodríguez's songs

[Table 2](#) provides a summary of musical devices Rodríguez has used in the preceding examples. Often these devices are used in pairs with a contrasting one, adding to their meaning. The resigned monotone melodies of the verses of “La era está pariendo un corazón” or “El necio” are contrasted against their anthem-like choruses. The opinions of different parties are set in different harmonies, such as dominant vs. tonic in “Ese hombre.” The rapidly shifting harmonies in the verse of “Ojalá,” projecting a range of memories, are set against the repeated authentic cadences of the chorus, stating the singer's resolve to forget. Similarly, tonal ambiguity in “Abracadabra” pits the misuse of sorcery against clear-headedness. Such contrasts are often highlighted by a multipartite structure, with the sections in different keys, as in “Debo partirme en dos.” On the other hand, monothematic songs often have strophic settings, such as “Resumen de noticias,” “Unicornio” (1981), or “Cita con ángeles” (2003)

Particularly interesting is Rodríguez's use of different types of cadences. In the above-mentioned “Ojalá” and “Abracadabra,” as well as “Al final de este viaje,” authentic cadences underline the notion of resolve or clear-headedness. In other songs, a sparse use of authentic cadences serves to spotlight dramatic moments in the text, such as the appearance of butterflies in “Mariposas” or the moment of death in “La gaviota.” There also seems to be a differentiation in the use of plagal or double-plagal cadences relative to authentic cadences; as previously discussed, with plagal cadences used in songs with a certain pessimism and double-plagal cadences used to set never-ending, cyclic situations.

Moreover, Rodríguez's use of these patterns has been consistent throughout his career, including the period before he received training at ICAIC. Given this consistency, it is interesting to compare songs with remarkably similar patterns. As discussed previously, Rodríguez consciously uses simple, repeating progressions when he wants to convey a message; within this format, the similarity between "Resumen de noticias" (1970) and "Testamento" (1975) is striking, as both are open progressions starting with I and ending in V, cycling through V, vi, and ii in the interim. Rodríguez's position with the government could not have been more different between the two – the former was written in defiance of censure on the *Oceano Pacífico*, while the latter was written to sing to Cuban soldiers stationed in the Angolan War. Nonetheless, he may have harbored the same feelings in both cases--of having an extensive message to convey, with urgency, while in transit (in "Resumen," he was on his return home; in "Testamento," as he was about to leave for Angola).

Ex. 18-"Reino de todavía" and "Sueño con serpientes," Schenker graphs

REINO DE TODAVÍA

SUEÑO CON SERPIENTES

Another striking similarity is the use of the same progression (I-v-VII-IV-I) in "Sueño con serpientes" and "Reino de todavía," whose Schenkerian graphs are pictured on Ex. 18. Not only do both songs have the same harmonic progression, in mixolydian mode, but their melodies are also similar: they are both circular, with "Reino" starting and finishing on C# and "Sueño" on D, and

both melodies fall by a third over the harmonies from *v* to *I*.^[38] Such close resemblance leaves one wondering how similar the meanings or sentiments behind these songs must have been. “Reino” speaks with a pessimistic air of encroaching capitalism and the difficulties of ordinary Cubans in the 1990s; “Sueño” speaks of life’s struggles, as captured in a dream, in 1974. But of what kind of struggles was Rodríguez dreaming? How connected were these struggles to the situation in Cuba at the time, and how pessimistic did he feel regarding their resolution? Or turning to “Reino,” how might he consider Cuban idealism and Cuba’s relationship with the United States as endless struggles? Rodríguez focused his reply on the question of composition, perhaps showing the connections, however unconscious, in sentiment:

Generalmente cuando lo que yo hacía se parecía a otra cosa, eso yo lo echaba. Y me quedaba nada más que no me parecía a nada. Me hace cuidado de mis propias canciones. Porque como tú bien sabes, es muy habitual que uno se fusila a uno mismo. En aparecer “Reino de todavía,” me di cuenta que se parecía un poco. Yo creo que tomé algunas cuantas ideas de “Sueño con serpientes”; yo tomé algunos esquemas parecidos al de “Sueño con serpientes.” Y traté de variar un poco la melodía, y di otras palabras y un coro diferente. Es que tenía urgencia en este momento por decir este discurso de “Reino de todavía”; tenía necesidades de escribir (Rodríguez 2006, interview)..^[39]

