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The Journeys of Humboldt: A Guide to Efrain Oscher's Composition for Orchestra

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THE JOURNEYS OF HUMBOLDT: A GUIDE TO EFRAIN OSCHER'S
COMPOSITION FOR ORCHESTRA

A Monograph

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

in

The School of Music

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this monograph is to provide a conductor's guide to the preparation, performance, and programming of Efraim Oscher's composition for orchestra "*Los Viajes de Humboldt*" since there has been no other research done on this composition. This monograph offers a biography of the composer and an insight into the composer's intentions and thoughts when composing this piece. The following monograph also provides a better understanding of the historical context of this piece by detailing the journey of Alexander von Humboldt to the Americas, in particular, his experiences of his time spent in Venezuela from 1799 to 1800. Moreover, this research delves into the life and paintings of Ferdinand Bellermann from the 1840s, paintings that also inspired this composition. The following research aims to provide a guide into programming this piece and to provide an in-depth analysis of the piece. This monograph aspires to serve in future studies of this piece and to help fellow conductors, performers, musicologists, and theorists who are interested in this piece.

Introduction

This research is divided into three chapters. Chapter one establishes the piece in our modern context by discussing the composer's life and his involvement as a composer. Chapter two places the piece in the historical context of the subject matter, Alexander von Humboldt and Ferdinand Bellermann. More specifically, this chapter follows Humboldt's journey and experiences in the country of Venezuela. Chapter three is an analysis of the piece and includes aspects of how this piece should be conducted. The document concludes with insight into the programming of this composition.

I chose this piece purposefully. Since my acceptance as a D.M.A. student, I wanted to write about a contemporary work and also wanted it to have a connection to my country of origin, Venezuela. I considered composers as Giancarlo Castro, Felix Mendoza, Aldemaro Romero, and Inocente Carreño. I chose Efrain Oscher for two main reasons: he is an active composer who currently is gaining much recognition, and he was my first flute teacher and I had direct access to him for questions and research materials. When we began corresponding about my research, he gave me a list of pieces about which I could write. I was instantly drawn to *The Journeys of Humboldt* because this research would allow me to learn more about the early days of Venezuela. I was also inspired by the serendipitous connection between Humboldt, a German who travelled to Venezuela, and Oscher, a Venezuelan who travelled to Germany.

I was also interested in the lineage that occurred within the composition of this piece. Humboldt sponsored himself and traveled to Venezuela in 1799; recommended by Humboldt, Bellermann traveled to Venezuela in 1842; the Venezuelan Embassy in Germany sponsored Oscher, who wrote a piece, in 2009 that followed the steps of Humboldt through Venezuela.

Los Viajes de Humboldt (The Journeys of Humboldt) is a work for orchestra composed by Efraim Oscher and is based on a smaller composition for flute, violin, viola, cello, string bass, and piano. The piece is orchestrated for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, 4 percussionists (timpani, maracas, cymbals, and wood block), harp, and strings. The composition deals with Alexander von Humboldt's 1799 journey from Germany to the Americas. The composer refers to this piece with two different names, "Los Viajes the Humboldt" (*The Journeys of Humboldt*) and "*Humboldt y los Sonidos de Venezuela*" (*Humboldt and the Sounds of Venezuela*), and uses the names interchangeably when discussing the piece. He prefers *The Journeys of Humboldt*, however, because the other one is too long and because he has plans of expanding this composition into a massive piece that recounts the journeys of Humboldt through Latin-America (pg. 9).

This composition last about 20 minutes and it has seven movements: "A Bordo de la Fragata Pizarro" (Aboard the Pizarro Frigate) is the first movement of the piece, and focuses on the month long journey to Venezuela aboard the Pizarro ship "Cumaná Bajo las Estrellas" (Cumaná Under the Stars); the second movement focuses on the nights of Cumaná and Oscher emphasizes Humboldt's fascination with the night sky; the third Movement is called Mérida, a town located in the Andes Mountains with strange vegetation; the fourth movement, Maracaibo, is based on a coastal town which surrounds a great lake; Caracas, the fifth movement, mixes European and Venezuelan sounds; the sixth movement, Orinoco, based on this large South American river contains improvisational passages; the last movement, Angostura, was Humboldt's last stop in Venezuela and the music combines all of the other themes from the piece.

With the exposure of El Sistema in recent years, more Venezuelan composers have emerged into the spotlight of mainstream orchestral music. Oscher is no exception and his compositions have been performed by renowned orchestras in acclaimed concert halls.

My personal friendship with the composer allowed me access to him about many facets of his compositional process. Oscher sent scores at my requests and answered questions throughout my research. Oscher meticulously writes details on his score and is very specific about how he wants the piece to sound, so meticulous that he writes specific fingerings and extended techniques. This composition also involves some aleatoric events and his use of language is compelling. Most of the indications are in Spanish and there are some very descriptive tempo markings; “Allegro Marítimo” (Maritime allegro) is an example. Moreover, this piece has roots in jazz, classical music, as well as Venezuelan folkloric music, which has African influences. Its characteristics, language, and history are easily relatable for a musician like me and it is my intent that my research will expand the knowledge of Venezuelan music, its composers, its performers, and its influence.

Chapter One: Efrain Oscher

Biography

Efrain Oscher is a professional flutist and composer born in Uruguay in 1974 during the dictatorship of Juan María Bordaberry. Oscher's parents moved to Venezuela in 1975,¹ where Oscher's uncle was already residing and was bassoonist of the Orquesta Sinfónica de Venezuela. Oscher talks fondly about his infancy in the city of Caracas during a time of economic and cultural boom for the country. While in Caracas, Oscher's brother and cousin were born and Oscher's grandparents also abandoned Uruguay for Venezuela.

Oscher is proud of his mixed-cultural heritage as he was raised by Uruguayan parents in Venezuela, and instilled with Jewish customs brought by his grandparents, who were born in Lithuania and Poland. Oscher accredits much of his musical aptitudes to his father who had an eclectic taste in music. With thanks to his uncle, Oscher spent as much time listening to orchestras as he did listening to jazz, bossa-nova, Latin folk, and most importantly in his household, Tango.

In the 1990s, his family moved to Valencia, the industrial capital of the country, located two hours away from Caracas. There, Oscher showed a more hands-on interest in music after his father bought him a guitar, which Oscher began learning and writing his own songs. He received his musical training within "El Sistema," José Antonio Abreu's musical project that enables hundreds of thousands of children to learn an instrument and play classical music in Venezuela. Before he turned 18, Oscher's uncle bought him a flute and registered him at the state

¹ Efrain Oscher, biography, <http://oscher.de/es/pages/flautista.htm> accessed 11/20/13.

conservatory of Carabobo. By the time he was 20, he was a member of the Orquesta Sinfónica de Carabobo. When he was 23, he became teacher at the Conservatorio de Música de Carabobo and at age 25, principal flute of the Orquesta Municipal de Valencia (Venezuela). Oscher formed a popular-music chamber group called “Nuestro Ensamble” in 1998, where he composed and arranged folkloric Venezuelan music mixed with jazz and classical music. This dichotomy of both a classical-trained musician/teacher and a pop composer/arranger/performer eventually gave way to compositions such as *The Journeys of Humboldt*.

In the summer of 1999, Oscher visited Europe for the first time and was enamored with his grandparents’ continent. He received classes with William Bennett in London and visited France, Holland, and Germany. He was accepted and was given a scholarship to study flute in the Royal Academy of Music in London with William Bennett, which he described as any “flutists dream”. While in London, he won the Benjamin Dale prize, founded the tango group “Flautango,” and received a postgraduate diploma in 2003. Also in London, he formed another folkloric chamber group called “Bolívar Soloists,” which stills performs Venezuelan music around the globe. His involvement with the Bolívar Soloists has been integral in his development as an arranger and composer, and Oscher recorded a CD with this group titled “¡México!” for Deutsche Grammophon, which was released in 2011; on this CD, the group collaborated with Rolando Villazón, a renowned Mexican tenor. This record also won the ECHO klassik award in the category of “classics without borders.”

Oscher has lived in Bremen, Germany since 2006, and is an important figure in the flute world, especially within the Boehm System; in this technique of flute-playing, the g# key must be pressed down to play the lower register which, according to many flutists, makes flute technique easier. He teaches flute and performs music of all genres. He describes his experiences

in Germany as contrasting those of Venezuela and he underlines the cleanliness, the punctuality, the honesty, and the calm nature of the people of Germany. Contrastingly, he misses a myriad of Venezuelan aspects, among them the sun, the beaches, and the parties with Venezuelan music.

Oscher stated that the German people never acted in a cold manner, a trait he had understood from Venezuelan hearsay. He has felt welcomed and accepted in Germany as an immigrant. His significant involvement in the Latin and Hispanic communities greatly facilitated his European transition, and he feels that his connection to the German culture and people is equally pleasant. He indicated that he has always felt like an immigrant everywhere he's lived, whether Venezuela, London, or Germany. He also thinks, however, that his experiences with different genres of music through his travels have helped his versatility as a musician.

Oscher has also recorded numerous CDs during his career, his first the *Nuestro Ensemble* in 1998. In 2005, Oscher recorded a flute CD titled "Opera Fantasies," which included fantasies and arrangements of famous operas such as Bizet *Carmen*, Verdi *La Traviata*, Thomase *Mignon*, and others. In 2009, he recorded "Flamenco" where he teamed with a double bass, guitar, and drums to create a modern take on flamenco with jazz, Latin, and oriental elements.

Oscher has performed as soloist with the University of Carabobo Chamber Orchestra, the Caribbean Philharmonic, and the Francisco de Miranda Orchestra. He has performed in significant venues across Germany, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, England, Venezuela, Mexico, and in prestigious festivals like Bath International Music Festival and English Chamber Orchestra Young Artist Series.

Oscher has regained acclamation as a composer and his compositions have been performed by many notable groups. Oscher began his compositional career as a member of

Nuestro Ensemble, a period of musical and compositional experimentation for him when he mixed classical traits with jazz and Venezuelan folk. While in Europe, Oscher arranged Venezuelan music for classical instruments, which gave rise to his acclaimed group “Bolívar Soloists.” From 2006 – 2010, Oscher composed for the “Begabden Förderung” of Bremen, a program for talented music students. The Simón Bolívar Orchestra has performed many of his works; his overture “Obertura para Orquesta Sinfónica” was performed at the International Music and Tourism Festival of Venezuela in 2009. Oscher has created compositions for Edicson Ruiz, a Berlin Philharmonic double bass player, including a double bass concerto composed in 2011. He has also written piano pieces for Venezuelan-Argentinian pianist Sergio Tiempo who resides in Belgium. The Nuevo Mundo Chamber Orchestra has also performed his works and the Sinfonisches Orchester Mainz has performed his “Green Concerto” for flute, percussion, and orchestra. The Deutsche Oper Orchestra performed his “Miranda” concerto for flute in 2011, a piece which was commissioned by the Venezuelan embassy. He has also composed for The Junge Simfonie Berlin for their Stars von Morgen program, and for the Theater am Goetheplatz for their youth-theatre program. The Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie premiered his piece *Fipps* in Bremen. Moreover, acclaimed trumpet player Pacho Flores has performed Oscher’s trumpet concerto *Mestizo* around the world since its conception in 2010. Oscher has also arranged pieces for the Deutsche Grammophon for tenor Rolando Villazón, trumpeter Pacho Flores, and mandolinist Avi Avitel.

Efrain Oscher on Composing *The Journeys of Humboldt*

A portion of my research included an email interview on 21st of January, 2015, in which Oscher answered the following questions about composing in general and about this piece in particular. His answers are translated; however, they are unedited.

