

Florencia Grimaldi:
Latin America's Soprano Heroine

by

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A Research Paper Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Musical Arts

Approved April 2013 by the
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May 2013

ABSTRACT

Although opera is the last musical genre one typically associates with Latin America, Mexican composer Daniel Catán (1949-2011) found surprising success across the United States and overseas with his opera *Florencia en el Amazonas* (1996). Catán blends colorful music with literary elements to create a representation of Latin American culture through language, drama, scenery, and music. Among these elements is *realismo mágico* (magical realism), a significant characteristic of Latin American literature. Indeed, the plot of the opera is influenced by Gabriel García Márquez's novel, *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* (Love in the Time of Cholera, 1985), as well as the poem "Mariposa de obsidiana" (Obsidian Butterfly, 1951) and the short story "La hija de Rappaccini" (Rappaccini's Daughter, 1953), both by Octavio Paz.

To create his protagonist in the opera, Florencia Grimaldi, Catán combines the dramatic qualities of several European soprano heroines. This figure's character development is conveyed largely through her Act I, Scene 2, aria, "Florencia Grimaldi," and her Act II, Scene 17, aria, "Escúchame." An overview of the opera places these two arias into context, and their musical content and text-setting are closely examined in relation to the character of Florencia. Finally, how Daniel Catán creates a soprano heroine from the Latin American perspective is discussed.

Dedicated to my husband, Eduardo, and my parents, Salvador and Catalina.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my committee, each of whom has helped me develop as a musician, performer, and educator. Dr. Amy Holbrook, thank you for your time, patience, and guidance. Carole FitzPatrick, thank you for your instruction, dedication, support, and friendship throughout the years; my experience at Arizona State University would not have been the same without you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES	v
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER	
1 BIOGRAPHY	3
2 <i>FLORENCIA EN EL AMAZONAS</i>	17
3 “FLORENCIA GRIMALDI”	29
4 “ESCÚCHAME”	59
CONCLUSION	88
BIBLIOGRAPHY	91
APPENDIX	
A REPRINT PERMISSION	96
B LIST OF WORKS	99

LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Example	Page
1. “Florenxia Grimaldi,” mm. 20-23	31
2. “Florenxia Grimaldi,” mm. 24-32	33
3. “Florenxia Grimaldi,” mm. 33-43	36
4. “Florenxia Grimaldi,” mm. 44-60	39
5. “Florenxia Grimaldi,” mm. 61-79	41
6. “Florenxia Grimaldi,” mm. 80-86	43
7. “Florenxia Grimaldi,” mm. 87-93	45
8. “Florenxia Grimaldi,” mm. 94-102	47
9. “Florenxia Grimaldi,” mm. 103-115	49
10. “Florenxia Grimaldi,” mm. 116-128	51
11. “Florenxia Grimaldi,” mm. 129-132	52
12. “Florenxia Griamaldi,” mm. 133-144	54
13. “Florenxia Grimaldi,” mm. 145-159	56
14. “Escúchame,” mm. 102-114	64
15. “Escúchame,” mm. 115-126	67
16. “Escúchame,” mm. 127-137	70-71
17. “Escúchame,” mm. 138-143	73
18. “Escúchame,” mm. 144-150	75
19. “Escúchame,” mm. 151-155	76
20. “Escúchame,” mm. 156-163	78
21. “Escúchame,” mm. 164-167	79

Example	Page
22. “Escúchame,” mm. 168-177	81
23. “Escúchame,” mm. 178-186	83
24. “Escúchame,” mm. 187-197	85
25. “Escúchame,” mm. 198-213	86

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, compelling characters, fascinating stories, and passionate music have transformed many into opera enthusiasts. Works by Mozart, Verdi, Puccini, Wagner, and Strauss, among others, comprise the standard operatic repertoire in the Western tradition. Even though Spain is a Western European country and Spanish is among the most-spoken Romance languages in the world, Spanish-language opera has been neither included in the operatic repertoire nor given much research and study.

Because of this unfortunate truth, Mexican composer Daniel Catán (1949-2011) sought to create a new operatic tradition rooted in “the Spanish of Latin America.”¹ To compose Spanish-language operas that evoked this culture, Catán turned to the major Latin American writers for inspiration. His first successful opera, *La hija de Rappaccini*, is based on Octavio Paz’s (1914-1998) 1953 adaptation of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short story, “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (1844). The successful performance of this work in San Diego, California, in 1994 led to a commission from the Houston Grand Opera and the result was *Florencia en el Amazonas* (1996).

Set in the Amazonian jungle, Catán’s *Florencia en el Amazonas* captures elements of the language, drama, scenery, and music of Latin America. Fascinated with the writings of Gabriel García Márquez (b. 1927), who created a “literary boom” in Latin America with the development of *realismo mágico* (magical realism), the plot of opera is influenced by Márquez’s 1985 novel, *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* (Love in the Time of Cholera). In addition to Márquez, the influence of Paz is also apparent.

¹ Lorena Mora-Mowry, “Daniel Catán a Mexican Opera Composer,” *Mujer Latina Today*, <http://www.mujerlatinahoy.com/interviews/video/symphony-opera/item/491-daniel-catán-a-mexican-opera-composer> (accessed February 20, 2012).

Similar to Puccini's "Floria Tosca," Catán's protagonist, "Florenxia Grimaldi," is a renowned opera soprano. After a twenty-year career, the diva returns to her native land of Manaus, Brazil, in hopes of being reunited with her long-lost lover, the butterfly hunter Cristóbal Ribeiro da Silva. During her journey, Catán reveals Florenxia's heartache, anger, and regret for abandoning Cristóbal.

According to Catán,

Florenxia ... [is] the story of the return journey that we all undertake at a certain point in our lives: *nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*, the moment when we look back at what we once dreamed of becoming, and then confront what we have now become.²

Florenxia's final transformation into the rare Emerald Muse butterfly is Catán's twist on the concept of fated women; instead of destroying his soprano heroine, he transforms her into a beautiful creature that is a symbol of rebirth. Although Florenxia sings three arias, Catán conveys her character development primarily through her Act I, Scene 2, aria, "Florenxia Grimaldi," and her Act II, Scene 17, aria, "Escúchame." Close examination of these arias will shed light on Florenxia's character development and how her physical transformation, the ultimate operatic representation of "magical realism," makes her Latin America's soprano heroine.

² Daniel Catán, "Composing Opera: A Backstage Visit to the Composer's Workshop," Lecture, Inter-American Development Bank Cultural Center Lectures Program, Washington, D.C. (August 14, 1997), http://www.iadb.org.ezprozy1.lib.asu.edu/exr/cultural/documents/encuentros/17383_97.22.pdf (accessed August 19, 2011), 9.

CHAPTER 1

BIOGRAPHY

Daniel Catán was born in Mexico City on April 3, 1949. He began piano lessons around the age of four and in 1963, after being admitted to a boarding school in Somerset, he moved to England with the intention of enhancing his piano studies.¹ While in England, Catán won a number of local piano competitions, including first place at the Bath International Music Festival; despite his success, he became less interested in a performance career and more interested in the field of composition.² In an interview with musicologist Leonora Saavedra, Catán said that even though, up to this point in his life, it “meant nothing more than improvising in a rock and roll group,” he was interested in composing.³ Shortly before initiating his studies at the Royal College of Music, however, Catán decided to halt his musical studies and, instead, pursue a degree in philosophy at the University of Sussex.⁴

Interestingly enough, the three years he spent at this institution were musically significant in his life. Catán learned that music was not limited to a solo instrument and, in addition to composing, he became interested in orchestral conducting.⁵ Because the university was located near Glyndebourne, Catán had the opportunity to attend and observe musical rehearsals at the annual opera festival, giving him insight into a

¹ María Ángeles González and Leonora Saavedra. *Música mexicana contemporánea* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1982), 207.

² Ibid., 208.

³ Ibid., 209. This interview was performed in Spanish. All English translations have been completed by the current author.

⁴ Ibid., 208-209.

⁵ Ibid., 209.

professional musician's life beyond the concert stage.⁶ After a short time at the University of Sussex, Catán decided to "be a composer and musician in a broader sense."⁷ He became acquainted with the music professors at the university and began composing his first works within the European tradition of counterpoint and harmony.⁸

In 1970, after completing his degree in philosophy, Catán began his compositional studies at the University of Southampton.⁹ In addition to original compositions, Catán had to learn to compose in historical styles, especially Palestrinian, Classical, and Romantic. Catán mentioned:

I felt it was necessary to submerge myself in all the musical styles of the time, perhaps because of a certain insecurity; and I thought that my insecurity would vanish if I could create what I admired: Mozart concertos and Bach fugues.¹⁰

During his time at the University of Southampton, Catán met the American composer Benjamin Boretz, a student of Milton Babbitt, from whom Catán learned the current compositional techniques and developments in America.¹¹ After graduating in 1973, Catán relocated to the United States and began his graduate studies at Princeton University under the tutelage of Benjamin Boretz, Milton Babbitt, and James K.

⁶ Ibid.; also Glyndebourne Productions Ltd., "Our History," Glyndebourne, <http://glyndebourne.com/brief-history-glyndebourne> (accessed December 29, 2012). Founded in 1934 by John Christie and Audrey Mildmay, the renowned Glyndebourne Festival mounts six opera productions per year. Although the repertoire during the early years of the festival revolved almost entirely around Mozart, the repertoire has expanded to the works of Benjamin Britten, Giuseppe Verdi, and Gioachino Rossini among others. In order to reach a broader audience, the Glyndebourne on Tour was founded in 1968. Every autumn, the Glyndebourne on Tour takes three productions around the United Kingdom. The Glyndebourne Festival and the Glyndebourne on Tour combined present approximately 120 performances per year and reach an audience of approximately 150,000.

⁷ González, 209.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 210. Catán mentions that during his time at the University of Southampton, the composition department included composers Peter Evans, Eric Graebner, and Jonathan Harvey.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 211.

Randall.¹² During his second year, he earned a teaching assistantship and taught music theory to undergraduate students in the program; this, Catán explained, allowed him both to solidify and to move away from certain traditions in harmony and counterpoint.¹³

Until 1977, Catán's compositions were solely instrumental. Fascinated by Mozart's ability to capture a character's personality through music alone, Catán studied Mozart's orchestrations and text settings. Because irony, among other literary devices, exists in literature (e.g., plays, librettos, poems), Mozart's vocal music taught Catán about the importance of conveying the underlying, not literal, meaning of the text. When describing Mozart's text settings, Catán said:

... sometimes the orchestra is saying precisely the opposite of what the text is saying ... those types of situations interested me very much, from there arose [my] book, and from there arose [my] *Ocaso de medianoche*, which is written as if it were a scene in an opera.¹⁴

Ultimately, the text setting and orchestration in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Tatyana's letter scene in Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* influenced Catán's first vocal composition, *Ocaso de medianoche* (Sunset at Midnight). This work for mezzo-soprano and orchestra is based on the poem "El poeta pide a su amor que le escriba" (The Poet Asks His Love to Write to Him) by the Spanish poet and dramatist, Federico García Lorca.¹⁵ Catán explains that, like Tatyana, the poet in Lorca's poem experiences feelings of love, doubt, and hope when calling to his lover.¹⁶

¹² Ibid.; Sean Bradley, "Daniel Catán: A Brief Authorized Biography," Daniel Catán Foundation, <http://www.catanfoundation.com/bio.php#.UNTNR2AIZ8Y> (accessed March 20, 2012).

¹³ González, 211.

¹⁴ Ibid., 223; The book Catán is referring to is, in fact, his dissertation.

¹⁵ Ibid., 221; Films Media Group, "The Spirit of Lorca," Films On Demand. <http://digital.films.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/PortalPlaylists.aspx?aid=1850&xtid=10092> (accessed January 2, 2013). Born in Fuente Vaqueros, Spain, on June 5, 1898, Federico García Lorca is Spain's greatest poet and dramatist of the 20th century. His writing incorporates Surrealism, as well as elements of Spanish folklore, including the Andalusian Gipsy traditions he learned from his friend Manuel de Falla. Because

With the exception of a few lines, Catán believed Lorca's poem was not very good and, therefore, wanted to correct its weaknesses with music.¹⁷ During his interview with Saavedra, Catán described this composition:

The orchestra ... is used in a different manner: the timbres are dark. It has three sections, more or less, [with] one very dark and profound section that returns in the end, when she [the poet] returns to the dark night. It has a section with memories of when [their] relationship was marvelous ... [as well as] a very tormented section, where she speaks of her entrails as if they vanished; this section is very tortuous ... These sections require very different music; in some places it is well [orchestrated], but in others, I feel it can be improved.¹⁸

With *Ocaso de medianoche* and his dissertation, which he titled "A Cure for Form and Other Stories: A Study of Three Arias and Two Duets in Mozart's Opera *Don Giovanni*," Catán earned his Ph.D. in 1977 from Princeton University.¹⁹

Upon completion of his formal education, Catán returned to Mexico and accepted an administrative position at the Palacio de Bellas Artes (Palace of Fine Arts) in Mexico City.²⁰ During this time, Catán founded and conducted the Camerata de la Nueva España (Camerata of the New Spain), a small orchestra comprised of professional musicians interested in performing chamber music.²¹ While composition was always his passion, conducting refined his skills in orchestration and instrumentation. Catán tells Saavedra,

Lorca was open about his liberal political views and his homosexuality, he was strongly hated by fascists. He was executed by firing squad on August 19, 1936.

¹⁶ González, 223.

¹⁷ Ibid., 222.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 212; and Daniel Catán, "A Cure for Form and Other Stories: A Study of Three Arias and Two Duets in Mozart's Opera *Don Giovanni*" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1977), iii. Catán earned his master's and doctorate degrees from Princeton University in 1975 and 1977 respectively. His dissertation focuses on Mozart's text setting and orchestration of excerpts from *Don Giovanni*.

²⁰ Bradley, 1.

²¹ González, 225.

