



Rhythm and Colors
June 14 & 15, 2024

PROGRAM NOTES

Kauyumari

Gabriela Ortiz (b.1964)

Among the Huichol people of Mexico, Kauyumari means "blue deer." The blue deer represents a spiritual guide, one that is transformed through an extended pilgrimage into a hallucinogenic cactus called peyote. It allows the Huichol to communicate with their ancestors, do their bidding, and take on their role as guardians of the planet. Each year, these Native Mexicans embark on a symbolic journey to "hunt" the blue deer, making offerings in gratitude for having been granted access to the invisible world, through which they also are able to heal the wounds of the soul.

When I received the commission from the Los Angeles Philharmonic to compose a piece that would reflect on our return to the stage following the pandemic, I

immediately thought of the blue deer and its power to enter the world of the intangible as akin to a celebration of the reopening of live music. Specifically, I thought of a Huichol melody sung by the De La Cruz family –dedicated to recording ancestral folklore– that I used for the final movement of my piece, Altar de Muertos (Altar of the Dead), commissioned by the Kronos String Quartet in 1997. I used this material within the orchestral context and elaborated on the construction and progressive development of the melody and its accompaniment in such a way that it would symbolize the blue deer. This in turn was transformed into an orchestral texture which gradually evolves into a complex rhythm pattern, to such a degree that the melody itself becomes unrecognizable (the imaginary effect of peyote and our awareness of the invisible realm), giving rise to a choral wind section while maintaining an incisive rhythmic accompaniment as a form of reassurance that the world will naturally follow its course.

While composing this piece, I noted once again how music has the power to grant us access to the intangible; healing our wounds and binding us to what can only be expressed through sound. Although life is filled with interruptions, Kauyumari is a comprehension and celebration of the fact that each of these rifts is also a new beginning.

– *Gabriela Ortiz*

Latin Grammy nominated Gabriela Ortiz is one of the foremost composers in Mexico today, and one of the most vibrant musicians emerging in the international scene. Ortiz has written music for dance, theater and cinema, and has actively collaborated with poets, playwrights, and historians. She has received commissions from Los Angeles Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, The National Orchestra of Bretagne, The Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, The Hungarian Philharmonic Orchestra, The Malmo Symphony Orchestra, Simon Bolivar Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony, and The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, among others. She currently teaches composition at the Mexican University of Mexico City. Ortiz has been honored with the National Prize for Arts and Literature (Mexico), and her music is published exclusively by Boosey & Hawkes.

<https://boosey.com/composer/Gabriela+Ortiz> .

Percussion Concerto

Jennifer Higdon (b. 1962)

The 20th century saw the development of the percussion section grow as no other section in the orchestra. Both the music and the performers grew in visibility as well as in capability. And while the form of the concerto wasn't the least bit new in the century, the appearance and growth of the percussion concerto as a genre exploded during the later half of the century. My "Percussion Concerto" follows the normal relationship of a dialogue between soloist and orchestra. In this work, however, there is an additional relationship with the soloist interacting extensively with the percussion section. The ability of performers has grown to such an extent that it has become possible to have sections within the orchestra interact at the same level as the soloist. When writing a concerto I think of two things: the particular soloist for whom I am writing and the nature of the solo instrument. In the case of percussion, this means a large battery of instruments, from vibraphone and marimba (the favorite instrument of soloist Colin Currie), to non-pitched smaller instruments (brake drum, wood blocks, Peking Opera gong), and to the drums themselves. Not only does a percussionist have to perfect playing all of these instruments, but he must make hundreds of decisions

regarding the use of sticks and mallets, as there is an infinite variety of possibilities from which to choose. Not to mention the choreography of the movement of the player; where most performers do not have to concern themselves with movement across the stage during a performance, a percussion soloist must have every move memorized. No other instrumentalist has such a large number of variables to challenge and master. This work begins with the sound of the marimba, as Colin early on informed me that he has a fondness for this instrument. I wanted the opening to be exquisitely quiet and serene, with the focus on the soloist. Then the percussion section enters, mimicking the gestures of the soloist. Only after this dialogue is established does the orchestra enter. There is significant interplay between the soloist and the orchestra with a fairly beefy accompaniment in the orchestral part, but at various times the music comes back down to the sound of the soloist and the percussion section playing together, without orchestra. Eventually, the music moves through a slow lyrical section, which requires simultaneous bowing and mallet playing by the soloist, and then a return to the fast section, where a cadenza ensues with both the soloist and the percussion section. A dramatic close to the cadenza leads back to the orchestra's opening material and the eventual conclusion of the work. Written for Colin Currie, this work is