Question: Which method do you use to compose? There are composers who write with an orchestration in mind, others write with a clear programmatic vision, and there are many others ways. How do you prefer writing music?

Answer: I actually don't have only one method of composing. I almost always compose for commission, for my group [Bolívar Soloists] or to play them myself. In every situation there are different motivations, which induce in me a work method. Many of my compositions are based on real events of politic, historic, or religious nature. This has allowed me to develop a compositional method in which the dramaturgy of the piece is governed by the story it recounts. I imagine a series of scenes, like from a movie, to which I give music. Although I have the instrumentation in mind and I sometimes use idiomatic elements, the story provides a leading thread and a series of images help the interpreter find the suitable character for each phrase.

Question: What was your inspiration for composing *The Journeys of Humboldt*? What kind of investigation did you do before or while composing the piece?

Answer: For the anniversary of the birth of Alexander von Humboldt, the Venezuelan Embassy organized a concert of my ensemble, Bolívar Soloists, and commissioned a piece that would musicalize the journeys of this illustrious scientists through the Venezuelan lands. As a point of reference, there was an exhibition of the paintings of Ferdinand Bellermann, who travelled through Venezuela sponsored by Humboldt to paint the landscapes that so fascinated

the researcher. To achieve inspiration, I did a previous investigation that included reading various texts that narrated the journeys of Humboldt through Venezuela, as well as a selection of texts from Humboldt's time and Humboldt himself. The cultural sector from the Venezuelan embassy in Germany provided me with a selection of paintings of Bellermann in digital form as well as a copy of the documentary 'Fiebre en el Trópico' [Fever in the Tropic], filmed in the amazon jungle of Venezuela, which I watched with much attention. All this material helped me enter the story and create the musical atmosphere to retell it.

Question: Why did you make the second version for orchestra?"

Answer: I made the orchestration for a Latin American program prepared in Berlin by the Nuevo Mundo Chamber Orchestra. My colleagues from the Bolívar Soloists suggested that I orchestrate the piece because it lends itself for expansion of the color-palette from what I used on the original version. That instrumentation only included a woodwind quintet and strings on that occasion, but my idea was to orchestrate it for a standard orchestral body, which I accomplished later in order to make it more attractive for orchestras around the world.

Question: You titled the smaller version "Humboldt and the Sounds of Venezuela" and the orchestral version "*The Journeys of Humboldt*". Is there a specific reason for the change of name?

Answer: First, the name seemed too long. On the other hand, I have a vision of expanding the work into a series of pieces called "*The Journeys of Humboldt*". Then, this piece would be subtitled 'Venezuela', while the new sections will have subtitles for each Latin-American country or region visited by Humboldt on his expeditions."

Question: What do you imagine through the seven movements?

Answer: Each one of the movements describes the cities or regions that Humboldt visited on his journey, to which I used elements of Venezuelan folklore.

Question: What is your mental/visual story of this piece?

Answer: To answer that question, I give you the text I sent to my editorial 'Compofactor', which describes each of the movements: "The piece describes several destinations of the travels of Alexander von Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland around Venezuela. These places were painted a few years later by German landscape painter Ferdinand Bellermann. 'A bordo de la Fragata Pizarro' describes the adventurous sailing of the scientists across the rough Atlantic Ocean and their arrival to the calm waters of the Caribbean Sea. The distinctive three-note motive appears throughout the piece whenever they travel over water. In their first Venezuela port, Cumana, they witnessed a colossal display of shooting stars that Bellermann pictured in one of his paintings. A harmonic-glissando effect on the strings gives this movement a very magical sound. Mérida is a city beautifully set in the Venezuelan Andes; high in the mountains the vegetation is very peculiar, a fact that captured the attention of the researchers. In this movement appears the Venezuelan Merengue, a musical style in 5/8 that is unique among all the Latin American folkloric music. The researchers also visited Maracaibo, which is an important city at the shore of a great lake, the capital of the County Zulia. This county is partially inhabited by aborigines of the tribes Añú (Paraujano), Barí, Wayúu (Guajiro), Yukpa y Japreria. I used the rhythm of 'Gaita de Tambora', which belongs to the folklore of this county and the sound of the piccolo flute, to imitate the 'Pífan', an ethnic flute used in the area. In Caracas Humboldt was surprised by the strong European influence on the life of Venezuelan capital. This movement begins with a touch of European Waltz but then turns into a Joropo, Venezuela music style of the plain lands. The longest part of the expedition took place in the south of the country where the scientists were

looking for the connection between the rivers Orinoco and Amazonas, while making a catalogue of all the plants and animals they found on their way across the Amazonic Jungle. In this section the musical language is less traditional, improvisation and extended techniques are required on the woodwinds. In ‘Angostura’, the final stop on their expedition to Venezuela, Humboldt and Bonpland wrote the report of their travels. In this final movement all the main melodies are played again with slight modifications.”

Question: Is there any other detail about this piece that you would like to share?

Answer: I’m sending you the Powerpoint presentation with images from Bellermand’s paintings [<http://bit.ly/15gJVMD> – Also appended at the end of this document]. During the premiere of the camera version, these images were projected. Unexpectedly, the image of the meteor shower appeared just as the strings were playing the harmonic effects, to which the audience reacted with an “Ohhhh!” The premiere of the small-orchestral version was performed by the Nuevo Mundo Chamber Orchestra and conducted by Carlos Izcaray, who was named this year as musical director of the Alabama Symphony Orchestra.

Chapter Two: Historical Context

Alexander von Humboldt's experience in Venezuela



Image 1. Painting of Humboldt by Friedrich Georg Weitsch from 1806.

Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), an explorer and naturalist, travelled extensively through Central and South America studying their ecology and geography. He was the first scientist to propose that Africa and South America may have been connected at one point. While studying at the University of Frankfurt, Humboldt became fascinated with botany and was eager to explore places where he could study rare plants up close. During his year at the University of

Göttingen he became fascinated with geology. The Napoleonic Wars offered Humboldt many opportunities to participate in scientific expeditions, but he was unable to join them. He received permission from the Spanish government to travel to the Spanish colonies, which were only accessible to Spanish officials and Roman Catholic missions; his social status helped him when requesting permission for his travel. He financed the entirety of the journey from the inheritance he received upon his mother's death. Departing Marseille in 1799, Humboldt spent five years away from his homeland on foot, in canoes, and on horseback on his 6000-mile expedition.

It is important to note that the country of Venezuela was not established at this time. The Spanish Empire claimed its territory in 1522 and it became independent merely 10 years after Humboldt's passing through Caracas. Moreover, by the time Humboldt arrived in Caracas, the notions of freedom had been brewing in Caracas' underground scene because of the United States' success in dethroning British rule. Copies of Paine's *The Rights of Man* and Rousseau's writings were secretly imported from France and were printed and hidden in private houses. Despite an unsuccessful revolution attempt in 1797, Venezuela claimed its independence in 1811 and secured it completely in 1821, becoming the first Spanish-American country to do so.

Humboldt's expedition started with a stop at Tenerife and a climb to the Teide volcano. He arrived in Cumaná, Venezuela, on July 16, 1799. His first days in this new land were sensory shocks for Humboldt as he experienced new smells, saw half-Indians, and exotic animals such as electric eels, blue crabs, and armadillos. He was also amazed by the plants and their rate of growth sizes, "trees with enormous leaves and sweet smelling flowers as big as your hand, all utterly new to us."² The people of Cumaná were as fascinated with his instruments as he was

² Douglas Botting, *Humboldt and the Cosmos* (New York: Harper & Row, 1873), 77.

with the people. Humboldt introduced the people to aspects of science, letting them use his telescope to see the moon spots and letting the ladies use his microscope to inspect lice. In turn, almost every night Humboldt was invited to dances and he learned the local musical rhythms like the samba, the animalito, and the Congo minuet, which was of African influence. Moreover, in Cumaná, Humboldt became fascinated with the night sky and the prevalence of Venus on the night's brilliance. Humboldt wrote that one could read at night by the light of Venus and that Venus played the role of the moon.³ He was also awestruck by the haloes of rainbow color that Venus showed at night. In contrast to Venus' beauty, the slavery of Cumaná revolted Humboldt and he was forced to watch as black young men were sold on the town square. He noted that these Spanish slaves were better treated than slaves elsewhere, but he still disliked the practice.



Image 2. Overview of Humboldt's expedition⁴.

³ Douglas Botting, *Humboldt and the Cosmos* (New York: Harper & Row, 1873), 78.

⁴ Wikipedia, *Alexander von Humboldt*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_von_Humboldt

Humboldt set out to explore the tropical rain forest/mountainous region of Caripe. There, he met the Spanish missionaries who lived with the Chayma Indians; although these missionaries knew that Humboldt came from a protestant region of Germany, to Humboldt's surprise, they made no remarks to him about it. Before returning to Cumaná, Humboldt explored the legendary cave locally known as "The mine of fat" or "Cueva del Guácharo." The locals mentioned that a mysterious oilbird resided in this cave and Humboldt set out with Indian guides and most of the monastery's population to explore the cave. They shot one of the Guácharo birds for closer examination and Humboldt remarked that it was an entirely new species. Humboldt named it *Steatornis caripensis*. This bird was the size of a crow, had long wings (3.5 feet) and strong beaks, and the younger birds had a thick cushion of edible fat in their legs, which the Indians used for cooking. Humboldt also witnessed strange plants, the seeds of which the birds brought inside; these plants were pale and deformed from the lack of photosynthesis.

After returning to Cumaná in November, he witnessed a solar eclipse, an earthquake, and a meteor shower, all of which he documented extensively. The morning of the solar eclipse, Humboldt spent much time watching the event through an incredible heat. He refused to stop looking even though his metallic instruments reached a temperature of 124° and his face was badly burned. He was forced inside and it took him two days to recover before he went outside again.

The earthquake was an unforgettable experience for Humboldt, not from a fear of death, but from its novelty as he had never experienced one. During the event, Humboldt was cool-headed enough to look at his magnetic needle, which reduced by more than 1°. He wrote that it wasn't an undulation but an upwards/downwards movement.

The meteor shower occurred early on the morning of November 12th and lasted until a quarter of an hour after sunrise. Humboldt arose to “enjoy the freshness of the air,”⁵ when he was astonished to notice that fireballs were raining from the sky. Thousands of meteorites, with brilliant-white nuclei and long luminous traces, rocketed through the sky. Humboldt discovered much later that the event was witnessed over one million square miles. Missionaries in Brazil, a count in Cayenne, astronomers in Florida, a vicar in Weimar, and Eskimos in Labrador and Greenland observed the event. Now known and celebrated in the history of astronomy as the “Leonids,” Humboldt’s precise documentation was used as a starting point for research into the nature and periodicity of asteroids.⁶ On November 16th, Humboldt left by sea for Venezuela’s capital Caracas. Although he had spent but four months in Cumaná, he felt as if it had been his home for years and later in life he recalled, “This was the first spot we set foot on in a land I had been dreaming about since I was a boy... In my mind’s eye it is not to all the wonders of the Cordilleras that I return most often, but to Cumaná and its dusty soil.”⁷

Humboldt’s two and a half months’ stay in Caracas was spent in a large and comfortable house situated in the most fashionable part of town and overlooking the Plaza de la Trinidad. Much of Caracas’ population of 40,000 people was well educated and cultured, and especially appreciated music. Humboldt heard the latest trends from Europe including Mozart, Haydn, Pleyel, and others played in the gardens of Chacao, an open air theater. Caracans warmly welcomed Humboldt, however he was careful not to involve himself too much in politics. He was aware of the underground need for change and, even though he agreed with the revolutionary cause for freedom, he enjoyed both *Criollos* (those born in Venezuela) and

⁵ Botting, *Humboldt and the Cosmos*, 90.