There is no better experience, either to learn how to orchestrate or to learn what works and what does not, than to be in an orchestra and make a score ring ... Therefore, my interest in conducting is, in the end, an extension of my interest in composition ...²²

In 1979, the same year that *Ocaso de medianoche* premiered in Mexico City, Catán began composing his first opera, *Encuentro en el ocaso* (Encounter at Sunset), a one-act chamber opera with a libretto by Carlos Montemayor.²³ The plot has to do with a man, Don Francisco, who is easily manipulated. According to music critic Alida Piñón, “even though [the opera] had good music, it did not function well dramatically.”²⁴ Catán explains, “The problem as I now see it was that the characters were planted too superficially in their world and as a result they did not blossom.”²⁵

Despite the initial lack of acclaim, the opera received second place at the 1979 Asociación Morales Esteves competition, was premiered at the Teatro de la Ciudad in Mexico City on August 2, 1980, and was performed at the 1982 Festival Internacional Cervantino in Guanajuato, Mexico.²⁶ According to Brenslauer, *Encuentro en el ocaso* is no longer part of Catán’s active repertory.²⁷

Soon after the completion of *Encuentro en el ocaso*, Catán decided to set San Juan de la Cruz’s poem “Cántico espiritual” (Spiritual Canticle), a poem he had been

²² Ibid., 224.

²³ Catán, “Composing Opera: A Backstage Visit to the Composer’s Workshop,” 11; Alida Piñón, “Daniel Catán, un ‘grande’ que México ignoró,” Vanguardia, <http://www.vanguardia.com.mx/danielcatanungrandequemexicoignoro-1092326.htm> (accessed January 12, 2013). Catán often referred to this work as “Ópera Cero” (Opera Zero).

²⁴ Piñón.

²⁵ Jan Brenslauer, “Into Uncharted Waters,” The Modern Word, http://www.themodernword.com/gabo/catan_brenslauer.html (accessed December 21, 2012).

²⁶ González, 207; Catán, 11. The Asociación Morales Esteves competition is a national competition for original operatic compositions in Mexico. The Festival Internacional Cervantino is the most important multicultural festival in the Americas. This international festival takes place every fall season in Guanajuato, Mexico.

²⁷ Brenslauer.

interested in since he first encountered it years prior.²⁸ The result was *Cantata*, a work for soprano, mixed choir, and chamber ensemble inspired by Igor Stravinsky's composition of the same title.²⁹

Although Catán admits to not liking Stravinsky's *Cantata* very much, he believes that the composition has a certain degree of perfection.³⁰ He explains that, as a listener, a composer may seek to "improve [the] terrible faults" in a composition, but certain compositions, specifically those by Mozart, Beethoven, and, in this case, Stravinsky's *Cantata*, prevent such desires.³¹ Thus, Catán's *Cantata* became a tribute to Stravinsky's work. The Convivium Musicum premiered *Cantata* in Mexico City on January 30, 1982, with Daniel Catán at the podium.³²

While Catán was interested in the music of other composers, it has been observed that his "richest fountain of inspiration [was] literature."³³ In Catán's description,

Many times, while reading a poem or a novel, an intense desire to compose music enters me, whether it is to add music to a poem, interpret the characters that interest me from literature through music, or simply accomplish certain aspects that called my attention in the literary text through music: a rhythmic aspect, the way in which the story develops, etc.³⁴

As an avid scholar and writer, Catán wrote numerous essays about literature, many of which were published in reputable sources. Consequently, his contribution to *Vuelta*, a literary magazine founded by the Mexican poet and essayist Octavio Paz (1914-1998), led to a long-lasting friendship with the renowned writer.³⁵

²⁸ González, 225.

²⁹ Catán, "Composing Opera: A Backstage Visit to the Composer's Workshop," 11; González, 226.

³⁰ González, 227.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Catán, "Composing Opera: A Backstage Visit to the Composer's Workshop," 11.

³³ González, 239.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Bradley, 2.

Like his father and grandfather, Octavio Paz was an active political journalist.³⁶ After traveling to the United States on a Guggenheim Fellowship, Paz entered the Mexican diplomatic service and during his assignment in France he wrote a fundamental study of Mexican identity titled *El laberinto de la soledad* (The Labyrinth of Solitude).³⁷ Upon his resignation from the diplomatic service in 1968, Paz worked as an editor and publisher, founding *Plural* and *Vuelta*, two prominent magazines dedicated to the arts and politics.³⁸ Paz, who was given an honorary doctorate at Harvard in 1980, received the Cervantes Award, the American Neustadt Prize, and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1981, 1982, and 1990 respectively.³⁹

In 1984, the Secretaría de Educación Pública commissioned Catán to compose a work in honor of Octavio Paz's seventieth birthday.⁴⁰ Because he was deeply "attracted to the dramatic force" of Paz's poem "Mariposa de obsidiana" (Obsidian Butterfly), Catán set the poem in a work for soprano, chorus, and orchestra, which he titled by the same name.⁴¹ Catán says,

In *Obsidian Butterfly* a goddess speaks to us with images of fire ... but the most interesting aspect of the poem is that the extreme worlds the goddess describes are ultimately seen, not as disconnected and opposed to one another, but as parts of a complex and organic unity... The words "die in my lips/Rise in my eyes" form a single and terrifying unit. This vision of the world that Paz's poem presents is what inspired me most during the composition. The piece I composed is a dramatic scene more than a song; it is opera more than *lieder*. An ideal performance should therefore be acted and not merely sung.⁴²

³⁶ Nobelprize.org under "Octavio Paz-Biography,"

Nobelprize.org.http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1990/paz-bio.html (accessed November 13, 2012).

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid. The Cervantes Award is the most prestigious literary award in the Spanish-speaking world.

⁴⁰ Catán, "Composing Opera: A Backstage Visit to the Composer's Workshop," 12.

⁴¹ Ibid., 12, 6.

⁴² Ibid., 6.

When describing his text setting in this composition, Catán emphasizes the importance of following the more profound sense of the text instead of its natural or suggested rhythm.⁴³ He adds that while the reader may understand the text without difficulty,

... the musician has a whole world to illuminate; he has to decide ... what is the significance behind the words: if they are said with anguish, with hate, with sadness, with fear, or with solitude.⁴⁴

Catán's *Mariposa de obsidiana* premiered at the Festival Internacional Cervantino on October 20, 1984.⁴⁵

According to Catán, writing *Mariposa de obsidiana* inspired his next opera.⁴⁶ He decided to set text by Paz again because he perceived it as "a natural continuation" of *Mariposa de obsidiana*.⁴⁷ After a stay in Tokyo and Indonesia during the late 1980s, Catán combined the exotic sounds of Asia with Octavio Paz's text and completed *La hija de Rappaccini* (Rappaccini's Daughter), a two-act opera with full orchestra described as Catán's "modest homage" to Octavio Paz.⁴⁸ The libretto, written by Juan Tovar, is based on Octavio Paz's 1953 play by the same title, which happens to be an adaptation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story, "Rappaccini's Daughter" (1844).⁴⁹ Paz's adaptation of Hawthorne's story inspired Catán's inner ear:

⁴³ Daniel Catán, "En torno a *Mariposa de obsidiana*," *Diálogos: Artes, Letras, Ciencias humanas*, vol. 20, no. 5 (119), (El Colegio De México, September-October 1984), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27934942> (accessed September 24, 2012), 27.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Catán, "Composing Opera: A Backstage Visit to the Composer's Workshop," 12.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 12; Bradley, 2.

⁴⁹ Catán, "Composing Opera: A Backstage Visit to the Composer's Workshop," 12; Richard C. Sterne, "Hawthorne Transformed: Octavio Paz's *La hija de Rappaccini*," *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3 (September 1976), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40246044> (accessed January 11, 2013), 230.

I heard soft melodies in the woodwinds, entering one at a time, twisting, turning, shimmering delicately, like leaves rustling gently in the breeze ... After the woodwinds... the harp, like a beam of silver light ... illuminates it all. It is the source, the foundation of that mysterious harmony.⁵⁰

In the opera, Dr. Rappaccini, “a crazed botanist,” has been growing poisonous flowers in his home garden.⁵¹ Because his daughter, Beatriz, has been raised among these dangerous plants, “her very touch is poisonous” and therefore she is kept in isolation.⁵² When Giovanni, a young medical student, falls in love with Beatriz, he ignores the warnings of his mentor, Professor Baglioni, and sneaks into the garden to meet with her. Giovanni gives Beatriz a powerful antidote and she soon begins to suffer from the effects of the poisonous flowers. Because Beatriz has become immune to the plants, the antidote kills her.⁵³ Catán describes the final scene of the opera:

As Beatriz Rappaccini sings her final aria, she sheds the top layer of her dress, a heavy, earthly layer so to speak. She remains in a white, silky underdress that lets her free; thus her image matches the freedom of her voice as it soars and goes through the sky ... She collapses at the foot of the tree. Giovanni takes her in his arms. The lights go down slowly; the characters leave without being seen. The human tragedy has passed. All that remains is the garden, which comes alive with dazzling light and color, transforming the tragedy into the only thing capable of redeeming it: everlasting beauty.⁵⁴

La hija de Rappaccini premiered at the Palacio de Bellas Artes on April 25, 1991, with Catán’s colleague, Eduardo Diazmuñoz, at the podium.⁵⁵ Unfortunately, it “failed to achieve the critical success Catán needed,” and soon after the mixed reception of his

⁵⁰ Catán, “Composing Opera: A Backstage Visit to the Composer’s Workshop,” 7.

⁵¹ Anthony Tommasini, “A Mad Botanist’s Idea of Fathering,” *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/04/25/arts/a-mad-botanist-s-idea-of-fathering.html?pagewanted=print&src=pm> (accessed December 11, 2012)

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Catán, “Composing Opera: A Backstage Visit to the Composer’s Workshop,” 8.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 12.

opera, “In need of money, the composer took a job as a loan officer at a local bank.”⁵⁶

This period of disillusionment, however, was short-lived.

When Paz won the Nobel Prize for Literature, Catán’s opera received much-needed international attention.⁵⁷ With the assistance of John Dwyer, Catán distributed recordings of his work to opera houses throughout the United States and made personal visits to several opera producers, which, eventually, led to the San Diego Opera’s production of *La hija de Rappaccini* in 1994.⁵⁸ Martin Bernheimer, music critic for *Los Angeles Times*, wrote,

[The opera] speaks a sophisticated musical language with elegance. The dominant metaphor is Rappaccini’s exotic garden. The composer makes it shimmer and glow and throb and rustle with orchestral impulses rooted in Debussy and Ravel ... the music is beautifully crafted and tastefully restrained.⁵⁹

The successful premiere of *La hija de Rappaccini* in San Diego led to a commission from the Houston Grand Opera. The result was *Florencia en el Amazonas* (1996), the story of Florencia Grimaldi, “an aging opera singer who embarks upon a steamboat journey down the Amazon River.”⁶⁰

Because *Florencia en el Amazonas* received critical acclaim, Catán received a second commission from the Houston Grand Opera and composed *Salsipuedes: A Tale of Love, War, and Anchovies* (2004).⁶¹ Unlike his previous works, *Salsipuedes* is a comic

⁵⁶ Bradley, 2.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 3; John Dwyer is an American diplomat and writer working for the United States Information Agency in Mexico in the early 1990s.

⁵⁹ Breslauer.

⁶⁰ Allen B. Ruch, “Daniel Catán’s *Florencia en el Amazonas*,” *The Modern Word*, http://themodernword.com/gabo/catan_florencia.html (accessed February 20, 2012).

⁶¹ NPR Music, “Love and Anchovies: Catán’s ‘Salsipuedes,’” *NPR Music World of Opera*, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=91309131> (accessed January 5, 2013); Bradley, 3-4. The libretto for *Salsipuedes* was produced by the Cuban writer Eliseo Alberto, son of Eliseo Diego whom Gabriel García Márquez considers “...one of the greatest poets in the Spanish language.”

opera with a plot described as “a loopy cross between ‘Springtime for Hitler’ and Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*.”⁶²

Set in 1943 on a fictional island in the Caribbean called Salsipuedes, Catán’s opera, similar to Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*, includes two young couples who do not trust each other.⁶³ It also includes a Salsipuedean ship headed to fend off prowling German submarines, and a corrupt government determined to make a fortune by selling a large amount of anchovies, “the most coveted product of Salsipuedes,” to the Nazis.⁶⁴ While this is an unusual concept for a comedy, Catán explains:

For me, comedy is a very serious matter. It has to joke about things that are otherwise difficult to discuss, and it must also reflect contemporary issues ... You have to draw a smile from the listener, and at the same time deliver a very serious message.⁶⁵

In order to immerse himself in Caribbean music, Catán traveled to Cuba and Miami. He explains that while in Miami, “For reasons strictly musical, I had to incorporate many visits to dance clubs ... [and] started composing the opera in between dance and mojito sessions.”⁶⁶ He describes the difficult task of combining the “sparkling rhythms and accents of Caribbean music” with the “lyrical vocal lines” of the operatic tradition.⁶⁷ Catán describes his evolution from *Rappaccini* to *Salsipuedes*:

The music of *Rappaccini* is very complex and very intense. The orchestra maintains a constant dialogue with the singers. In *Florecia* I chose a more diaphanous role for the orchestra and I gave the singers the undisputed front and center stage ... In *Salsipuedes* I have continued what I began in *Florecia*, but with a new ingredient: rhythm. This musical dimension plays a very important

⁶² NPR Music.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ramon Jacques, “Latin Rhythms,” Playbill Arts, <http://www.playbillarts.com/features/article/575.html> (accessed January 5, 2013). Ramon Jacques is an opera critic who contributes regularly to the magazines Pro-Opera (Mexico), Opera-Actual (Spain), Opera del Buen Ayre (Argentina), and L’Opera (Italy).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

role in *Salsipuedes*. Even in scenes where the music is not particularly Caribbean, the role of rhythm is still crucial.⁶⁸

Perhaps because of its complex rhythms and unique orchestration, which excludes violins and violas, it took Catán eight years to complete *Salsipuedes*.⁶⁹ For the 2004 premiere at the Houston Grand Opera, “ushers greeted audiences wearing floral shirts and beach wear [and] mojito cocktails were served in the lobby.”⁷⁰

Catán’s next opera, *Il Postino* (2010), is an adaptation of Massimo Troisi’s 1994 Academy Award-winning film of the same title.⁷¹ The story is a “fictitious account of a relationship between real-life Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, and a provincial mailman, Mario Ruoppolo.”⁷² Neruda, who is living in exile in Italy, is Mario’s sole customer. The two develop a friendship when Mario becomes curious about Neruda’s mail, which happens to be mostly from women. When Mario falls in love with Beatrice Russo, Neruda helps bring them together, and they eventually wed. At this time, Neruda and his wife, Matilde, return to Chile. Several years later, Neruda returns to Italy and finds Beatrice alone with her young son. She informs Neruda that Mario was killed at a communist rally in Naples before their son was born.⁷³

With Plácido Domingo’s input, Catán wrote the role of Pablo Neruda specifically for the world-renowned tenor. Domingo’s “standout singing and suave acting” contributed to the success of *Il Postino*, which was received with “near riotous applause”

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ G. Schirmer Inc., “Daniel Catán: Salsipuedes, A Tale of Love, War and Anchovies,” http://www.schirmer.com/default.aspx?tabId=2420&State_2874=2&workId_2874=26758 (accessed January 5, 2013).