Conclusion

When I met Rodríguez, he told me that he found it interesting that I was studying his harmonic patterns, as most writers had concentrated on his lyrics. Despite the evidence to the contrary, he does not consider himself a musician, but a “writer of songs”:

Realmente el estudio más profundo musical no lo hice nunca. Realmente no puedo decir que soy músico. Soy un autor de canciones que apenas sabe lo suficiente para escribir sus propias canciones, arreglar por unos instrumentos, pero con mucha dificultad. Puedo seguir una partitura, pero leer una partitura, me cuesta mucho trabajo. Todo yo canto es lo que he oído en la cabeza (Rodríguez 2006, interview).^[40]

He thus seemed surprised when I described certain elements of his style that I had discovered— “¿Tú crees que yo tengo un estilo?”^[41]—and was eager to hear of more examples. While he employs some musical patterns deliberately (e.g., repeating progressions for anthems), more often, he does not choose them consciously but out of inspiration, and he then works to fashion a surprise out of a sequence or add a chord or inflection that could provide a setting for some words (Rodríguez 2006, interview).

I believe that this method, however unconsciously, has resulted in a style that has remained remarkably consistent in its use of certain harmonic and melodic patterns to depict emotions and states, as has been demonstrated in this article. Moreover, many of these devices are similar to the topoi in the classical music that the songwriter admires; such devices include the use of chromatic harmonies to show turbulence or excitement, diatonic harmonies and descending *Urlinie* for clarity, a question and response set in dominant vs. tonic, and monotone melodies depicting resignation. While some aspects of classical music were taught at ICAIC, Rodríguez likely absorbed some of these concepts through listening to classical music or popular music that was influenced by it, such as the songs of Sindo Garay or the Beatles. These artists had also used the modal mixture and chromatic modulations also seen in nineteenth century art song and reflected in Rodríguez's songs. A subject for further research would be a general study of the transfer of musical patterns and topoi between classical music and traditional and popular musics.

Furthermore, the eclecticism of Rodríguez's influences is an example of the syncretic nature of global popular musics, which often blend elements of local traditional musics with the latest in popular music from elsewhere in the world. In the early Rodríguez song "Fusil contra fusil," a 1960s-rock style was combined with a *tresillo* rhythm in the bass for an elegy to a Revolutionary hero, whereas in the Special Period, Rodríguez turned to traditional Cuban styles to set songs alluding to domestic problems. A closer reading of these musical blends, looking at how musical patterns of influential popular musicians are reinterpreted outside of their countries and in other languages, would yield interesting results. Finally, Rodríguez's influence on the musical language of further generations of Latin songwriters would be worthy of investigation.

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Notes

- [1] Cuban song movement that gathered steam in the 1960s, affiliated with the nueva canción movement in Latin America.
- [2] Díaz Pérez categorizes twenty songs, divided into four periods (1966-1969, 1970-1974, 1975-the middle of 1984, and beyond), by subject matter; stance of the songwriter; rhyme and meter of the text; whether or not harmonies are conventional; whether time signatures are binary, ternary, or compound; and general melodic shape (descending, ascending, or equal). Her general conclusions are that songs in the two earlier periods featured more socially-oriented, discursive texts with harmonies that were conventional and melodies that were ascending, while the latter two periods featured more affective, nostalgia-driven texts of an introspective nature, with greater variety and less conventionality in harmonies. No musical transcriptions are included, in favor of melographs, rendering difficult an analysis of the interaction of text and music. The dissertation is available at the Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Música (CIDMUC) in Havana (Díaz Pérez 1989).
- [3] "I almost never work on the text first. Generally I put text to the music I've made. On very few occasions I've done it the other way around, and it's cost me much work."
- [4] "I don't have a fixed method of composing. The most common is that I write what my guitar advises me to do. Sometimes I take notes – as many musical ones as literary ones – and afterwards I develop them. I use tape recorders a lot, and I have a stock of musical themes that expands almost every day. This has let me on ocasión to compose a song from music I archived a long time ago."
- [5] "This song has three themes. And the three seemed attractive to me. I spent three months angling it around to see how to organize the song. I didn't know which theme to put before and which to put after. I first had to organize it musically. Once everything had been organized, I had the complete structure of the song, and I wrote the text for it. If I didn't have the complete structure, I couldn't write the text because the three themes had something that connected them, but I wouldn't have known what idea to put where."
- [6] Brouwer (1939-) studied composition at Juillard with Persichetti, Wolpe, and others. He was one of the leaders of the Cuban avant-garde music movement in the 1960s. (Eli Rodríguez 2006)
- [7] Díaz Pérez believes the total number of songs to be 800 (Díaz Pérez 2006, phone interview). Of the number of songs recorded, 19 have appeared only on the discontinued recording *Cuando digo futuro* (1977) or the unofficial recordings *El hombre extraño*

(1995) or *Memorias* (1987).

