Ode to the Fallen Trees

PLAS, in partnership with the Department of Music, Council of Humanities, Effron Center for the Study of America, Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies (PIIRS), and the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, was honored to host the musical event Ode to the Fallen Trees on Thursday, March 9, 2023. The event featured Puerto Rican composer and classical and jazz pianist Alfonso Fuentes Colón, who was a former VISAPUR fellow at Princeton University, and special guest clarinetist Oskar Espina Ruiz. Nearly 400 guests from the Princeton community and surrounding cities attended the special event.

After an introduction by PLAS Director, Gabriela Nouzeilles, the event began with a Q & A session in which Librarian for Latin American Studies, Latino Studies, and Iberian Peninsular Studies, Fernando Acosta-Rodríguez, asked Alberto Fuentes Colón about his creative process, inspirations, and
technique. The musical portion of the show began with a moving piano improvisation based on Hurricane María and was later followed by a composed counterpart, “Ode to the Fallen Trees”. Fuentes Colón’s Ode to the Fallen Trees is an orchestral piece that was influenced by the catastrophic aftermath of Hurricane María on Puerto Rico that he started writing during his summer stay at Princeton in 2018. He was joined on stage by Oskar Espina Ruiz to perform a stunning rendition of the piece for piano and clarinet. Later, guests heard “Voces del Barrio” performed by Espina Ruiz who interpreted diverse Latin rhythms on the clarinet.

After a brief intermission, Fuentes Colón took the audience on a tour of Latin America with his improvisations of traditional, classical, and popular musical pieces from Caribbean and Latino traditions. Between songs, he introduced the new countries and musical styles he would represent, clapping out rhythms and interacting with the audience.

The concert culminated with a special musical dedication titled “Mapeyé Dulzura”, to Emeritus Professor from the Spanish and Portuguese Department, Arcadio Díaz Quiñones and his wife Alma Concepción, dancer and choreographer. Fuentes Colón described the piece as simple and unassuming yet had incredible musical quality and depth.

Alfonso Fuentes Colón is a Puerto Rican composer, concert improvisation pianist, commercial musician, poet, and educator with international presence. He has produced a profoundly passionate, artistic, diverse, and inclusive canon of work and has successfully developed and implemented new teaching methods. Oskar Espina Ruiz has been described as a "masterful soloist" and a "highly expressive clarinetist" by the press and has performed at major concert halls and festivals to high critical acclaim.