

Some Notes on *Cithara mea* (Evocations) for Orchestra by Composer Stephen Jaffe

Cithara mea (Spanish Music Notebook) is a response to a commission from the North Carolina Symphony, who has planned concerts in conjunction with the Nasher Museum of Art's show "El Greco to Velasquez: Art During the Reign of Philip III." The piece has three main parts, 'Round Some Spanish Dances' (based on Spanish secular songs and dances of the period); 'Galeria' (literally gallery--of visual and musical correspondences) and 'Cithara mea' ("my harp", taken from sacred settings of Job: "My harp is turned to mourning and my music into the voice of those that weep"). Just as the paintings in the exhibition range from *bodegas* (scenes of the kitchen, every day still life, etc.) to allegorical scenes of the saints, the music of the period ranges from simple songs with accompaniment to highly complex liturgical settings. Spanish sacred music was among the purest and most sophisticated forms of polyphonic art. Everyday music was rich in beguiling modal harmonies, and in the delicious rhythms of dance (often emanating from the provinces, from Africa and the New World).



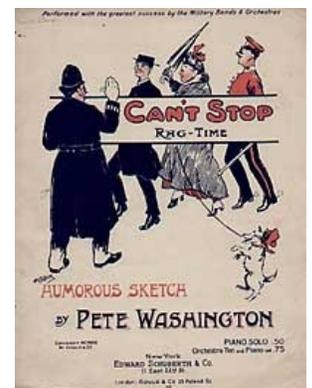
A symphony orchestra cannot reproduce music created for early instruments like the *vihuela* (small guitar), *bajon* (something like an early bassoon), *cornetto*, *sackbut*, or portative organ--and most of the music of this period, sacred and secular, was vocal, not instrumental. The NCS wanted something allowing them to "get close to that music", so my evocation allows the composers of that period to sing with eloquence. Their music breathes through. At the same time, I didn't want to uncritically reify the artistic achievement of the period: the patrons of strikingly beautiful religious art and music were also Inquisitors, and some of the secular dances of the period were considered so dangerous with imported sexual energy that the church banned them. Are pieces of old art such as this "transcendent objects" which we as viewers today are supposed to laud, congratulating ourselves about our high culture in appreciating them? Or can we perhaps engage in a dialogue with them? These are some of the things I have been thinking about in creating *Cithara mea*, based on earlier music, but of our time.



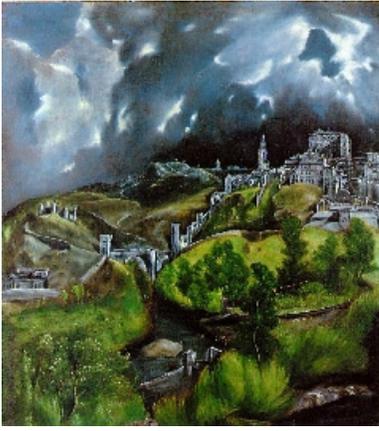
One other correspondence has given me a great deal of stimulation. In summer 2007 I did a residency at the Atlantic Center for the Arts in Florida. I made many friends there, but in particular, was able to discover the work of German photographer Thomas Struth. Among Thomas' work are a "museum series", portraits of contemporary museum viewers looking at famous paintings--among them the great monuments of Spanish painting, including El Greco and Velasquez, whose portrait of the Spanish royal family, "Las Meninas," calls into question whether the artist is observing us, or we, him. "Las Meninas" has invited a great deal of interest through the years, including commentary by Foucault, and by Picasso, who devoted several months in 1959 to producing about 30 studies on the painting. With his brilliant portrait of viewers-viewing-Velasquez-viewing-us, Thomas Struth seemed further to

invite an active, contemporary conversation with early Spanish art. It is in this spirit that in *Cithara mea* I have thought of my work not just as an arrangement of early music (like Respighi's *Ancient Airs and Dances*, for example)--but as something new, as an Installation: our contemporary sounds (for example our dance music, and interior spoken monologue) are in dialogue with the music of distant people, whose dances and music, despite the spiritual and intellectual deprivation of the Inquisition, embodied its own recent history--a time of *convivencia* (coexistence) when Spanish, Moorish and Jewish cultures coexisted.

The sources for the music are published editions roughly corresponding to the period of the exhibition. The dances of Part I culminate in Aranes' popular Chacona "A la vida bona". Such an erotic and crude a dance it was that Cervantes wrote that it "even managed to squeeze through the convents of the nuns." Like Ragtime, banned in some U.S. states one hundred years ago, and Hip-hop, whose lyrics have often brought censure, the dancing of the chaconne during this period was banned by church authorities.



Continued →



In Part Two the two pieces of sacred music used are both Latin settings of a verse from Job:

Versa est in luctum, **cithara mea**, et organum meum in vocem flentium. Parce mi Dómine, nihil enim sunt dies mei.

My harp is turned to mourning, and my organ into the voices of those that weep. Spare me, Lord, for my days are nothing.

