



## Piedra de Sol Composer Note

*Piedra de sol* is a poem like no other. I vividly remember the profound emotional impact of reading this epic masterpiece for the first time. The hugeness of the poet's vision, the cosmic immensity of the imagery, its febrile surrealistic intensity, its random journeying through space, time and colour from reality to fantasy and back again, its moments of heartfelt intimacy that never fail to surprise, its joyful disregard of conventional narrative structure – all combined to leave me feeling astonished and deeply moved when, 584 lines after lift-off, the opening stanza repeated itself and I realised that the whole poem is one enormous, never-ending circle.

Even when simply spoken, the words flow and seem almost to sing. There is a lucid, coiling lyricism to the text which invites music in. Although every single line of the poem has a relentless eleven-syllable structure, the stress patterns within the lines change constantly so that the poem has a shifting, restless, questing energy that moves it constantly forward. It was its sense of endless fluidity and ceaseless momentum that inspired me to turn *Piedra de sol* into a long-form choral piece.

I'd previously used an extract of the poem for the climax of my ballet score *Like Water for Chocolate*, based on Laura Esquivel's novel *Como agua para chocolate*, that opened at the Royal Opera House in London in June 2022. This song – scored for mezzo soprano, guitar, and orchestra – was my first attempt at setting a substantial piece of Spanish text to music and was a revelation. The experience confirmed me in my resolve to create a larger choral piece around the text, so I was thrilled when Conspirare came to me with this opportunity. I selected the sections that I felt would work best for massed voices (about two-thirds of the poem's total) and constructed a seventy-minute-long musical structure that mirrored the poem's narrative journey from ecstatic vision through profound despair to eventual enlightenment. To do justice to the poem's unparalleled scale, I wanted to explore as wide a range of vocal textures as I could conceive. There are

extended passages of complex rhythmic interplay, exposed solo passages for a single voice, and episodes where slabs of sound colour reflect the poem's terrifying images. Underpinning much of the music is the role of the marimba which anchors the harmonies and rhythm and contributes to the otherworldly exoticism of the musical palette.

*Piedra de sol* invites listeners and performers alike on a journey of infinite dimensions – a voyage whose course bends, advances, recedes, comes full circle and arrives forever.

- Joby Talbot