⁶ Ibid, 91.

⁷ Ibid, 90.

Peninsulares (Spanish supporters) for acquaintances and preferred not to voice his political opinions. His only commitment to Spanish America was to its geophysical phenomena.

The rest of Humboldt's passing through Venezuela was spent travelling through the coastline and then farther inland towards the river Orinoco. While on the coast he passed through the coastal town of Puerto Cabello and visited Lake Valencia further inland. The coastal towns at the time enjoyed most of the advantages of 18th century civilization. Farther inland in the plains, Los Llanos, people lived a more ancient and pastoral life. And further south in the forests, savage Indians still lived under the tentative rule of Franciscan missionaries, and had lived in an unchanged state since the time of Columbus. Humboldt desired to dispel the existence of rumor that was not actually documented or believed by geographers of the time: a connection between the Orinoco and the Amazon rivers.

Humboldt traversed the Llanos – a vast plain, “bigger than France and almost as big as Texas”⁸ – before reaching the jungle. Nothing but land stretched as far as the eye could see. Done on a very hot season with a scarcity of trees big enough to provide shade, this trek through the plains meant that Humboldt suffered severe burns; they often travelled through the night to make the trip more bearable. The water supply was especially a problem and the travelers drank stinking-yellow-puddle water that they filtered through a linen cloth. When they reached the dusty cattle-trading station of Calabozo, they studied electric eels. Humboldt captured five and dissected them and proposed questions such as why did the animal not electrocute itself. He also revealed that the electric discharge was not visible on a dark room, it did not register on his

⁸ Ibid, 94.

electrometer, and there was no magnetic effect. He left these quandaries for other scientists to examine.

In March of 1800, Humboldt completed the crossing of the Llanos and arrived at the San Fernando village, the capital of the Capuchin Missions located in the province of Varinas. This small village, founded in 1790, was strategically located on the Apure River, an important tributary of the Orinoco River. San Fernando was notable for the heat throughout the year. They obtained large canoes that the Spanish called “Lanchas,” and required four Indians to paddle; these canoes were considered luxurious when compared to later means of transportation. Almost all of the available space in the canoe was taken up with Humboldt’s scientific instruments, a little scientific library, firearms that were almost useless in the damp climate, and provisions for a month. They were aware that their expedition through the jungle would take longer than a month, but they were mistakenly confident that a place as fertile as the Amazon would be rich with game; their trek through the Amazon took three months and their supplies were destroyed by insects and rain shortly after departing.

The first part of their journey eastward down the Apure, then southward along the Orinoco, took them to the natural barrier of the Atures and Maipures rapids, known as the Great Cataracts. Beyond the Cataracts lay *terra incognita*, a land only seen by a handful of soldiers and conquering priests, and inhabited, then as it is now, by no more than a few scattered tribes of wild Indians and a few isolated missionaries. From there on, Humboldt and his crew spent most of the time in their canoe.



Image 3. South American rivers⁹.

Traversing the upper Orinoco was an amazing experience for Humboldt, as he was observed as a sort of huge riverine zoo. He was constantly treated to wonderful close views of birds, animals, and insects of every conceivable variety. Flocks of birds were so numerous that looked like clouds in the sky. He saw bands of fifty to sixty capybaras, the largest rodent in the world, paddling like dogs along the river, and fresh water dolphins swam alongside their canoe.

⁹ Rainforest Foundation, South American rivers map: <http://www.rainforestfoundation.org/>

The water was infested with piranhas, stingrays, flesh eating fish, and at any moment they could see five or more alligators lying motionless on the coast with their jaws wide open. At night, parrots and howling monkeys awakened them. They made a brief stop at an island where they encountered about 300 Indians of different tribes who were there to harvest turtle eggs used to make oil.

Shortly after leaving the island and the captain's almost sinking the canoe, they found another encampment of egg-harvesters. There they met Father Bernardo Zea, a missionary who agreed to guide them through the Rio Negro. They had to abandon the big lancha for a smaller canoe to navigate the rapids. This new canoe, their home for the next two months, was made out of a single hollowed out tree trunk; it was forty feet long and less than three feet wide, and it capsized if they stood without warning. This structure was stiflingly hot during the day and filled with mosquitoes at night. All instruments were stored in trunks and they had to paddle ashore every time they wanted to retrieve one. This proved uncomfortable for the Europeans, but they endured the conditions with a good sense of humor and tenacity.

They departed in their new canoe on the 10th of April, 1800. The Indians had to paddle against rising water levels and stronger currents that the rainy season had brought. Humboldt was amazed by the endurance of the Indians, who paddled one day for twelve and a half hours straight. When they reached the Great Cataracts on the 15th of April, they traveled forty miles by land to avoid the violent rapids that stemmed from the Cataracts. This trek proved challenging, not because of snakes, jaguars, and crocodiles, but because of insects that bit their bodies and got inside their mouths and nostrils. They were amazed by the Cataracts, however, and never tired of gazing down on them from the top of a nearby hill; and the deafening sound of the rushing water was especially loud at night. This land beyond the Cataracts was a source of mystery and in the

300 years since Diego de Ordaz first travelled through the Orinoco, and Sir Walter Raleigh ventured along its lower reaches in search of El Dorado, only stories from the Indians were known. Tales of men with dog heads and mouths below their navels and eyes in their forehead were propagated in the civilized world.

Back on the boats on the 21st of April, Humboldt busied himself measuring ground, air, and river temperatures, as well as barometric pressure, magnetic dip, and longitude/latitude.

On the night of April 24, they reached the bifurcation of the Orinoco and Atabapo rivers. They veered right to the Atabapo River, a so-called black river, in search of the connection with the Orinoco/Amazon Rivers. In a letter to King Carlos IV in Madrid, Humboldt wrote that this coveted connection would make the communications much easier between the Portuguese possessions on the Amazon and the Spanish ones on the Orinoco.

When they awoke the next morning, it was as though they were in a different country. The mosquitoes disappeared overnight; the color of the Orinoco water had been muddy and musky and Humboldt used his linen to filter the water, while the water of the Atabapo was pure, cool, odorless, and delicious to drink. They spotted small fish at a depth of twenty feet and sometimes could see the bottom of the river. “Nothing,” Humboldt wrote, “can be compared to the beauty of the Atrato.”¹⁰ They spent six days traversing the Atrato and on occasion, anacondas fourteen-foot-long swam alongside the canoe. They also witnessed a spectacle in which they were surrounded by fresh-water dolphins that blew spouts of compressed air and water. The Atrato River did not connect with the Pimichin River, which connected to the Rio Negro, so they traversed the land on foot. Again, the Indians carried the canoe for four days and

¹⁰ Botting, *Humboldt and the Cosmos*, 22.

Humboldt explored the surrounding forest. They finally reached the Pimichin, which, according to Humboldt, has the most twists and turns of any river in America with a total of eighty-five bends. Although they went with the current, this stretch took four and a half hours of paddling to reach the Rio Negro, the most beautiful of all the Amazon rivers. This great, successful moment of their thirty-six day expedition in a narrow canoe, bitten by insects, soaked by storms, endangered by rapids and falls, took them closer to their goal. Nevertheless, hundreds of miles of dangerous waters lay in front of them before reaching their journey's end.

On May 7th they reached San Carlos, a small military post on the Brazil-Venezuela border on the Rio Negro. They were halfway between the Orinoco and the Amazon Rivers, and Humboldt was tempted to follow the Amazon all the way to the Atlantic seaboard of Brazil. The Portuguese authorities in Brazil learned of his expedition through the Rio Negro and issued a warrant for his arrest as a spy and political undesirable and, if captured, he was to be sent to Lisbon. The warrant read, "a foreigner who might possibly conceal plans for the spread of new ideas and dangerous principles among the faithful subjects of this realm at a time when the temper of the nation is in a condition so dangerous and so difficult to deal with."¹¹ Humboldt decided against following the Amazon and, after a stay of only three days, they made way towards the Caribbean coast of Venezuela by way of the enigmatic Casiquiare canal.

The Casiquiare canal combined the so-called "white waters" of the Orinoco and the dreaded and agonizing mosquitoes. Moreover, their canoe began to look more and more like a floating zoo. Besides their dog, species of animals were collected throughout the journey and the collection included a toucan, a hyacinth macaw, seven parrots, two brilliantly colored manakins,

¹¹ Ibid, 125.

a jay-like bird, two wild jungle hens, little mammals called manaviris (recognized today as kinkajous), and eight monkeys (two spider monkeys, two nocturnal monkeys, a cacajao, a viudita, and two squirrel monkeys¹²). Some of the animals roamed the canoe as their pleased and their antics amused the travelers so that sometimes they forgot about the torment of the mosquitoes.

Their journey upstream through the Casiquiare proved to be a challenge as paddling was difficult and the insects returned. Father Zea boasted that the insects in his mission near the Cataracts were the most unpleasant, yet acknowledged that the stings of the Casiquiare insects were the most painful he had ever felt.¹³ This stretch proved one of the hardest in terms of provisions as it was a sort of desert in which was possible to starve to death rather than being abundant and lush with food sources. They were forced to eat ants and dry cacao beans.

During their journey through the Casiquiare, Humboldt kept precise notes of the longitude and latitude because the maps of the time were very imprecise. His purpose was twofold: to prove that a connection between the Amazon River and the Orinoco indeed existed and to establish a point through which the equatorial line went. They found that the lower part of the Casiquiare was at 2 ° north, on a site of a granite rock, which informed them that the Rio Negro was the one that crossed the equator. This was also important because the equator was the boundary between the Spanish and Portuguese colonies. The Casiquiare proved to be the only waterway between these two gigantic river systems; this was a great success for their expedition because this would require redrawing the maps of South America throughout the world.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, 130.

When they reached the Orinoco on May 21st, their next goal was to follow the Orinoco to its mouth in the Atlantic. They headed for the town of Angostura, today called Ciudad Bolívar, located in the east of Venezuela and near the mouth of the river. To their advantage, they were going with the current, which eased travel and improved spirits. Father Zea left the party at this point and returned to his mission.

The expedition reached the Angostura on June 13th and they were glad to experience civilization once again in this town of 6000 people. Humboldt wrote in his diary, “Long privations give a value to the smallest enjoyments, and I cannot express the pleasure we felt, when we saw for the first time wheaten bread on the Governor’s table.”¹⁴ Humboldt and his group had successfully completed the first scientific exploration of an area of 1500 miles of almost unknown territory between headwater areas of the Amazon and Orinoco basins. They had measured the latitude and longitude of more than 50 places, including the Casiquiare canal, taken a series of important magnetic readings, and made a huge collection of plants 12,000 rare or new to science specimens. In every respect, the journey was a remarkable success.

The Europeans had remained free from any serious illness such as with malaria in this foreign place, however that changed when they reached Angostura. Bonpland felt sick for a couple of days before reaching Angostura; Bonpland, Humboldt, and one of the Indians became seriously ill after reaching the town, most likely with typhoid fever that they picked up in the forest. The Indian quickly entered into a coma, but just as quickly was out of it and recovered. Humboldt treated himself with a local remedy of honey and *cortex Angosturae* and recovered.

¹⁴ Botting, *Humboldt and the Cosmos*, 136.

