

Bel Canto: A Symphonic Canvas

Instrumentation

- 3 Flutes (2nd and 3rd doubling Piccolo), 3 Oboes (3rd doubling English Horn), 3 Clarinets in Bb (2nd doubling Eb Clarinet), 3 Bassoons (3rd doubling Contrabassoon)
- 4 Horns in F, 3 Trumpets in Bb/C (2nd doubling on Pututo in Eb; 3rd doubling on Picc. Tpt. in Ab), 3 Trombones, 1 Tuba
- Timpani; Perc. 1: Glockenspiel, Triangle, Cowbells (3), Snare Drum, Suspended Cymbal, Tam tam, Low Tom-tom; Perc. 2: Suspended Cymbal, Crash Cymbals, Woodblocks, Vibraphone, Tam tam, Tom-toms (3), Large Ratchet; Perc. 3: Bass Drum, Triangle, Tambourine, Snare Drum, Tam tam, Tubular Bells, Lion's Roar, Mark Tree.
- Harp
- Strings

Bel Canto: A Symphonic Canvas, orchestral suite in three movements.

Published by Filarmonika.

Duration: 30 minutes.

Creating *Bel Canto*, the opera, was one of the most exhilarating experiences of my career. From its inception back in 2010, through its announcement in 2012 and subsequent premiere in 2015, culminating with its nation-wide broadcast on PBS in January of 2017, it encompassed a period of my life which saw me grow personally and professionally, defining my thirties, both as an artist and human being. Commissioned by the Lyric Opera of Chicago as part of the Renée Fleming initiative, *Bel Canto* is based on the eponymous, best-selling novel by Ann Patchett, which is, in turn, inspired by real events that took place in Lima, Peru between 1996-97. The creation of the libretto fell into the hands of Pulitzer Prize winner, Nilo Cruz.

Bel Canto: A Symphonic Canvas, captures the essence of the opera, highlighting some of its most striking instrumental and vocal moments. Those who have already seen the opera will recognize the overall arch of the story condensed into a mere 30 minutes, while those who have not, will find this instrumental suite, with its classic three movement structure, satisfying on its own.

Like the opera, the first movement, titled "Peru, Real and Unreal", begins with the Overture and continues uninterrupted all the way to the first entrance of the chorus on a beautifully poetic passage, here rewritten for brass and woodwinds:

"Is the Inca Empire the Earth's skin?
Are our rainforests the Earth's tresses?"

By now, all the guests have arrived to the Vice President's mansion, expecting the arrival of Katsumi Hosokawa, a Japanese mogul who has been invited by the Peruvian government in hopes of having him bring much-needed investment to the country. In order to lure him all the way to Peru, Superstar Diva Roxane Coss has been engaged to sing at his birthday celebration. Little does he, or anyone else, know that this is the beginning of a four-month ordeal: a hostage crisis in the hands of guerillas from the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement that would capture the world's headlines. The movement then transitions into the aftermath of one of the most dramatic moments in the opera: the shooting of Christoph, Roxane's accompanist. The orchestra swells as his body is removed from the stage, leading to a heartfelt lament by Carmen, a young female guerrilla, and Father Arguedas, a Peruvian priest who decided to stay voluntarily at the mansion, even though him and the women were granted passage to freedom. We conclude the movement with the chorus chanting the initial ascending motif "Peru, Peru, Peru" as the sound of a pututo (conch shell) emerges, ominous, from the orchestra. We are at the end of Act I, and only three days into the crisis.

A mysterious fog, known locally as "La Garúa", has enshrouded the mansion and the whole city of Lima. Two weeks have elapsed since the beginning of the crisis, and it is in this second movement that we begin to sense the true passage of time. The house is in a calamitous state: sofas have been turned on their sides, chairs are piled up, and clothes are hanging everywhere. At some point even the furniture is displaced so the terrorists can play soccer right in the middle of the living room. Hostages and terrorists seem to have found a daily routine, sharing chores and developing friendships; some even falling in love with one another, as is the case with the two leading couples: Roxane Coss and Katsumi Hosokawa, and Carmen and Gen Watanabe, Mr. Hosokawa's interpreter. One by one, the main characters take center stage to express their innermost feelings, eventually leading to one of the most iconic moments in the opera: Carmen's prayer to St. Rose of Lima. Her prayer (in her native Quechua) and loving exchange with Gen is interrupted by chants of "Libertad!" uttered by the women from outside the mansion calling for their husbands' freedom. As each character exits, "La Garúa" wastes no time in making itself felt by several brief instrumental interludes, all based on the main motif of this second movement. Toward the end of this movement the fog clears, allowing for the first rays of light to be seen, piercing through the mansion's windows and prompting Father Arguedas to proclaim:

"Look! It's gone!
La garúa has vanished!
The light...the sun...the sun...
the one who honors us with his light
has come back to us."

Everyone awakens as if from a deep sleep, moving frantically within the house trying to catch the first rays of sun, opening their arms to the light and welcoming the hope that it brings with it.

"The End of Utopia", begins with the first notes of the opera's sixth and last scene. A brief interlude ensues, and one of the hostages remembers his wife and native Paris with nostalgia. Fast figurations on the strings make us feel the impending danger, as commandos surround the premises and blast into the house killing several terrorists, including Carmen and César, a young countertenor whose talent for singing had been nurtured in the last weeks of the crisis by Roxane Coss herself. As the hostages, now free, are escorted outside, a heartbroken Roxane enters the horrific scene. Inconsolable, and having witnessed firsthand the death of Carmen and her beloved Hosokawa, she begins to turn the bodies around, desperately looking for survivors but only find death around her. Her final aria, here conveyed mainly by the trumpet, rises above the scene of desolation, closing with the words:

"I must move forward and ahead..
I must, I must move forward
Like the movement of the days..."

Bel Canto: A Symphonic Canvas has been co-commissioned by the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Bremen Philharmonic. My special gratitude goes to the FWSO and its principal conductor, Miguel Harth-Bedoya, without whose initiative this commission would not have been made possible. The world premiere performances will take place in Atlanta, with subsequent performances in Fort Worth, Washington DC, and Bremen during March, April, and May of 2018.

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