

Chanticleer Festival 2000

Ana Cervantes

1. OVERTURE

It's Monday the 14th of August, on Chanticleer Farm in Richmond, Indiana. I put the last things in my suitcase, hoping that we'll have time to read the slow movement of the Brahms and suspecting that we won't.

I run downstairs. We have only about half an hour before Caroline, Salvo, and I must leave for the Dayton airport. Salvo says, "Anaré, I don't think we'll have time. I have to settle that stuff at the airport and I don't want to lose my plane. Next time, no?" I make a sad look and Salvo says, "Let's play a little, just us. What's that Bach you and Caroline were playing the first day - the *Arioso*?"

On that first day of the 24th Chanticleer Summer Music Festival, two weeks and two days ago, Caroline came to me. I was getting reacquainted with the 7-foot Steinway, in that big sunny living room where there is space, cosily, for a string quartet. "Let's bless the beginning of the festival with some Bach, just you and me," she said, and handed me the *Arioso*. So in that light-filled room which looks out on the pasture where this year there are about 16 head of black Angus grazing, we play, just the two of us, making a blessing of Bach. Simple and majestic, the music fills the air, and our souls, with something larger than ourselves.



I love playing with Caroline Klemperer, always have. As sometimes happens, we both knew from the moment we met each other that we wanted to collaborate. That was at the CMA (Chamber Music America) meeting in January 1997 in New York. We started working together about 8 months later, creating what was to become *Crosscurrents*, the children's program in which wonderful dancer Sam LeSane was to become the third partner.

Caroline's string quartet, the Chanticleer Quartet, takes its name from the farm on which Caroline grew up, where she and her husband Bob have raised a family of three boys and where she still spends her summers. It is the place to which she returns to recharge and reconnect with the rich Indiana farmland from which she seems always to have drawn some essential nourishment. Every summer, the quartet invites a guest artist to join them for the two week Festival. In years past guests have ranged from singer Rosemarie Gore to clarinetist Harold Seletsky, and the repertoire from Beethoven to Bartok, from gospel to Piazzolla.

When Caroline invites me to play, in June of 1999, she says, "We'd certainly love for you to play some solo piano music ... but what would you like to play with the quartet?" It takes me about three nanoseconds of salivating anticipation to respond, "The Brahms F-minor". The Piano Quintet, that is, Opus 38, the extraordinary feat of musical energy and architecture which I have been lusting to play for years. That was easy!

We also decide, as time goes on, that it would be a super idea to include some music of Mexico, not just concert music but "*música popular*," some traditional and pop songs. A core part of the Fulbright-García Robles Award with which I'd spent the last year in Mexico was "the development of repertoire of Mexican contemporary music for subsequent diffusion in the United States". This process had already started to unfold when, earlier in the year, I'd performed the US premiere of two works by Mexican composers in the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, DC.

Now, through the imaginative programming which both of us get a lot of glee from devising, the process of "subsequent diffusion" will start a further flowering. We add the slow movement of a Piano Quintet of Blas Galindo (one of México's most prolific and longest-lived composers of the 20th century); because of its gorgeous slow movement it's almost as quick a decision as the Brahms. By late winter of 1999 in Mexico, I've finally hooked up with Mexican composer Arturo Márquez, whose music I've admired for some time, and he's given me the scores for two solo piano works: "*En Clave*" and "*Días de Mar y Río*" (*Days of Sea and River*). I fall head over heels in love with "*Días*" and decide pretty quickly that it will be one of my solo pieces for the Chanticleer Festival. I give Caroline a taste of it when we're touring with "Crosscurrents" in February, and she approves.