Bonpland, on the other hand, hovered near death as his fever failed to diminish. Their stay in Angostura extended to one month before they were fit to travel again.

Their long stay in Angostura prohibited them from reaching the mouth of the Orinoco. Instead they set north, traversing the llanos, towards Nuevo Barcelona. From there, a British naval ship took them to Cumaná; Humboldt was enchanted with the impeccable gentlemanliness of the British officers and their excellent education. One year from their departure they reached Cumaná; the first phase of the South American expedition was over.

Humboldt and his crew sailed and stayed in Cuba for a couple of months, then returned to the mainland of South America to make their way to Lima through the Andes. Humboldt studied and compared the different plants west of the Amazon. Humboldt never reached the city of Mérida, but he was close since Mérida is also located in the Andes and therefore the vegetation is analogous. Humboldt also never visited Maracaibo but he was the first scientist to describe the Catatumbo Lighting, a series of powerful and sustained lighting flashes on the Maracaibo Lake. He wrote that these lightning were “electrical explosions that are like a phosphorescent gleam.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Russell Maddicks, *Bradt Travel Guide: Venezuela*, (Guilford, Connecticut: The Globe Pequot Press Inc., 2011), 421.

Ferdinand Bellermann: Life and Paintings of Venezuela



Image 4. Portrait of Bellerman by Carl Steffeck in 1887.

To reveal and explain the importance of both Mérida and Maracaibo in Oscher's composition, one must therefore investigate further the paintings and life of Ferdinand Bellermann. Almost half a century after Humboldt and inspired by his journeys, Ferdinand Bellermann travelled to Venezuela in 1842, and remained there for over two years with a grant from the King of Prussia to further his studies of tropical landscapes. His landscapes are of the romantic style of visual arts, which the Encyclopedia Britannica defines as those developed in Britain in the late 18th century that depict classical mythology in a bizarre and strange way. In regards to classical landscapes, the next generation of artists developed a style that emphasized "transient and dramatic effects of light, atmosphere, and color to portray a dynamic natural world

capable of evoking awe and grandeur.”¹⁶ Bellermann not only painted while in Venezuela, but he took abundant notes about the country, which he would use upon his return to Germany to keep expanding his portfolio. This earned him the name “painter of virgin forests.”¹⁷

Bellermann was born in Erfurt on March 14, 1814, ten years after Humboldt’s return to Europe, and died in Berlin on August 11, 1889. After his basic schooling, he joined the Weimar Academy of Fine Arts where he studied with Blechen, Schirmer, and J. E. Meyer; he furthered his studies in the Royal Academy of Berlin. Landscapes became Bellermann’s specialty and his early career was spent travelling and painting the landscapes of Thüringen, Harz, Rügen Island, Holland, Belgium, and Norway. His early paintings caught Humboldt’s attention and eventually led to his recommending Bellermann to the King of Prussia;¹⁸ Humboldt heard of Bellermann’s landscapes as they were already appreciated in Berlin for their splendor. Humboldt recognized the importance of a visual recollection from the landscapes of South America, especially his beloved Venezuela and Cumaná; thus Humboldt recommended Bellermann’s artistic journey to Venezuela to Frederick William IV of Prussia, whose contributions to art are still recognized today.

From 1842 to 1846, Bellermann travelled to Venezuela to follow Humboldt’s steps. He journeyed to and painted in Caracas, La Guayra, Puerto Cabello, Colonia Tovar, Cumaná, Cumanacoa, Caripe, La Cueva del Guácharo (The Mine of Fat), San Mateo, Valencia, Mérida, and Maracaibo. Of all these, only three were not visited by Humboldt: Colonia Tovar, a German colony established in Venezuela located between Caracas and San Mateo; Mérida, a cold Andes

¹⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica Online, s. v. "Romanticism", accessed February 05, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/508675/Romanticism/8417/Visual-arts>.

¹⁷ Inter-American Development Bank, *Leading Figures in Venezuelan Painting of the Nineteenth Century*, 13.

¹⁸ Eduardo Röhl, *Exploradores Famosos de la Naturaleza Venezolana*, (Caracas: El Compas, 1948), 116.

town located in the west of the country; and Maracaibo, a hot town with a great lake in its center also in the west of Venezuela.

Like most painters of this period, Bellermann's paintings fall into two categories- pencil studies and studio paintings. The first type is done in pencil and outdoors; its goal is to depict in more-or-less faithful detail the plants, bushes, and other landscape characteristics which constitute notes for future use. The second category is works done in the studio. Here, the sketches taken in the field are of great importance. "In the first case, artistic interpretation plays no role, and consequently the sketches lack the personal touch that Bellermann conferred upon his studio re-creations of tropical scenes."¹⁹

Bellermann's paintings are displayed presently in one of the rooms of Berlin's Nationalgalerie, but they can also be found in other German museums as well as German palaces. There are a total of 650 works by Bellermann that reference Venezuela,²⁰ including sketches and paintings. A selection of sketches of plants, forests, and overall vegetation were published by Hermann Kartsen in 1894 in his "Landschafts un Vegetationsbilder aus den 'Tropen Südamerikas'" (Landscapes and paintings of tropical vegetation in South America), a scientific publication that describes the vegetation of South America.

¹⁹ Inter-American Development Bank, *Leading Figures in Venezuelan Painting of the Nineteenth Century*, 14.

²⁰ Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, *Miradas Alemanas – Bellermann*, Accessed February 19, 2015, <http://portal.iai.spk-berlin.de/Bellermann.144+M52087573ab0.0.html>



Image 5. Coast of La Guaira at Sunset. Ferdinand Bellermann 1874.²¹

²¹ Sotheby's, *Ferdinand Bellermann: Costa de La Guaira a la Caída del Sol*, Public Domain work of art: <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2013/latin-american-art-n08998/lot.11.html>

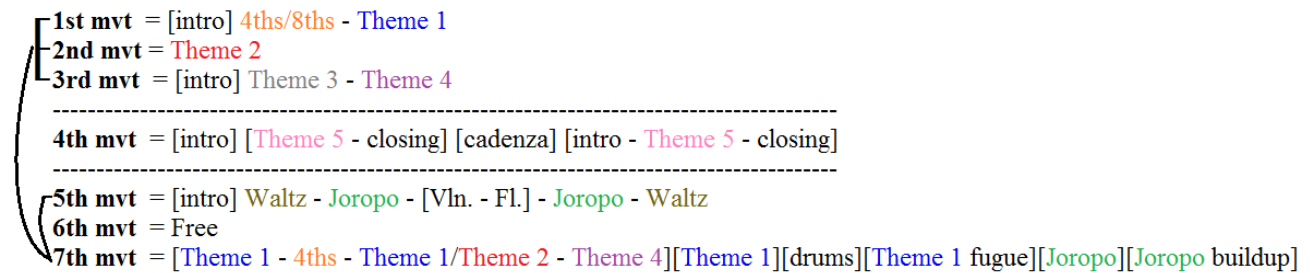
Chapter Three: Conductor's Analysis

Studying Oscher's musical writing provides insight into his compositional techniques and uncovers evidence of his personality in his music. He is adamant about how he wants the piece to sound in performance and writes out specific fingerings and extended techniques in some movements. No more than four bars are without some kind of indication in between, be it dynamic, tempo, technique, or otherwise. Most of the indications are in Spanish; some tempo markings are especially descriptive and are discussed in detail in this monograph. Oscher also includes some aleatoric events and his use of language is compelling and precise. The length of the piece is purposeful and it's on the shorter side. In my opinion, this makes the composition not arrogant. It seems that Oscher is not trying to say more or less in each movement than he has to, but milking each melodic line precise as long as it should be. Throughout this chapter, there are connections drawn between this composition and many other influential works from other composers. This connections are strictly personal and are not indicative of the composer's intentions. Moreover, Oscher is very creative in terms of orchestration. He seldom uses tutti sections, but instead he combines smaller sections of instruments to create very interesting textural-colors. Oscher also uses a quotation device throughout the piece, which unifies the entire piece through these motifs and make for a compelling "storyboard"²², as my professor calls it. The following graph visually depicts the overall story and structure of the piece. Interestingly, the fourth movement (Maracaibo) is the most symmetric and falls right in the middle of the piece. The last movement draws from every movement except the middle one (Maracaibo) and the free-

²² Riazuelo, Carlos. *Conducting classes* at LSU, 2012-2015.

form one (Orinoco). I have color-coded each theme for better location on the last movement.

This chapter includes a detailed analysis of each movement.



Graph 1. Overall structure of the piece.

Movement 1: A bordo de la Fragata Pizarro

This piece begins with “A bordo de la Fragata Pizarro” (Aboard the Pizarro Frigate) and it focuses on the month long journey to Venezuela from Spain crossing the Atlantic Ocean. The first six bars serve as an introduction and follow a regular tempo marking (Maestoso $\text{♩} = 72$). The time signature is in $\frac{3}{4}$ and all instruments have an accent on the first note. The strings and percussion begin *f* while all the winds have *ff*. Each consecutive measure brings a dynamic decrease to arrive at *p* in measure 7. A ritardando on measure 6 makes the change to the allegro more significant.

Oscher’s harmonic pattern is the most interesting aspect of this introduction. Similar to Stravinsky, who used five note patterns throughout his early compositions (e.g. beginning of “Rite of Spring” and finale of “The Firebird”), Oscher used a four-note pattern that changes every two measures. It changes first by ascending a perfect fourth, followed by a whole step. The following image visually represents this pattern on the violins and violas. These harmonic changes refer to those in measures 1, 3, and 5.

m. 1	m. 3	m. 5
b	e	f#
a	d	e
e	a	b
d	g	a
a		

Figure 1. Harmonic movement of the introduction.

Figure 2. String score of the introduction.

Furthermore, Oscher interposed these harmonies by only using those same notes on the woodwinds and brass melodic punctuations. The only exceptions are the “b” on the oboes/horn on measure 3 and the “d” on the clarinets/bassoon, which I have circled on the next image. Oscher also paired one woodwind instrument with one brass instrument on each punctuation: first flute with first trumpet, first oboe with first horn, first clarinet with second trumpet, with the

exception of replacing the second trumpet with bassoon on measure 6. 2nd flute, 2nd oboe, and 2nd clarinet repeat the first two punctuations before dropping off, most likely to make the dynamic contrast more significant.

The image displays a musical score for the introduction of a piece, marked *maestoso* with a tempo of 72. The score is written for a full wind section, including Flute I and II, Oboe I and II, Clarinet I and II in A, Bassoon I and II, Horn in F (two parts), and Trumpet in C (two parts). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into measures, with dynamic markings such as *ff* (fortissimo), *f* (forte), *mf* (mezzo-forte), and *mp* (mezzo-piano) indicating the volume. Red annotations highlight specific musical features: a red oval encircles a triplet of eighth notes in the Oboe I and II parts in measure 4; another red oval encircles a triplet of eighth notes in the Clarinet I in A part in measure 6; and a third red oval encircles a triplet of eighth notes in the Bassoon I part in measure 6. The score also includes articulation marks, slurs, and a *rit.* (ritardando) marking in measure 6.

Figure 3. Wind punctuations in introduction.