⁷⁰ NPR.

⁷¹ Bradley, 4. This is the first opera where Catán wrote the libretto himself.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ G. Schirmer, Inc., “Daniel Catán: Il Postino,” http://www.schirmer.com/default.aspx?TabId=2420&State_2874=37729 accessed (January 5, 2013).

at the 2010 premiere at the Los Angeles Opera.⁷⁴ Music critic Joshua Kosman adds that with its “lush” and “singable score,” Catán’s *Il Postino* is “undeniably beautiful.”⁷⁵ *Il Postino* received critical acclaim and “found its way into the consciousness of contemporary American culture.”⁷⁶

Since the premiere, *Il Postino* has been performed at Philadelphia’s Center City Opera Theater; the Theater an der Wien in Vienna; the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris; the Teatro de Bellas Artes in Mexico City; the Festival Internacional Cervantino in Guanajuato, Mexico; and the Teatro Municipal in Santiago, Chile.⁷⁷ In addition, the opera was broadcast on PBS Great Performances in 2011 and released on DVD in 2012.⁷⁸ *Il Postino* is, in fact, the most significant operatic composition of Catán’s musical career.

Daniel Catán died in Austin, Texas, on April 9, 2011.⁷⁹ At the time of his death, he was on the faculty of the College of the Canyons in Santa Clarita, California, and was working on *Meet John Doe*, an English-language opera commissioned by the University of Texas at Austin.⁸⁰ During his lifetime, Catán became Latin America’s preeminent

⁷⁴ Ronald Blum, “Daniel Catán’s ‘Il Postino’ opens with Domingo,” Boston.com Associated Press, http://www.boston.com/ae/music/articles/2010/09/24daniel_catans_il_postino_opens_with_domingo/ (accessed January 5, 2013).

⁷⁵ Joshua Kosman, “Opera review: L.A. Opera premieres ‘Il Postino,’” SFGate.com, <http://www.sfgate.com/performance/article/Opera-review-L-A-Opera-premieres-Il-Postino-3173441.php#photo-2308848> (accessed January 12, 2013).

⁷⁶ Bradley, 4.

⁷⁷ Mike Boehm, “Plácido Domingo wins raves as ‘Il Postino’ goes home to Chile,” *Los Angeles Times* (July 16, 2012), <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/jul/16/entertainment/la-et-cm-placido-domingo-wins-raves-as-il-postino-comes-home-to-chile-20120713> (accessed January 5, 2013).

⁷⁸ PBS: Public Broadcasting Service, “Il Postino from LA Opera,” PBS.org, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/gperf/episodes/il-postino-from-la-opera/watch-the-full-program/1210> (accessed April 3, 2013); The Metropolitan Opera, “Il Postino (DVD)—Los Angeles Opera,” MetOperaShop.org, <http://www.metoperashop.org/shop/il-postino-dvd-los-angeles-opera-9942> (accessed April 3, 2013).

⁷⁹ Norman Lebrecht, “Daniel Catán’s sad death—the official statement,” ArtsJournal, http://www.artsjournal.com/slippeddisc/2011/04/daniel_catans_sad_death_-_the.html (accessed January 5, 2013).

⁸⁰ G. Schirmer, Inc., “Daniel Catán,” http://www.schirmer.com/default.aspx?TabId=2419&State_2872=2&composerId_2872+2261#Full (accessed January 5, 2013).

living composer. He was the first Latin American composer both to be commissioned and to have his works premiered by major opera companies in the United States. He received the Plácido Domingo Award in 1998 for his contribution to opera and the Guggenheim Fellowship in 2000.⁸¹ With *Florencia en el Amazonas* and *Il Postino*, Catán brought Spanish-language opera into the operatic repertoire. His sudden and tragic death was a great loss to the opera world.

⁸¹ Fabiola Palapa and Reyes Martínez, “Murió Daniel Catán; llevó operas en español a escenarios de EU,” *La Jornada* (April 12, 2011), <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2011/04/12/cultura/a04n1cul> (accessed January 12, 2013).

CHAPTER 2

FLORENCIA EN EL AMAZONAS

Shortly after the 1994 premiere of *La hija de Rappaccini* in San Diego, California, David Gockley, director of the Houston Grand Opera, “took interest in the composer’s work” and, along with the Los Angeles Opera, Seattle Opera, and the Ópera de Colombia in Bogotá, commissioned Catán to compose a work that would celebrate the “artistic, musical, literary, and visual aspects of Latin America.”¹ Catán said, “My knees trembled at the thought. As a composer, I’d never had an opera commission in my life. But I thought, ‘This is the project of my life, I will go with it.’”² Given this opportunity, Catán wanted to continue exploring the musical techniques he developed while writing the music for the garden scene in *La hija de Rappaccini*.³ Catán described this scene in a lecture for the Inter-American Development Bank Cultural Center Lectures Program:

In order to capture the essential magic of the garden scene ... I needed to write music that was seductive, glittering, [and] mesmerizing ... I developed a way of writing for the orchestra, the woodwinds in particular, that seemed ... to capture the feel of that magical garden. Wishing to continue exploring this kind of writing, I started looking for subjects that would allow me to pursue these magical sounds.⁴

According to Catán, his friend and colleague Álvaro Mutis, a Colombian-born poet and novelist who has written a great deal about the Amazonian jungle, is an opera enthusiast.⁵ The two often met in Mutis’ home studio, which is decorated with pictures of steamboats as well as the Amazon River. These images became so powerful in Catán’s

¹ Bradley, 3; Ruch.

² Breslauer.

³ Catán, “Composing Opera: A Backstage Visit to the Composer’s Workshop,” 1.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

mind that the garden in *La hija de Rappaccini* transformed itself into the Amazonian jungle.⁶

Because the Colombian-born novelist Gabriel García Márquez (b. 1927) previously volunteered to help him find a story for his next opera, upon receiving the commission from the Houston Grand Opera, Catán contacted Márquez and the two began searching for a libretto.⁷ Like Octavio Paz, Gabriel García Márquez is among Latin America's preeminent writers.⁸ Márquez, affectionately known as "Gabo" throughout Latin America, received the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 1972 and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1982.⁹

According to Phillip Swanson,

Márquez's long career as newspaper columnist, film critic, and investigative journalist clearly influenced his fiction both in its subject matter and in its forms ... The marvelous and the magical, with which García Márquez is now iconically associated, are significantly different from the turn to myth that characterized many of the modernists.¹⁰

Márquez's contribution to the popularization of *realismo mágico* (magical realism) in Latin American literature makes him the writer most associated with this style. Indeed, his most notable works, *Cien años de soledad* (One Hundred Years of Solitude, 1967)

⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁷ Mora-Mowry. Márquez attended the 1991 premiere of *La hija de Rappaccini* in Mexico City. He enjoyed Catán's opera so much, he approached the composer after the performance and volunteered to help him find a story for his next opera.

⁸ Nobelprize.org under "Gabriel García Márquez-Biography," Nobelprize.org, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prize/literature/laureates/1982/marquez.html (accessed November 13, 2012).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Philip Swanson, *The Cambridge Companion to Gabriel García Márquez* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 179.

and *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* (Love in the Time of Cholera, 1985), are prime examples of “magical realism.”¹¹

While the term “magical realism” first appeared in post-expressionist European art and literature during the early 1900s, *lo real maravilloso* (the marvelous reality), a similar concept specific to Latin American literature, was first discussed by the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier in the preface of his 1949 novel *El reino de este mundo* (The Kingdom of this World).¹² However, when the literary critic Ángel Flores redefined Carpentier’s *lo real maravilloso* as “magical realism” in 1954, the terms began to merge and caused much confusion.¹³

Although *lo real maravilloso* has become interchangeable with *realismo mágico* (magical realism), the terms have distinct meanings: Carpentier’s “marvelous reality” refers to the marvelous qualities of a real place while “magical realism” refers to a literary mode.¹⁴ When defining *lo real maravilloso*, Shannin Schroeder quotes Jean-Pierre Durix:

...[Carpentier] not only privileged *lo real maravilloso* as a Latin American (and, more specifically, Caribbean or perhaps even Cuban) event; he argued that the very concept itself sprang from the marvelous quality of the Latin American soil.¹⁵

¹¹ Ibid., 1.

¹² Swanson, 183; Shannin Schroeder, *Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 2. In Carpentier’s novel, the protagonist, Ti Noel, returns to Haiti after a decade in Paris and becomes “overwhelmed by the ‘surreal’ quality of the Caribbean and Latin American landscape and history.” In an attempt to separate *lo real maravilloso* (the marvelous reality) from European Surrealism, Carpentier redefined the term as *lo real maravilloso americano* (the marvelous American reality) and argued that his ideas were specific to Latin America.

¹³ Schroeder, 2.

¹⁴ Swanson, 183.

¹⁵ Schroeder, 6.

Thus, *lo real maravilloso* incorporates magical qualities of particular places in Latin America. This specific geographical setting distances Carpentier's "marvelous reality" from all European traditions and movements.

In contrast, numerous scholars have defined "magical realism" in various ways. Because "magical realism" is not limited to a specific geographical setting, Amaryll Beatrice Chanady argues that "literary mode" is a more appropriate description than "literary movement."¹⁶ As for the characteristics of this "literary mode," Edwin Williamson believes that "... magical realism is a narrative style which consistently blurs the traditional realist distinction between fantasy and reality."¹⁷ Beverly Ormerod argues that "Magical realism is a literary technique that introduces unrealistic elements or incredible events, in a matter-of-fact way, into an apparently realistic narrative."¹⁸ Lois Parkinson Zamora adds that "magical realism" is where "the strange is commonplace" as well as "an attitude toward reality that can be expressed in popular cultured forms, in elaborate or rustic styles, [and] in closed or open structures."¹⁹ Thus, due to lack of limitations, the magical and supernatural are not viewed as problematic in "magical realism."²⁰

When describing the differences between Carpentier's "marvelous reality" and "magical realism," Schroeder quotes Stephen Hart:

Yet perhaps the single greatest difference between "lo real maravilloso" and magical realism concerns the role that the supernatural plays in each. According to Carpentier's definition of "lo real maravilloso," the experience of the

¹⁶ Amaryll Beatrice Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1985), 16-17.

¹⁷ Schroeder, 5.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (ed.), *Magical Realism: Theory History, Community* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 104, 121.

²⁰ Chanady, 23.

marvelous is unexpected and unusual ... Nothing could in fact be further from magical realism.²¹

In other words, while both incorporate magical or supernatural qualities, these qualities are viewed as strange in “the marvelous reality” but normal in “magical realism.”

Elements of magical realism appear in *Florencia en el Amazonas*. Catán describes magical realism:

The fantastic elements really are symbols for some emotional or internal solution to a problem, dressed up in this exotic way. But the solutions to situations are internal solutions ... that get presented in a poetic way.²²

Although Catán originally intended to set a story by Márquez for his next opera, he found that the best approach would be to develop an original story inspired by Márquez’s characters.²³ Márquez recommended his pupil Marcela Fuentes-Berain to Catán and she agreed to write the libretto.²⁴ Fuentes-Berain and Catán created *Florencia en el Amazonas*, an opera loosely based on Márquez’s *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* (Love in the Time of Cholera, 1985).²⁵

El amor en los tiempos del cólera illustrates love “as an irresistible force that overwhelms the rational mind and sweeps those in its grasp to the margins of conventional society.”²⁶ The protagonist, Florentino Ariza, is a modest man whose “jobs are uninspiring and [whose] looks [are] unprepossessing.”²⁷ He falls in love with Fermina Daza and “nurtures his passion with total dedication for over fifty years.”²⁸ Fermina, on

²¹ Schroeder, 7.

²² Breslauer.

²³ Mora-Mowry.

²⁴ Ruch.

²⁵ Mora-Mowry.

²⁶ Swanson, 113.

²⁷ Ibid., 116.

²⁸ Ibid.

the other hand, “does not reciprocate Florentino’s love with the same intensity.”²⁹ She rejects Florentino and marries Juvenal Urbino, a medical doctor in search of a cure for cholera.³⁰

As in other works by Márquez, marriage, in this novel, is portrayed as a social institution that is not expected to involve love.³¹ Indeed, Fermina questions whether she ever loved her husband and after he dies, she reconnects with Florentino and their love blossoms in their old age.³² Swanson adds, “The life-affirming tone and the optimistic ending ... create a celebration of love which seems more characteristic of romance than of a novelistic realism.”³³ Thus, passionate love exists, but not necessarily in marriage.

Florencia en el Amazonas takes place on El Dorado, a steamboat sailing down the Amazon River from Leticia, Colombia, to Manaus, Brazil, in the early 1900s.³⁴ The protagonist, Florencia Grimaldi (soprano), is returning to her homeland of Manaus after twenty years. Like Puccini's Tosca, Catán's Grimaldi is a renowned opera singer. Although she is traveling to sing at the re-opening gala of the Theater of Manaus, the true purpose of her visit is to reunite with her lover, Cristóbal Ribeiro da Silva, a butterfly hunter.

