

Beethoven "Emperor" – November 16, 2019

Petrichor

Ellen Reid b. 1983

Tennessee-born composer Ellen Reid calls herself a sound artist. She is a graduate of Columbia University and the California Institute of the Arts. Her opera, *Prism*, tackling the psychological struggle of survivors of sexual assault, garnered the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 2019. As a largely collaborative artist, Reid has produced works that fall into disparate categories, including chamber music, electronic pop songs, film scores and interactive media. She currently divides her time between Los Angeles and New York.

Petrichor is the earthy scent produced when rain falls on dry soil. In attempting to express in music other senses – in this case smell– Reid follows in the footsteps of Aleksander Skryabin (1872-1915), who attempted an exercise in synesthesia, uniting all the arts and the senses in his never-realized grand project, *Mysterium*.

Reid creates this synesthesia by redefining ‘surround sound’ with spatialized musicians, shimmering strings and bright winds throughout the hall. In discussing *Petrichor*’s premiere with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra in 2018, Reid stated, “the piece I’m writing is spatial, and this is both exciting and a challenge. The players will be scattered all over the hall, but no two halls are exactly the same.”

Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat major, Op. 73, “Emperor”

Ludwig van Beethoven
1770-1827

Two of the signature aspects of Western thought are the importance of progress and individuality. Nowhere are these concepts more apparent than in the history of music, where we give special attention to innovation in form and harmony. While not always appreciated at first hearing – witness the audience riot over Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* – innovators eventually receive their due – in hindsight.

In his greatest works, Beethoven was both an innovator and an individualist who attempted to put his personal stamp on everything from harmony and musical structure to advances in piano construction. While retaining the three-movement form of the concerto, he expanded the internal structure of the individual movements, especially in the Fourth and Fifth Piano Concertos. The dramatic use of the piano in the opening phrases of these concertos was tried only once before – by Mozart in his Piano Concerto in E-flat major, K. 271 – and did not occur again in any major piano concerto until the B-flat major Concerto of Brahms. The thunderous opening of the Fifth Concerto was without precedent, as was Beethoven's refusal to allow the performer to improvise a cadenza.

Beethoven composed the Concerto in Vienna during the summer of 1809, under conditions hardly conducive to creativity. Following a day of heavy bombardment, Vienna surrendered to the French army under Napoleon, and those citizens who could afford to flee did so, including Beethoven's patron and friend the Archduke Rudolph. Prices and taxes skyrocketed, food was scarce, parks were closed to the public and Beethoven remained in the city, alone and lonely. In spite of the hardships during those trying months, he managed to compose some of his greatest works: The Piano Sonata Op. 81a (“*Les adieux*”), the Quartet

in E-flat, Op. 74 (the “Harp”) and the “Emperor” Concerto (the title bestowed on it by one of the publishers, without Beethoven's approval.)

The Fifth Piano Concerto was premiered in Leipzig in 1811 to an enthusiastic reception. It was the only one of Beethoven's piano concertos without the composer himself at the keyboard, since by that time his hearing had deteriorated too far for him to perform in public, especially with an orchestra. Two months later, however, the first performance in Vienna was a total failure, primarily because the Concerto was on the program of a Charity Society performance featuring three living tableaux on Biblical subjects – hardly a suitable milieu.

The Concerto opens with a powerful orchestral chord, followed by a sweeping cadenza-like flourish by the piano solo. Only after two more orchestral chords interrupted by the piano outbursts, does the orchestra introduce the principal theme. The movement is stormy and driving with some of the same harmonic ambiguity as in the first movement of the Fourth Concerto. At the point where traditionally one would have expected a cadenza, the pianist's score bore Beethoven's directive: “Do not play a cadenza!” The music that follows, however, has all the characteristics of a cadenza as if the composer wanted to be sure that his ideas, not the performer's, would prevail.

The hymn-like lyrical second movement opens with the muted violins introducing the theme, followed by a pianissimo aria by the piano. There follow two variations, the first by the piano, the second by the orchestra. Then follows one of Beethoven's most mysterious musical moments, the hushed transition leading without pause into the exuberant Rondo. Beethoven builds up immense tension by subtle changes in key and tempo with hints of the rondo refrain to come, until the Finale bursts out in its jubilant mood.