- [8] These percentages are taken from the sample of 136 songs rather than the entire oeuvre of Rodríguez's recorded songs. This style designation is meant to give a general sense of the rhythms and textures given to the songs in commercial recordings and is not meant to specify the genre; e.g., songs designated as "son" may not have the largo and montuno format characteristic of a Cuban son, but contain rhythms associated with a son, such as a tresillo or clave, and may have improvisatory, repeated sections at the end that recall a montuno ("Rosana"). Often the orchestration of a recording may change the "style;" however, in comparing bootleg recordings on acoustic guitar of "Ese hombre," "Son desangrado," "Pioneros," etc., against commercial recordings released years later, I believe that the general spirit of the song, such as the primary rhythms and harmonies, have generally been retained.

By "folk," I am referring to acoustic, pre-1965 Bob Dylan (e.g. "Girl from the North Country," "It Ain't Me Babe") or Victor Jara (e.g., "Te recuerdo Amanda," "Cuando voy al trabajo"). By "folk-rock," I am referring to music where the guitar is strummed more aggressively (e.g., Bob Dylan in *Blonde on Blonde*) or the guitar is electrified (e.g., the Byrds, "Turn! Turn! Turn!"). By "trova," I am referring to a picking style of vieja trova similar to, say, Trio los Veinte Años. By "bolero," I am referring to a slow song with a guitar playing chromatic passing chords more frequently than in the "folk" style (e.g., the songs of Marta Valdés or César Portillo de la Luz). By "timba," I am referring to the presence of salsa-like rhythms and bigger band instrumentation than for "son." There are many possible overlaps between my designations of folk, trova, and bolero; bolero and canción, jazz-pop and timba; and son and timba. Hence, I would expect many fans of Rodríguez to take issue with some of these classifications, and I merely put them forward for the purpose of illustrating the vast variety of styles among Rodríguez's recordings.

- [9] Noting a sounded pulse as "x" and an unsounded or held pulse as "-", a tresillo rhythm is x--x--x-; a clave is x--x--x-/-x-x---; and a cinquillo is x-xx-xx-. An anticipated bass is a bass note that is sounded slightly before the downbeat of a measure where a harmonic change occurs (e.g., an eighth note before the downbeat in a 4/4 meter).
- [10] All transcriptions and analyses are mine unless otherwise noted. 143 of Rodríguez's songs have been included in the four-volume *Antología*, which contains piano-vocal scores and guitar chords (Rodríguez 2004, 2005). However, these scores were not notated by Rodríguez himself but are transcriptions by Martha Duarte. While Duarte has done an admirable job of catching the off-beat rhythms of Rodríguez's singing, I disagree with several of the key signatures, meters, chords, bass notes, and melodic pitches she has chosen; in addition, many of her transcriptions are in different keys from the recordings to which I have referred. Hence, my analyses, transcriptions, and tables do not match that of the scores in the *Antología*.
- [11] I am using William Caplin's definition of a perfect authentic cadence as a cadential sequence with dominant preparation (often a IV or ii), dominant with the bass in root position, and tonic in root position with the soprano line or melody finishing on the first scale degree. The perfect authentic cadence is the strongest confirmation of a key. An imperfect authentic cadence has the same elements as a perfect authentic cadence, except that the melody does not finish on the first scale degree. A half cadence is similarly prepared as an authentic cadence but culminates on the dominant, in root position, without the seventh (Caplin 1998: 23-31).
- [12] I.e., for a major scale, harmonies outside of I, ii, iii, IV, V, vi, and viio; for a minor scale, harmonies outside of i, iio, III, iv, v or V, VI, and VII or viio; and for a mixolydian

scale, harmonies outside of I, ii, iiiio, IV, v, vi, VII (assumed to be bVII). I have not highlighted some cases where a II# is substituted for ii and acts as dominant preparation.