On bar seven, Oscher introduces the first descriptive tempo indication with “Allegro Marítimo” (Maritime allegro). He not only communicates the tempo, but also the character and even a visual atmosphere by indicating that the explorers are now traveling through water. The flowing nature of the music also comes from its time signature 6/8, like Rimsky-Korsakov indicated Sinbad in his ship in *Scheherazade*, Debussy did in *La Mer*, or Smetana *Moldau*. The time signature 6/8 and the rhythmic initial pattern of the cellos strongly suggests the fast “Sevillana” rhythm, probably pointing to the fact that the trip started in Spain. This very rhythmic cello drone on a D lasts all the way to square 1. It is important to note that Oscher uses many octaves and perfect fourths throughout this movement. On measure 10, instruments begin to interject in perfect fourths, one ascending and one descending, beginning with the basses and bassoon and followed by the horn. The fourths that are always followed by octave jumps (on the first movement) are used as transitions between the statements of the melodic material (Figure 4). These fourths are present throughout the piece and are the three-note motive that Oscher referred to in chapter one as the motive stated every time Humboldt travels through water, which can also be found in the movements *Orinoco* and *Angostura*.



Figure 4. Perfect fourths followed by descending octave jumps.

On measure 13, there is a dissonant e on the second violins that creates a bit of tension, but quickly disappears. This dissonance gives the passage more color and it occurs again on

measures 18 and 31 on the clarinets. From the beginning of the 6/8 to square 1, these small interjections serve also as introductory. On measure 22, the first glimpse of the main melody becomes fragmented on the strings, serving as a foreshadowing of what is to come. The following image (Figure 5) compares the violins and violas statements on measures 22 and 23 against measures 29 and 30 (which can also be found in 40 and 41 by the flute, 49 and 50 by the bassoon and cellos, 62 and 63 by the violins, and 79 and 80 by the first violins). Figure 6 expands on Figure 5 by showing a full statement of what I will subsequently call B.



Figure 5. Comparison of measures 22 and 23 with 29 and 30, both stated in the violins and violas.



Figure 6. Complete statement of B (second part of the main theme) in measure 29.

It is important to note that B (the second and most used part of the main theme in diverse quotations) contains an emphasis on beats 3 and 6. This accent on weak beats gives it a Venezuelan folkloric flavor. The statement of B (Figure 6) is usually used as an answer to A (Figure 8), although in some occasions it is stated on its own. Oscher, however, only gives complete statements of Figure 5 twice, the first two times on measures 29 and 40; the rest are varied slightly (Figures 9, 10, 11, and 12). Furthermore, the first time that Figure 6 is stated, it is preceded by a melodic introduction that only occurs one time through the movement (Figure 7).

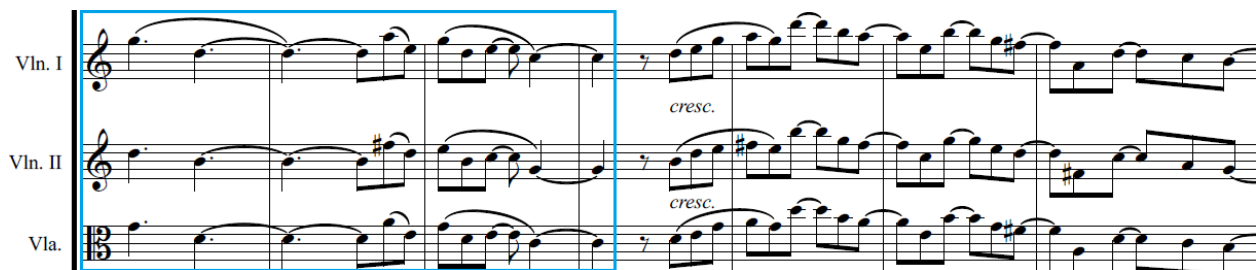


Figure 7. Blue square delineates unique melodic introduction.



Figure 8. Complete statement of A and B, the main melody.



Figure 9. Extension of the B theme by the bassoon in measure 48.



Figure 10. Fragmentation of the B theme in the middle section (measure 61) in the first violins.



Figure 11. Extension of the B theme by the violins in measure 83.

The last statement of the B theme happens the same way it was introduced, fragmented over three measures (see measure 22 against measure 93). Figure 12 displays the last statement of B and it is juxtaposed with the first statement. The last statement is transposed a minor 6th above the first statement and instead of being played by three string instruments, it is only played by the first violins.

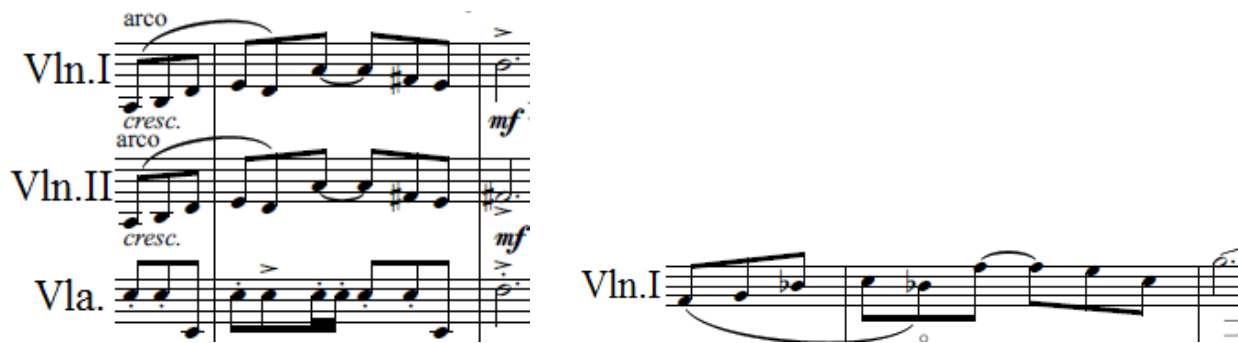


Figure 12. First and last statements of the B theme. Fragmented, reduced, and transposed.

The middle section from square 3 to square 4 uses various time signature modulations between 6/8 and 9/8. Oscher begins this sections by using the 4ths and 8ves from the beginning. Halfway through the middle section (m. 61), Oscher states the B fragmented in the middle of all the commotion of the other instruments, a nod to classical development sections. These fragmentations occur on measure 62 by the violins, 64 by the violas and horns, 67 by the horns violas and cellos. The entire movement grows toward the middle section and the statement of B in measure 61 and recedes after square 4 near the end. There is a last statement of the main theme with cellos and violins between measures 77 and 84. The next graph shows the overall structure of the first movement.

intro	Fundamental Ideas				Citation of Ideas and Fragmentation of Ideas							
	4ths/8ves	B	ABAB		4ths/8ves	Bfrag+Bfrag+Bfrag+Bfrag	AB	4ths/8ves+Bfrag				
			(theme x2)				(theme)					
m. 1-6	m. 7-25	m. 26-33	m. 36&45	m. 55-60	m. 62	m. 64	m. 67	m. 69	m. 75	m. 85	m. 93	

Graph 2. Reduction of movement 1.

Movement 2: Cumaná Bajo las Estrellas

“Cumaná Bajo las Estrellas” (Cumaná under the stars) focuses on the starry nights of Cumaná and is attacca from the first movement. As Humboldt was fascinated with the night sky of Cumaná, Oscher assures that this important characteristic is present in the composition. Oscher uses some clever devices throughout the movement to depict the meteor shower that Humboldt witnessed. The movement starts in $\frac{3}{4}$ and the tempo marking is stated as “andante estrellado $\text{♩} = 78$,” which translates to “starry andante $\text{♩} = 78$.” Once again, Oscher’s tempo marking does more than to set the beat pattern- it paints an image of stars. The triplet figure present throughout the first movement stops after the first measure, and gives the feeling that the sea travel is over and Humboldt has arrived on firm land. This movement uses one main melodic idea, which circles through different instruments and every statement is texturally different. The first part of the movement lasts fourteen measures and sets the mood of the movement. The main theme of the movement is played by the piccolo and oboe (Figure 13), and it is then restated by the flute and bassoon in measure 106. It is important to note that this theme has agogic accents on the upbeats and the first time it is heard, with all the held notes on the other instruments, feels as though the upbeats are the downbeats. After the first part is over, when there is more rhythmic stability, the listener retroactively understands that the theme was on the upbeats and not the downbeats. Between the first two statements of the theme in the introduction, Oscher adds acciaccaturas on the piccolo and oboe (Figure 14), which give the movement a mood reminiscent of the introduction to Ravel *Daphnis et Chloe*. This melody is underlined by aleatoric glissandi/harmonics on the strings. Oscher clarifies how to play them, but gives the players freedom to make these glissandi their own (Figure 16). Oscher’s indication reads, “descending

glissando with harmonics on the g string (random rhythm).²³ These devices of acciaccaturas and glissandi represent the shooting starts. Moreover, some harmonic stability is established by the clarinets and bassoons who play two major chords (G major and A major) repeatedly (Figure 15). Oscher use of these devices creates a mood of mystery and wonder.



Figure 13. Statement of the movement's theme by the piccolo and oboe.



Figure 14. Representing shooting stars by the piccolo and oboe reminiscent of Ravel.

²³ Oscher, Erain. *Los Viajes de Humboldt*. Pg. 10.

Cl.I

Cl.II

Bsn.I

Bsn.II

p

p

p

p

G-A - G - A

Figure 15. Harmonic stability by the bassoons and clarinets playing G major and A major chords.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

*

*

*

*

*

* glissando descendente con harmónicos en la cuerda Sol (ritmo aleatorio)

Figure 16. The harmonic glissandos on the strings and Oscher's indication.

The rest of the movement contains descending sixteenth notes that are stated in a repeated pattern and are juxtaposed against sixteenth-note quintuplets (Figure 17), which underline the main theme and recall *Daphnis et Chloe*. This interplay between sixteenths and sixteenth-quintuplets has deep roots in Venezuelan folkloric music and can be found throughout the folk literature.



Figure 17. Juxtaposition of sixteenth note against sixteenth-note quintuplets.

While Figure 17 is in progress at square 6, the main theme is played as a violin solo and is then played right after in the entire violin section. Here, the listener should retroactively think about the theme as being on the upbeats.

Subsequently, there is a seven bar transitional passage (m. 119-125) that is written with a diminuendo and the last five bars are in 2/4. The first two bars of this transition are rhythmically complex. The figure 17 rhythmic pattern continues while other instruments play eighth-note, eighth-note triplets, and the harp plays dotted eighth-note/sixteenth-note pattern (Figure 20). The last five bars of the transition give the impression that the movement might end with the woodwind trills and the half-note answer on the string harmonics (Figure 18). Interestingly, these harmonics are derived from the first notes heard on the piece (Figure 1) but the only difference is the d instead of b (Figure 19).



Figure 18. Shortened score-view of the trills and pizzicato on the 2/4 section. Flute, oboe, clarinet, and cello.

m. 1 of first movement	m. 123 of second movement
e	e
d	d \sharp
b	b
a	a

Figure 19. Harmonic comparison of both movements.

Figure 20. Reduced view of score page 13 to illustrate rhythmic complexity.

The time signature returns to $\frac{3}{4}$ in square 7 and while the second violins, violas, and cellos play the random descending-glissandos of the beginning, the first violins continue playing the descending sixteenth note pattern; the violin solo plays the theme one whole-step higher than previously stated (Figures 21 and 22). There is another short three-bar transition between 131 and 133. In square 8, the sixteenth note pattern is transformed into sextuplet undulations on the flute and solo violin while all other instruments disappear for two measures. In 136, the oboe, clarinets, viola, and cello are added, and the bassoon and horn play the melody a perfect fifth lower than in the beginning (Figure 23).



Figure 21. Main theme as it was stated in measure 2 by the piccolo.



Figure 22. Theme transposed one whole-step higher in measure 128 and played by the solo violin.

Figure 23. Theme transposed one perfect fifth lower than the beginning statement in measure 136.