**Suite No. 1 from
*El Sombrero de tres Picos (The Three-Cornered Hat)***

Manuel de Falla
1876-1946

The ballet *El Sombrero de Tres Picos* began life in 1917 as an accompaniment to a two-act pantomime adapted from a popular story by Pedro de Alarcón. Sergey Diaghilev, the impresario of the renowned and avant-garde Ballets Russes in Paris, heard the music on a visit to Spain and asked de Falla to expand it into a ballet. It is the story of a miller and his faithful wife, and an aging lothario of a Corregidor (district governor) and his haughty wife. In the story – which would have been perfect for a Rossini opera – the Corregidor tries to seduce the miller's wife; the miller, in revenge, tries to seduce the Corregidor's wife. It all ends happily, except for the Corregidor who is left looking foolish. The ballet premiered successfully in London in 1919 with set designs by Picasso.

De Falla extracted two orchestral suites from the ballet. The first, called “Scenes and Dances,” consists of the following scenes from the ballet:

1. *Introduction* – “*Afternoon*.” The introduction was added in London ostensibly to provide the audience time to appreciate Picasso's drop curtain. The scene opens on the miller and his wife happily working together and teasing each other.
2. *Dance of the Miller's Wife (Fandango)*: The miller has been called away and she is alone, dancing the fandango, but he returns and secretly watches her.

3. *The Corregidor*: Pompous and self-important, the Corregidor appears on the scene with his retinue, wearing a three-cornered hat, symbol of his social class and position. He arrests the miller and tries to embrace the miller's wife but she pushes him off a bridge into a stream. After she has chased him off the scene with a gun, he returns and takes off his coat and three-cornered hat to dry outside and goes into the miller's house. The miller, who has escaped from the soldiers, returns to find the Corregidor's clothes outside his house and decides to pursue the Corregidor's wife.
4. *The Miller's Wife* Is a short interlude, which describes the flirtatious and teasing wife. Suddenly she becomes skittish and scampers away.
5. *The Grapes*: The Corregidor tries to flirt with the miller's wife. She teases him with a bunch of grapes, and he chases her awkwardly, trips and falls. The miller and his wife help him to his feet but he leaves in a huff.

"Ritual Fire Dance" from *El amor brujo* (Love the Magician)

Manuel de Falla
1876-1946

One of the first Spanish composers in three centuries to win international recognition, Manuel de Falla, realized early on that in order to achieve international exposure for his music, he would have to leave Spain. In 1907, he settled in Paris where he came under the influence of Paul Dukas, Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel. His music, however, even during the height of the French influence, remained unmistakably Spanish. With the outbreak of World War I he returned to his native country.

The inspiration for the ballet *El amor brujo* came in 1915 from the Roma singer and dancer Pastora Imperio, who had asked de Falla for a short work for narrator and dancer with instrumental octet to be performed with her family. After reworking the score, taking out most of the spoken dialogue and expanding the orchestration, de Falla premiered it again in 1916. Although the idiomatic Spanish rhythms annoyed the early reviewers, the public loved it.

Of the 13 numbers in the ballet, the most famous is the "Ritual Fire Dance" (to banish evil spirits).

Danzón No. 2

Arturo Márquez
b.1950

The *danzón*, the official dance of Cuba, probably originated in Haiti and is popular throughout the Caribbean and all along the gulf coast of Mexico, especially in the state of Veracruz. It has been an inspiration for Mexican composer Arturo Márquez, the son of a mariachi musician, since his childhood. Márquez is best known for his interdisciplinary works, blending music with theater, dance, cinema and photography. His series of eight *Danzones* composed in the 1990s explore popular twentieth-century rhythms and melodies of urban music and social dance, incorporating them into Classical structures

Márquez studied piano, violin and trombone in Mexico, later adding composition in France. In California on a Fulbright Fellowship, he received an MFA in composition at the California Institute of the Arts. For ten years he taught composition at Mexico's *Escuela Nacional de Música*.

Danzón No. 2, composed in 1994 on a commission from the National Autonomous University of Mexico, gained instant popularity and is sometimes referred to humorously as Mexico's second national anthem. The inspiration for the work came to Márquez after a visit to a ballroom in Veracruz. The composer writes: "I discovered that the apparent lightness of the *danzón* hides a music full of sensuality and rigor," and added: "...it is a personal way of expressing my admiration and feelings towards real popular music."

Like most Caribbean *salsa* and Afro-Cuban, music, *danzón* is based on a *clave*, a repeated rhythmic figure that is maintained for the entire piece, even as it progresses through a variety of moods and melodic themes.

Program notes by:
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