Florencia and Cristóbal's relationship mirrors Fermina and Florentino's relationship in Marquez's novel. Florencia and Cristóbal fell in love with each other during their youth. Similar to Fermina, Florencia's feelings were not as intense as Cristóbal's. She rejected the modest butterfly hunter and, instead, pursued an international

²⁹ Ibid., 117.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 114-115.

³² Ibid., 119.

³³ Ibid., 116.

³⁴ Daniel Catán, *Florencia en el Amazonas*. Libretto by Marcela Fuentes-Berain (Milwaukee: Associated Publishers, 2006), vi.

operatic career. After years of longing for her lover, Florencia became a recluse. Afraid of being identified, the diva travels incognito.

Riolobo (baritone), “a polymorphous river god,” narrates parts of the story and provides insight about the passengers.³⁵ As he blurs the lines between reality and the supernatural, his mystical character introduces an element of magical realism. Capitán (bass) is the captain of the El Dorado. He was well acquainted with Cristóbal, Florencia’s lover, and although he remembers meeting the diva prior to her successful operatic career, he keeps this information to himself. Arcadio (tenor) is Capitán’s nephew and apprentice. He comes from a family of sailors and while he is on this journey to learn from his uncle, he secretly wishes to be a pilot.

Arcadio is attracted to Rosalba (soprano), the young journalist who prides herself as Grimaldi’s most faithful admirer. Rosalba, who is currently writing a biography of the diva, hopes to meet and interview her in Manaus. Obsessed with being a successful and free woman like Grimaldi, Rosalba ignores her attraction to Arcadio and refuses to fall in love. Because Arcadio is more than willing to compromise his happiness for Rosalba’s career, the two are young versions of Florencia and Cristóbal as well as Fermina and Florentino.

Finally, Álvaro (baritone) and Paula (mezzo-soprano) are a middle-aged couple trapped in a loveless marriage. They hope that their trip to Manaus will rekindle their relationship. As in Márquez’s novel, love is not expected in marriage.

The first act opens with “a dance scene highlighted by Latin American rhythms ... [and] features a rich display of fruits and plants and other goods of the New World

³⁵ Breslauer.

...”³⁶ Riolobo announces that the El Dorado is headed to Manaus where the renowned soprano, Florencia Grimaldi, will perform at the theater’s re-opening gala. One by one, Capitán, Arcadio, Rosalba, Paula, and Álvaro board the steamboat. Florencia, who is travelling incognito, arrives at the port just as the steamboat is about to disembark. Rosalba, who does not recognize the diva, approaches Florencia and notes her tardiness. Once alone, Florencia contemplates her solitude, emptiness, and longing for Cristóbal.

Arcadio sits on the deck secretly hoping for his life to change. When Rosalba accidentally drops her notebook containing all her notes for the biography into the river, Arcadio recovers it and she thanks him for saving her “life’s work.” Later that night, Paula and Álvaro are arguing while having dinner. Álvaro grows frustrated with his wife and removes his wedding band. Enraged, Paula also removes her wedding band, drops it into a bottle of wine, and throws the bottle into the river.

The next morning, Florencia is alone on deck when Capitán, who secretly recognizes the diva, approaches her. She is distraught when Capitán reveals that Cristóbal vanished in the jungle years ago while searching for the Emerald Muse, the rarest Amazonian butterfly. During a card game, the obvious attraction between Rosalba and Arcadio parallels the tension between Paula and Álvaro. When a storm begins, Capitán becomes unconscious and the passengers fear for their lives. Arcadio takes charge of the boat and as they are about to crash into a huge log, Álvaro jumps into the river to push the log away from the boat. Paula is devastated and fears her husband’s death.

After the storm, Florencia finds herself in her cabin, confused as to whether she is alive or dead. Overwhelmed with emotions, she breaks the mirror and her hand begins to

³⁶ Efraín Kristal, “Literary Anecdote on Florencia en el Amazonas,” *Florencia en el Amazonas*, TROY531/32 CD (Albany Records, 2002), 8.

bleed. Realizing she is alive, she vows to continue searching for Cristóbal. As they recover from the storm, Rosalba and Arcadio resist the attraction they feel for each other while Paula realizes she still loves her husband. Riolocho prays to the spirits of the Amazon River and Álvaro suddenly returns to the boat. He explains that his wife's voice called him back from the dead and the two reconcile. Florencia thanks him for his bravery and they resume their voyage to Manaus.

Rosalba is devastated when she discovers that her notebook is completely ruined from the storm. When the two are left alone on deck, Florencia assures Rosalba she has lost nothing irreplaceable. During an argument about the source of the diva's talents, Florencia declares that her voice flourished from her love for Cristóbal, and Rosalba realizes that the woman beside her, still incognito, is Grimaldi herself.

With Florencia's revelation, Rosalba opens her heart and accepts her feelings for Arcadio. The boat is about to reach Manaus when the passengers learn that, due to a cholera epidemic, no one may disembark. Hopeless, Florencia calls to Cristóbal and when her spirit ascends, she transforms into the Emerald Muse butterfly and the lovers have a mystical reunion. Florencia's transformation makes her the ultimate operatic representation of magical realism.

In addition to being an important image in the opera, the butterfly is also a powerful symbol in literature. W. Deona says,

The butterfly is the symbol of the soul, and Psyche ... It signifies life, human destiny, renaissance, immortality ... It is the enemy of death, a funeral cipher of faith in the after-life, of victory over death. It is poised on the skull implying that

the soul released from the mortal body has triumphed, that eternal life has vanquished death.³⁷

Even though the final scene in the opera is unclear as to whether or not Florencia finds Cristóbal and about whether she lives or dies, there is a “sense of reconciliation with life as it comes to terms with itself and as it overcomes death.”³⁸ When comparing the finales from *Florencia en el Amazonas* and *La hija de Rappaccini*, Catán explains that Florencia and Beatriz’s individual transformations are his “way of coping with the sadness of separation ... [and] transforming it.”³⁹ In both the opera and Márquez’s novel, love is represented as “the force that gives meaning to life and death.”⁴⁰ Thus, *Florencia en el Amazonas* delivers the Latin American perspective on this universal subject.

When imagining daybreak and nightfall in the Amazon, Catán heard “the glittering music of harps and marimba” combined with flutes and clarinets.⁴¹ Two exotic instruments Catán decided to include were the *djembe* and the steel drum. According to Catán, the *djembe*, an African drum, “can capture the crisp rhythms of the tropical rain as well as the deepest rumbles of a fearful storm.”⁴² Because the steel drum is often used in Caribbean music, he “had to have one too.”⁴³ Ultimately, the instrumentation includes:⁴⁴

2 Flutes (2nd doubling Piccolo)
2 Oboes
2 Clarinets in Bb
Bass Clarinet
2 Bassoons

³⁷ W. Deonna, “The Crab and the Butterfly: A Study in Animal Symbolism,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 17, no. ½ (1954), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/750132> (accessed January 13, 2013), 63.

³⁸ Kristal, 9.

³⁹ Catán, “Composing Opera: A Backstage Visit to the Composer’s Workshop,” 8.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 2.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Catán, *Florencia en el Amazonas*, viii.

Contrabasson

3 Horns in F

2 Trumpets in C

2 Trombones

Tuba

Timpani

Marimba

Percussion (4 Players)

Harp

Piano

SATB Chorus

Strings (4,4,4,4,3)

Even though “Houston aimed high ... [and] Catán reached for the stars,” the 1996 premiere of *Florencia en el Amazonas* at the Houston Grand Opera was an immediate success.⁴⁵ According to Breslauer,

It became the largest-grossing premiere in the history of the company, which is known for producing new operas. Sales for six performances totaled more than \$712,000, and it played to 90% capacity houses—a figure almost unheard of for a new work.⁴⁶

Breslauer adds that because the themes in *Florencia en el Amazonas* have “less to do with culturally specific traditions than with human emotional experiences,” Catán makes a “very personal statement.”⁴⁷ Catán says,

The work is a very important work in my own transformation ... When I wrote ‘Rappaccini,’ my first marriage had just ended after 14 years. When that broke up, my only view of marriage was very idealized. ‘Rappaccini’ was a work that I sought refuge in. When I was writing ‘Florencia,’ I was looking back on all that ... [It] taught me a great deal about how love can function without the idealization ... ‘Rappaccini’ was trying to prove myself in the international world.

⁴⁵ Breslauer. Breslauer quotes Mark Swed, music critic for *Los Angeles Times*.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

‘Florenxia’ was more trying to do what I really wanted to do. It really is like journeying back and looking at myself.⁴⁸

Since the premiere, *Florenxia en el Amazonas*, which critics described as “beautiful,” “lush,” and “sensuous,” has been performed in Los Angeles, Seattle, Cincinnati, Denver, Salt Lake City, Mexico City, Germany, Colombia, and Brazil.⁴⁹ With *Florenxia en el Amazonas*, Catán received the Plácido Domingo Award (1998), the Guggenheim Fellowship (2000), and a second commission from the Houston Grand Opera which resulted in his fourth opera, *Salsipuedes: A Tale of Love, War, and Anchovies* (2004).⁵⁰ It is the work that brought Spanish-language opera into the operatic repertoire, and the work that led to Catán’s collaboration with Plácido Domingo in his most successful opera, *Il Postino* (2010).⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ruch; Melinda Bargreen, “Adventure in Opera: A Brave New Work Arrives,” *Seattle Times*, March 15, 1998, <http://community.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/archive/?date=19980315&slug=2739673> (accessed: December 21, 2012)

⁵⁰ Bradley, 3; Los Angeles Opera, “Domingo Awards & Concert,” <http://www.laopera.com/community/hispanics-for-LAO-viva-placido-domingo/> (accessed January 5, 2013); John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, “The Fellowship,” <http://www.gf.org/about-the-foundation/the-fellowship/> (accessed January 5, 2013). The Plácido Domingo Award is presented each year by the Hispanics for Los Angeles Opera, a support organization for the Company, to celebrate the accomplishments of Hispanic artists as well as those who contribute to the awareness of opera and its educational value in the Latino community of Los Angeles. Often characterized as “midcareer” awards, Guggenheim Fellowships are intended for men and women who have already demonstrated exceptional capacity for productive scholarship or exceptional creative ability in the arts. Fellowships are awarded through two annual competitions. Each year, the Foundation receives between 3,500 and 4,000 applications, but only about 200 Fellowships are awarded.

⁵¹ Bradley, 3.

CHAPTER 3

“FLORENCIA GRIMALDI”

According to Catán, opera deals with “those expressions which are the foundation of our humanity: love, death, passion, [and] happiness ...”¹ His protagonist, Florencia Grimaldi, experiences many conflicting emotions during her journey down the Amazon. Soprano Sheri Greenawald, who created the role of Florencia, says,

Florencia is given to you emotionally through the music. Sometimes it has to do with a key: She flips back and forth between major and minor keys, between the dark and the light, the hope and the despair ...²

With few exceptions, the music of Catán’s opera is continuous as each scene leads into the next without interruption. Act I, Scene 1, ends after Riolocho assists Florencia onto the deck of the El Dorado.³ In Scene 2, while the boat leaves the dock, Rosalba approaches Florencia and says, “I’m glad you arrived! You were delaying us. We’re pressed for time to see Grimaldi.”⁴ When Florencia, afraid to be identified, steps away from her, Rosalba says,

What? You’re not coming to see her? In order to return to the Theater of Manaus our diva cancelled at La Scala in Milan! She loves her homeland! Florencia Grimaldi: an apparition in the profane jungle of appearances.⁵

After Rosalba leaves, Florencia considers those parting words and begins to sing her first aria, “Florencia Grimaldi.”⁶

In addition to introducing Florencia’s character, this aria, which is approximately seven minutes in duration, provides insight into her past. Although she is alone on the

¹ Breslauer.

² Ibid.

³ Catán, “Florencia en el Amazonas,” 28. Because the boat has already pulled away a few inches from the dock, Riolocho takes Florencia’s hand and helps her jump on board.

⁴ Ibid., 31. All English translations were completed by the current author.

⁵ Ibid., 31-32.

⁶ Act I, Scene 2, mm. 1-19 consist of Rosalba’s dialogue and exit music. Florencia’s aria begins in m. 20.

deck, Florencia speaks to Cristóbal, recalls meeting him twenty years prior, and confesses that her voice blossomed from the passionate love she experienced with him.⁷ Her feelings quickly change from contemplative to remorseful when she suddenly remembers rejecting Cristóbal and pursuing an operatic career instead. Because she despised the jungle, leaving Manaus and gaining international fame were of utmost importance to her. While Cristóbal promised to wait for her forever, Florencia broke her promise to return to him after finding success overseas. She regretfully admits both to allowing fame to deceive her and to losing sight of herself. Even though she accomplished her professional aspirations, she finds herself isolated and surrounded by lies. Once she accepts the Amazon as part of her existence, Florencia feels liberated for the first time in twenty years and her newfound hope is the beginning of her emotional and physical transformation.

Florencia's lengthy aria is divided into sections in accordance with the text. In the first section, mm. 20-41, Florencia reminisces about her intimacy with Cristóbal.

Text	Translation
Florencia Grimaldi, No sólo soy mi nombre. Aquí, aquí, hace veinte años te conocí, Cristóbal. Enseñaste a mi cuerpo a sentir la pasión y mi alma tomó forma entre tus manos. De la pasión brotó mi voz, Cristóbal, como aquella mariposa que buscabas en la selva.	Florencia Grimaldi, I am not just my name. Here, here, twenty years ago I met you, Cristóbal. You taught my body how to feel passion and my soul took shape in your hands. From this passion blossomed my voice, Cristóbal, like that butterfly you sought in the jungle.

Anxious to be reunited with her lover, Florencia considers Rosalba's words and struggles to voice her overwhelming thoughts. The aria begins with rapid alternating chords and

⁷ This is the first time Cristóbal is introduced. Although Florencia often speaks to him (or refers to him while speaking to other characters, e.g. Capitán and Rosalba), Cristóbal is not a physical character in the opera.

tremolo in the strings, which create a sense of nervousness (Example 1). This “nervous” figure is interrupted in m. 21 when the orchestra, suddenly reduced to only bassoons, clarinets, and cellos, sustains a half-diminished seventh chord that suggests hesitation. Both figures depict Florencia’s trepidation as she begins her return journey to Manaus. The “nervous” figure returns in m. 22 before Florencia begins to speak.