The last statement of the theme is played by the strings with a one bar introduction by the first violins and cellos. The violins and cellos play in unison the same perfect fifth lower than the bassoon and horn just played, but the second violins and violas play harmonically under it (Figure 24). On the final bar, every instrument plays either G, D, or A, which are two perfect fifths stacked, and the solo violin plays a B in harmonics, which offers harmonic ambiguity. Moreover, the flute keeps playing the undulating sextuplets and the rest of the winds play constant eighth-notes and crescendo. The last three measures of the movement have a ritardando and offer a remnant of the rhythmic variety in the flute and oboe (Figure 25), while the rest of the orchestra plays a calmer diminuendo into a final *pp*. Here, for the first time since the piece commenced, there is a pause between movements.

Figure 24 shows the last statement of the theme with underlying harmony. The score includes staves for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabasso. It features dynamic markings like *mf*, *cresc.*, *f*, *dim.*, and *pp*, along with articulation like *arco* and *senza sord.* The harmony is indicated by letters CM, bm, CM, a d c, CM, and BM at the bottom.

Figure 24. Last statement of the theme with underlying harmony.

Figure 25 shows the remnant of the rhythmic complexity at the end of the piece by the flute and oboe. The score is marked *molto rit.* and features triplets and dynamic markings like *f*, *dim.*, and *pp*.

Figure 25. Remnant of the rhythmic complexity at the end of the piece by the flute and oboe.

The next graph is a reduction of the second movement. The upper part delineates who plays the melody and the lower part delineates its accompaniment.

m.98	m.107	m.112	m.116	m.119-125	m.128	m.131-133	m.136	m.140
picc. - flute		solo vln. -	1st vlms. -	transition	solo vln. transition		bsn/hn	tutti
string glissandi		woodwinds	sixteenths+quintuplets		glissandi+sixteenths		sextuplets	

Graph 3. Reduction of second movement.

Movement 3: Mérida

Mérida is a particular movement because it is a folkloric merengue in 5/8, which is very popular in Venezuela. There are two things to note here, though. The first one is that the

Venezuelan merengue is not the popular dance of the same name, which originated in the Dominican Republic and became very popular in all of the Americas after 1980 or so, together with the apparition of the “salsa” rhythms from Latin American musicians in New York. The second note is that the typical 5/8 rhythm of the “merengue” has two different “tempi” in Venezuela: a faster one popular in the Northern part of the country called “merengue” proper, and a slower one typical of the Andes (Southwestern) region of the country, where it is called “bambuco”. The city of Mérida is right in the middle of the Andes region. The composer titles the movement “merengue” but indicates a rather slow tempo, more adequate for the “bambuco,” and adds the indication “merengue montañoso,” or “mountainous merengue” (the only important mountains in Venezuela are in the Andes region, where Mérida is located.)

The most particular aspect of this short movement (67 measures) is that it has two clear melodic ideas (A and B). Both of these melodies are similar in one special feature, which is the use of a downward leap followed by an ascending second. Oscher seems to be letting us taste the theme in small bites before giving us a full meal of it in the last statement. This is important because it is not until the piece is almost over that we retroactively understand that all those small bites are derived from the final statement of the theme. This is also important as Oscher used this technique in the second movement in the rhythmic stability and now he uses it for melodic stability. The rest of the thematic statements are derived from the main theme but are transformed and fragmented throughout. Moreover, every melody in this movement has the same characteristics: 1. Ascending into higher registers with the use of both step-wise and leap motion; 2. Descending into lower registers using the same devices; 3. Always ending the melody on a three note motive of a descending 3rd followed by an ascending 2nd (Figure 26), and in the first melodic material, a 4th followed by a 2nd which heralds that the melody is about to end (Figure

27). Conversely, the next two times that we hear the first melody the 4th + 2nd are followed by a 6th + 2nd (Figure 28).



Figure 26. Very last measure of the movement. The violins play the ending motif.



Figure 27. The clarinet plays the first melodic material ending like so.

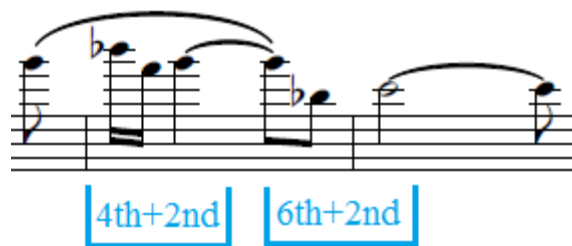


Figure 28. The flute plays the first melodic material ending like so.

The tempo marking at the beginning of the movement follows the same pattern that Oscher established in the previous movements, another descriptive marking apt for the region's depiction. The tempo reads "merengue montañoso $\text{♩} = 78$ " which translates to "mountainous merengue." The movement begins with an introduction that follows the rules previously stated on Figure 28, this time on a tutti (Figure 29). This is followed by the first melodic theme that is stated three times, beginning with the first clarinet, then the solo violin, and then the first flute (Figures 30, 31, and 32).



Figure 29. Melody A played by every instrument following the ascending, descending, and three-note motif pattern.



Figure 30. Melody A played by the clarinet, which follows the ascending/descending/three-note pattern and the 4th + 2nd herald the end of the melody.



Figure 31. Melody A played by the solo violin. This time the 4th + 2nd is followed by a 6th + 2nd. The last measure is also the first measure of Figure 32.



Figure 32. Melody A played by the flute but this time the 2nds are major instead of minor.

The second melody is stated three times also, a sort of development by the horn in between the 1st and 2nd statements. A most interesting point about this melody is that it follows the contour of a mountain on paper. It starts low and moves gradually up and down, almost like a musical word painting. The first statement is by the oboe with a bassoon counterpart and it has a two-measure extension before the last two measures (Figure 33). The horn plays a fourteen-measure melody, which follows the ascending/descending/three-note pattern, but it is played with a three-measure fragmentation repeated three times before playing the three-note motif (Figure 34). The violins play the second statement of the second melody and the violas harmonize

it; it is incomplete because it is missing the last two measures including the three-note motif (Figure 35). After a three-measure transition, the final statement of the second melody is played by the woodwinds and strings in its entirety and Oscher adds a two-measure closing theme with the three-note motif played pizzicato on the strings (Figure 36).



Figure 33. Oboe plays the B melody and the bassoon ends it with the three note motif.



Figure 34. Horn plays the B melody fragmented.



Figure 35. The B melody is played and harmonized by the strings, but it is missing the last two measures.

Figure 36. Complete statement of the B melody on the last 10 measures. Harmonized the same way as in Figure 35.

This is a tricky movement in terms of rhythm and the conductor must pay special attention when rehearsing that all the instruments play the rhythms with precision. Its irregular beat structure may not be challenging but most entrances are on the upbeats and there are some tricky entrances of which the conductor must be aware.

The following graph is a reduction of the movement and it indicates the three large sections: introduction, first idea, and second idea; and which instruments play it.

m.146	m.150	m.159	m.164	m.170	m.179	m.194	m.200	m.203
intro	A(cl.)	A(solo vln.)	A(fl.)	B(ob.)	B fragmented (hn.)	B short (strings)	transition (3ds+2nds)	B(tutti)
	first idea				developmental	with harmonies	second idea	

Graph 4. Reduction of third movement.

Movement 4: Maracaibo

Maracaibo is a short movement similar to a mini piccolo concerto as the piccolo is heavily featured throughout; it has a short, written cadenza, which fits the length of the movement. The woodblock is also present through the entire movement and it plays a constant sixteenth-note ostinato.

The tempo marking reads “Gaita de Tambora y Pífano ♩ = 76”, which is best understood by defining each of its terms. “Gaita” is a type of folk music that originated in the Zulia state of Venezuela, where Maracaibo is located. It gained public recognition through the 1960s and it is mainly heard around Christmas season. This style features drums such as forro, maracas, cuatro, guiro, and tambora, which is a round drum placed between the player’s legs and played with two wooden sticks. Pífano is another ethnic instrument of this region and it is like a small/high-pitched wooden flute.

The six-measure introduction is reminiscent of 20th century woodwind-quintet writing, such as that of Ligeti *Six Bagatelles*. It features a constant sixteenth-note pattern, with a one-measure rhythmic bassoon solo, and with winds and strings *f* punctuations on measures 2, 4, and 5 (Figure 37).

Maracaibo

12 *Gaita de Tambora y Pifano* $\text{♩} = 76$

Figure 39. First closing section. String view.

Figure 40. Piccolo Cadenza.

Figure 41. Second introduction with the same bassoon triplets as the beginning.



Figure 42. Closing material derived from the first closing section.

intro	theme	closing	cadenza	intro	theme	closing
m.213	m.219	m.229	m.236	m.242	m.246	m.254

Graph 5. Broad structure of the movement.

Movement 5: Caracas

Caracas is an interesting movement because it begins with an emulation of an 18th century waltz that is transformed into a Venezuelan Joropo. Oscher calls it a waltz, however it would more appropriately should have been named a minuet since this was the dance-style which composers used at this time in the late 18th century. The Joropo is a very popular rhythm in fast triple meter and usually sung, shared by the people of the plains both in Colombia and Venezuela, where it has become the Venezuelan folk rhythm “par excellence.” In his travels, Humboldt listened to composers while in Caracas and Oscher acknowledges this. The movement begins with a four-measure introduction (Figure 43) before the actual waltz begins. The waltz features the oboe, followed by the flute and the first violins. The oboe plays two eight-measure phrases with an 18th century trope between the first and the second phrase. This trope is the eingangs which appear in this introduction, similar to Mozart’s classical concertos. The word eingang is translated as entrance, but it is broken down literally as “one way.” In music, eingang

is a term that Mozart coined, which was originally an improvised passage which connects or leads into the music. Oscher is very deliberately making use of this device on this introduction. The first one is found in the oboe between its first and second phrase (Figure 44) and the second one occurs before the flute and violin play their first eight-measure phrase. The phrase of the flute and violin follow the same rhythmic structure but not the same melody (Figure 45). The last phrase of the violin and flute begin the same way as the first phrase did but only the first three measures are repeated. The last three measures are fragmented from the main melody and serve as closing with a *ritardando* at the end (Figure 46).

Figure 43. Reduced Introduction. The high winds play the same as the clarinets and the strings begin with a tremollo.

Figure 44. Oboe's two phrases with the eingang in between.

Figure 45 shows a musical score for the first phrase of the flute/violin. The score includes parts for Flute I (Fl. I), Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The Flute I part begins with a melodic line marked with a *p* dynamic, followed by a blue bracket labeled "---eingang---" indicating the entrance. The dynamics for the other instruments are also marked, with *f* and *mp* being prominent. The score is numbered 279 at the beginning.

Figure 45. First phrase of the flute/violin with the eingang in the beginning.

Figure 46 shows the last five measures of the waltz. The score includes parts for Flute I (Fl. I), Clarinet I (Cl. I), Clarinet II (Cl. II), Bassoon I (Bsn. I), and Bassoon II (Bsn. II). The Flute I part is marked with a *mf* dynamic, followed by a blue bracket labeled "Main melody" for the first measure, a blue bracket labeled "Fragmented rall." for the second measure, and a blue bracket labeled "Fragmented more" for the third measure. The dynamics for the other instruments are also marked, with *mf*, *f*, and *sfp* being prominent.

Figure 46. Last five measures of the waltz, which ends with fragmented material from the melody.

