

Impact (2013)

Charles Halka (b. 1982)

[West Coast Premiere]

Impact is an eight-minute work for large orchestra that explores a sonic gesture best described as a fall and heavy thud. This gesture, which opens the work in its clearest form, is a steep drop from the upper register of the orchestra to its depths. Each time the gesture plummets to the bottom, the impact of this arrival generates various “resonances” —shards of harmonic or melodic material that proceed to develop on their own, contributing to subsequent impacts and eventually blooming into more lyrical passages. Along the way, the gesture is fragmented, stretched, reversed, and dissected to reveal microscopic musical worlds within, before finally regaining its original form and prominence near the end. One giant, cascading swirl of sound brings the work to a rumbling close.

—Charles Halka

Impact was premiered on May 16, 2014, at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City for the opening of the 36th Foro Internacional de Música Nueva (International Forum for New Music), performed by the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional (National Symphony Orchestra of Mexico), conducted by José Luis Castillo.

Not recorded

Ángeles de llama y hielo

(Angels of Flame and Ice)

(1994, rev. 2015)

Ana Lara (b. 1959)

One of Mexico’s most prominent composers, Ana Lara continues to hold a leading position as an advocate of new music in her native country. In 1993, she began her tenure as composer-in-residence with Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional (Mexico), during which she wrote *Ángeles de llama y hielo*.

The work is comprised of four continuous sections inspired by a series of four poems by Mexican poet Francisco Serrano. Serrano’s poems were a conscious reference to the persistent numerological and mystical significance of tetradic groupings in many cultures from the ancient Greeks to modern Christianity: four elements (fire, earth, air, water), four winds, four points of the compass, four horsemen of the apocalypse, four evangelists, etc. Serrano seizes on this numerological symbolism, combining it with the image of an angel for each episode. Serrano’s angels are not the gentle cherubic figures of the

Italian Renaissance, but rather nebulous beings inhabiting a netherworld of consciousness at the frontier of the material and spiritual realms. The following is excerpted from Francisco Serrano’s own description of Ana Lara’s *Angels of Flame and Ice*.

The Angel of Darkness is characterized by deep, dense sonorities of terrestrial textures. The harmonies spread until they are fully present in the Angel of Dawn. Day breaks. With the Angel of Light the harmonies open completely. The work reaches its zenith: its noon. Finally, they blend in the Angel of Dusk and become less concrete. It is the end. This last of the four angels ends where the first begins. Thus the music strives to express the idea that life is the beginning of death and that death is at the same time a beginning and an end. Lara further distinguishes her “angels” by means of orchestral sonority: the first angel is characterized by the brass instruments, the second by strings and brass, the third by strings and woodwinds, and the fourth by the percussion section.

—Robert S. Katz

Ángeles de llama y hielo (Angels of Flame and Ice) was commissioned by the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional (National Symphony Orchestra of Mexico). It was premiered on September 2, 1994, at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City by the OSN, conducted by Enrique Diemecke.

Not recorded

Four poems by Francisco Serrano:

Angels of Flame and Ice

To Ana Lara

Angel of Darkness

Imperious, glacial, like a bare blade of cold steel

He suddenly appears, dark in the place of shadows,

On the edge of silence, unrelenting, unvanquished,

Terrible messenger of an existence that has not been reached.

He is a wind born of the void to gnaw at the body

(Body itself) to leave it in an instant, intact.

Prisoner perhaps of an excessive bliss,

There is no passion in the angel: He is the stranger.

An acrid air precedes him, a limitless fog,

A being without limits, coalesced shadow, breath of the breath.

Being of silence, angel so sad, do you grieve for us?

Do you take for yourself what you need, or get back what is yours?

Will this flesh be of use when death

Finally breathes under your incomprehensible light?

Angel of Dawn

Is there no place for the angels to spread their wings?

In the loose breeze of the first light

He sparkles, indelible, a face

Kneaded from water and fire and air and salt.

He hovers over time, like a flowing sky,

Wing and skin undulating at the edge of bright water.

With very gentle hands, a sketch of gold in each finger,

He reaches towards light that fulfills its promise.

Angel, sacred vessel of being, incandescent condensation of the cosmos,

Prescient space, in your grace everything is about to be born.

Would you accept a prayer addressed to you?

The world is like rain that does not sustain you.

The angel has no roots: he moves among us

Detached from the earthly heart, like a hostage.

Angel of Light

Angels, birds of the abyss, are they so different from us?

A breath of crystals coming from afar,

A superior command, shining and hidden,

Pure love unlimited within the boundaries of the spirit?