Tomás Luis de Victoria's motet using these lines was sung at the funeral of Empress Maria, Philip II's sister, in 1603. Alonso Lobo's setting was sung at the *Honras funebres* of Philip II himself, in 1598.

The audio sounds in *Galería* and elsewhere are taken from samples recorded May 2008 in Toledo Cathedral, and from the Convent de las Descalzas Reales in Madrid where both pieces were first sung. Other elements of the audio are from contemporary sources, i.e. discussions about how to hang a picture, and reference banned [dangerous] dances, and the legacy of this period of Spanish conquest in contemporary America. Our problem in modern culture is not to purify culture, but to create, excitingly, in the context of pluralism. Thus, I have also included references to songs which existed in Spain long after the Reconquista:

Three Moorish girls won my heart in Jaen: Aisha, Fatimah and Marien ...I swear to you by the Koran in which you ladies believe that each one of you and all three have caused me to suffer greatly...

and also, through the accompaniment of sandpaper blocks, that the Jews of Kingston, Jamaica still cover the floor of their synagogue in sand, a tradition dating from the period of the late 15th century. They recite a prayer in Portuguese "for our bretheren who are imprisoned by the Inquisition." *Cithara mea* refers to a very specific period, but also tries to make it live for us today. It reaches back to ancient poets (*Beatus Ille* is a setting of one of Horace's Odes) and forward to contemporary tourists in Toledo.

Cithara mea can be enjoyed as a piece of music, plain and simple. On a deeper level, my piece presents questions which can be taken home for further thought. I don't present any conclusions, as this is a piece of music, not a lecture. Instead, the purpose is to invite active participation of the listener...

Beatus Ille: Happy is he who removed from all business, like the first race of mortals, cultivates his family farm with his oxen, freed from every burden of debt—not as a soldier, stirred by the trumpet's cry, nor trembling in an angry sea—as he stays away from the forums and the proud doorways of influential men"

--Stephen Jaffe



Thomas Struth's *Museo del Prado* series is featured in the short photo prelude prior to the concert. Stephen Jaffe is deeply grateful to Thomas Struth and his studio in Düsseldorf for this artistic contribution to *Cithara mea*.

Thomas Struth was born in 1952 and attended, first as a painter, the Academy of Fine Arts in Düsseldorf. He was the first artist in residence at P.S. 1 Studios, Long Island City, and from 1993-6 he was Professor of Photography at the Hochschule für Gestaltung, Karlsruhe. In 1997 he was awarded the Spectrum International Prize for Photography, Stiftung Niedersachsen (Germany). Since the 1970s Thomas Struth's work has been internationally recognized for his photographs of cities, landscapes, portraits and architectural interiors. His work has been widely exhibited in the US, Europe, and Japan. A virtual tour of works up to 2002 by Struth, to whom *Cithara mea* is dedicated, may be found at www.thomasstruth25.com.

Image Credits: Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velasquez, *Juan de Pareja*, and El Greco (Domenikos Theokopoulos) *View of Toledo* reproduced with permission of Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Thomas Struth, *Museum Series*, with kind permission of the artist. Juan Sánchez Cotán *Still Life with Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber*, San Diego Museum of Art, with permission of Nasher Museum of Art. Washington, *Can't Stop Ragtime* (1913) www.tabootunes.com/gallery.html.

Additional Material

MUSICAL SOURCES

Alonso Mudarra *Romanesca I: O guárdame los vacas*
Monumentos de la musica Espagnola, v. 7.

Luys Milan, *Libro de musica de Vihuela de mano* (1535), in Die Tablatur, Hofmeister Hofheim, 1978.

J. Aranes Chacona *A la Vida bona*. Monumentos de la musica Espagnola, v. 23.

Tomás Luis de Victoria
Versa est in luctum, Officium Defunctorum, Madrid, 1605. Mapa Mundi, Series A, Vanderbeek & Imbrie, London, 1978.

Alonso Lobo *Versa est in luctum, ad exsequias Philip II. Cathol. Regis. Hisp. Liber primus missarum, Madrid, 1602*. Mapa Mundi, Series A, Vanderbeek & Imbrie, London, 1978.

Tres moriscos m'enamoran/ Tres morillas m'enamoran. Monumentos de la musica Espagnola, vol. 5

Alonso Mudarra *Beatus Ille, Tres Libros de Musica en Cifra Para Vihuela* (Seville, 1546). Editions Chanterelle, S.A. 1980.

SOURCES OF AMBIENT SOUNDS AND PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

a) Toledo Cathedral and in the Convent of las Descalzas Reales, Madrid, May 22 and May 23, 2008

b) Nasher Museum of Art, Duke University, June 17, and August 6, 2008

c) North Carolina Symphony offices, Raleigh, May 27, 2008

d) New York, NY, July 7, 2008

SPOKEN TEXT SOURCES

"*get close to that music*" Invitation by Scott Freck, North Carolina Symphony, about the problem of having the vocal music of this period in Spain made viable for orchestra, March 2007.

