

flowers and plants asserting their right to be, even in this most devastated of American cities.”

Something for the Dark is a meditation on renewal, and the hard-won wisdom that attends the small, personal, daily triumphs of asserting one’s right to be.

The initial ideas for *Sinfonia* were sketched at a series of campsites during a road trip across country from the Pacific northwest to the east coast on a northern route during June of 1984. I used to think of it as a piece of landscape art. The course of the trip took us through the Rockies of Idaho and Montana, across northern prairies, along the Yellowstone River, through the Badlands, the Crow Reservation, and into the Midwest, where we encountered a tornado at Whitewater, Minnesota. There were daily discoveries and new connections. Always, there was a sense of the sheer power of landscape, the sources of rivers, the ranges that divide the basins, and a spectacular immensity. The trip gave us an opportunity to fill in some of what we did not know about territory that we had only flown over. Having but 6 or 7 days to make the trip we had to keep it moving. I have always regretted making the trip at much too fast a tempo.

Looking back at the piece now, the *Sinfonia*, composed over 35 years ago still carries a sense of that headlong movement, one that changes its character abruptly from landscape to landscape. It also conveys that sense of variable speeds where the far horizon changes slowly, while the nearby field of view is in a rapid state of flux. The placid middle section of the piece emanated after the conclusion of that eastward cross-country trip during a long stay on an island off the Maine coast, a sojourn that was essentially tranquil, and with wide horizons and the slow rhythms of the tide.

Sinfonia was commissioned by the Pro Arte Orchestra and premiered by them at Harvard’s Sanders Theater under the direction of David Hoose in October, 1984.

Illapa: Tone Poem for Flute and Orchestra (2004) (dedicated in affection and appreciation to Leone Buyse and Larry Rachleff) depicts a moment in the life of Illapa, a powerful weather god from ancient South American Andean culture.

In the first movement, Introducción: Soliloquio Serrano (“Introduction: Mountain Soliloquy”), Illapa sits at the edge of a highland valley, playing his bamboo flute while accompanied only by his own parpadeos or “blinking” (initially performed by orchestra claves). While not an actual Andean tune, Illapa’s soliloquy evokes typical gestures and articulation effects of mountain flutes. At the end of the movement, momentum picks up as Illapa slowly leans over and then finally leaps to the floor of the valley, whirling his music on the flute and blinking his eyes ever more furiously.

At the entrance of the rest of the orchestra, Illapa is now standing squarely inside the valley as the second movement, Harawi, commences. The vastness and mystery of the Andes are conveyed by the low and high glissing strings, the oscillating marimbas, and the interplay between the conga drum and rainstick.

When the flute re-enters, the harawi music begins with the typical melancholy and elegiac mood encountered in this traditional song form. The melody is also played by the violas and violoncellos albeit slightly out of synchronization to convey the wet reverberating effect of Andean echoes (marked in the score as Un grito y un mil de ecos, or “a cry and a thousand echoes”). Illapa’s flute music is increasingly overwhelmed by the valley’s own naturaleza, its own inner life, until the moment when Illapa takes out his spinning top (the zumballyu) and spins it, calling up a storm. Thunder and lightning crack around the havoc that the zumballyu creates as it uproots trees and boulders in a violent yet brief fury.

After the climactic highpoint, we hear the sounds of the valley in the aftermath of the storm, and Illapa is curiously quiet (...stunned?...) — quiet, that is, until a final flute call that holds and then slowly fades as Illapa climbs out of the valley, looks back at the destruction left in his wake, and blinks...just once.

Philharmonia and Percussion Ensemble personnel are listed in the Festival program book.

Audience members are reminded to silence alarm watches, pagers and cellular phones before the performance.

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THE MIDAMERICAN CENTER
FOR CONTEMPORARY MUSIC PRESENTS

The 38th Annual Bowling Green New Music Festival

Concert 8

Bowling Green Philharmonia
and Percussion Ensemble

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2017, 8PM

KOBACKER HALL

MOORE MUSICAL ARTS CENTER

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Musical Arts
BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

PROGRAM

BGSU Percussion Ensemble
Daniel Piccolo, director

Scatter (2011).....**Christopher Dietz**

-BRIEF PAUSE-

BGSU Philharmonia
Emily Freeman Brown, director

Turn the Key (2006).....**Steven Mackey**

Mercedes Diaz-Garcia, conductor

Something for the Dark (2016).....**Sarah Kirkland Snider**

Sinfonia (1984).....**Richard Cornell**

Illapa (2004).....**Gabriela Lena Frank**

I. Introducción: Soliloquio Serrano
II. Harawi

Conor Nelson, flute

PROGRAM NOTES

Scatter for 12 percussionists

Scattering is a physical process where light is forced to deviate from a straight trajectory via irregularities in the media with which it interacts.