dedicated to him. “Percussion Concerto” was commissioned by The Philadelphia Orchestra, The Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, and The Dallas Symphony Orchestra. This commission was made possible with support from The Philadelphia Music Project (an artistic initiative of The Pew Charitable Trusts, administered by The University of the Arts), and by a generous gift from LDI, Ltd. and the Lacy Foundation.

– *Jennifer Higdon*

Jennifer Higdon is one of America’s most acclaimed figures in contemporary classical music, receiving the 2010 Pulitzer Prize in Music for her *Violin Concerto*, a 2010 Grammy for her *Percussion Concerto*, a 2018 Grammy for her *Viola Concerto* and, most recently, a 2020 Grammy for her *Harp Concerto*. Higdon’s first opera, *Cold Mountain*, won the International Opera Award for Best World Premiere and the opera recording was nominated for 2 Grammy awards. In 2018, Higdon received the prestigious Nemmers Prize from Northwestern University, awarded to contemporary classical composers of exceptional achievement who have significantly influenced the field of composition. Most recently, she was invited to become a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Higdon enjoys several

hundred performances a year of her works and her works have been recorded on more than seventy CDs.

Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra

John Corigliano (b. 1938)

I rely on the components of particular concerts to generate my musical materials. This commission from the New York Philharmonic provided me with a unique constellation of elements that eventually formed the basis of my approach to the work. My associations as a child – attending rehearsals and performances with my father, who was then the concertmaster of the Philharmonic – gave me the opportunity of getting to know many of the men in the orchestra both as artists and friends. This feeling of intimacy governed my decision to make sure that my first work for the Philharmonic utilized the entire orchestra. I was aware that, with a wind concerto, this is a potentially dangerous thing to do – to solve problems of balance most such pieces are discreetly scored for small ensembles – but it provided me with a fascinating challenge.

My regard for the musicians of the Philharmonic also shaped their role in the accompaniment to this Concerto. In it, each player has a chance to display solo virtuosity; often the work approaches being a concerto for orchestra in its demands. The soloist, Stanley Drucker, was first clarinetist of the Philharmonic in my youth. Knowing his special gifts enabled me to write music of unprecedented difficulty for the solo instrument, and gave me the idea that generates the first movement; the opening cadenza.

I. Cadenzas: The first movement is actually two cadenzas, separated by an interlude. It starts directly with the first cadenza, subtitled “ignis fatuus” (“Will-o’-the wisp”). Like that phosphorescent flickering light, this cadenza is almost audibly invisible. The soloist begins with a rapid unaccompanied whispering run. He then appears and disappears, playing as fast as possible, leaving glowing remnants behind in the orchestra. All the material for this movement is contained in the initial cadenza, including a central chord which functions as a tonic might in conventional harmony. This chord (E-flat, D, A, E-natural) is derived from the clarinet melody, and is held by

the strings under the rapid clarinet passages of the last part of the cadenza.

The interlude begins with an orchestral tutti that transforms the original clarinet run into slow, almost primeval sounds in the lower winds, while the upper strings and winds play other fragments of the cadenza. The clarinet enters and shortly after begins to pull the orchestra ahead, goading it into a more feverish tempo. The low winds then accelerate and become secco and the solo clarinet and trombones begin a contest consisting of glissandi of jagged canons, until the strings burst forth in a bubbling contrapuntal reiteration of the original clarinet run. From here to the end of the interlude, the orchestra and clarinet race ahead, building energy and preparing the listener for the percussion bursts that introduce the second cadenza, subtitled “Corona solis.”

