

Thursday, 13 August 2009

Diverse Peruvian Musical Landscape explored with [*Caminos del INKA*](#)

By Chip Michael



Miguel Harth-Bedoya is a fast rising star in the conducting world, hopping about the United States conducting everywhere from Atlanta to the Hollywood Bowl. With his Peruvian roots, his interest in bringing to the forefront some of the great classical music from his homeland is understandable. His latest CD release, *Caminos del Inka* is the first in an on-going project to do just that. With the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, Miguel Harth-Bedoya leads us on a journey of Peruvian music spanning three centuries. Not only is this rarely heard music - most of this CD is world premiere recordings. This is a real treat where so often new classical music CD's are re-interpretations of well known pieces.

The music ranges from a baroque style piece written by cleric Baltazar Martínez de Compañón, a Spaniard of the 1700's who claimed Peru as his home, to *Fiesta!*, a piece by composer Jimmy López who created it to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Lima Philharmonic Society in 2007. Like the diverse Peruvian landscape, the music covers a broad spectrum of musical styles, soaring to the skies like the Andes, traipsing through the thickest jungles or just relaxing on the beach with a glass of wine.

Sinfonía Junín y Ayacucho by Enrique Iturriaga begins the journey – a commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the battles of Junín and Ayacucho eventually establishing Peruvian independence. This is my second exposure to this piece and I must say it fares better on CD than it did in performance. It was nice performed by the Philadelphia

Orchestra at the Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival in July 2009, but it has much more heart and life in this recorded version (oddly enough).

From here we journey back in time with a collection of three pieces by Baltazar Martínez de Compañón. They do not quite have the flare of Vivaldi or J.S. Bach, but they are delightful pieces of music.

I previously reviewed Gabriel Frank's *Elegia Andina* from [A Composer's Voice](#) and was again thrilled to hear this piece. It is highly rhythmic, melodic and intriguing in all the right ways. If this is an example of what is to come from Peruvian composers we are all in for a treat!

Vilcanota by Armando Guevara Ochoa is a mid 20th century piece. Rather than the atonal experimental music much of Europe was exploring Sr. Ochoa harkens to the tonal world Ralph Vaughan-Williams, a much more recognized 20th century composer. *Vilcanota* is a short piece but rich in the way it explores the sacred river of the same name.

Fiesta! is just that a romp of music and frivolity. But make no mistake, this is *not* a fluff piece. It has intensity, excitement and rhythmic interest throughout the journey – rather like trying to take in all three weeks of Carnival in 10 minutes. According to Jimmy López, he wanted to incorporate European classical music traditions, with Latin American music and flashes of Afro-Peruvian and pop music. I think he also included some local spices into the mix, because the flavor of the music has all the above elements and something as yet un-tasted. It's spicy yet without the burn, slightly sweet and strong while not overpowering.

The album ends with another piece by Enrique Iturriaga, *Obertura para una comedia*. It is ostensibly a satire on the type of polka dance in Lima since the 19th century, so the music is filled with quick dance steps and mocking rhythmic changes - a fun romp for the orchestra and listener both. At just over 3 minutes it is a delightful encore for a wonderful performance.

Overall the CD holds together well with some exceptionally strong pieces by Frank and López. By the nature of the collection, it is varied and pleasantly so. The performance by the Fort Worth Symphony is superb, with a sense of control even with the huge disparity in musical styles. They commanded the intense rhythms when necessary, while still relaxing into the regular rhythms of the earlier styles of music. Kudos go to Miguel Harth-Bedoya for bringing to light and life these unknown Peruvian pieces. If this is any example of what is to come, the project to convey Peruvian music to a wider audience will undoubtedly succeed.