

Gabriela Lena Frank: *Elegía Andina*

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky: *Andante Cantabile* for cello and orchestra

David Popper: *Hungarian Rhapsody Op. 68*

Antonín Dvořák: *Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Op. 95* (“From the New World”)

Gabriela Lena Frank (b. 1972) is a composer and pianist who currently serves as Composer-in-Residence with the Philadelphia Orchestra. Born and raised in Berkeley, California, she went on to study music at Rice University in Houston and completed a doctorate in music from the University of Michigan. Her collaborations with some of the world’s finest performers and ensembles have identified her as one of the top 35 female composers of all time by the Washington Post (August 2017). Beyond her tremendous musical accomplishments, Frank is dedicated to civic outreach, volunteering at schools, hospitals, and prisons, and has co-authored music-industry articles on climate action.

The composer herself writes about her piece *Elegía Andina*, a hauntingly poetic chamber orchestral work which has had over 60 performances since its inception:

Elegía Andina for Orchestra (2000) is dedicated to my older brother, Marcos Gabriel Frank. As children of a multicultural marriage (our father being Lithuanian-Jewish and our mother being Chinese-Peruvian-Spanish), our early days were filled with Oriental stir-fry cuisine, Andean nursery songs, and frequent visits from our New York-bred Jewish cousins. As a young piano student, my repertoire included not only my own compositions that carried overtones from Peruvian folk music but also rags of Scott Joplin and minuets by the sons of Bach. It is probably inevitable then that as a composer and pianist today, I continue to thrive on multiculturalism. *Elegía Andina* (Andean Elegy) is one of my first written-down compositions to explore what it means to be of several ethnic persuasions, of several minds. It uses stylistic elements of Peruvian arca/ira zampoña panpipes (double-row panpipes, each row with its own tuning) to paint an elegiac picture of my questions. The flute part was particularly conceived with this in mind but was also inspired by the technical and musical mastery of Floyd Hebert, principal flutist of the Albany Symphony Orchestra. In addition, as already mentioned, I can think of none better to dedicate this work to than to "Babo," my big brother — for whom Perú still waits.

In the summer of 1869, the whole Tchaikovsky family spent the summer in Kamenka, Ukraine, for the occasion of his brother’s wedding. While Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) stayed at his sister’s house, he happened to overhear her gardener singing a silly folk song: “Vanya sat upon the divan / and filled a glass of rum / before he’d poured out half a tot / he called Katenka to come.”

Tchaikovsky was able to look beyond these nonsensical lyrics and borrow the song’s catchy melody for the *Andante cantabile* movement of his 1st string quartet, one of his most tender and gentle musical numbers. He approached the music again years

later when he arranged this quartet movement for solo cello and string orchestra to be performed by one of his close friends.

If you have never heard of the composer David Popper (1843-1913), it is likely that you are not a cellist. Considered one of the greatest cello virtuosos of the 19th century, Popper was principal of several orchestras in Austria and Germany, taught at the National Hungarian Royal Academy of Music, and composed an enormous number of works and technical exercises for the cello. (Fun fact: folks in the American southeast are much more familiar with his cousin, Jalapeño.)

Hungarian Rhapsody follows the style of the *Csárdás*, a traditional folk dance that features several abrupt changes in tempo. The piece begins majestically, featuring long, romantic lines from the cello, but without warning picks up a playful pace, and then again bursts into breakneck speed, displaying the soloist's hotshot mastery of the instrument.

Composer Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904, pronounced “duh-VOR-zhawk”), grew up in a working-class family as the oldest of eight children in a village 20 miles north of Prague, Bohemia (now the Czech Republic.) There was always music in the home because his father, the town butcher and innkeeper, was also the featured entertainment when he regularly performed on the zither for guests. (The zither is a plucked instrument with dozens of strings stretched over a wood frame.)

Dvořák received singing and violin lessons from the start of grade school, and being such a quick study, he began regularly playing at church and with the village band. By the time he was a teenager, his parents decided that he should continue his studies at a nearby town where he could get a deeper education which included piano, organ, music theory, and learning to speak German. These studies continued at the Prague Organ School, where he received additional lessons in harmony, counterpoint, and improvising, and exposure to some of the great performers of the time, such as Franz Liszt and Clara Schumann.

Although an avid composer, Dvořák's music had difficulty attracting attention and recognition, so he had to scrape by giving piano lessons and playing organ at church. This all changed in 1877 when he applied for a state artist stipend and the composer Johannes Brahms—impressed with Dvořák's technique and expressive range—wrote a glowing recommendation to one of the big music publishers. It was at this point that the performances and publications flew in, ensuring Dvořák's future success.

By 1891, Dvořák's reputation as a great composer had reached international status, and he was offered a job at the National Conservatory of Music of America for a salary that was 25 times what he was making in Prague. Dvořák accepted this position, and now a nationalist Czech composer would leave his homeland for the new world.

Symphony No. 9 in E minor, “From the New World” is likely Dvořák's most famous composition. Although it is firmly rooted in the established structures of late-19th

century European orchestral music, he wanted it to convey the “impressions and greeting from the New World.” Dvořák was captivated by Negro spirituals and sought to share those feelings in this music.

In the end, what draws us to the “New World” symphony is not the question of nationality (“is this Czech music, or is it American?”), but instead the memorable melodies, intimate moments, lush orchestration, and gratifying climaxes. After a slow introduction in the 1st movement, Dvořák presents two contrasting themes: one dark and driving, the other gentler and more hopeful. Those who are familiar with the song “Goin’ Home” will be familiar with the nostalgic English horn solo in the 2nd movement (it was one of Dvořák’s students who wrote the words to this tune almost 20 years after his death.)

The 3rd *scherzo* movement can be identified by its propulsive force. But with each cinematic culmination, the music gives way to tranquil, idyllic beauty, and then once again cycles again back to the original impetus. The final movement is marked, *Allegro con fuoco*, meaning “fast with fire,” and that is no exaggeration. Dvořák is at the height of his powers in this riveting ending, with its authoritative themes in the brass and frenzied energy in the strings and woodwinds. It is no surprise that this American-born symphony may be the greatest accomplishment of this Czech composer.

--David H. Johnson

Comments? Questions? Email me at david.johnson@gcsu.edu.