

Voces Fantasma:
A Reflection on Immigration Detention
Through Art

Program Notes

J.E. Hernández – Director/Composer

Shannon Murray – Soprano

Apollo Chamber Players

Houston Contemporary Dance Company

FILMATIC Cinema

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston

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jehernandez.com

Program Notes

A note from the composer:

Thank you for coming to see this show. I was detained on August 4, 2013, over 8 years ago now. This experience changed my life forever, but I cannot say that it was quickly or immediately. It was not until 2017, nearly 4 years after I had spent 60 days incarcerated, that I could even speak it about my experience to another. It took three more years after that breakthrough for me to get to this work, Voces Fantasma.

This work is a way for me to communicate to you, the audience, a reality and a truth without the tarnish of bias. I met many, many people there, and though their faces become distorted, obfuscated, and forgotten by the transfiguration of memory through age, the timbre of their voices remains intact and ringing through my memory, forever.

I hope that in the future, people who have gone through this experience can experience this program and know that they can have a life, feeling their souls emancipated from shame, knowing their value as people continues forever.

Voces Fantasma (Eng: ***Phantom Voices***) is a multi-disciplinary program consisting of a 30-35 minute, continuous three-movement performance – honoring the many people Hernández met while inside the facility, who have since become no more than phantom voices in the memory of the artist, continuing the path that his art has taken since the event. The program is made up of music, dance, and film, exploring the way in which each medium can – both together and separately – say something about the phantom voices that are now lost to the eternity of time.

Sounds and images taken directly from the experience are injected into the program, for a palpable element of reality – tangible as well as abstract. Sounds of a vehicle in motion are sampled from the same route that vehicles take from the George Bush Intercontinental Airport to the Houston ICE Detention Facility as they transport migrants – the same route that Hernández experienced in 2013. Sounds, both emulated and real, of prisons and immigrant centers, are manipulated and fused with “music on hold” (music heard in the telephones inside the detention centers as inmates try to call their loved ones).

Shushing, speaking, and different recreations of scenes that unfolded in 2013 emulate real life – the middle movement, titled *Velorio*, deals with a man who attacked another, only to be placed in solitary confinement; his aim of committing suicide going unimpeded as a result. Text for this movement is in Nahuatl – echoing the first real life encounter of the language that Hernández had, all while detained. This Nahuatl speaker was eventually deported. Filming locations include places often visited by Hernández in the wake of this humanitarian disaster – one which continues into today.

Voces Fantasma is the first of a trilogy that deals with immigrant detention by Hernández – the second and third works getting further away from Hernández’s own experience and dealing with the macrocosm of immigrant detention. These are *33,000 Stolen Sunsets* and

Souls on the Desert Floor. We welcome you to visit jehernandez.com to keep up with the composer's work and to follow along with this trilogy as the other works find footing across the country.

The Nahuatl text in the *Velorio* was assembled from a variety of Nahuatl proverbs, compiled over the centuries by various translators and native speakers, and composed by Hernández. Corrections and further insight were provided by the excellent Mexican composer Gabriel Pareyón – we would like to extend a great gratitude to him. Find below a translation of the text:

Nahuatl:

*Mixtlitzalan, poyauhtitlan
cochipatla in tlapatl toloa
ticalaquiz in cuauhtla, zacatla
in choquiztli, in ixayotl
in colotl, in tzitzicaztli
in teuhli, in tlahzolli.
Aocmo huel ca in ixiptli, in iyollo
in ahmo ompa yez moix, moyol
Ma ontlami immixtzi, immoyollotzin
itechpantzinco in Totecuiyo
ximochocaz
Citlalcueye
tinimitzpotania
tinimitzpotania
¿Azo ye centlamantli ipan omitz
mixehuili in Totecuiyo?*

English:

*In between clouds and obscurity
swallowing stupefactions, the toloache
you'll enter the forest, the weeds
crying, tears
the scorpion, the nettle
the dust, the rotten
Your face and your heart have turned
they will not be recognized
Don't hide your face and your heart
from the Lord
cry
Stellar Skirt
I'll cover you in white chalk
I'll cover you in white chalk
Perhaps somehow the Lord has lifted
your countenance?*

People

Performers:

Shannon Murray – Soprano

Apollo Chamber Players:

Matthew J. Detrick – Violin
Anabel Ramirez Detrick – Violin II
Whitney Bullock – Viola
Matthew Dudzik – Cello

Houston Contemporary Dance Company:

Marlana Doyle – Choreography
Jesus Acosta – Dancer
Risa D’Souza – Dancer
Gene Wallis McGrath – Dancer
Dwain Travis – Dancer

J.E. Hernández:

Composer and cinematographer J.E. Hernández (b.1993) is a Mexican-born, Houston-based composer focusing on elevating personal and cultural narrative through his work. J.E.’s music has been featured by distinguished ensembles and organizations such as the Kennedy Center for the Arts, Houston Grand Opera, American Opera Project, Apollo Chamber Players, Foundation for Modern Music, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Contemporary Museum of Art Houston, American Composers Forum, the Brazil National Orchestra, and in a wide variety of films, both in the United States and abroad. He holds a degree from the University of Houston. Past teachers include Marcus Maroney and Gregory Spears.

