

# Gabriel Vicéns

## Mural



Roberta Michel • Raissa Fahlman • Adrienne Munden-Dixon • Joenne Dumitrascu  
Julia Henderson • Wick Simmons • Rocío Díaz de Cossío • Corinne Penner  
Mayumi Tsuchida • Mikael Darmanie • John Ling • David Bloom • Nu Quintet



# Gabriel Vicéns

(1988)

- |   |        |
|---|--------|
| <b>1 - Mural</b> (2021)<br>for clarinet, violin and piano                                 | 11'54" |
| <b>2 - Sueños Ligados</b> (2020)<br>for violin, cello and piano                           | 07'57" |
| <b>3 - El Matorral</b> (2022)<br>for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano and vibraphone | 14'33" |
| <b>4 - Una Superficie Sin Rostro</b> (2020)<br>for piano                                  | 08'14" |
| <b>5 - Carnal</b> (2019)<br>for violin and piano  | 06'25" |
| <b>6 - Ficción</b> (2021)<br>for flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon and horn                  | 10'24" |
| <b>7 - La Esfera</b> (2021)<br>for cello and piano  | 10'32" |

World premiere recordings

**Roberta Michel**, flute [3]  
**Raissa Fahlman**, clarinet [1, 3]  
**Joenne Dumitrascu**, violin [1, 3]  
**Adrienne Munden-Dixon**, violin [2, 5]  
**Rocío Díaz de Cossío**, cello [2]  
**Wick Simmons**, cello [3]  
**Julia Henderson**, cello [7]  
**Corinne Penner**, piano [1, 3, 4]  
**Mayumi Tsuchida**, piano [2, 5]  
**Mikael Darmanie**, piano [7]  
**John Ling**, vibraphone [3]  
**David Bloom**, conductor [3]

**Nu Quintet [6]**

**Kim Lewis**, flute  
**Michael Dwinell**, oboe  
**Kathryn Vetter**, clarinet  
**Tylor Thomas**, bassoon  
**Blair Hamrick**, horn

Recorded by Nolan Thies at Bunker Studio, NYC on August 2022  
Assistant Engineer: Colin Bryson  
Editing Engineer: Danilo Pichardo at Addictive Audio Studio, NYC  
Mixed and Mastered by David Darlington at Bass Hit Recording, NYC  
Cover photo by Krystal Pagán  
Design by Andrea Dandolo  
Produced by Gabriel Vicéns

All compositions by Gabriel Vicéns, Vicens Music (ASCAP)  
[www.gabrielvicens.com](http://www.gabrielvicens.com)



## Murals in Time: Chamber Music by Gabriel Vicéns

*In all my paintings, I'm interested in what "difference" is and in how differences add up, creating assonance in the minor shifts between hues. ... When [Thelonius] Monk plays a single note instead of another, a piece is either saved or ruined. When [Josef] Albers puts a white next to a yellow instead of a blue, the yellow is changed—and the white is changed too. ... We look at works of art as single units—but they're actually composed of hundreds, of thousands of individual and tiny units, each one a decision.*

—Pat Lipsky, 2007.

Influenced by the Abstract Expressionism of the 1950s (“the highest moment we had in painting—and maybe any of the arts,” she has said), the American artist Pat Lipsky (b. 1941) has over the course of a long career produced work of great formal variety: from her rainbow-like “wave” paintings of the late 1960s, made with dilute acrylic paint sponged onto a wet canvas; to her diamond-oriented, close-value color grids of the early 1990s. Yet all her work, no matter its outward form, shares a concern with color, with the flat surface of the canvas, and with non-hierarchical relations between things. Her recent paintings—a series of works that employ similar patterns of interlocking vertical stripes using all the possible permutations of a restricted color palette—deal specifically with flat, non-hierarchical forms. “In that sense,” she said in a 2009 lecture about her work, “in addition to being synoptic, these canvases are also democratic... When a painting succeeds, nothing dominates, nothing ‘fixes’ too quickly, nothing settles. This allows for different ‘readings’—the flat surfaces don’t impose a figure-ground relationship—one hopes that

each shape connects with its color, as the proportions and colors have to be convincing for the painting to succeed.”

Lipsky’s words chime with the music of the Puerto Rican composer and guitarist Gabriel Vicéns (b. 1988). Vicéns is known first as a jazz musician: he has three albums to his name as leader, two as co-leader with the experimental ensemble No Base Trio, and has made numerous other recordings as a sideman. He studied jazz and Caribbean music at the Conservatorio de Música de Puerto Rico, graduating in 2010, and taught for four years at the Interamerican University of Puerto Rico before moving to New York in 2016. There, he continued his jazz studies with a master’s degree from Queens College and a doctorate from Stony Brook University, where he studied with legendary trombonist Ray Anderson.