During the opening section of the aria, the vocal line, with its short musical phrases and speech-like quality, resembles *recitativo* style. Because the voice lies in the middle register, marked *piano*, and because the orchestra is generally sparse and sustained, the hushed quality of this section demonstrates Florencia’s contemplative state. In mm. 22-23, when she says, “Florencia Grimaldi,” Catán sets the vocal line with a slow rhythm and the ascending pitches F# and A. This F#-A pitch motive appears throughout the aria and is referred to as the “name” motive (Example 1, mm. 22-23).

EXAMPLE 1: “Florencia Grimaldi,” mm. 20-23

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The “nervous” figure is interrupted in m. 23 by a sustained F#-minor seventh chord that decrescendos as the orchestra reduces to only harp and flutes in m. 24. At this time, the harp and flutes play the pitches of the “name” motive while Florencia reflects on the meaning of her name (Example 2, m. 24). In m. 25, when she finally says, “No sólo soy mi nombre” (I am not just my name), the vocal line repeats the pitch A in a sixteenth-note rhythm resembling the rhythm of language. This fast rhythm demonstrates Florencia’s frustration and disagreement with Rosalba’s account of the renowned soprano. Because this speech-like text setting (repeated pitch with rapid rhythm) appears throughout the aria, it is referred to as the “repeated pitch” motive. It is important to note that the repeated pitch of this motive is often A or F#, the pitches of the “name” motive.

Catán starts to convey Florencia’s unstable emotional state with increasingly higher peaks in the vocal line that are followed by rapid drops into the middle register. The first vocal peak appears in m. 26 with A up to F#, an inversion of the “name” motive, on the word “aquí” (here) (Example 2, m. 26). Catán sets the intervening pitch (E) with a dotted quarter note and the highest pitch (F#) with an eighth note. The quick rise and fall of the vocal line creates a sense of both urgency and restraint that demonstrates Florencia’s unease as she attempts to keep her overwhelming emotions under control. The word “aquí” (here) is repeated during this rise and fall, emphasizing how the place has brought back her memories. The persistence of the pitches of the “name” motive suggests that this emotional outburst stems from Florencia’s initial contemplation of her name.

The *recitativo* style returns in m. 27 when Catán sets “hace veinte años” (twenty years ago) with the “repeated pitch” motive. Similar to m. 26, the second vocal peak

appears in m. 28, again A up to F# on “te conocí” (I met you). Once again, the voice ascends but quickly drops to A and lingers on “Cristóbal,” suggesting that Florencia is thinking about her lover (Example 2, mm. 27-29).

24 ♩ = 54 *p*

F. *mp* *p* *pp legato*

¡No só-lo soy mi nom-bre! — A - quí, a - quí

27

F. *p*

ha-cevin-te a - ños — te co - no - cí, Cris - tó - bal en -

30

F. *p*

se - ñas-te a mi cuer - po a sen-tir la pa-sión y mi al - ma

EXAMPLE 2: “Florencia Grimaldi,” mm. 24-32

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The first major vocal peak appears in m. 29 with the setting of the text “Enseñaste a mi cuerpo a sentir la pasión” (You taught my body how to feel passion) (Example 2,

above). The orchestra quietly sustains a D-major seventh chord and the voice enters on a *piano* high A. In m. 30, a falling version of the “name” motive appears when the voice descends from A to F# and to G, then rising rapidly by major seventh to F# in m. 32. Between these jagged peaks, Catán emphasizes “cuerpo” (body) and “pasión” (passion) by lengthening their rhythm (Example 2, above). These emphasized words depict Florencia’s longing for Cristóbal’s touch.

Although mm. 31-32 contain the longest vocal phrase in the aria thus far, the short phrases return in m. 32 when Florencia says, “y mi alma” (and my soul) (Example 2, above). The F# in m. 32 stresses “alma” (soul), which descends to E in half notes. Florencia completes her statement, “tomó forma entre tus manos” (took shape in your hands), after the orchestra reviews the dissonant D-major seventh chord in m. 33 (Example 3, mm. 33-34). The slow fall from F# to E to A recalls the rising versions of this figure in mm. 26 and 28 which expressed surges of emotion (Example 2, above). The slowing in mm. 32-34 suggests Florencia’s thought process as she searches for the right words to say to Cristóbal.

Catán expresses Florencia’s growing anxiety in the *poco più mosso* section beginning in m. 35 (Example 3). He sets the text “De la pasión brotó mi voz, Cristóbal” (From this passion blossomed my voice, Cristóbal) with ascending triplets that are emphasized and stretched through mixed meter. As Florencia struggles to keep her sentiments under control, the stepwise motion of these slow triplets creates tension as the voice rises to F# in m. 35 but quickly falls to C# in m. 36 on “pasión” (passion). When she experiences her biggest emotional outburst thus far, in m. 37, Catán illustrates Florencia’s “blossoming” voice with long notes that push the voice from a high A to a

high B (Example 3, m. 37). The voice immediately descends by an octave when Florencia says, “Cristóbal.” Because the peak occurs on “voz” (voice) and not on “Cristóbal,” Catán suggests that Florencia’s singing career continues to be more important to her than her lover. During this time, the fast arpeggios in the orchestra enrich the harmonic color, support the sustained high notes in the voice, and create a rapid movement that conveys Florencia’s emotional surge.

Similar to the previous vocal peaks, this climax quickly drops to the middle register. In m. 39, as Florencia’s excitement comes to an end, the decrescendo and the triplets in the orchestra immediately suggest a slower tempo that isolates the text “como aquella mariposa que buscabas en la selva” (like that butterfly you sought in the jungle). The turn on “mariposa” (butterfly) depicts the fluttering movement of a butterfly and the ascending pitches A and B in mm. 40-41 quietly echo the vocal peak in m. 37 (Example 3). Because Catán sets “voz” (voice) and “selva” (jungle) with the same pitches (A and B), he suggests that Florencia’s voice is part of the Amazonian jungle. The end of the *poco più mosso* section overlaps with the first orchestral interlude (Example 3, mm. 41-43). These measures are *pianissimo* with a sustained melody. The falling “name” motive in the oboe solo and the syncopated quarter-note rhythm in the horns and the strings create heaviness that evokes Florencia’s guilty conscience, leading into the *agitato* section.

poco più mosso

33

F. *to - mó for - ma en - tre tus ma - nos De la pa -*

36

F. *sión bro - tó mi voz Cris -*

38

F. *tò - - bal co - mo a - que - lla ma - ri -*

40 **A tempo** (♩ = 54)

F. *po - sa que bus - ca - bas en la sel - va*

pp espr.

EXAMPLE 3: "Florenia Grimaldi," mm. 33-43

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During this opening section of the aria, Florencia's quiet and evasive behavior attests to her isolation. She avoids speaking to Rosalba, but considers the young writer's parting words. Once she is alone, Florencia reflects on the meaning of her name and recalls her intimate relationship with her lover. She admits that the passion she experienced with Cristóbal is the source of her singing talent. After comparing her voice to the rare butterfly Cristóbal sought in the jungle, Florencia's fond memories are interrupted by her own guilt. While the sustained chords in the orchestra suggest Florencia's initial pensive state, the sudden frantic movement in the *agitato* section evokes her unpleasant memories.

The next major section of the aria, mm. 44-93, reveals Florencia's remorse as she recalls leaving Cristóbal and pursuing an international opera career instead.

Text	Translation
<i>Agitato</i> (mm. 44-52) Me ofreciste esto, lo desprecié. Quería seducir con mi canto a multitudes.	You offered me this, I rejected it. I wanted to seduce the crowds with my singing.
<i>Allargando</i> (mm. 63-60) Prometí volver cuando triunfara en Europa, en América y en Asia.	I promised to return when I triumphed in Europe, in America, and in Asia.
<i>Meno mosso</i> (mm. 61-93) ¡Eso era el mundo! Éste río un lodazal de anacondas, humedad asfixiante. Dijiste que me esperarías siempre, Que el amor liberaba y no me detendrías	That meant the world! This river was a quagmire of anacondas, asphyxiating humidity. You said you would wait for me forever, that love sets one free and you would not hold me back.
Me fui, triunfé, y olvidé mi promesa entre oropeles. Me perdía.	I left, I triumphed, and I forgot my promise amongst the pretenses. I was losing myself.

The time signature unexpectedly changes from 4/4 to 6/8 and the orchestra depicts Florencia's anguish with a fast rise-and-fall figure, with *tremolo*, in the strings (Example

4). In mm. 44-47, when Florencia says, “Me ofreciste esto, lo desprecié” (You offered me this, I rejected it), the voice ascends from F# to C# with a duple rhythm that counters the ascending and descending triplets in the strings; these opposing rhythms and melodic shapes create an unsettling and frantic atmosphere that evokes Florencia’s anxiety. The voice quickly returns to F# and the setting of the text “Quería seducir con mi canto a multitudes” (I wanted to seduce the crowds with my singing) in mm. 48-51 repeats the rise from F# to C#, suggesting the strength of Florencia’s past resolve to pursue her career. This frantic movement ends abruptly when the orchestra, suddenly reduced to only oboes, bassoons, and trumpets, sustains a B-major chord with an added, dissonant G in m. 52, *sforzando*, as Florencia recalls her broken promise (Example 4). Here, the distorted quality in the orchestra, created by the *con sordino* in the trumpets, demonstrates Florencia’s anguish.

The sustained dissonant chord quickly decrescendos to *piano* and isolates the text “prometí volver” (I promised to return) at the start of the *allargando* section (Example 4, m. 53). The eighth vocal peak of the aria appears in m. 54 when Catán stretches “volver” (return) with a *pianissimo* high B that crescendos through m. 55 and highlights Florencia’s self-reproach. When she says, “cuando triunfara” (when I succeeded), the voice, again, descends to the middle register and the descending lines in the flutes, harp, and oboe solo echo the fall in Florencia’s line, demonstrating her desperation. The *tremolo* figure from the start of the *agitato* section returns in the strings in m. 58 when Florencia says, “en Europe, en América, y en Asia” (in Europe, in America, and in Asia). The ascending triplets in the strings and the crescendo in the winds complement the rise of the voice to lead into the next vocal peak (Example 4, mm. 58-60).

44 **Agitato** ♩. = 84

F. Me o - fre - cis - te es - to, _____ lo des - pre - cié _____ Que -

48

F. rí - a _____ se - du - cir con mi can - to _____ a mul - ti - tu - des _____

52 *allarg.* *pp*

F. Pro - me - tí vol - ver _____ cuan - do triun - fa - ra _____

57 *accel.* *a tempo*

F. en Eu - ro - pa en A - mé - ri - ca y en A - sia _____

EXAMPLE 4: "Flores en el Amazonas," mm. 44-60

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Florencia's major emotional outburst occurs during the *meno mosso* beginning in m. 61 (Example 5). The meter change from 6/8 to 2/4 creates a feeling of expansion while the fast arpeggios and the sixteenth-note interjections in the orchestra support the voice as it rises to the climax of the aria. With the first indicated *forte* in the vocal line, Florencia soars to a high C in measure 64 as she cries out "¡Eso era el mundo!" (That meant the world!) over a six-bar phrase. Because Catán emphasizes "mundo" (world) with a *forte* high C, he suggests Florencia's guilt, anger, and devastation for leaving Cristóbal. Florencia's contempt for her homeland is revealed when she says, "Éste río un lodazal de anacondas" (This river, a quagmire of anacondas). Catán stretches the unimportant word "un" (a) and treats "lodazal de anacondas" (quagmire of anacondas) as if Florencia is muttering to herself while Cristóbal's words slowly come to her mind (Example 5, mm.70-73). The pitches of the "name" motive begin and end this climactic phrase and the diminished-fifth fall from C to F# at the close adds a bitter tone.

Meno mosso ♩ = 72

61 *f* E - - - so e-ra el mun - - -

65 *f* do - - - Es - te ri - o

70 *f* un - - - lo - da - zal de a-na-con - das - - -

75 *p espr.* *allarg.* hu-me-dad as - fi - xian - te - - -

EXAMPLE 5: “Florenxia Grimaldi,” mm. 61-79

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A brief orchestral interlude occurs in mm. 73-76 while Florencia takes a moment to absorb her surroundings. Similar to the interlude in mm. 41-42, the oboe solo recalls the “name” motive by reiterating A to F#. The half-diminished harmony and repeated syncopated rhythm again create heaviness in the orchestra. As Florencia reminisces about all she despised in the Amazon, the *recitativo* style returns with the “repeated pitch” motive in mm. 77-79 as she mumbles “humedad asfíxiate” (asphyxiating humidity) on an F# (Example 5, above). The orchestra comes to a complete stop in m. 81 when Florencia, as if speaking to herself, says, “Dijiste que me esperarías siempre” (You said you would wait for me forever) (Example 6). Catán indicates *liberamente* and leaves the voice unaccompanied with a repeated F# that ascends to A, recalling the “name” motive on the word “siempre” (forever). This isolated text, set in the low vocal register, is a low point that reveals Florencia’s most vulnerable moment, when she acknowledges Cristóbal’s selflessness and her own selfishness.

The quietly ascending chromatic lines in m. 80 and m. 82, with the harp and violas, frames Florencia’s utterance and offer a moment of repose before Florencia resumes her thoughts (Example 6).

80 ♩ = 69 *liberamente*

F. Di - jis - te que me es pe - ra - rías siem - pre que el a -

83 ♩ = 80

F. mor li - be - ra - ba y no me de - ten drí - as

EXAMPLE 6: “Floresia Grimaldi,” mm. 80-86

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Catán sets the text “Que el amor liberaba y no me dentendrías” (That love sets one free and you would not hold me back) in the middle register, a step toward Floresia’s next peak. In mm. 83-84, Catán stretches “amor” (love) with a sustained pitch (B) that is underlined by quiet, quarter-note lines punctuated by sixteenth-note interjections (Example 6, above). The disturbance of these repeated major-seventh chords suggests Floresia’s unease as well as her accelerating heartbeat.