“Corona solis” (i.e., the crown or corona of the sun) is the macrocosmic version of the microcosmic “Ignis fatuus” – the opening cadenza transformed into blazing bursts of energy, accompanied by orchestral outbursts and dominated by the soloist. “Corona solis” builds to a peak that signals the

entrance of the full orchestra. This in turn builds to a long-held climax in which the “tonic” chord from the “Ignis fatuus” boils with energy. The chord eventually diminishes in intensity until at last it is held only by four solo strings. The solo clarinet then enters pianissimo, and after assisting the disintegration of the held chord, it flickers and finally disappears into silence.

II. Elegy: The slow movement, , was written in memory of my father, who died on September 1, 1975. He had been concertmaster of the Philharmonic for 23 years and I still find it hard to think of the orchestra without him sitting in the first chair. So the idea of an extended dialogue for clarinet and violin seemed not only natural but inevitable. This duet has a special poignancy for me when I remember the many years that my father and Stanley Drucker were colleagues under the baton of Leonard Bernstein.

The Elegy begins with a long, unaccompanied line for the violins. The lower strings enter, and a mood of sustained lyricism introduces the solo clarinet. The prevailing feeling is that of desolation. I deliberately avoided an emotional climax in the Elegy, feeling that by sustaining the same mood

throughout the music would achieve a heightened intensity. Structurally, this movement alternates two main melodic ideas. The first (in B) is introduced by the strings, while the second (in B-flat) is presented by the clarinet. A three-note motto (C-sharp, B, B-flat), grows from the alternation of the two tonalities and provides a third major element. The movement ends as it began, with the same long violin line, this time joined by the clarinet.

III. Antiphonal Toccata: The finale is my solution to the balance problems created by using the full orchestra in a wind concerto. Early on I made a decision to save some of the instruments (five French horns, two trumpets, and two clarinets) for the final moments of the Concerto. This gave the idea of physically separating them from the rest of the orchestra, and that, in turn, led to locating them in spatial positions so that they could be used antiphonally. An immediate problem arose: that of being able to synchronize the distant instruments with the orchestra. The relatively slow speed of sound can mean up to a one-second delay between the sounding of a tone and its perception at a distance in a concert hall, making precisely synchronized playing

impossible. The solution, I found, was to write music which specifically shouldn't be synchronized, and against these erratic patterns I superimposed the opposite rhythmic idea – that of a toccata, with its regular, tightly aligned motor-rhythmic pulsations.

Antiphonal Toccata is basically in two sections: the first uses alternating calls on the stage as well as motion across the stage, and the second involves the players situated around the hall. While the strings of the orchestra are seated conventionally, the brass and percussion are re-situated for this movement, so that they engage in antiphonal conversation. Trombones and tuba, usually placed near the trumpets, are here located to the left of the stage, while the trumpets are to the right. In addition, a set of timpani is positioned on either side.

The movement begins with an irregular rhythmic pulsation at the far right of the stage as the last stands of cellos and violas play a single note which slowly moves across the stands of strings from right to left, finally ending at the far left of the

stage in the last stands of violins. Over this another note emerges in the trumpets in a slow, freely pulsating rhythm.

Three bassoons and a contrabassoon provide the first melodic material, a quote from Giovanni Gabrieli's *Sonata Pian e Forte*, written in 1597. (The eminent musicologist Curt Sachs wrote that, with this piece, "The art of orchestration has been born." Gabrieli was one of the first composers to specify that particular instruments play particular lines, but his main interest for me lay in his brilliant use of antiphonal instrumental choirs.) The Gabrieli motive develops into a large pulsating chord, which contains all twelve tones and forms the first of two tone-rows used throughout the movement. The solo clarinet enters, introducing the toccata rhythm (his part is marked "computer-like") and the second of the tone-rows, this one presented melodically. This section is followed by antiphonal calls between the solo clarinet and the stage brass. The dialogues take the form of short repeated fanfares constructed so that the choirs of instruments do not play repeated notes together, an element of non-alignment that will be developed in the finale's second section. Solo clarinet and orchestra build to a sudden *sforzando*.