- [13] In several cases, Rodríguez's songs contain identifiably distinct sections, but with varying texts. Some analysts may prefer to consider such songs as strophic due to the different texts. However, I have chosen to divide them into sections, as I believe they are more descriptive of the functions each section plays in the song.
- [14] "In those times, I had many problems with some sectors of the cultural (ministries). I was suspended from radio and television, and I wasn't invited to activities. People saw the penetration of the enemy everywhere. It was the period of the revolutionary offensive."
- [15] "In the last two years I had been on a roller coaster, an experience that had almost led me to madness, and the string on which my existence hung was dangerously stretched" (Rodríguez 1996: 12).
- [16] According to Rodríguez's Ojalá Studios, this song was written in 1977 (p.c.), as is written in the liner notes for *Expedición*. However, Clara Díaz believes the song was written in the 1967-1970 period, due to its style (p.c.), while Shaw cites it as an open statement of Rodríguez's disillusionment with the regime during the 1967-1970 period (Shaw 2002: 182-183). No further explanation of the song is given in the liner notes.
- [17] Examples include "La tarde" by Garay and "Porque me siento triste" by Vera, both of whose second sections are in the parallel major of the first. Others, such as "Perla marina" by Garay, contain modulations in the second half (Garay 1940, Trio Veinte Años 1999). Rodríguez admires the turn to the minor mode in the bridge of the Beatles' "We Can Work It Out" (Rodríguez 2006, interview).
- [18] "My songs are not balanced. They're consciously not. There are times when I start in one form and end with another. For example, a recitative that ends with something rhythmic. Very intentionally in order to establish two manners, two states."
- [19] "Generally these songs with messages are musically simpler, less worked on, for the sake of the messages. There's less of a search for musical things. 'Resumen de noticias' could be one of these songs. I wasn't so interested in singing musically as to find a harmonic schema onto which I could set a quantity of verses. In those cases I have more interest in the words than the music. They are cases where text dominates the song."
- [20] "The traditional Cuban troubadours played three or four diminished chords as a sequence going down, but I played them going up. But I said to myself, 'It works. Incredible.'"
- [21] Recent examples include "Palabras" and "En la imaginación" by Marta Valdés (2006).
- [22] "No other music influenced me so much as classical music. I listened to classical music on radio CMBF since I was a child."
- [23] "I didn't understand the classes in harmony and counterpoint. The best classes I missed because I wasn't at the level of these classes. I needed to start by knowing what was music. I had an idea of musical notation, but barely. I needed to start by writing my own songs. When I knew how to write my own songs, then other things occurred to me. But while I didn't know how to notate, they didn't occur to me. And we were studying Xenakis. Very difficult. Hence, a person who didn't know how to write down a melody

wasn't going to understand Xenakis. Impossible. I felt useless. And I felt that I couldn't really understand what they were saying to me, if I didn't know how to write a melody."

- [24] "I believe that the most useful thing I learned from the Grupo Sonero was to learn how to write my own songs. We also learned about serial music, electronic music, how to compose collaboratively, and how to spread a work over 20-30 minutes, how to analyze the development of a form. For example, the second movement of Beethoven's seventh symphony. To know these things is very useful. But I also realized that I had already been doing these things before."
- [25] It should be noted, however, that among his pre-MNT songs were protests against Vietnam or imperialism (e.g., "El rey de flores" (1970)) or elegies to Revolutionary heroes (e.g., the previously analyzed songs for Che, "Canción del elegido" (1969) for Abel Santamaría).
- [26] Specifically, plagal cadences (IV-I or V-IV-I) are central to 8% of songs in the sample, while double-plagal cadences (VII-IV-I) account for 3% of songs.
- [27] At "Pero lo que me ha estremecido./hasta perder casi el sentido/son tus ojitos divinos."
- [28] However, taking the songs of Garay and Vera as examples of *vieja trova*, the cadences are mostly of the V-I variety, and while there are falling fourth progressions, they rarely seem to happen in sequence; sequences of falling fifths are far more common (e.g. Garay's "La bayamesa," Vera's "Es mi venganza.") One example of a sequence of fourths is Garay's "Perla marina," but this sequence (Db-Ab-Bbm-F-Gb-Ebm) is not a double-plagal.
- [29] "I was a great admirer of the Beatles, especially during the time when I was taking shape as a composer. I didn't like the first songs of the Beatles. I started to like them from Rubber Soul onwards. I listened to Revolver, Sergeant Pepper, and Abbey Road—pu-lease, Abbey Road!. It's a masterpiece. And Sgt. Pepper is also very sophisticated, in its arrangement of voice and harmonies."
- [30] "The first song that I liked was "We Can Work It Out." I liked how it passes from C major to Bb and F, instead of going to G. [The song is in D, but the progression is I-bVII-IV-I] I liked this way of using keys, of not doing the well-worn progressions."
- [31] "I confess to you: I don't think much. Sometimes, I think. But not always. And when I'm composing, I first act, and then (pauses and sits back) I think. I don't really think, 'Now I'm going to do this pattern.' Never, no. I have never written songs that way. We learned those things in the Grupo Sonero, but those are things we learned in order to forget them. And one has to forget them for certain because the music would be a disaster – what would come out wouldn't be music. You can't write music by the book. You do it by. . . I believe in inspiration. But of course, I also believe in work, because after the inspiration sometimes a song has a detail, a moment where one finds a surprise, a change, a sound that quickly appears. Hence, one has to have everything that is around, to insert an idea here and there; yes, one has to work, one has to work hard."
- [32] Paladares are privately-operated restaurants (as opposed to state-operated ones), typically run often out of the proprietor's home to cater to tourists.
- [33] Songs from the late 1970s through the 1980s commenting on imperialism and solidarity among Latin American countries include "Me acosa el carapálida" (1979), "Canción urgente para Nicaragua" (1980), "Por quién merece amor" (1981), "El tiempo está a favor de los pequeños" (1982), "Sueño de una noche de verano" (1984), and "La