Floresia expected Cristóbal to wait for her forever, and she did not consider returning to Manaus until twenty years later. Although the dynamic level has remained at *piano* since m. 73, the trombones, timpani, bassoons, and violas enter with a *subito forte* on the downbeat of m. 87 when Floresia says, “Me fui, triunfé” (I left, I triumphed)

(Example 7). Catán demonstrates Florencia's anger when the voice, motivated by the *forte* chord on the downbeats of mm. 87 and 88, quickly rises from B to E, *forte*, and is immediately followed by rapid descending arpeggios in the violins and flutes (Example 7, mm. 87-88). While the ascending pitches in the voice stress the text, "Me fui, triunfé" (I left, I triumphed), the fast descending motion in the violins and flutes expresses Florencia's unrest. During Florencia's moment of despair, the voice struggles for another peak and instead abruptly descends to F# in m. 89 with the text "y olvidé" (and I forgot) (Example 7, m. 89). When Florencia says, "mi promesa entre oropeles" (my promise amongst the pretenses), the voice rises in stepwise motion to C with a quiet return to the orchestral figure from mm. 83-86 in mm. 89-90 (Example 7, mm. 89-90).

As Florencia becomes lost in thought, the voice sustains a *pianissimo* high F# with the text "me perdía" (I was losing myself) that overlaps with the brief orchestral transition in mm. 91-93 (Example 7). During this transition, the clarinets play a falling version of the "name" motive while the trumpets and trombones descend by half-steps. In addition to demonstrating Florencia's diverted thoughts, the dissolving quality of this music suggests her lost identity.

87

F. Me fui triun - fé y ol - vi -

89

F. dé mi pro - me - sa En - tre o - ro - pe - les. me per -

91 *pp*

F. dí - - a ¡No

p sub.

EXAMPLE 7: "Florenxia Grimaldi," mm. 87-93

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A new section begins in m. 94 when Florenxia suddenly remembers Rosalba's disturbing words. Even though she accomplished her professional aspirations, Florenxia is unhappy and angry with herself for abandoning Cristóbal.

Text

No sólo soy mi nombre.
¡No! ¡No soy mi nombre!
La fama es un desastre
si dejas que te engañe.
Yo lo permití.
Ya no sabía
quien era Florencia Grimaldi,
si aquella que el público aclamaba,
o ésta que aquí se enamoró,
y ambas soy.

Translation

I am not just my name.
No! I am not my name!
Fame is a disaster
if you allow it to deceive you.
I allowed it.
I no longer knew
who Florencia Grimaldi was,
the one whom the crowds acclaimed,
or this one who fell in love here,
and I am both.

The return of the accelerating heartbeat figure from mm. 83-86 (*tremolo* and sixteenth note interjections) evokes Florencia's growing anxiety (Example 8). This figure appears in mm. 94-101 and functions as an ostinato. Because a layer of this ostinato consists of the "name" motive, Catán suggests that Florencia's anguish originates from her identity crisis. He sets the text "No sólo soy mi nombre" (I am not just my name) with eighth notes on a repeated pitch (B) rising to a sustained E on "nombre" (name). Unlike the initial pensive setting of this text in m. 25, the slow, accented quality of the repeated eighths expresses Florencia's controlled, yet rising, anger. She shouts, "¡No! ¡No soy mi nombre!" (No! I am not my name!) and Catán stresses "No!" with a *forte* high B in m. 96. The voice quickly descends to the middle register and when Florencia says, "La fama es un desastre si dejas que te engañe" (Fame is a disaster if you allow it to deceive you), the return to the repeated B's in mm. 97, 98, and 100 emphasizes the words "desastre" (disaster) and "engañe" (deceive). While the rise from F# to B in mm. 98 and 100 suggests a struggle for another peak, the eighths and triplets in the voice counter the sixteenths of the ostinato figure, suggesting Florencia's conflicting emotions. When she admits, "Yo lo permití" (I allowed it), the voice, again, rises from B to E.

94
F. só - lo soy mi nom - - - bre! ¡No, no soy mi

97
F. nom - bre La fa - ma es un de - sas - tre si

100
F. de - jas que te en ga - ñe Yo lo per-mi-tí

EXAMPLE 8: “Flores Grimaldi,” mm. 94-102

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Flores’s confession, “ya no sabía quien era Flores Grimaldi” (I no longer knew who Flores Grimaldi was), reveals that she is beginning to recognize her dual identity. With a fast-ascending triplet that evokes Flores’s agitation, the voice rises to the high register and Catán emphasizes “sabía” (knew) in m. 104 with the sustained pitches G and F# (Example 9). The aggressive quality of the ascending triplets in m. 105

suggests Florencia's self-reproach when she says, "quien era Florencia Grimaldi" (who Florencia Grimaldi was). Overwhelmed with anger, she exclaims, "Si aquella que el público aclamaba, o ésta que aquí se enamoró" (That one whom the crowds acclaimed, or this one who fell in love here). Catán sets this text with vocal peaks on "aquella" (that one) and "ésta" (this one) in m.106 and m. 108, bringing out the two identities. In both instances, the orchestra plays a *forte* Bb on the downbeat and the voice enters on the second beat with a surge from E to A that immediately descends to the middle register. Because these two lines are set alike, the music suggests that there is no distinction between Florencia the opera singer, and Florencia the native of Manaus.

During the orchestral climax of the aria, m. 110, the *tremolo* in the strings and the crescendo to a triple *forte* continue this emotional peak. Catán then evokes Florencia's epiphany with a decrescendo to *piano* that isolates the text "y ambas soy" (and I am both) (Example 9, mm. 110-112). As Florencia ponders this sudden realization, Catán suggests her reflective state with the return of the "name" motive in the oboe and horn solos during the orchestral interlude (Example 9, mm. 114-115, and Example 10, mm. 116-117). Dropping the "name" motive an octave downward, Catán suggests Florencia's deep contemplation of her identity.

Although she is a successful and independent woman, Florencia's guilt is a heavy burden that keeps her from finding happiness. She is miserable and angry with herself until she realizes, "and I am both." As she begins to realize that she never really left the Amazon, her self-reproach starts to disappear.

103

F.

Ya no sa - bí - - a quien er - a Flo-ren-cia Gri-mal-di

106

F.

si a - que - - lla que el pú-bli-co a-cla-ma - - ba

108

F.

o és - - ta que a - quí se e-na-mo-rò Y

112 *meno mosso*

F.

am - bas soy

EXAMPLE 9: "Florencia Grimaldi," mm. 103-115

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In the new section, mm. 118-132, the vulnerable Florencia realizes her error in trying to repress the Florencia of the Amazon:

Text	Translation
Traté de olvidar a la Florencia de antes y destruí parte de mi alma. Nunca había estado tan sola y tan rodeada de mentiras.	I tried to forget the Florencia of before and I destroyed a part of my soul. I had never been so alone and so surrounded by lies.

The *recitativo* style returns in mm. 118-119 when Florencia says, “Traté de olvidar a la Florencia de antes” (I tried to forget the Florencia of before) (Example 10). While the harp and the strings sustain a dissonant chord, the voice ascends from G to Bb to D, lingering on Bb with the “repeated pitch” motive. Although the vocal line is set with fast rhythms suggesting speech, the extended rhythms on “olvidar” (to forget) and “antes” (before) create a feeling of longing that suggest Florencia’s regret. The orchestral pause in m. 120 isolates the text “y destruí” (and I destroyed) as the voice continues the rising thirds up to F# and A, the pitches of the “name” motive; because the “name” motive appears in this particular text setting, Catán stresses the suppression of Florencia’s former identity. During the next vocal peak (sustained, *piano* high A to Bb), the oboe solo recalls the “name” motive before doubling the voice as it descends to the middle register. The dissolving quality in the vocal line, created by the *piano* and the chromatic descent, illustrates Florencia’s “destroyed” soul. At this time, a slow ostinato figure with a slowly rising line begins in the second violins and violas and creates a dark and mournful color suggesting Florencia’s desolation (Example 10, mm. 121-127). Beginning with “y ambas soy” (and I am both) in m. 112 and resuming during the voice’s peak in m. 121, this ostinato plods on while Florencia joins it with “parte de mi alma” (part of my soul) in m. 123. First the pitches of the vocal peak (A-Bb) are quietly echoed, then the voice

concludes with the plaintive half-step D-Eb-D (Example 10, mm. 123-126). This slow and quiet statement, followed by one last ostinato figure, the simplest and barest of its appearances, suggests Florencia's exhaustion and defeat (Example 10, mm. 127-128).

116

F. Tra-té de ol-vi-dar a la Flo-ren-cia de an-tes

120

F. y des-tru-í par-te

124

F. de mi al - - - ma

allarg.

mp

p

EXAMPLE 10: "Florencia Grimaldi," mm. 116-128

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Finding herself in yet another vulnerable state, Florencia reveals, “Nunca había estado tan sola y tan rodeada de mentiras” (I have never been so alone and so surrounded by lies) (Example 11). Similar to the setting of “aquí” (here) in mm. 26-28, the voice rises from A to F#, an inverted version of the “name” motive, in m. 129. When Florencia says, “y tan rodeada de mentiras” (and so surrounded by lies), the voice rises from A to F, replacing the original major second rise with a minor second; this distorted version of the “aquí” setting suggests that Florencia’s solitude began when she decided to leave the Amazon (Example 11).

The image shows a musical score for Example 11, measures 129-132. The vocal line is in treble clef, 4/4 time, with a tempo marking of 54. The lyrics are: "Nun-ca ha-bía es-ta-do tan so-la y tan ro-de-a-da de men-ti-ras". The piano accompaniment is in bass clef, 4/4 time, with dynamics of *pp* and *mp*. The score includes a key signature change to one sharp (F#) and a time signature change to 3/4 for the final measure.

EXAMPLE 11: “Florencia Grimaldi,” mm. 129-132

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During mm. 118-132, when Florencia realizes that her attempts to forget her past destroyed part of her soul, Catán evokes Florencia’s deteriorating spirit. While she has the international career she always wanted, she continues to feel alone and dejected. This moment of helplessness is Florencia’s weakest moment in both the aria and in the opera.

In the final section of the aria, mm. 133-159, Florencia begins her transformation when she acknowledges the Amazon as an essential part of her existence:

Text

Supe que no podía seguir,
tenía que regresar.
Florenxia era parte de ti,
¡de este paisaje, de esta luz!
¡Esta luz me hace libre,
me da alas,
me transforma en mí!

Translation

I knew I could not go on,
I had to return.
Florenxia was part of you,
of this scenery, of this light!
This light makes me free,
it gives me wings,
it transforms me into myself!

Significantly different from the rest of the aria, the *calmato* section includes the marimba and the djembé, performing syncopated rhythms that produce a dance-like atmosphere (Example 12). In addition, the pandiatonicism of this passage contributes to the folk character. The hushed quality in the orchestra, created by the *pianissimo* dynamic and alternating measures of *pizzicato* and *arco con sordino* in the strings, produces a feeling of distance as Florenxia begins to recognize her true relationship to this place on the Amazon. When she says, “Supe que no podía seguir, tenía que regresar. Florenxia era parte de ti” (I knew I could not go on, I had to return. Florenxia was part of you), the voice imitates the syncopated rhythms in the orchestra, suggesting Florenxia’s identification with the Amazon (Example 12, mm. 135-144).

133 Calmato ♩ = 69

F. Su - pe - que -

pp distant

136 no - po - dí - a se - guir Te - ní - a -

139 que re - gre - sar

142 Flo - ren - cia e - ra par - te de ti

EXAMPLE 12: "Florenxia Grimaldi," mm. 133-144

Florenxia en el Amazonas

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The next vocal peak appears in m. 146 when the voice surges to high A as Florencia says, “de este paisaje” (of this scenery) (Example 13). Because the high A in the voice and the F# in the orchestra present the pitches of the “name” motive, Catán suggests that Florencia is realizing that part of her has been here all along in the natural elements. With an ascending *glissando* in the harp and a *crescendo* in the trumpets and horns, Catán anticipates Florencia’s revelation (Example 13, m. 148). Although Catán repeats the previous peak (m. 146) in the setting of “esta luz me hace libre” (this light makes me free) (m. 149), the rich color in the orchestra, created by the rapid motion of the triplets in the violins, *senza sordino*, and the sextuplets in the winds, provides a lush setting of the earlier climax that suggests Florencia’s new revelation (Example 13, mm.149-150). She first recognizes that she was part of the light and scene, but now she realizes that the place is merging with her to complete her; in other words, the part she left behind years ago is rejoining her. This realization is summarized in the final peak with “me transforma en mí” (it transforms me into myself); when the orchestra joins Florencia with the “Amazon music” from the *calmato* section on “mí” (myself), Catán suggests that Florencia has returned to her origins and is beginning her magical transformation.

145

F. de es - te pai - sa - je de es - ta luz

149

F. Es - ta luz me ha - ce li - bre me da a - las Me trans-

152

F. for - ma en mi

155

F. optional

non dim.

EXAMPLE 13: "Flores en el Amazonas," mm. 145-159

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In summary, Florencia's first aria is divided into four major sections. The "nervous" figure in the first section, mm. 20-43, evokes her uneasiness as she begins her return journey to Manaus. Initially hesitant to say her thoughts out loud, the sparse and sustained accompaniment suggests Florencia's contemplative state. Reflecting on the meaning of her name, Florencia recalls her intimate relationship with Cristóbal, and the increasingly higher peaks in the vocal line, followed by rapid drops into the middle register, convey her erratic emotional state. Because the first emotional surge occurs on "voz" (voice), Catán suggests that Florencia's operatic career continues to be the source of her conflict.

