

Daniel Catán

Daniel Catán's lyrical, romantic style lends itself particularly well to the human voice, which features prominently in the majority of his works. Catán's proficiency can easily be heard in his opera *Florencia en el Amazonas* — the first Spanish-language opera commissioned by a major American company. Catán describes his objective for the opera: "I set out to write beautiful music for a story of the journey to transcendent love; it concerns all of us who have lived love with all its intricacies, subtleties, wretchedness, and glorious happiness."

Catán's intentions are noble and bold. In the eyes of both the public and the critics — who lauded the work's honesty, beauty, and sheer devastating dramatic effect — he accomplished his goals. Some of Mr. Catán's recent highlights include Houston Grand Opera's 50th year celebration with Catán's comedy *Salseipuedes* in 2004, the European premiere of *Florencia en el Amazonas* in 2006, and in 2007 the premiere of *Caribbean Airs* for orchestra, commissioned by the Pacific Symphony.

His influences belie his native land: he has been compared to Debussy, Richard Strauss, and Puccini — with a wisp of Japanese influence. Catán attests gladly to his wide spectrum of influences. "I have inherited a very rich operatic tradition," he says. "In my work, I am proud to say, one can detect the enormous debt I owe to composers from Monteverdi to Alban Berg. But perhaps the greatest of my debts is having learnt that the originality of an opera need not involve the rejection of our tradition (which would be like blindly embracing the condition of an orphan), but rather the profound assimilation of it, so as to achieve the closest union between a text and its music."

Though Catán was born in Mexico he is a product of both British and American schooling, receiving degrees from University of Sussex (in philosophy), University of Southampton and Princeton University — where he studied with Milton Babbitt — before returning to Mexico to take up the post of music administrator at Mexico City's Palace of Fine Arts. There, apart from establishing himself as an essayist writing about music, he came to love opera.

In 1994, the San Diego Opera premiered his symbolist opera, *La Hija de Rappacini* (*Rappaccini's Daughter*) a work written in collaboration with librettist Juan Tovar.

The success of *Rappacini's Daughter* led to Catán's next opera, *Florencia en el Amazonas* — a collaboration between Catán, Columbian author Gabriel García Márquez, and García Márquez's protégée, Marcela Fuentes-Berain. The opera is loosely based on García Márquez's novel *Love in the Time of Cholera*.

Florencia en el Amazonas taps deeply into García Márquez's world of *magical realism*. "It is," says Catán, "the story of the return journey that we all undertake at a certain point in our lives: the moment when we look back at what we once dreamed of becoming, and then confront what we have now become."

Since its premiere in 1996 *Florencia* has been performed by a number of major American opera companies including the Houston and Seattle Opera companies. The European premiere took place in 2006 in Heidelberg, Germany, and it was performed by the Cincinnati Opera in June of 2008.

In celebration of its 50th anniversary, the Houston Grand Opera commissioned Catán's third opera *Salsipuedes, A Tale of Love, War and Anchovies* — a dark comedy which takes place on the fictitious island of Salsipuedes which premiered in 2004. Catán's next opera *Il Postino*, based on the Oscar-winning film, is scheduled to debut at the Los Angeles Opera with Plácido Domingo and Rolando Villazon in the leading roles.

Catán's non-operatic output is full of equally powerful works: *Caribbean Airs* for orchestra with a featured role for the percussion section (2007); *En un Doble del Tiempo (A Fold in Time)* and an *Orchestral Suite* from *Florenia*; *Mariposa de Obsidiana*, for soprano, chorus and orchestra; and the small but charming *Encantamiento*, for two flutes.

His music is published by Associated Music Publishers.

(2009-2010)