Since the waltz strives to emulate 18th century music/minuets, I formally analyzed the initial harmonies and determined that Oscher uses mostly conventional harmonies. Of the eight chords, six are more conventional and the other two are clusters. The six conventional chords, though, are a modern take on classical harmony because the chord progression especially is very progressive (Figure 47). He moves from “subdominant” chords to “dominant” chords and eventually to tonic, but he changes the flavor of these chords. Every chord is modified in some way, which does not fit the traditional conventions of harmonic chord-progressions.

mp

pizz

Vln. I

p pizz

Vln. II

p pizz

Vla.

p pizz

Vc.

p pizz

Cb.

p pizz

p G9 IV9 Bb+ VI₄⁺ g7 iv7 c+d+eb cluster aø7 vø7 eb+g+a+bb cluster D I₄⁶

Figure 47. Harmonies of the waltz.

Interestingly, Oscher's tempo markings are less descriptive for this movement. He only writes "waltz tempo $\text{♩} = 54$ " for the waltz and "Joropo tempo $\text{♩} = 70$ " for the Joropo.

The Joropo begins in square 16 and like all Joropos, there is a polyrhythmic sense that occurs where the strong beats vary from two beats per measure to three beats per measure. In fact, the strong beat changes every two measures in the dichotomy of the first six measures. The first measure accentuates beats 1 and 3, and the second measure accentuates beat 2, giving the audience the illusion that these beats mark the takt. This sense is shattered on measures three and four where the first measure of this sequence has accents on beats 1 and 2, and immediately are displaced on the upbeats of beat 3 as well as 1 and 2 of the next measure. The last rhythmic pattern on the last two measures really gives a sense that the piece has changed to a two beat per measure pattern. The entire movement contains these three rhythmic patterns used in different

places. I have assigned letters to each of the patterns for better recognition through the movement (Figure 48). The Intro pattern is only heard once, while A and B appear throughout the Joropo.

The musical score for Figure 48 is organized into three main sections: Intro, A, and B. The Intro section (measures 1-3) features a forte-fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic and accents on the first, third, and second beats. The A section (measures 4-6) features a forte (*f*) dynamic and includes a 'div.' (divisi) marking. The B section (measures 7-9) features a forte (*f*) dynamic and includes a 'Duple meter' marking. The Vla. and Vc. staves have 'Triple meter' markings. The Cb. staff has dynamics *ff* and *f*.

Figure 48. Polyrhythm on the first six measures.

Aside from these patterns, there are two points of interest in the Joropo where Oscher combines these rhythmic patterns into single phrases. These are at the heart of the Joropo dance and if you tap your feet with the music, you would not be wrong in your choice of B or C (Figures 49 and 50). These two sections of interest (C and D) are separated by a larger section consisting of B+A+B+A+B before square 17.

C

-----duple-meter upbeats-----

8va

mf *cresc.* *F*

mf *cresc.* duple-meter downbeats

mf duple

mf *cresc.* triple

mf *cresc.*

mf *cresc.*

mf *cresc.*

mf *cresc.*

Figure 49. Figure C, combining strong beats on measure 311.

The image displays a musical score for a section labeled 'Figure D'. The score is written for a full orchestra, including Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabasso (Cb.). The music is in 3/4 time and features a complex rhythmic structure with multiple measures. The score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 1-7) shows a complex rhythmic pattern with various note values and rests. The second system (measures 8-14) continues the pattern, with a key signature change to one flat (B-flat) in measure 10. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *dim.* (diminuendo). The notation includes various note values, rests, and articulation marks, indicating a highly complex rhythmic structure.

Figure 50. Figure D and its rhythmic complexity.

In terms of conducting, the Joropo should be conducted in one because the duality of 2 beats per measure against 3 beats per measure could make the players confused if it was conducted in one or the other. Instead, conducting it in one will make the players play their poly-rhythms in time.

The waltz returns in square 18 and it follows the same melodic and rhythmic structure as the beginning waltz but with different instrumentation. This time, the clarinet replaces the oboe on the first phrase and the flute and bassoon replace the oboe on the second phrase. This ending only features two phrases plus a two-measure extension (Figure 51) instead of four phrases as at the beginning.



Figure 51. Second phrase of the oboe at the beginning.

A musical score for four staves: Fl.I, Ob.I, Cl.I, and Bsn.I. The score shows a phrase ending with a two-bar extension. The extension is highlighted with a blue box and labeled "extension". Dynamics include "rit.", "dim.", and "p".

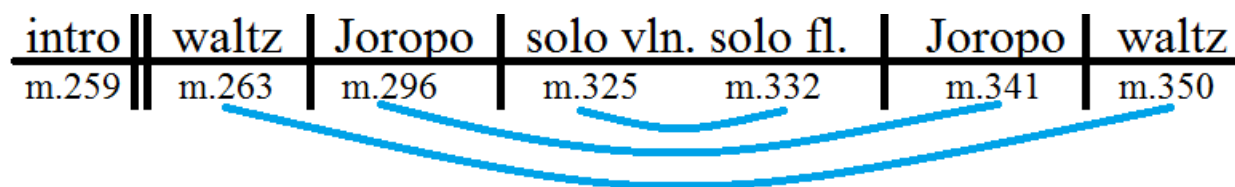
Figure 52. Last phrase of the movement with a two bar extension.

The last measure of the movement completely changes the character of the movement to a darker tone with a “d” minor-chord sforzando with a half-step trill (Figure 53). This serves as a launching point to the next movement because it is attacca.

Musical notation for the last measure of the movement "Caracas". It features four staves: Timp., Vla., Vc., and Cb. The time signature is 2/4. The notation includes a sforzando (sf) dynamic, a trill (tr), and the instruction "arco" for the Cb.

Figure 53. Last measure of Caracas.

The broad structure of the movement is a palindrome, but it is not a strict palindrome because the last statements of both the Joropo and the waltz are half as long as the first statements. The next graph represents this.



Graph 6. Reduction of the movement. The last Joropo and waltz are considerably shorter than the first.

Movement 6: Orinoco

Regarding the tempo of this movement, Oscher wrote “fluyente ♩ = 72,” which translates to flowing and brings forth the mental image of this prominent river. This movement contains many aleatoric elements in terms of improvisation as well as compositional techniques. The main motif of the movement is a sixteenth-note undulating passage that is present throughout most of the movement. This repeated two-measure motif (Figure 54) contains mostly half-tones, two whole-tones, five minor-thirds, and two major-thirds.



Figure 54. Main motif of the movement. The dotted line delineates half-tones.

This motif begins in the strings and the woodwinds and tutti also play it later in the composition, but it does not follow an even structure. Moreover, this motif varies between statements of one, two, or three measures, making it even more uneven structurally. While this motif flows, there are written improvisational-punctuations in the woodwinds. After three statements of the main motif, Oscher gives a one-measure statement of the theme, more specifically, the second measure of Figure 54. Then, Oscher transforms the motif to fit in a one-measure structure, which he then repeats for four measures in the cellos (Figure 55). This second

motif relies heavily on accents on the third beat by the woodblock, harp, and first violin (Figure 56).



Figure 55. One-measure transformed motif on measure 378.

Figure 56. Accents on the third beat over the modified motif.

Next, there is a texture change after the main motif disappears and it is replaced by a four-measure closing/transitional passage (Figure 57). Here, the bassoons and lower strings play a mysterious melody that is reminiscent of Debussy *Afternoon of a Faun*.

Figure 57. Texture change that could be transitional or closing.

The next section is comprised of two eight-measure phrases and it features extended techniques on various instruments. Here, Oscher emulates the unknown nature of the jungle. He switches the woodwind instruments to alto flute and English horn to give the section a darker color and involves the bassoon and clarinet in this conversation. In the beginning eight measures, the woodwinds take turns playing a written improvisation that lasts two measures each beginning with the alto flute, followed by the English horn, the bassoon, and ending with the clarinet (Figures 57, 58, 59 and 60). While the woodwinds play this melodic material, the strings play uncommon techniques beginning with the Bartok Pizzicato every two measures and lasting three repetitions, and the last one is displaced two beats early (Figure 61). The Bartok Pizzicato is an extended string technique, referred to as snap pizzicato where the string is held high and released so that it snaps the fingerboard. Also every two measures, the violin solo plays battuto rebound on one single note which is lowered by a half-step every time (Figure 61); this technique is performed by putting enough pressure on the bow so that it continuously bounces on the string. The clarinet's phrase could be considered a small cadenza or possibly an eingang because it is only one measure long, but also because it is the only instrument that has any melodic movement (Figure 60). This one measure has an *accelerando* and gives an introduction to the improvisational techniques on the woodwinds. Oscher directs these eight measures to decrease in tempo.



Figure 58. Written improvisation on the flute.

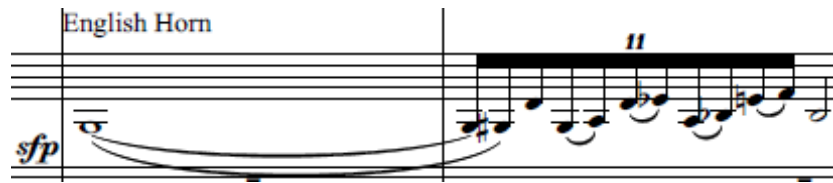


Figure 59. Written improvisation on the English horn.



Figure 60. Written improvisation on the bassoon.

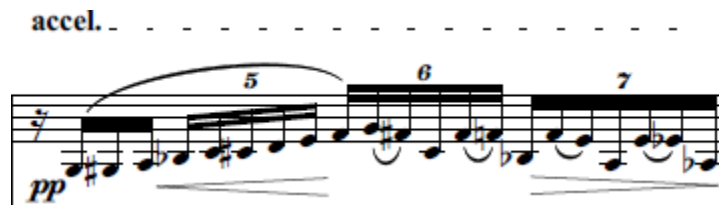


Figure 61. Written improvisation/eingang on the clarinet.

Figure 62. Extended techniques on the strings while the woodwinds play the previous figures.

On the next eight measures another one-measure variation of the motif returns with a return to the Tempo I in one of the most interesting sections in the whole composition. Here, Oscher gives indications to the flute, bassoon, and English horn to begin every two measures to improvise jungle sounds. He also uses the woodblock to give this section a mysterious texture and it sounds almost like a simulation of jungle insects (Figure 63).

Improvisar sonidos de selva

A. Fl.

Cl. II

Timp.

W.B.

(Tutti)

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

pp

p

pizz

arco

p

pp

p

Improvisar sonidos de selva

Figure 63. First four measures of jungle sounds.

Improvisar sonidos de selva

Eng. Hn.

Cl.I

Cl.II

Bsn.II

W.B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

arco

p

pizz

arco

p

pizz

arco

p

pizz

Figure 64. Last four measures of jungle sounds. The woodblock rhythms increase.

Subsequently, the woodwinds are indicated to stop improvising and the next six measures serve as a transitional passage where the woodwinds begin playing the one-measure motif in a layered fashion. The alto flute begins, the clarinet starts on the third measure, all flutes oboes and clarinets begin on the fourth measure, and the motif is played tutti on the fifth measure. On the last two measures of this transitional passage, the texture is thinned by only the flute and oboe playing a sextuplet-descending motif that lasts one beat, and only the clarinets and cello play a

pianissimo whole note on the last measure. Oscher indicated that the cello was to be played without mutes, tremolo, and towards the bridge. Also on this last held note, the flute is given an extended technique indication to play with both trill keys, giving the trill an airy sound.