The second section of the aria, mm. 44-93, reveals Florencia's self-reproach as she remembers leaving Cristóbal and breaking her promise to return. The frantic movement in the *agitato* section, mm. 44-60, and the vocal climax on "mundo" (world) express Florencia's devastation. The exposed quality of the unaccompanied *liberamente*, "dijiste que me esperarías siempre" (you said you would wait for me forever) (m. 81), suggests her vulnerability. When she recalls her international success, mm. 87 and 88, the *forte* chord on the downbeat and the rapid descending arpeggios in the flutes and strings express Florencia's anger. The quiet setting of "me perdía" (I was losing myself), a sustained, *pianissimo* high F# with quiet descending figures in the orchestra (mm. 91-92), suggests Florencia's lost identity.

During the third section of the aria, mm. 94-117, Florencia becomes upset as she remembers Rosalba's account of the renowned soprano. Catán expresses Florencia's growing anxiety with an ostinato figure (*tremolo* and sixteenth-note interjections) that depicts her accelerating heartbeat. Her sudden realization, "y ambas soy" (and I am both),

leads to the next peak, where she admits to destroying part of her soul when she attempted to forget the “Florenxia from before.” When Florenxia reveals that she has “never been so alone and so surrounded by lies,” the distorted version of the “aquí” (here) setting (m. 26) in the voice suggests that Florenxia’s solitude began when she decided to leave the Amazon.

In the *calmato* section, mm. 118-132, the quiet dance- and folk-like atmosphere, created by pandiatonicism and syncopated rhythms performed with exotic instruments, demonstrates Florenxia’s return to her origins. In mm. 119-153, the rapid movement and rich colors in the orchestra highlight Florenxia’s liberation as she realizes that she is both the opera singer and the one who fell in love in the jungle. When Florenxia finally recognizes that the Amazon “transforms me into myself,” the Amazon music from the *calmato* section returns, joining her as she begins her emotional and physical transformation.

CHAPTER 4

“ESCÚCHAME”

Act II, Scene 17, begins when Arcadio joins Rosalba and Florencia on the deck.¹ He says, “Do you see, Rosalba? We will arrive in time to see Grimaldi!” When she fails to express excitement, he asks, “What? Aren’t you happy?”² Having learned about Florencia’s love for Cristóbal, Rosalba kisses Arcadio and asks, “What if we could find freedom together?”³ Taken by surprise, Arcadio asks, “To love each other without fear?” and Rosalba answers, “You will give meaning to what I write.”⁴ Overjoyed, Arcadio says, “You will guide my flight!” and the two embrace.⁵ After Paula and Álvaro appear on the deck, Álvaro recounts the details of their first date and the two celebrate their rekindled marriage.⁶ The reconciled couples give Florencia hope to be reunited with Cristóbal and she says, “Manaus! I return to sing my true love song to you!”⁷

Just as the passengers begin to voice their new aspirations, Riolobo interrupts them, yelling, “Cholera! Cholera!” and Capitán shouts, “Damned illness!”⁸ Frantically, Florencia asks, “And Manaus, Capitán, will it die?” but he continues to cry, “Damned illness!”⁹ The scene becomes chaotic as the passengers fear for their lives. Capitán finally yells, “Remain calm! We will be safe as long as we don’t disembark!”¹⁰ Devastated,

¹ Florencia has remained incognito throughout the opera. In Act II, Scene 16, Florencia and Rosalba are alone on the deck. During an argument about the source of the diva’s talent, Florencia reveals her identity to Rosalba and the two embrace.

² Catán, “Florencia en el Amazonas,” 210. All English translations were completed by the current author.

³ Ibid., 211.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 211-212.

⁶ Ibid., 212-213. In Act I, Scene 1, Paula asks Álvaro if he remembers their first date and he answers, “No! I’ve forgotten all about it!”

⁷ Ibid., 214-215.

⁸ Ibid., 215.

⁹ Ibid., 216.

¹⁰ Ibid., 218.

Florencia cries, “No!” and leaves the dock.¹¹ When Rosalba asks if they will get to hear the diva, Capitán regretfully says, “I’m sorry. Look!”¹² As Capitán points to the numerous caskets floating down the river, Riolobo says, “Death floats upon the river. The last embrace.”¹³ Tormented by the realization that she will never see her lover, Florencia appears on the deck and calls out to Cristóbal in her final aria, “Escúchame.”¹⁴

Dramatically similar to “Liebestod” from Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*, “Escúchame,” which is approximately six minutes in duration, is an aria of transfiguration.¹⁵ At the beginning of the aria, Florencia feels helpless as her hope to reunite with Cristóbal is suddenly shattered. Devastated and defeated, she kneels on the deck and, with a very soft voice, asks, “Where are you Cristóbal? Did I come all this way just to lose you again?”¹⁶

During her moment of desolation, she suddenly senses Cristóbal’s presence near her. She calls his name and begs him to hear her words as she begins to slowly raise herself. Because her song begins to soar, Florencia is certain that Cristóbal is listening. She tells Cristóbal that because of him, she was able to make her journey down the Amazon River and that whether he is alive or dead, she knows he can hear her. Cristóbal’s presence is so intense in Florencia’s mind that she begins to feel his heartbeat. When she finally says, “I feel you here, here, in my song,” the lovers have a mystical

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 219-220.

¹⁴ Ibid., 221. The opening portion of Act II, Scene 17 (from Arcadio’s entrance until Riolobo’s last line), consists of mm. 1-101. Florencia’s final aria begins in m. 102.

¹⁵ Thomas Smillie, “Opera Explained—Tristan und Isolde,” Naxos Audio Books, <http://www.naxosaudiobooks.com/558195.htm> (accessed February 1, 2013). In her final aria (“Liebestod”), Isolde has a vision of her deceased lover, Tristan, before she joins him in death.

¹⁶ Catán, “Florencia en el Amazonas,” 221.

reunion as Florencia transforms into the Emerald Muse butterfly Cristóbal sought in the jungle.¹⁷

Similar to her first aria, Florencia's final aria consists of various sections divided in accordance with the text. In the first section, mm. 102-114, Florencia, who is devastated after learning that she will never reunite with her lover, calls out to Cristóbal:

Text	Translation
¿Dónde estás Cristóbal?	Where are you Cristóbal?
¿Vine hasta aquí para perderte de nuevo?	Did I come all this way just to lose you again?
¿Te arrebató otra vez la selva voraz?	Has the voracious jungle ripped you away from me once more?
¿Por qué te siento cerca?	Why do I feel you near?
Cristóbal, Cristóbal.	Cristóbal, Cristóbal.
Te siento cerca.	I feel you near.

During this opening section of the aria, the orchestra, which is reduced to violins, harp, and marimba, sustains a *piano* D-major chord with *tremolo* that evokes uncertainty (Example 14). Because the afflicted Florencia is at a loss for words, the sparse orchestration expresses her initial frailty. Catán indicates “En voz muy baja, de rodillas” (In a very soft voice, kneeling down) as Florencia begins to sing.¹⁸ In the middle register with a slow rhythm, the vocal line is in *recitativo* style. Because the voice repeatedly enters on the second beat, after sustained chords in the orchestra, Catán depicts Florencia's slow thought process, which is a result of her mournful disposition.

When Florencia asks, “¿Dónde estás Cristóbal?” (Where are you Cristóbal?), the voice slowly rises from F# to D and stresses “Cristóbal” as it descends in half-notes back to F# (Example 14, mm. 102-103). This stretched minor-sixth interval suggests Florencia's pain as she calls her lover's name. Because she is emotionally drained, the

¹⁷ Ibid., 229.

¹⁸ Ibid., 221.

voice struggles for a peak as it rises to D but quickly drops to G# with Florencia's next question, "¿Vine hasta aquí para perderte de nuevo?" (Did I come all this way just to lose you again?) (Example 14, mm. 104-105). Because the voice fails to sustain the high pitch (D), the descending diminished fifth on "nuevo" (again) demonstrates Florencia's physical and emotional weakness. At this time, the addition of the clarinets expands the high sonorities in the orchestra, highlighting Florencia's unanswered questions.

Desperate for answers, Florencia asks, "¿Te arrebató otra vez la selva voraz?" (Has the voracious jungle ripped you away from me once more?). Struggling for a peak, the voice rises to Eb but drops an octave and slowly ascends to A in stepwise motion (Example 14, mm. 106-107). In addition to the disjunct quality of this vocal phrase, the Eb-minor chords, the *tremolo* in the marimba, and the *pianissimo* trill in the flutes create a somber color that suggests Florencia's despondency. When she asks, "¿Por qué te siento cerca?" (Why do I feel you near?), the surreal quality of the B-minor harmony with a major-seventh A# suggests Florencia's bewilderment (Example 14, mm. 108-109). In addition, the descending minor intervals on "te siento cerca" (I feel you near) and the extension of the low sonorities in the orchestra, created by the addition of the violas, create an unsteady feeling that suggests Florencia's perplexity.

In mm. 110-111, the return of the Eb-minor chord and the omission of the violas, which emphasizes the high sonorities, highlight Florencia's thrill as she calls her lover's name (Example 14). Because Florencia wants nothing more than to find her lover, the first setting of "Cristóbal," an ascending minor third with eighth notes, suggests urgency while the second setting, an ascending minor third followed by a descending diminished fifth with half notes, suggests longing. In mm. 112-113, the question "why do I feel you

near?” becomes “I feel you near.” The setting of this statement is similar to that of “Cristóbal, Cristóbal” in mm. 110-111, but the voice rises to Gb with “Cristóbal” and to G with “cerca” (near). Because the higher peak occurs on “cerca” (near), Catán suggests that Cristóbal’s presence is overpowering Florencia’s mind.

102 ♩ = 69 (En voz muy baja, de rodillas)
Florencia: (*In a very soft voice, kneeling down*)

¿Dón de es-tás, Cris - tó - bal ¿Vi-ne has-ta a-quí pa-ra per-der-te de

nue - vo? ¿Te ar-re - ba-tó o-tra vez la sel-va vo-raz?

¿Por qué te sien - to cer - ca? Cris - tó - bal Cris -

tó - bal te sien - to cer - ca? Es -

EXAMPLE 14: “Escúchame,” mm. 102-114

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Heartbroken and confused, Florencia has much to say to her absent lover. During the beginning of the aria, the low, speech-like quality of the vocal line and the sparse and

sustained orchestration convey Florencia's desolate state. On the other hand, the gradual rise in the voice and the addition of instruments in the orchestration suggest her increasing inner strength.

After sensing the presence of her lover, Florencia begs Cristóbal to hear her words in a new section, mm. 115-126. Because Catán indicates, "Florencia se levanta y empieza su aria final" (Florencia raises herself and begins her last aria), he suggests that Cristóbal's proximity gives her strength.

Text

Escúchame. Escúchame.
Mi voz vuela hacia tí
como un ave y se cierne
sobre el amor del mundo.

Translation

Hear me. Hear me.
My voice soars toward you
like a bird and it spreads its wings
over the world's love.

As Florencia begins to utter her plea, the voice descends from Eb to D with a dotted rhythm that emphasizes "Escúchame" (Hear me) (Example 15). Because this minor-second interval recurs throughout this section of the aria, it is referred to as the "plea" motive. In m. 115, the full orchestra enters quietly with the "plea" motive in the clarinets and violas. Along with the orchestral crescendo created by the addition of all the instruments, the persistence of the "plea" motive in the subsequent measures demonstrates Florencia's despair. The extension of the low sonorities in the orchestra, created by the entrance of the cellos and double basses, produces a dark and heavy color. During the second setting of "escúchame," the descending half-notes in the voice suggest a more desperate plea, and the octave descent of the "plea" motive in the cellos and double basses functions as a ground bass that depicts Florencia's lamenting soul (Example 15, mm. 116-120).

When she says, “Mi voz vuela hacia ti como un ave” (My voice soars toward you like a bird), the decrescendo to *piano* in the orchestra and the recurring “plea” motive in the voice suggest Florencia’s desperate and weakening spirit (Example 15, mm. 120-123). Catán sets “y se cierne sobre el amor del mundo” (and it spreads its wings over the world’s love) in *recitativo* style with the voice descending to G and slowly ascending to Bb in stepwise motion. Unlike its climactic setting in her first aria, “mundo” (world) is in the middle register with ascending half notes (A-Bb) (Example 15, m. 125).¹⁹ With this calmer setting of “mundo,” Catán suggests that the world of Florencia’s international career has now shrunk and become more personal.

¹⁹ The vocal climax of her first aria occurs on “mundo” as the voice rises to high C.

115 (Florenxia se levanta y empieza su aria final)
(Florenxia raises herself and begins her last aria)

allargando

mp

F. *cú - cha - me Es - cú - cha - me mi*

121 $\text{♩} = 58$

F. *voz _____ vue - la ha - cia ti co - mo un a - - ve y se*

124

F. *cier - ne so - bre el a - mor del mun - do _____ De*

EXAMPLE 15: “Escúchame,” mm. 115-126

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Initially inconsolable, Florenxia begs Cristóbal to listen to her words. In a new section, mm. 127-137, Florenxia, who is convinced her lover is listening, confesses that Cristóbal was the source of her song:

Text

De ti nació mi canto,
de entre tus manos,
que en sueños y despiertas,
veneran mariposas.
Sé que estás escuchándome
porque vuela mi canto
Si tú no lo escucharas,
mi voz no volaría.

Translation

From you, my song was born,
from within your hands,
which asleep and awake,
will bring butterflies.
I know you are hearing me
because my song soars.
If you did not hear it,
my voice would not fly.

As she reveals the inspiration behind her singing talent, Florencia's emotions change from desolate to hopeful. The *recitativo* style returns when the orchestra reduces to strings, horns, and harp, isolating the text, "De ti nació mi canto, de entre tus manos" (From you, my song was born, from within your hands) (Example 16, mm. 127-128). The sustained notes on "ti" (you) and "canto" (song) interrupt the otherwise fast-moving vocal line, implying that Cristóbal is, indeed, part of Florencia's song. When Florencia says, "que en sueños y despiertas" (which asleep and awake), the sustained, *piano* chord in the orchestra demonstrates "sleeping" while the rise from G to A to Bb in the voice (middle register) depicts "waking" (Example 18, m. 129). The third vocal peak appears in m. 131 when the voice rises from C to high G with the repetition of "y despiertas" (and awake), evoking Florencia's growing strength and waking spirit. At this time, the fast ascending sixteenth notes in the harp, winds, and marimba, and the trills in the flutes, illustrate the text "veneran mariposas" (will bring butterflies) by emulating the fluttering movement of butterflies (Example 16, m. 131-132). Because this figure appears throughout the rest of the aria, it is referred to as the "butterfly" motive. Also, because Cristóbal is a butterfly hunter, the "butterfly" motive suggests his presence in the elements.

