

Leonardo Le San's Artist Philosophy

This is a question I ask myself: is my art the result of my biology, part of my DNA before I was even born, or am I the product of my artistic influences? How can one even begin to define the not so obvious influences – visual, auditory, behavioral, and beliefs constantly saved into the hard disks of our minds and retrieved when least expected? My philosophy of art is fueled by the vivid pain of my youth in an immigrant family dealing with separation and adaptation to a new world, and my passion and love for a woman-artist and our only child. It is shaped by a sense of the majestic universe and an urge to rebel against it, still admiring its mathematical conventions in search of its secrets and infinite light. Mine is a philosophy comprised of ephemeral moments of inspiration, wild visions, folklore, dances, my mother's and father's favorite songs, and storytelling in the small Colombian town where my brother and I were born.

For me, the masters' legacy juxtaposes my formal schooling and my multicultural world experiences as working person and creative intellectual. When interpreting the works of Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt or Rachmaninov, I experience the journey of life at the speed of light or at the slower tempo of an old train. I am captivated in the midst of each of the masters' expositions, developments, phrases, and structural designs and in the most robust climactic points. This has become my discipline: interpreting and studying master works as well as writing my own compositions forming an inseparable practice.

My Suite For Piano, *The Voices of my Town*, begins with Noctazia. The themes of this movement have diverse inspiration. Some flow from the 1960s and 1970s songs my mother, Luz Ofelia, listened to when I was a child. Others echo scientific discussions amongst friends at UD about the ethics of human cloning and the amazing capability of scientists to manipulate genetics in order to achieve specific aesthetics in a creature. I began to think that, as a composer, I could attempt to cross different styles or forms into a new piece, and came up with the term and concept of Noctazia, a term and style I invented that crosses nocturne and fantasy-free toccata-like forms.

The second movement, *Tertulia*, comes from many spirited debates seeking to fix the world's problems in a colorful, Colombian coffee shop. This movement also reflects American Jazz harmonic influences that hold the peaceful yet fiery dialogue together, recalling the enjoyable and inspiring improvisations of Charlie Parker and Oscar Peterson.

The Third movement, *Tango Impromptu*, stems from my father's influence, as this was his favorite genre of music. When he left Colombia and moved to the US, my mother, brother and I lived across from a bar that played melancholic Tango and *despecho* (songs of the broken hearted) tunes all night. Perhaps the music coming from the loud sound system of the bar reminded me of my dad and his stories about Tango and the passionate – at times spiteful – lyrics of its songs.

During my college years, a dear mentor, anthropologist and geologist Dr. J. Villamarin directed me to read Gabriel Garcia Marquez's books. I was fascinated by the author's magical realism and his various influences: history, fiction, his small town, politics, injustice and even stories from the Old Testament. Reading Gabo's works opened my mind to an unlimited range of possibilities. I pondered two of my favorite figures, Old Testament King David, a musician and shepherd who later became a king and fighter, and fascinating Pythagoras, a mathematician, fine musician, and leader of a secret society. Both of these characters are so different from the segregated way we are taught today to identify with specialized singular aspects of society. The concept of finding Renaissance characters in our contemporary society led me to the following and closing movement.

The last movement, *Bambuco Global*, comes from the many folk songs on guitar and *requinto* that my brother and I used to play and sing during social gatherings. The *bambuco* is a dance similar to the Waltz or even a Polska in meter 3/4 or 6/8 but with its unique Andean origin. In this movement, I have taken a traditional *bambuco* theme and rhythm and rendered it *presto* followed by an improvised cadenza, which gives it a very different feel from the folkloric style. A cross of themes and ideas similar to a chorale or an American hymn or song follows the opening. In this middle section, I have experimented with Stravinsky's bi-tonality but mixed with Liszt's arpeggiated technical

influences especially in the cadenzas, “Chopin’s modality” (Dr. Orlando Otey) and genius for adapting his Polish folk dances into his works, Gabriel G. Marquez’s magical realism, and Jazz harmonies and improvisation throughout the whole work.

I have resided in the US for more than half of my life, where I have had the opportunity to look into many nationalities and their heritage. How could I not be influenced by the many cultures co-existing in America? My artistic expression has been shaped by the many conversations my friends in America have about their favorite local sports teams, by the many commercials, short dialogues via text, and popular radio stations most people listen to, by being submerged in everyday culture. It is the product of all my experiences, personal and professional. Thus, half of the title, *bambuco*, helps me to look back where I came from, and half, *global*, reflects where I am today and the many people and subcultures that surround me.

A Special Thanks and Dedication

I am grateful to Dr. Orlando Otey for sharing the legacy of two masters, F. Chopin and F. Liszt, with me. This recording takes part in a universal celebration of their bicentennials (Chopin in 2010 and Liszt in 2011) and is a tribute to mastro Otey. Many thanks to the Music School of Delaware for their hospitality and support. After searching for the right instrument to make this recording, I chose their wonderful, old, 9 foot Steinway. Some of my favorite recordings by Horowitz and Rubinstein did not have the technological perfection available today. Nonetheless, the rich music, brilliant artistry, and risk taking came through, more than in clinical and perfected recordings of our time.

In memory of Dr. Orlando Otey (1925-2011)