Hearing the CPE Bach Sonata which I'm practicing during that same time, Caroline asks me if I'll add that to the Festival program as well. At the Fulbright Midterm Reunion in early February, my Report (naturally!) consists of a concert: some of the Mexican music whose US premieres I'm soon to play in Washington, DC. Fellow-Fulbrighter Daniel Santillano, a fair amateur violinist in addition to his stated specialty of biologist, has asked if I'd like to play with him a little traditional tune he's discovered called "Oaxaca" (waHAKa). This too gets added to the list in a simple arrangement for the five of us. It's the kind of lovely little waltz which you might hear from a mariachi band in the Jardín Union in Guanajuato (or Oaxaca City), celebrating the beauty of Oaxaca's sunsets, its mountains, its women. At the last minute before leaving México for the US in late June, I arrange to pick up quartet arrangements (his own) of some Mexican standards from violist Emilio García of Guanajuato's Orquesta Sinfónica. Caroline picks *Solamente una vez* (*Just Once*) of Agustín Lara, one of México's most famous singer-songwriters earlier in the 20th century, whose tunes still wring tears from the hardest-hearted in a dance bar at 4AM almost anywhere you might go in México. We decide to play "Estrellita" (*Little Star*) of Manuel Ponce, probably the best-known Mexican song (outside México) for an encore, in an arrangement for piano and string quartet.

The Chanticleers will open with the "Pizzicato" movement of the Bartok 4th Quartet and also play the *Adagio and Allegretto* of Shostakovich. Thus do programs come together.

You might say, Hmm, Mexican music and 19th century German music on the same program? Where do we find a connection there? Well, two ways. First of all, at the close of the 19th century, México was beginning to develop some individuality, musically speaking, which it hadn't enjoyed since the amazing mix of Spanish baroque music and indigenous idioms in the *villancicos* of the Virreinato (the Viceroyalty or colonial period). Composers like Brahms were a powerful inspiration and influence for Mexican creators like Ricardo Castro, among others.

Second, interestingly enough, I find from my friend the *rumbero* that there is an important German connection in Jalisco, the state of México which is renowned principally for its production of tequila, practically (and justifiably) the national drink of México. Of course, the indigenous inhabitants had been making this distillation of the *agave azul* (blue agave) for centuries; but it was with the arrival of German distillers in the 19th century that distillation techniques were refined so that consistent standards could be met with larger production.

Even the Bartók has its relevancy here, its plucked sounds a beautiful example of the integration of a folk idiom into "concert music", something which, half a century later, the Márquez work also exemplifies. And the Shostakovich? Pure self-indulgence, so beautifully written for strings, the *Allegretto* which follows the tragic *Adagio* has an ironic clownish quality which falls just short of being savage, and instead manages to be redemptive.

I think there's often a little bit of an association for many people between "community" and music that's been "dumbed-down" - in terms of repertoire or standards of musicianship - to some lowest common audience denominator. This is one of those things which ain't necessarily so, as CMA's (formerly the NEA's) Rural Residency program has certainly proved. Surely in Caroline's case, there is never any question of lowered musical standards, whether it's for the students whom she teaches to play lying down (for relaxation) or the children's programs she's been creating for over 20 years, or the music the two of us have made together since we began collaborating. She's known and respected at the highest levels, for the quality both of her music-making and of her imagination. As I am to discover, the other members of the Quartet are also committed teaching and community artists, who feel the same joy in bringing to their listeners the excitement they themselves feel about the music we're making.

Caroline's focus as an artist/teacher has been community outreach, long before the phrase became sexy and probably before it was even coined. Having committed herself to making a life and raising a family in a Midwestern farming community where culture was not as easily available as in some of the metropolitan centers in which she'd lived, she proceeded to make it happen. Her ability to take risks is breathtaking and heartwarming. She'll go into some small business absolutely cold, heart pounding, light up her megawatt smile, and ask for a contribution for the summer Festival or for some other community music activity. What really counts here is the same thing as when you're on stage with a pounding heart: to go forward and use your skill and imagination to make a compelling statement for your listeners. In this way she's created a sense of ownership among the people of Richmond, Indiana, for the music that she helps to bring alive.