But alongside this public side to his career, Vicéns has also pursued an interest in classical composition, sparked while he was still an undergraduate student. “We had this theory class taught by composer Manuel Ceide and we did a little introduction to twelve-tone music,” he says. “And I loved those Schoenberg Five Piano Pieces [1923]—I was like, ‘wow,’ those sonorities. It was just beautiful, those voicings.” For several years, he made private experiments in twelve-tone music, inspired by Schoenberg and, especially, Anton Webern. But it was not until he moved to New York, where he encountered the music of Morton Feldman for the first time, that he started to pursue the idea of classical composition seriously: “It was like my reaction towards Schoenberg’s music—I loved Feldman’s use of space and meditative aura.” Alongside his doctoral studies, he took private lessons with Daria Semegen, Lois V Vierk, and Carlos Cabrer and attended seminar courses by Marti Epstein, Nirmali Fenn, and Margaret Schedel. It was during this time that the works recorded on this album, Vicéns’ first as a “classical” composer, were born.

In contrast to the lively warmth of his jazz work, the first impression one has upon listening to Vicéns' concert music is of its emotional neutrality: the repeated, unadorned low piano C with which *Mural* for clarinet, violin, and piano begins; the scattered elements of *Ficción* (Fiction) for woodwind quintet, set beside each other but in little obvious relationship. Even the gestural complexity of *Sueños Ligados* (Linked Dreams) for piano trio—flurries of intervals exchanged between the three instruments, widely spaced and dissonant—has an emotional coolness that belies its dynamic surface. The influences of both Webern and Feldman are easily apparent. But just as important is a third element: painting.

Because as well as being a musician, Vicéns is also a painter. Indeed, between 2019 and 2021 he took lessons with Lipsky at The Art Students League of New York. His paintings share with hers an interest in simple relations of geometry and line, and a respect for the flat plane of the canvas. But thanks to his use of many layers of different colored acrylic paint they also have a greater surface energy, a richer texture. Vicéns speaks often about his love of old murals and frescoes, and of the beauty of the cracks and flakes in their paint that develop over time. In his paintings we can see his interpretation of that dimension of time, in conjunction with the flat surface in space.

So it was that Vicéns' interests in composition and painting developed alongside one another, both inspired by his move to New York. He draws an explicit connection between the two: "I create musical compositions with melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre, and register, and every instrument and part of the composition is equally important to me," he writes in a statement on his website. "Everything needs to work together. The same principle applies to my paintings, but with color, form, line, and texture instead of musical elements. I see my paintings as an extension of my music and vice versa. The conceptual processes are incredibly alike." And although his music is often

quite flat in its surface relations, in its unfolding over time it admits cracks into that surface, and slow transitions from one color to another. In *Carnal* for violin and piano, for example, repeating piano chords are subtly changed in meaning and context by shifts in rhythmic placement and the overlaying of scratchy violin gestures, like dirt smudges. And in *Mural*, the work most obviously connected to the image of the aging fresco, the gradual addition of elements over that limping C pedal activates different kinds of energy and relationship that slowly alter the music's overall palette.

Feldman was another composer with interests in both music and painting; although he didn't paint himself, he was friends with, and profoundly inspired by, members of the Abstract Expressionist school. And there is in Vicéns' music a Feldman-like fascination with uneven repetition, with chords that are left to hang in the air, and with a concatenative (rather than discursive) approach to form, in which self-contained units are added to one another, like links in a chain. This also connects Vicéns' work to Lipsky's interest in differences and their accumulation. How the disjunct sections of *Sueños Ligados*—pointillistic gestures, syncopated vamps, a locked-groove chorale—can reflect upon and echo each other to create a complete picture, for example; or how in *El Matorral* (The Bush) for Pierrot ensemble, similar divisions suggest the image of a man running through and becoming lost in the El Yunque forest in northeast Puerto Rico. (Like many of Vicéns' pieces, these titles came to him midway through working out an abstract process.) *Una Superficie Sin Rostro* (A Faceless Surface) for solo piano is particularly indebted to Feldman's contemplative soundworld. An homage to his *Piano Piece 1952*, it begins similarly with an unfolding sequence of resonating pitches that compounds into an ever-evolving harmonic bed. But whereas Feldman's piece remains in this somewhat austere territory throughout its duration, Vicéns allows his music to grow and develop, gradually accelerating the arrival of each successive note until they lock into



a two-handed melody played in octaves, and then allowing this to disintegrate once more before the work's end. Just as in Vicéns' paintings, there is a focus on surface abstraction, but this does not mean that an underlying depth of shape and color is not allowed through as well.

The last work on this album, *La Esfera* (The Sphere) for cello and piano, unfolds more than one such process of disintegration and accumulation. (The title nods to the Dustin Hoffman film of 1998, the piece's serial underpinnings suggesting a sci-fi connection to the composer.) Beginning with expansive piano harmonies, these dissolve first into pointillist fragments and then again into a dry cello pizzicato pedal tone, each successive change throwing into question the apparent solidity of the one that came before. From this state of almost complete erasure, new elements are added, however—a second cello note, a piano chord, some connecting tissue—until a new kind of music, built of strident exchanges between piano and cello, is fully fleshed out. But this too dissolves away into held chords, a reminiscence of the opening, and then a last, limping C, where everything began. No matter how clear and clean the surface may be, it cannot hold forever.

*Tim Rutherford-Johnson*







































This album is dedicated to the memory  
of my dear friend Sammy Morales.

STR 37292