The honor of composing a piece to mark the opening of a new performing arts center in Miami inspired a list of “to-dos”. I wanted to explore the acoustics of the new hall, pursue my own, current compositional interests, and appropriately celebrate the occasion.

To put the hall through its paces *Turn the Key* has a variety of densities: small moments for solo harp and solo violin, big arrivals for the whole orchestra, clangorous percussion, silky passages for string orchestra, plucky staccato passages, brassy wind band music, intricate rhythmic interplay, dense counterpoint, and various combinations of the above. Of course, in so doing, I’ve also put the orchestra through its paces and having worked with the New World Symphony many times in the past I have complete confidence in them to bounce all the right vibrations off the walls.

My current interest in terse melodic structures and persistent rhythmic motives helps, I hope, to make sense of this varied topography. The piece grew from a simple rhythm that I found myself employing to knock on doors and absent minded tap on all available surfaces – long, long, short, short, in a 7/8 meter. (Incidentally, dash, dash (long, long) is the Morse code for the letter ‘M’ and dot, dot stands for ‘I’ as in “MIaMI”.) This rhythm suggested melodic cells and complimentary counter-

rhythms that in turn suggested other melodic cells. These lean and unadorned elements develop and combine to form fanciful sonic images.

It is hard for me to describe the affect of the piece. Technically speaking, the language at the outset is quite dissonant but, in my mind, the tone is playful like some weird dance by a crippled but soulful creature. This dance, in spite of its struggles embodies a bittersweet joy, like watching my 12 year old, diabetic, arthritic, black lab, greet his evening meal.

More and more I find that I want my music to contain catharsis and transformation and for this occasion I wanted to fully embrace a sense of triumph and accomplishment. The stinginess of the musical material at the beginning, by the end, unlocks a generous, joyous spirit and culminates in an unabashed celebration.

The title, *Turn the Key* has several resonances. It obviously refers to opening a door to a new concert hall. Also, the secondary definition of the word key, “crucial for understanding,” can be translated by the Spanish word ‘clave’ which also refers to the basic rhythm of dances of Afro-Cuban origin, (i.e. the ‘key’ rhythm). This seems appropriate since *Turn the Key* does spring from a fundamental rhythm and develops by turning this rhythm around to mean different things. To my knowledge, this rhythm is not an actual clave for an existing dance, the 7/8 gives it a marked limp, but if you divide music into its most primal motivations – singing, dancing, and praying – *Turn the Key* is a dance.

Something for the Dark takes its title from a poem by Philip Levine, the Detroit-born-and-raised, Pulitzer Prize-winning former U.S. Poet Laureate who was best known for his poems about the city’s working class. The poem, written for Levine’s wife and entitled “For Fran,” reads:

“She packs the flower beds with leaves,
Rags, dampened papers, ties with twine
The lemon tree, but winter carves
Its features on the uprooted stem.
I see the true vein in her neck
And where the smaller ones have broken
Blueing the skin, and where the dark
Cold lines of weariness have eaten
Out through the winding of the bone.

I turn to her whose future bears
The promise of the appalling air,
My living wife, Frances Levine,
Mother of Theodore, John, and Mark,
Out of whatever we have been
We will make something for the dark.”

On the hard ground where Adam strayed,
Where nothing but his wants remain,
What do we do to those we need,
To those whose need of us endures
Even the knowledge of what we are?

When I received the commission to write this piece, I thought I would try to write something about hope and endurance. Early into my sketches for the piece, I stumbled onto an idea that sounded to me like hope incarnate: a bold, full-hearted little melody surrounded by dignity and sunlight and shiny things. I thought that maybe I would open the piece with it and then have the music journey through some adversity to an even bigger, bolder statement of optimism. Growth! Triumph! A happy ending! But that wasn’t what happened. The piece opens with the statement of hope, and sets out on an uncertain journey to find it again, but instead encounters strange new echoes of the motif in different, unfamiliar settings. It chases digressions, trying to resolve related but new musical arguments. Eventually it finds its way to solid ground, though this place is quite a bit darker than where we began. But to my mind this arrival feels more trustworthy, more complete, more worthy of celebration, because it feels more real.

While writing the piece, I was reading some Detroit poets for their take on the city, and grew better acquainted with the work of Philip Levine. The last two lines of “For Fran” struck me as an apt motto for the kind of clear-eyed reflections on endurance that run through his poems about Detroit. In preparing the flower beds for winter, Levine’s wife becomes a symbol of the promise of renewal in general: “Out of whatever we have been/ We will make something for the dark.” Levine has said that much of his poetry about Detroit was born of “the hope that [Detroit] might be reborn inside itself, out of its own ruins, phoenix-like, rising out of its own ashes. Except I don’t see it in heroic terms. The triumphs are small, personal, daily. Nothing grandly heroic is taking place; just animals and men and