

Soundtrack of home

Miguel Harth-Bedoya explores the music of his native Peru and finds treasures to share in a series of concerts by the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra

By MATTHEW ERIKSON / Star-Telegram staff writer [📧](#)

When Americans think of Latin music, it's usually dreaming about Argentine tango, Brazilian rhythms or Mexican mariachi.

It's a prickly issue for Miguel Harth-Bedoya, the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra music director and a native Peruvian. For him, the soundtrack of his homeland -- what he calls Andean music -- has an immensely rich and equally valuable tradition, encompassing the cultural treasures of Machu Picchu, the pre-Columbian Incan ruins, as well as the adjoining Inca Trail -- those hundreds of miles of ancient roads that connect parts of Peru with its mountainous South American neighbors.

Harth-Bedoya and Peruvian-American composer-in-residence Gabriela Frank hope to open some ears with a series of concerts called *Caminos del Inka*. Beginning next weekend, the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra performs the first of three multimedia programs this season exploring the music -- old and new -- of a geographical and cultural region that many might not know about musically.

For 15 years, Harth-Bedoya has been hunting for instrumental scores composed in his native land. Part amateur sleuth, part keen collector, the conductor has amassed a treasure trove of music discovered in deserted boxes, dusty desk drawers, museums and libraries. As he describes it, his vast collection includes the miniature -- a short song from 1910, composed in the French impressionist style of Faure (it was found in a drawer in Lima) -- as well as the old, a set of indigenous dance music transcribed by a Spanish bishop in the 18th century. (Harth-Bedoya located it in Madrid's royal palace library last spring.)

"What has frustrated me for years is that very little of the instrumental music in South America has been published," he says. "It's not that this music didn't exist, but like stories, most of it just wasn't written down for years."

The conductor has worked hard to get select works in print and is commissioning orchestral arrangements of others. This weekend's Fort Worth Symphony program, for instance, opens with an orchestral arrangement of *El Condor Pasa*, the centuries-old Incan folk song popularized by Simon and Garfunkel.

In promoting the new with the old, Harth-Bedoya has also programmed three works by Frank that underscore their mutual Andean heritage.

Frank, 35, was born and raised in Berkeley, Calif., the daughter of a Lithuanian Jewish father and a Peruvian mother. Her parents met while her dad was on a Peace Corps assignment in Peru in the late '60s.

As someone of mixed heritage, Frank says that she had a tendency growing up to romanticize her mother's native land "as well as keep a distance from it." Although she was raised with her parents' recordings of native Peruvian music, Frank had a typical musical education. As a young pianist, she played the standard repertoire: Bach, Beethoven and Mozart. But looking back, she realizes that the folk-based music of Bartok and Ginastera flew into her fingers a lot faster.

It wasn't until she was an undergraduate at Rice University that Frank discovered the power of incorporating Peruvian folklore elements into her own compositions. "As someone of mixed heritage, I wanted to write mixed-heritage music," she says. "I wanted to figure out through music what it means to have my background."

She was encouraged by her teacher at the University of Michigan (where she was awarded her doctoral degree in 2001), the renowned composer William Bolcom, to travel Peru and "piece together" parts of her heritage. In recent years, Frank has received prominent commissions and recognition for a compositional language that fuses Latin American history, mythology and music into Western classical forms.

Frank describes her *Leyendas: An Andean Walkabout* -- the work that Harth-Bedoya will lead next weekend -- as one of her "more ethnic" pieces, although the Peruvian influences can be subtle: the bowings and pizzicatos of the strings imitating an indigenous pan pipe, for instance, or the fleet character of another movement evoking the Incan *chasqui*, the legendary runners who delivered messages along the Inca Trail.

Frank sees herself as a storyteller through her music. That facet will become emphasized in an extensive multimedia component planned for the orchestra's *Caminos del Inka* programs. Photographs by Peruvian-born Fort Worth photographer Fabiana van Lente will be projected above the Bass Hall stage to accompany the music.

The pictures will give a wider context, says Harth-Bedoya, who is eager to share his native music with a larger audience. Performances are planned in other South American and U.S. cities, including a weekend of concerts in Baltimore in 2008.

"I suppose there's a bit of a selfish interest here," the conductor says. "Being a performer, I'm always looking for new things."

Yet he adds, "these concerts can present a whole new world to people who have never been to South America."

Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra

7:30 p.m. Friday, 8 p.m. Saturday and 2 p.m. Nov. 18

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