J.E.’s work focuses on both traditional and multi-disciplinary mediums, and he has collaborated with directors, choreographers, and playwrights. His interest in incorporating his cultural heritage from both his native Tabasco, Mexico, and Houston, Texas led J.E. to create Concertia, a non-profit arts organization for social causes. Its mission statement reads: “To empower social causes through the prism of new music and multi-media art,” resonating with his goal as a composer to engage communities at large.

Recent and upcoming projects include *hela*, a chamber work focusing on the transformative aspect of trauma, commissioned by the Houston Grand Opera’s HGOco, a McKnight Visiting Composer Residency with American Composers Forum, and a fellowship with American Opera Project’s Composers & the Voice program, where he will workshop a wide variety of operatic works with world class singers, culminating in a premiere.

Shannon Murray¹:

Soprano Shannon Murray is a fearless performer of new music. As a second-year Young Artist with DACAMERA of Houston, she has performed chamber music in venues such as the Moody Center of the Arts and has assisted in educational arts integration initiatives in the city of Houston. Her work as a soloist and collaborator has also been featured by distinguished organizations and ensembles such as the Kennedy Center for the Arts, the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, the Houston Chamber Choir, the Apollo Chamber Players, the AURA Contemporary Ensemble and Psophonia Dance Company – work which

¹ Performer Website: shannonsoprano.com

includes the premiere of three new multi-disciplinary programs covering a gamut of topics, from the environmentally conscious to abstract expressionism.

Murray has performed as a soloist in summer festivals such as the Texas Music Festival and the soundSCAPE festival of contemporary music in Cesena, Italy, where she participated in masterclasses with renowned contemporary singer, Tony Arnold. She has studied abroad at the Felix Mendelssohn-Bartoldy Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Leipzig, Germany, where she appeared in Handel's *Giulio Cesare*. Other opera credits include William Bolcom's *Dinner at Eight*, Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld*, and Gounod's *Romeo et Juliette*. She graduated from the University of Houston with a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance.

Apollo Chamber Players²:

Houston TX based Apollo Chamber Players “*performs with rhythmic flair and virtuosity*” (The Strad) and has “found fruitful territory” (Houston Chronicle) through innovative, globally- inspired programming and multicultural new music commissions. Recent winner of Chamber Music America’s prestigious Residency Partnership award, the quartet has performed for sold-out audiences at Carnegie Hall twice in the past five years, and it holds the distinction of being the first American chamber ensemble to record and perform in Cuba since the embargo relaxation.

Apollo is a passionate advocate of contemporary music. In 2014, the organization launched a bold project to commission 20 new multicultural works by the end of the decade. Now approaching its conclusion, 20×2020 features a roster of the world’s leading composers including Pulitzer and/or Grammy- winners Jennifer Higdon, Libby Larsen and Christopher Theofanidis. The group has collaborated with renowned ensembles and artists including the Houston Ballet and Houston Chamber Choir, Grammy/ Emmy winner and Academy Award contributor Vanessa Vo, James Dunham, Ismail Lumanovski, and Indian Classical music star Chitravina N. Ravikiran, among others.

Apollo reaches further into the community by partnering with schools, universities, at-risk youth centers, refugee and veterans service organizations, hospitals, airports, and public libraries, providing performances, educational programs, and entrepreneurship lectures that impact a wider, underserved audience.

Houston Contemporary Dance Company³:

The Houston Contemporary Dance Company’s mission is to ignite passion for contemporary dance by providing world-class professional repertory concert performances and community engagement activities that are accessible to all regardless of race, culture, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, or nationality. The dance company’s members are all from diverse backgrounds – Jesus Acosta, also a Mexican immigrant, will play the lead role in the show.

As Houston’s only repertoire contemporary dance company, HCDC has many new commissions in this first season from choreographers such as Joshua Manculich, Joe Celej, Christian Denice, Sean Carmon, Andrea Dawn Shelley, Hanna Britson and so many more. The company’s dancers come from a plethora of diverse backgrounds, representing the most

² Ensemble Website: apollochamberplayers.org

³ Company Website: houstoncontemporary.org

diverse city in the country. The programs have focused on both superb artistry and an intent on expanding the social footprint of the arts within the city.

FILMATIC's Orlando & Christian Briones⁴:

FILMATIC, a Houston based film production team, is made up of Orlando and Christian Briones – brothers from Houston, Texas. The Briones brothers grew up watching action films and grew an interest in story telling once introduced to Mexican Cinema by their father. They currently focus on creating films that both intrigue and bring a market presence and explores the relationship in between their cultural heritage and the current American paradigm. Their work extends into a national and international level, including working on projects for Discovery, Netflix, NBC et al.

Orlando is a Cinematographer and Director, and has produced feature films, short films and commercials. He has worked for companies such as Vice, Discovery, HP and many others as a Cinematographer. Christian Briones was born in Houston, Texas and graduated from the University of Houston-Downtown in History and Theatre. Working as a screenwriter he has written the feature film "Journey" as well as scripts for several independent clients.

⁴ FILMATIC Studios Website: filmaticcinema.com

jehernandez.com
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