Resurrección" (1988).

- [34] "(‘La primera mentira’ and ‘Abracadabra’) are about ambiguous and speculative things. ‘Abracadabra’ is about the misuse of beliefs and power to do harm. It should be the opposite. If one has power, a God, or a Don that gives a disposition, one should use it to do good, not evil. And ‘La primera mentira’ is about how everyone – including those that want to be good as well as those that are bad – has frustrations. The two songs have something in common, because they are about the helplessness of being human. And perhaps for this reason, the tonality is so uncertain, as if one didn’t know where things were, where we were. And I found those forms to express them musically and did it that way. It’s probably one of those cases where the music occurred to me first, and the music suggested the thematic. The ambiguity suggested to me what the text had to say."
- [35] Among his later albums, *Mariposas* (1999), is acoustic, featuring the guitarist Rey Guerra; *Expedición* (2002) uses orchestration; *Cita con ángeles* (2003) is acoustic; and *Érase que se era* (2006) features acoustic guitar, percussion, woodwinds, backup vocals, and some strings.
- [36] "Rosana" is about a Cuban woman leaving a lover to go far away, perhaps to the United States, possibly for economic reasons.
- [37] Also interesting is the choice of a blues setting for "Me quieren" (1996), where Rodríguez recounts the demands of enemies and fans alike.
- [38] Some analysts may wonder why I have given VII a higher place in the hierarchy in "Reino de todavía" and IV in "Sueño con serpientes." In "Reino," the harmonies unfold over evenly-spaced four-measure phrases (see Ex. 15B). Using the designation of "strong" and "weak" measures as discussed by Lerdahl and Jackendoff (1983), the moves to v and IV occur on the relatively weak third measure, while VII occurs on the relatively strong first measure. The higher hierarchy of VII is borne out by the ensuing tag line in the guitar. On the other hand, in "Sueño" (Ex. 12A), the entire progression takes place in a scant two measures and a downbeat. Here, the move to v is on a strong measure, while the move to VII takes place on a downbeat, but on a weak measure. Even though IV is not on a downbeat, I believe the chord stands out more in "Sueño" than in "Reino" because it is conjunct with the tonic in the context of a time-concentrated progression.
- [39] "Generally, when what I was composing resembled something else, I threw it out. And only what didn't resemble anything else remained. I pay attention to my own songs. Because as you know, one often shoots oneself. When I started working on "Reino de todavía," I took some ideas from "Sueño con serpientes." And I realized that they had some resemblance. I think I took some similar schematics from "Sueño con serpientes" and tried to vary the melody a bit, and I gave it different words and a different chorus. I felt urgency in that moment to voice the discourse of "Reino de todavía"; I had to write.
- [40] "I've never really studied music deeply. I can't really say I'm a musician. I'm a songwriter who hardly knows enough to write down his own songs and make arrangements for a few instruments, but with great difficulty. I can follow a score, but to read a score takes a lot out of me. All I sing is what I've heard in my head." Rodríguez was interested to learn that none of the Beatles read music during their tenure as a group (Everett 1999: viii).
- [41] "You think I have a style?"

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