"*...one thing is that the art was very emotional...it was central to the lives of these people...they patterned their lives after the saints.*" Phone message by Sarah Schroth, May 2007, in response to composer's question about the relevance of this period of Spanish art for contemporary life.

"*the Marranos would cover the floor with white sand during prayer services to conceal the sound...the congregation recites a prayer...for our brethren who are imprisoned by the Inquisition...*"

Bard, Mitchell G., in *The Menorah*, February 2008, and through the Jewish Virtual Library www.jewishvirtual.org.

SELECTED BOOKS AND SCHOLARLY ARTICLES

Hudson, Richard Passacaglio and Ciaccona: from Guitar Music to Italian Keyboard Variations in the 17th C., UMI Research Press, 1968, 1981.

Kreitner, Kenneth "The Cathedral Band of Léon in 1548, and when it played" Early Music, Feb. 2003.

Ortiz, Diego Trattado de Glosas, Rome 1553, ed. Ann. Otterstedt, Bärenreiter, 2003.

Parkins, Robert, "Spain and Portugal" in Keyboard Music Before 1700, ed. Alexander Silbiger, Routledge, 2004.

Struth, Thomas Making Time Museo Nacional del Prado, 2007.

PARTICULARLY RELEVANT CD RECORDINGS

AliaVox 9384 Villancicos Y Danzas Criollas de La Iberia Antigua al Nuevo Mondo. Hesperion XXI, Jordi Savall.

Archiv 447-095-2 Tomás Luis de Victoria: Officium defunctorum (1605). Gabrieli Consort, Paul McCreesh

Archiv 457 597-2 Morales Officium defunctorum. A Requiem for Philip II as it might have been performed at funeral rite in the Cathedral of Toledo in 1598. Contains Lobo *Versa est in luctum*. Gabrieli Consort, Paul McCreesh.

Glossa 920207 música en el Quijote. Orhénica Lyrica, José Miguel Moreno.

Veritas 7243 5 61815

Spanish Music of Travel and Discovery. "Musical Reflections on Moorish Spain. Michael and Kay Jaffee, direction.

Dorian 90284 Espagnoletta. Chatham Baroque.

Acknowledgements

For help with research into the Spanish music and art of the period the composer gratefully acknowledges Alexander Silbiger, Stephen T. Moore, Kirsten Dougan, and Robert Parkins (Duke University). Help with sound recording was given by Thom Limbert. John Mayrose, whose expertise in Max.msp is truly virtuosic, is the creator of the sampler. It was a pleasure to learn and invent with John, who is now about to pass his immense knowledge on to a new generation of students at Lawrence University Conservatory. Penka Kouneva copied and edited the parts from score with skill and patience.

At the North Carolina Symphony, Scott Freck ventured well beyond the usual skills required of even an imaginative artistic administrator with support and good humor; Allyn Love has given indispensable help with evolving the projections. Above all, Music Director Grant Llewellyn was responsible for the initiation of the project and for its musical direction. Thanks to Maestro Llewellyn and the members of his orchestra, including John Ilika, trombone, and Anita Burroughs-Price, harp, for their interest and advice.

The composer wishes especially to acknowledge the interested collaboration of Sarah Schroth, Nancy Hanks Senior Curator, Nasher Museum of Art, who has worked on the artists of this period for more than twenty years and who envisioned the entire exhibition, in concert with her colleagues at the Nasher Museum and at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Contrary to my worry that Sarah would somehow feel my engagement with the art of this period work would be cause for her concern, Sarah has in fact become a full participant. Her support is gratefully acknowledged. For logistical assistance in Spain, I thank Sarah, and also Carolina Cordova Sanchez, Program Coordinator at the Nasher Museum. In Spain I was the recipient of kind hospitality of the Duke University Alumni Association, as well as access and permission to record from Ana García Sanz, Conservadora del Patrimonio Nacional, and Dean Don Juan Sanchez, Toledo Cathedral. For assistance with Spanish idioms: Elana Jaffe.

Thomas Struth's artistic work has been an inspiration in the present endeavor. I am grateful to Thomas for his artistic example, and for his consultation on not only the visual, but other artistic aspects of *Cithera mea*. These led to Thomas' captivating contribution to the opening of the work, which excites and amazes me, and which I hope may eventually lead to further collaboration. I appreciate Thomas' spirit of exchange, and these thanks are extended as well to Thomas' studio in Düsseldorf, including Caroline Müller and Achim Schunk, and to the staff and artist associates of the Atlantic Center for the Arts in New Smyrna Beach, Florida, where Thomas and I first met, without forethought of collaboration, in May, 2007. Thanks to ACA for providing a space for the early stage of the process to develop.

Funding for the co-commission by the Nasher Museum of Art and the North Carolina Symphony was generously provided by Drs. Victor and Lenore Behar.

Pedro G. de la Fuente's "Eso es musical!" is a fine, intense contribution to this musical work. Gracias, Pedro.

As often during my writing, my daughters Anna and Elana, and my wife Mindy Oshrain have heard my score, and its many versions, many times over. For their forbearance, I am grateful.