Five offstage horns are now heard for the first time, playing a soft, cluster-like texture. This abrupt movement of the action off the stage is counterpointed by more onstage playing, including a recapitulation of the Gabrieli motive by four solo double-basses. The solo clarinet develops this material lyrically, and is joined by the two orchestral clarinets, placed right and left at the top of the hall. All play a slow descending triple-canon. The soloist interrupts with a soft but rapid restatement of his toccata subject, but the rooftop clarinets ignore this and re-echo the descending canon. Suddenly the toccata returns fortissimo in the orchestra, establishing a momentum that continues to the end of the movement. Conversations between solo clarinet and onstage trumpet and trombones are now extended to include two offstage trumpets (rear-center of the hall). A short but highly virtuosic cadenza leads to an outburst of all offstage instruments and to a buildup of the initial row-chord in the full orchestra. This is followed by an extended coda with a fortissimo restatement of the Gabrieli theme and an antiphonal ending.

– *John Corigliano*

John Corigliano continues to add to one of the richest, most unusual, and most widely celebrated bodies of work any composer has created over the last forty years. Corigliano's scores, now numbering over one hundred, have won the Pulitzer Prize, the Grawemeyer Award, five Grammy Awards, an Academy Award, and have been performed and recorded by many of the most prominent orchestras, soloists, and chamber musicians in the world. Attentive listening to this music reveals an unconfined imagination, one which has taken traditional notions like "symphony" or "concerto" and redefined them in a uniquely transparent idiom forged as much from the post-war European avant-garde as from his American forebears.

Symphonic Dances from West Side Story

Leonard Bernstein (1918 - 1990)

When *West Side Story* debuted on Broadway in 1957—with a book by Arthur Laurents, concept and choreography by Jerome Robbins, and lyrics by a young Stephen Sondheim—it created an immediate sensation for its engagement with hot-button social issues: racial tensions, immigration, urban gang violence, and policing.

Much of this work is done by the story, which transplants Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet to modern New York City. The star-crossed lovers, Tony and Maria, are doomed by the rivalry between the Jets (barely assimilated Eastern Europeans) and the Sharks (Puerto Ricans).

Yet Bernstein's score also deserves much of the credit for crafting a work that the composer described as "an out and out plea for racial tolerance." The music of West Side Story is remarkable for its spirit of inclusivity. Latin American dance idioms (the mambo, the cha-cha) intermingle with riffs from cool jazz and bebop (a distinctly Black American intellectual property) and modernist European compositional techniques (the fugue on a twelve-tone subject in "Cool"). In its exuberant stylistic diversity, Bernstein's music advocates for a world where people from different races and cultures can live in peace and harmony.

In collaboration with his colleagues Sid Ramin and Irwin Kostal, Bernstein extracted and reorchestrated nine selections from the musical into the Symphonic Dances. The suite was premiered by the New York Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall on February 13, 1961, in a gala concert entitled "A Valentine for Leonard Bernstein." Jack Gottlieb, Bernstein's longtime assistant, provided this summary of the Symphonic Dances and how the

selections relate to the plot of the musical:

Prologue (Allegro moderato): The growing rivalry between two teenage gangs, the Jets and Sharks.

“Somewhere” (Adagio): In a visionary dance sequence, the two gangs are united in friendship.

Scherzo (Vivace leggiero): In the same dream, they break through the city walls, and suddenly find themselves in a world of space, air and sun.

Mambo (Presto): Reality again; competitive dance between the gangs.

Cha-Cha (Andantino con grazia): The star-crossed lovers see each other for the first time and dance together.

Meeting Scene (Meno mosso): Music accompanies their first spoken words.

“Cool” Fugue (Allegretto): An elaborate dance sequence in

which the Jets practice controlling their hostility.

Rumble (Molto allegro): Climactic gang battle during which the two gang leaders are killed.

Finale (Adagio): Love music developing into a processional, which recalls, in tragic reality, the vision of “Somewhere.”

For further reading: Carol J. Oja, “An Out and Out Plea for Racial Tolerance: West Side Story, Civil Rights, and Immigration Politics.”

— *Mark Seto*