I arrive from New Jersey on Saturday the 29th of July. As usual, everyone tries to coordinate flights, and if all the arrival times are close enough Caroline basically spends the afternoon at the Dayton, Ohio airport and picks everyone up as they arrive. My flight from Cleveland gets in on time, as it turns out the only flight with this distinction. There are hugs and kisses and lots of catching up, as Caroline and I haven't seen each other since our *Crosscurrents* tour in February.

Violist Jennifer Smith comes from Great Falls, Montana, and her connecting flight from Minneapolis is about an hour late. Much worse is the situation of Salvatore Greco, who's flying in from Palermo, Sicily, to play first fiddle (Caroline changes from first to second in the summer, saying it gives her valuable perspective), who should have arrived the previous day. His connecting flight from Detroit was finally cancelled after having been delayed various times: very bad weather in Detroit, we're told. We cross our fingers that he'll arrive today. Salvatore is here because Caroline had a brainstorm and called him after the quartet's regular

first fiddle for the last few years had to cancel. For Salvatore, this will be a return in more ways than one. When Caroline met him he was studying with Josef Gingold at University of Indiana, where he also studied with Yuval Yaron and Franco Gulli. For some part of that time he was Concertmaster of the Richmond Symphony, which is where he and Caroline met and became friends and collaborators. It's his first time back in Indiana in thirteen years.

Caroline and I hang out and get caught up over the quite good (made to order!) turkey club sandwich at the airport café, until Jenny arrives, pretty much as scheduled. We're a bit white-knuckled about Salvatore's flight as the folks at the Northwest desk can't give us any firm information. Finally they say that the flight HAS taken off in Detroit: we heave a sigh of relief, now it's just a question of time. At last he arrives ... but, alas, without his luggage. All he has is his fiddle and the music for the festival; concert clothes and toothbrush are somewhere between Milan and Detroit, we imagine, although perhaps by this time in Amsterdam or Hong Kong. Immediate jawboning at the Northwest counter to arrange for him to get repaid for his unexpected Detroit hotel experience (due to the cancelled flight) and get luggage searches underway. Relentless followup with the airline, with the help of Caroline's husband Bob, will become a kind of ongoing counterpoint to our rehearsing and performing in the next week.

We all pile into the Jetta (180,000 and still going strong, thanks to duct tape, says Caroline, pointing to some of it holding on the rearview mirror) and leave for the farm. 'Cellist Elizabeth Mendoza and her husband Rubén, as well as their boxer Mitzi, reportedly have already arrived by car from Connecticut.

When we talked on the telephone a few weeks before the Festival, Salvatore said to me, "So bring some music, we can do some reading together." What are you in the mood for, I ask him, anything in particular? No, he says, whatever you think might be fun. So I stuff the second volume of the Mozart Sonatas in my suitcase, saying to myself, "This guy sounds like my kind of musician!"

Finally we are all at the farm, safe and sound. The excitement is building. We're all getting settled and unpacking (except for poor Salvatore), and focusing on our first meal together, but there's an undercurrent of excitement and anticipation as there might be between two new lovers. What will it be like to play together? What will this new music sound like? It's Saturday and the next five days will be mostly intensive rehearsal; our first concert, on Friday, will be at the Richmond State Hospital.

That first night, we are all exhausted from our various voyages, especially Salvatore, whom everybody is calling Salvo, his accustomed Italian diminutive, by the end of dinner. I have sore hands and wrenched-feeling wrists from schlepping my carryon luggage and Salvo has a hurting left forearm. But that thing that lives inside us and will not be denied brings us to the capacious room with the view and the Steinway, that night, and the two of us, barely warmed up after hours of travel, start reading the Mozart B-flat major Sonata. We know it's physically risky, but it seems not to matter, in fact we seem to need it as much as we needed the dinner, and we mesh beautifully with this extraordinary music. If you can sight-read Mozart together and feel how those little details balance, you know things are really right. Something's brewing here, I am thinking, we're going to make some good music, all of us together...

NEXT... Part 2: [PLAYING WITH STRINGS](#)