From measure 409 to the end, there is a textural and dynamic buildup where the beginning two measure motif returns. The motif is played by different or more instruments every two measures. The buildup is also achieved by diverse string techniques. The strings begin playing pizzicato, switch to con legno, and finish with regular bow. The cellos, playing the tremolo, have another peculiar indication; Oscher indicated for the cellos to keep playing the tremolo but also to begin a slow glissando and to slowly move the bow from the bridge to its regular position. On top of the motif, the woodwinds play fast and written-improvisational punctuations, as before. Also, the alto flute is indicated to play the main motif with another extended technique, a unique type of articulation; the indication reads “tsch” on every note of the motif (Figure 65) and it indicates exactly what the player is to do. This plosive produces much air and the little air that enters the flute produces the correct note, while the articulation is produced by its indication.

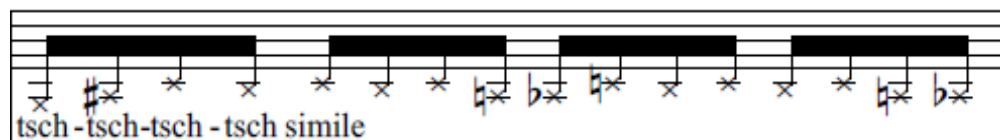


Figure 65. Specific articulation on the flute.

Additional instruments begin to play the motif and some play a new sextuplet undulating motif (Figure 66). Also, the woodblock begins playing the jungle sounds again on square 23, and from square 23 to 24 there is a marked accelerando and crescendo ending with a complete-silence G.P on the measure before square 24.



Figure 66. New undulating motif layer.

In the last three measures of the movement, the alto flute plays the main motif very slowly in augmentation. The clarinet joins the flute on the second to last measure and the last chord is a very fulfilling e major 9th chord played by the strings (Figure 66).

Figure 67. Last three movements of the piece.

This movement does not require a graph reduction because it does not follow a clear structure. It is very impressionistic in the sense that it only has one motif, of the undulating notes, to join the movement together. This lack of formal structure gives it a more mysterious and jungle-like character.

Movement 7: Angostura

Angostura (the largest and most important Venezuelan city along the Orinoco river) is a great compositional movement for Oscher because he presents various themes from the entire composition, most of which are slightly altered. The main themes presented in Angostura are

those of movements 1, 2, 3, and 5. The tempo marking in this movement is not descriptive and it reads “Maestoso $\text{♩} = 76$ ”. The first phrase is nine bars long and it presents fragmented sections from the first movement. A two bar introduction before the first one-bar fragmentation uses accents every two beats on the lower instruments to emphasize its rhythmic complexity. These first two bars are presented twice consecutively but the second fragmentation is transposed one whole-step down (Figure 69). On bar seven, Oscher introduces a different fragmentation from movement one, which lasts two measures, followed by the first fragmentation (Figure 70). Figure 68 presents the whole phrase from the first movement from which these fragmentations stem.



Figure 68. Phrase from the first movement.

Figure 69. Reduced score view of first six measures.

The image displays a musical score for a symphony, specifically focusing on the last three bars of the first phrase. The score is written for a full orchestra, including Flute (Fl.), Piccolo (Picc.), Oboe I (Ob. I), Oboe II (Ob. II), Bassoon I (Bsn. I), Bassoon II (Bsn. II), Horn I (Hn. I), Violin I (Vln. I), and Violin II (Vln. II). The time signature changes from 3/4 to 4/4 and then to 6/8. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score is marked with 'mf' (mezzo-forte) and 'f' (forte). A blue bracket at the top indicates 'new fragmentation from 1st mvt' for the first two bars and 'previous fragmentation from 1st mvt' for the third bar. The third bar is also marked 'rall.' (rallentando). The score shows various musical notations, including triplets, sixteenth notes, and rests.

Figure 70. Last three bars of the first phrase with the new and previous fragmentations.

The next section contains a tempo change and it also recalls the three-note-recurring figure from the first movement. The new tempo reads *tranquilo* $\text{♩} = 76$ and it begins with an ostinato figure in the violas, which also stems from the 10 measures before square 3 of the first movement. After three statements of the three-note-motif by the first horn, cellos, and violins (Figure 71), Oscher begins to state themes from different movements. He begins with the Cumaná theme and a small fragmentation from the first-movement at the same time (Figure 71). Two statements from the Mérida theme follow, but are rearranged slightly to fit from 5/8 to 6/8 and are played by the flutes, the clarinets, and the violins (Figures 72).

Figure 71. Themes from different movements stated simultaneously.

Figure 72. First statement of the Mérida theme.

Subsequently, the clarinet plays the Mérida theme the same way as the other instruments did with a smaller accompaniment. In Square 27, the ♩ becomes ♩ and the accompaniment from

Maracaibo returns, but the melody that is stated is that of the 1st movement and is fragmented into three sections/instruments (Figure 73).

Figure 73. 1st movement melody fragmented over Maracaibo's accompaniment.

On square 28, Oscher includes a percussion solo that resembles Venezuelan gaita-rhythm with the strings playing percussively on their instruments (Figure 74, 75, and 76). He transforms the takt into the measure beat by indicating $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$ when the percussion starts. The gaita-rhythm stems mainly from the dichotomy between eighth-notes and eighth-note triplets. The percussion plays this rhythm while the bassoon and cello play the first movement theme. This time, though, the first movement's fragment is followed by six measures of new material that work as a fugue. This new subject is stated every six measures by different instruments.

28

Maracas

Solo de Percusión

Mres.

W.B.

Hp.

(Vln. Solo)

Vln.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Vc.

Cb.

Solo

Solo

(Solo Vc.)

Figure 74. Textural change with percussion solo and string percussion.

Bsn. I

Hn. I

Mres.

W.B.

Vln.

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

arco

(Tutti)

arco

Figure 75. Fugue.

The image displays a musical score for the song "The Rose Tree." The score is arranged in a system with multiple staves. The instruments and parts included are:

- CL.I** (Clarinete I): Treble clef, playing a melodic line with some rests.
- Bsn.I** (Bassoon I): Bass clef, playing a rhythmic line with many slurs and accents.
- Hn.I** (Horn I): Treble clef, playing a melodic line with many slurs and accents.
- Mrcs.** (Maracas): Percussion, indicated by a double bar line and a cross symbol.
- W.B.** (Wood Block): Percussion, indicated by a double bar line and a cross symbol.
- Vln. II** (Violin II): Treble clef, playing a melodic line with many slurs and accents.
- Vla.** (Viola): Bass clef, playing a melodic line with many slurs and accents.
- Vc.** (Violoncello): Bass clef, playing a rhythmic line with many slurs and accents.

The score is written in 2/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is characterized by frequent slurs and accents, suggesting a lively and expressive performance. The vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass) are also present, with lyrics written below the staves.

Figure 76. Continuation of fugue.

Ob. I

Cl. I

Bsn. I

Hn. I

Mrcs.

W.B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Vc.

Cb.

arco

pizz

Figure 77. Continuation of fugue.

Subsequently, the fugue is interrupted and the woodwinds play a different variation of the first movement's motif (Figure 78), and the accompaniment morphs from fugue to Joropo (Figure 78).

Figure 78. Reduced score view of the Joropo variation.

This Joropo lasts twenty measures with a crescendo on the last two measures, which gives way to the Caracas joropo's return (Figure 79). The Caracas joropo is stated fully twice with tutti as a transitional passage in between, and the theme is transposed one whole-step down.

Figure 79. Reduced score-view of the Caracas Joropo.

From square 30 to the end, a big buildup occurs, which begins with a large textural reduction (Figures 80 and 81). Instruments continue joining in playing the Joropo and the last statement of it is played tutti with a two-measure ending on a unison d (Figure 81).

Figure 80. Textural reduction and beginning of buildup.

567 *mp*

Fl.

Picc.

Ob. I

Ob.

Cl. I

Cl. II

Bsn. I

Bsn. II

Hn. I

Hn. II

C Tpt. I

Timp.

Mrcs.

W.B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

Figure 81. Continuation of the Joropo buildup as more instruments join in.

Figure 82. Last eight bars of the piece ending with a unison d.

The following graph shows each of the sections of the movement and their characteristic theme.

Maestoso	Tranquilo	faster	faster					
1st mvt frag	4ths+combining + Merida	1stmvt	drums	fugue	fugue	Caracas Joropo	textural buildup	
	1st&2nd mvt	fragments		on 1st mvt	Joropo	verbatim	using 1st mvt Joropo	
m.427	m.436+m.440 + m.445	m.463	m.475	m.486	m.510	m.530	m.560	

Graph 7. Reduction of last movement.

My personal opinion of this piece is that this young composer has succinctly and non-arrogantly depicted a very complex subject on this short piece. It is a very well written composition, which uses great orchestration techniques and fabulous melodic and harmonic material. Leonardo da Vinci said that “art is never finished, only abandoned”

and my only reproach is that the last movement feels as though it ends abruptly. I would have preferred a slightly longer movement at the end to create more energy and excitement. As a conductor, I will find a way to energize this ending either dynamically or by asking the orchestra to repeat the last Joropo twice at least. I will also advise the composer on making this revision in the future for a more climactic ending. This piece is also significant because it paints the country of Venezuela in the magnificence of its natural beauty and it is almost reminiscent of a simpler time from our modern culture.

Conclusion

Studying *The Journeys of Humboldt* has expanded my orchestral music knowledge, especially that of living Venezuelan composers. This important composition also deals with the early history of Venezuela and Oscher's attention to detail makes for a well-rounded musical work. Delving into the mind of Efrain Oscher has also helped me not only understand his brilliant compositional techniques, but also has given me a glimpse into the life of a dedicated musician involved in various aspects of music as a performer and composer. His resolve for, dedication to, and entrepreneurship of the art of music are inspiring for a student like me. As I complete this research, I am pleased that I was able to fulfill my original goal of writing about a living composer from Venezuela. Not only was this expectation met, but it was surpassed by the added aspect of the historical significance of the piece. It is imperative that more research should focus on the works of contemporary composers.

Programming Possibilities and Financial Considerations

When programming this composition, a number of things must be considered and included. This would be a great piece to be programmed for a South-American repertory concert. Moreover, this could serve as a good introduction to Venezuelan music since so many popular styles are represented. Furthermore, this is also a great piece for educational purposes since the story of Humboldt is important to the story of Venezuela and to scientists all over the world. As far as I know, this piece only has one recording and it was been performed at least two times.

In terms of difficulty, it is a challenging piece but it should be able to be played by any collegiate orchestra. I wouldn't recommend it for a high-school group, although it may be able to be performed by an excellent high-school orchestra. When preparing to conduct this particular piece it is important to note that the woodwind section, especially the flute section, must be solid since the composer, as a flute player who performs this piece, added extended techniques that are not that easy. In terms of size of the orchestra, the composer did not stop when he composed the first chamber orchestra version and ultimately composed three different versions, each for a different sized orchestra. These different versions give budgetary flexibility, since a small chamber orchestra or a large full orchestra can perform the composition. The chamber orchestra only requires five wind players plus the string section, while the full orchestra version requires eighteen wind and percussion players plus the string section. The piece is also not especially long (less than 20 minutes), a consideration for audience engagement. This could work also as a great exhibition piece to younger audiences since extended techniques make it fresh and exciting.

This document concisely depicts the journey of Humboldt through Venezuela. What other writings have very thoroughly depicted in long books, this document has expressed them succinctly. There is also not much information about Bellermand out there in the academic world, which makes this document important for a Bellermand resource and also encourages others to pursue this painter in future research endeavors. Writing this document has been a great personal experience which has enriched me in

many ways from historical, to cultural, to academic and has eventually granted me a doctorate degree in orchestral conducting. I plan on conducting this piece repeatedly in the future and I am forever grateful to all parties involved in the creation of this piece and this document.

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