Maybe your diaphanous nature is not inaccessible to us.

In the exact center of the heart,

Beyond pleasure and grief,

You exist alongside of anguish, like an act of love.

And if we shouted, would you hear us?

If you descended upon us, could we keep silent?

We can only guess at your strength, at your pitiless mediation.

The song of the earth is the trace of his passing;

The white light of noon, his shadow.

He is stillness.

He does not last.

Angel of Dusk

*Like a window opened on an
untended garden,
Like a wasteland beneath the open sky,
They are beings that see with their
eyes closed,
Shadows of a body in search of its form.
They wander among us, sleepwalkers,
Extravagant, like the blind without a face,
Fire greedy for light, impenetrable fire
surrounded by water.
Where they alight, dancing ceases.
Angels of dusk, messengers
Of who knows what vacant and
higher kingdom,
They turn into night with each one of us.
In the boundaries of time, in the
crack between life and death,
They stalk in the crevices of
consciousness, formless,
While a dove flutters in a
frightfully severed sky...*

—Translation by Laura Reinking Keller

Supplica (2014)

Christopher Rouse (b. 1949)

The title *Supplica* means, perhaps unsurprisingly, “supplication” in Italian. There is no doubt in my mind that this work has a strong relationship to my Fourth Symphony, completed earlier in 2013. However, it is more of a challenge to define precisely what that relationship might be. It certainly is not a “completion of” nor “afterthought to” the symphony. It is also not some sort of “antipode” to this same symphony. Perhaps it might best be described as a “companion piece.”

Both were works I felt an inner compulsion to write, but both also possess meanings for me that must remain personal. This certainly does not mean that either piece is intended to be “impersonal”—rather that what I hope will be heard as both an intimate and an impassioned communication in sound must mean to each listener what it will, without further intercession or guidance from [the composer].

—Christopher Rouse

Supplica was jointly commissioned by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and the Pacific Symphony Orchestra. It was premiered on April 4, 2014, at Heinz Hall in Pittsburgh by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Juraj Valčuha.

Not recorded

Epiclesis (1993, rev. 1998)

James MacMillan (b. 1954)

[United States Premiere]

Epiclesis is a concerto for trumpet and large orchestra in one movement lasting about twenty minutes. The word *Epiclesis* means an invocation calling upon God’s name during any blessing or consecration. It is mostly used with specific reference to the invocation during the Eucharistic celebration in which the gifts of bread and wine are consecrated into the body and blood of Christ. In this case, the power of the Holy Spirit is invoked to bring about transubstantiation.

The concerto is a musical meditation on the mystery of the Eucharist and the idea of transformation of materials. There are two main musical “substances” forming the argument and formal development of the piece. Throughout the work one material influences and invades the other and vice versa, so that one music “becomes” the other.

Epiclesis begins unexpectedly as if from nowhere. A mysterious, hazy-textured introduction is interrupted suddenly and violently by a short ecstatic interjection on wind and percussion. This is followed by a lengthy exposition, *Adoro te devote*. The fast, violent music and the slow, Gregorian-based music proceed in a series of stark juxtapositions, one becoming longer and more developed at each appearance, the other contracting at each appearance.

Eventually one musical material becomes transformed into a version of the other. The central climax involves the full flowering of the Gregorian theme in the context of the fast, unsettled music. This is followed by a *recitativo accompagnato*, in which the soloist invokes violent, surging responses from the orchestra. After these convulsions, in a moment of uneasy calm we hear the *Adoro te devote* played on bowed vibraphones and double bass harmonics. The process has worked itself through; the transformation of musical substances is complete.

This is followed by a fast ecstatic dance—a rhythmic celebration in which the soloist now plays piccolo trumpet. The theatrical symbolism at the end of the work is meant to signify the living God, unseen but yet perceived, and is meant to reflect the words of St. Thomas Aquinas (here translated by Gerard Manley Hopkins).

*Adoro te devote, latens Deitas,
Quae sub his figuris vere latitas
Tibi se cor meum totum subjicit,
Quia, te contemplans, totum deficit.
Godhead here in hiding, whom I do adore,
Masked by these bare shadows,
shape and nothing more,
See, Lord, at thy service low lies here
a heart
Lost, all lost in wonder at
the God thou art.*

—James MacMillan

Epiclesis was premiered on August 28, 1993, at Usher Hall in Edinburgh with John Wallace and the Philharmonia Orchestra, conducted by Leonard Slatkin.

Recommended Recording: Royal Scottish National Orchestra with soloist John Wallace, conducted by Alexander Lazarev. BIS CD 1069