

WRITING SAMPLE

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All texts on the page, in Spanish and English, were written by Lorena Fernández.



Compra tus vinilos de antaño en la calle Cuenca. / Buy oldies vinyls on Calle Cuenca.

A Gonzalo se le recuerda siempre junto a su compañero de canto, Luis Antonio Valencia. Benítez fue a despertarlo al Potolo, como se le conocía, pues se había quedado dormido en una silla. Acabaron entre los dos de juntar la melodía con la letra...

La primera vez que *Vasija de Barro* fue cantada, era media noche, frente a un grupo ya algo tomado. Fue un éxito inmediato. "Se han pasado cantando hasta las seis de la mañana," recuerda Benítez. Claro que era una buena canción, pero es que además, con el paso del tiempo, los hombres que la crearon se convirtieron en los nombres que ahora forman nuestro patrimonio artístico impercedero, y *Vasija de Barro*, una de nuestra "melancolías" favoritas. ■

VASIJA DE BARRO

ONCE UPON A TIME, A CLAY POT

Por/by Lorena Fernández

I wish to be buried / As my ancestors were / In the fresh, dark womb / Of a clay pot.

Hugo Alemán was immediately drawn to the words. A literary man himself, Alemán would become a renowned author and poet, much like his high school friend, Carrera. In fact, many of the people that night now constitute the bulk of the artists who shaped Ecuadorian literature, music, and art. Alemán added:

When life gets lost / Behind a curtain of years / Unending moments will live on / Of love and deceit.

Guayasamín had attended Quito's Fine Arts School, and many of his guests were fellow artists. It came as a surprise to everyone when painter Jaime Valencia took the

book from the writers to add his own words:

Hard and cooked clay / Soul of green hills / Mud and blood of my men / Sun of my ancestors.

By now the book was being sought after by everyone who wanted to add to the poem, but Jorge Enrique Adoum, the youngest of the group, took the prize, edited a few things, and wrote the final verses. We remember him today as one of Ecuador's most consummate literary figures. He wrote:

From you I came and to you I return / Clay, cup of mud / With my death I lay on you / From you, passionate dust.

Finally, the book came to Gonzalo Benítez. Benítez was given the task of turning the poem into a tune. Many years later, he told the story: With his guitar, he went off while the others drank and chatted. When Benítez finished putting together the music, he went to wake up his close friend Luis Antonio Valencia, who had fallen asleep on a chair. They strummed it all together...

The first time *Vasija de Barro* was performed for a group of tippy *literati*, it became an instant hit. "People sang it until six in the morning," remembered Benítez. It was a good song then, but as time passed and as the men who composed it became stars, *Vasija de Barro* is now an icon of Ecuadorian music. Today, the tale, perhaps part-true, part-legend, of how this sad, Andean classic came to be, lives on. ■

BENÍTEZ & VALENCIA: DUO DINÁMICO

Dynamic duo

"Van cantando por la Sierra, con honda melancolía, las canciones de mi tierra, y mientras va muriendo el día," entonaba el dúo Benítez-Valencia al inicio de su programa de radio, *Canciones del Alma*, que se transmitió por primera vez en Radio Quito en 1940, el año de su inauguración. Su voz alcanzó todos los rincones de la ciudad, y así quedó establecido uno de los dúos más afortunados de nuestra música. Gonzalo Benítez, con solo 25 años, buscaba compañero de canción. Su primer dúo fue con Bolívar Ortiz —grabaron 45 canciones— pero Ortiz volvió a su cuarteto Alma Nativa, y le buscó a su amigo un reemplazo, más joven: Luis Antonio Valencia, quien ya cantaba en las mejores radios. Convenció primero a uno y luego a otro, y llegó un día Valencia a ver al maestro Benítez: "¿Qué vamos a cantar?" Cantaron pasillos, sobre todo. Pero además, en 20 años, presentaron composiciones que marcaron historia: *El Chulla Quiteño*, *La Vuelta del Chagra* y *Vasija de Barro*.

The radio program *Canciones del Alma* (Songs of the Soul) first aired in 1940, shortly after the inauguration of one of the capital's most well known stations, Radio Quito. It was in this musical space that two of Ecuador's finest musicians of the time became an established duo, and lifetime friends. Gonzalo Benítez was only 25. Born in Otavalo, he'd been sent as a child to complete his education in Quito, and there he found room for his musical talent to grow. Benítez knew Luis Antonio Valencia from high school, and from the circles of radio musicians. By the time they got playing, Valencia was better known than his counterpart, even as Benítez was already recording songs with artist Bolívar Ortiz (with whom they recorded 45 tunes). Eventually, Ortiz stepped aside, and it was he who suggested his two friends joined voices. Over the next 20 years, Benítez and Valencia sang and composed musical history. Their famous works include *Chulla Quiteño*, *Vuelta del Chagra* and *Vasija de Barro*.

On a cold November night in 1950, poet Jorge Carrera Andrade went to a party. It was a typical Quiteño affair: old friends, drinks, guitars. The host, Oswaldo Guayasamín, invited nearly eighty people to his parents' house in front of the Basílica, and there, they all admired his freshly finished painting *El Origen*. The depiction of a child tightly held in its mother's arms was, the painter explained, also how the baby would be held at its burial, as the indigenous tradition was to bury the dead in giant pots. Carrera looked at the painting, and suddenly wrote on the blank end pages of a Marcel Proust novel: ■