Up to this point in the aria, the sparse orchestration has evoked Florencia's weak spirit. However, in m. 134, with the text "vuela mi canto" (my song soars), the use of the full orchestra and the return of the "butterfly" motive suggest that Florencia's inner strength comes from nature (Example 16, mm. 134). When Florencia says, "Si tú no lo escucharas mi voz no volaría" (If you did not hear me, my voice would not fly), the sustained chord, marked *piano*, and the omission of the cellos and double basses creates a lighter orchestral color that evokes Florencia's brighter mood (Example 16, mm. 135-136). At this time, the appearance of the "name" motive in the vocal line suggests that Florencia's new revelation is transforming her. An orchestral transition occurs in mm. 137-138 with a descending version of the "butterfly" motive and a *crescendo* in the strings that anticipate Florencia's next thoughts.

127

F. ti na - ció mi can - to De en - tre tus ma - - nos que en

129

F. sue - ños y des - pier - tas y des - pier - - - tas ve -

132

F. ne - ran ma - ri - po - sas Sé que es - tás es - cu - chán - do - me por - que

134

F. vue - la mi can - to Si tú no lo es - cu - cha - ras mi



EXAMPLE 16: “Escúchame,” mm. 127-137

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Florencia is certain that Cristóbal is near because her song is soaring. In the next section, mm. 138-150, she reveals that in addition to being her inspiration, Cristóbal is the motivating force in her life.

Text

De ti nació mi canto,
por tí pude cruzar
el río tumultuoso de los días
o el río sereno de las noches.
Y allá, en la otra rivera,
detenerse a escuchar
su propio rumor de un agua enamorada.

Translation

From you my song was born,
because of you, I was able to cross
the tumultuous river of the days
or the serene river of the nights.
And there, on the other bank,
stop to listen
to its own loving murmur.

Figures from her first aria appear throughout this section. The slow, continuous version of the “nervous” figure in the orchestra evokes Florencia’s no longer diffident nature (Example 17, mm. 138-140).²⁰ Because this slow version of the “nervous” figure suggests the quiet movement of the flowing river, it is referred to as the “river” motive. Both the “name” and “repeated pitch” motives appear in the vocal line with the text, “De ti nació mi canto, por ti pude cruzar” (From you my song was born, because of you I was

²⁰ In her first aria, sustained chords interrupt the “nervous” figure, suggesting Florencia’s hesitation.

able to cross) (Example 17, mm. 138-140).²¹ The appearance of these figures suggests that, long after reflecting on the meaning of her name, Florencia has realized that Cristóbal enabled her to persevere in her career.

When she says, “el río tumultuoso de los días” (the tumultuous river of the days), the rapid motion of the ascending sixteenth notes in the voice depicts the “tumultuous river” (Example 17, m. 140). A vocal peak occurs in m. 141 with the arrival on F# with “días” (days), and a second peak occurs in m. 142 with the arrival on the *piano* high A with “río” (river) (Example 17, mm. 141-142). Even though the “river” motive disappears from the orchestra at this time, the quiet setting of this text demonstrates the “serene river.” Also, because vocal peaks occur on F# and A, the pitches of the “name” motive, Catán suggests that Florencia is becoming part of this river she originally despised. The pitches of the “name” motive reappear in m. 143 with the return of the “river” motive in the orchestra and the descent to A in the voice (Example 17, m. 143). In addition to the tranquil movement of the “river” motive, the sustained A on “noches” (nights) suggests the serenity of the “river of the nights.”

²¹ The “name” motive consists of pitches F# and A and the “repeated pitch” motive, often set with the pitches of the “name” motive, includes a fast rhythm that provides a speech-like quality in the voice.

♩ = 66

138 Voice enters 3rd time repeat 3x

F. De ti na-ce mi can - to por ti pue-de cru -

140 zar el ri - o tu-mul-tuo-so de los di - - as o el

142 *p* rí - o se-re - no de las no - - - ches ya -

pp

EXAMPLE 17: “Escúchame,” mm. 138-143

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The rise to F# in the voice and the return in the orchestra of the “butterfly” motive, marked with a crescendo, during the setting of “y allá en la otra ribera detenerse a escuchar” (and there, on the other bank, stop to listen) express Florencia’s growing

enthusiasm as well as Cristóbal's closeness (Example 18, mm. 144-145). Because Florencia is no longer weak and desolate, the voice descends after the peak but remains in the high register. As Florencia completes her statement, "su propio rumor de un agua enamorada" (to its own loving murmur), the slow rise to a sustained, *pianissimo* high B demonstrates Florencia's newfound affection for the Amazon (Example 18, mm. 148-150). Catán stretches "enamorada" (loving) with a slow descent to D in the voice. Because the voice steps down to the pitches of the name motive during its descent to D, Catán suggests that Florencia is merging with the place. While the return of the "butterfly" motive in the harp and winds depicts Cristóbal's proximity, the off-beat quarter notes in the violins and violas recall the Amazon dance music of the first aria.

144

F. llá, en la o tra ri - be - ra de - te - ner - - se a es cu - char

146

F. supro - pioru - mor de a - gua e - na - - mo - ra - - da

p sub.

f

pp

EXAMPLE 18: “Escúchame,” mm. 144-150

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After feeling desolate and helpless, Florencia increasingly senses Cristóbal’s presence in the natural elements around her. As her voice soars, the orchestra depicts her excitement. In the new section, mm. 151-176, Florencia becomes delirious with the realization that Cristóbal, whether dead or alive, is near her in the Amazonian jungle.

Text

Sé que me escuchas en la vida o la muerte.
 Si no lo escucharas,
 no sonaría mi canto.
 Te siento palpitir en las alas
 de cada mariposa, en cada brillo verde
 'nel viento, el agua,
 en el fondo de la selva,
 en la vida o la muerte, te siento palpitir!
 En el vuelo de mi canto,
 en el aire suave,
 te siento en el aire ...

Translation

I know you can hear me in life or in death.
 If you were not listening,
 my song would not resound.
 I feel you palpitate in the wings
 of every butterfly, in every green sparkle,
 in the wind, the water,
 in the depths of the jungle,
 in life or in death, I feel you palpitate!
 In the flight of my song,
 in the gentle air,
 I feel you in the air ...

When she recalls that Cristóbal may be deceased, Florencia says, “Sé que me escuchas en la vida o la muerte” (I know you can hear me in life or in death). The quarter-note ostinato accompanying this statement creates a dirge-like quality (Example 19). The whole notes in the double bass emphasize the low sonorities in the orchestra and contribute to the funereal atmosphere.

151

F. Sé que me es - cu - chas en la vi - da o la muer - te

EXAMPLE 19: “Escúchame,” mm. 151-155

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As Florencia quickly realizes that her song nonetheless continues to soar, the trills in the winds and strings, and the *tremolo* in the marimba demonstrate her exhilaration as she says, “Si no lo escucharas, no sonaría mi canto” (If you were not listening, my song

would not resound) (Example 20, mm. 156-159). The “butterfly” music in the orchestra and the sustained C in the voice on “canto” (song) suggest the strong emotional union between Florencia and her lover. As Cristóbal’s presence becomes more intense in Florencia’s mind, because she is connecting with the natural elements, she begins to feel his heartbeat in all of her surroundings. The weeping quality of the vocal line, created with sustained notes followed by rapid drops, evokes Florencia’s longing (Example 20, mm. 160-162).

156

F. Si no lo es - cu - cha - ras no so - na - rí - a mi

158

F. can - to Te sien - to pal - pi - tar en las

161

F. a - las de ca - da ma - ri - po - sa en ca da bri - llo ver - de

EXAMPLE 20: “Escúchame,” mm. 156-163

Florencia en el Amazonas

By Daniel Catán

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When Florencia feels Cristóbal in the wind and the water, the ascending triplets in the harp and clarinets and the ascending vocal line evoke Florencia’s growing excitement

(Example 21, mm. 164-167). When she feels him “in the depths of the jungle,” the fast “butterfly” motive suggests Cristóbal’s presence.

164

F. el vien - - to el a - - - gua

166

F. en el fon - - do de la sel - - - va

EXAMPLE 21: “Escúchame,” mm. 164-167

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The next peak occurs in m. 169 when the crescendo in the orchestra supports the voice as it surges to a high G on “palpitar” (palpitate) and descends by step to a sustained F (Example 22, mm. 168-170). In addition to doubling the voice, the violins highlight the vocal peak. Immediately after this emotional surge, the *piano* Bb-major chord and the ascending triplets in the harp and marimba suggest Florencia’s effort to keep her composure (Example 22, mm. 171-172). When she is finally calm, the quiet setting of “aire suave” (gentle air) suggests Florencia’s equanimity.

Starting in m. 173, the *tremolo* in the strings and marimba, the trills in the winds, and the pauses in the vocal line produce a feeling of suspense that represents the emotional buildup that will lead to Florencia's next surge (Example 22, mm. 173-177).

168

F. *ff*

en la vi - da o la muer - te Te sien - to pal - - pi -

170

F. *f*

tar en el vue - lo de mi can - to en el

172

F. *pp*

ai - - re sua - ve Te sien - - to

175

F. *p*

en el ai - - re

EXAMPLE 22: "Escúchame," mm. 168-177

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Unable to resist her emotional outburst, Florencia makes her most desperate cry to her lover in the last section of the aria, mm. 177-213. The intensity of Cristóbal's presence makes her experience a brief moment of insanity before finding solace. When she feels Cristóbal in her singing, Florencia's voice is united with the elements of the jungle; this powerful union liberates her from her guilt and suffering, and transforms her into the Emerald Muse butterfly.

Text	Translation
¡Cristóbal! ¡Cristóbal!	Cristóbal! Cristóbal!
¡Te siento palpar!	I feel your heart beat!
¡'nel aire suave de mi canción!	In the gentle air of my song!
Te siento en el aire,	I feel you in the air,
¡te siento Cristóbal!	I feel you Cristóbal!
Te siento aquí, aquí,	I feel you here, here,
aquí en mi canto.	here in my singing.

Overcome by emotions, Florencia makes a final cry to Cristóbal. The “butterfly” motive in the orchestra, more rapid than ever, suggests Cristóbal's strong presence while the voice surges to A# (Example 23, mm. 178-179). Even though A# is not the highest pitch in the aria, the double *forte* defines this rise as the vocal climax. Because this climax occurs on “Cristóbal,” when in the first aria it was on “mundo” (world), Catán suggests that Florencia's passion is now directed to her lover rather than to her international career.

178

F. ¡Cris - - - - - tó - bal ¡Cris - tó - bal! Te

181

F. sien - to pal - pi - tar _____ 'n el ai - re sua - ve de

185

F. mi can - - - - - ción _____

p sub.

EXAMPLE 23: “Escúchame,” mm. 178-186

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In addition to the *subito piano* in m. 186, the orchestral *crescendo* and the *tremolo* in the gong, timpani, and marimba anticipate Florencia’s next outburst (Example 23, above). The frantic vocal line and the fast descending figures in the orchestra suggest Florencia’s brief moment of insanity as she rises to another vocal peak when crying, “te

siento en el aire, ¡te siento Cristóbal!” (I feel you in the air, I feel you Cristóbal!) (Example 23, mm. 187-189). In m. 190, the *subito piano, dolce* on “te siento” (I feel you) suggests Florencia’s slowing thoughts as she feels Cristóbal “here.” In m. 192, when Florencia begins to calm herself, the off-beat quarter notes in the clarinets and the second violins again recall the “Amazon music” of the first aria. Because this “Amazon music” returns as she reiterates “aquí” (here), Catán is suggesting that Florencia is merging with the jungle and, by extension, with Cristóbal.

187

F. Te sien - to en el ai - re te sien - to ¡Cris -

sfzp

f

calmato subito (meno mosso)

189 *f* *p sub., dolce*

tó - bal! te sien - to A - -

p dolce, legato

193 *ritenuto*

F. quí a - quí a - quí

EXAMPLE 24: “Escúchame,” mm. 187-197

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When Florencia feels Cristóbal “in her singing,” the voice slowly ascends to a sustained, high *piano* A and descends to D (Example 25, mm. 198-201). While Florencia has completed her emotional transformation, her physical transformation begins at the arrival of the final peak. The orchestra joins the voice with a slow, quiet version of the “Amazon music” from her first aria, and the pitches of the “name” motive (F# and A)

appear throughout. The joining of the “name” motive and the “Amazon music” accompanies Florencia’s physical transformation as she begins to spread her butterfly wings.

198

F. en mi can - - - to

203

209

pp

Fine

EXAMPLE 25: “Escúchame,” mm. 198-213

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In summary, Florencia’s final aria, “Escúchame,” is an aria of transfiguration. Devastated after learning that she will not be reunited with Cristóbal, Florencia’s feeble state is expressed by the slow text setting and the sparse and sustained orchestration. In addition, her kneeling posture suggests her physical weakness.

As she begins imploring her lover to hear her, the descending lines in the bass and the persistence of the “plea” motive demonstrate Florencia’s state of grief. The slow, relaxed setting of “mundo” (world) suggests her international career is no longer of utmost importance to her. After Florencia confesses that her lover is the source of her talent, the “butterfly” motive becomes prominent in the orchestra and suggests Cristóbal’s proximity.

Catán begins to demonstrate Florencia’s union with the Amazon: the slow version of the “nervous” figure suggests the movement of the “serene river of the nights,” the quiet peak on “enamorada” (loving) suggests Florencia’s newfound affection for the jungle, and the return of the “butterfly” motive suggests Cristóbal’s ever-growing presence. Her voice begins to soar and she starts to feel her lover’s heartbeat. The climax occurs when the overwhelmed Florencia shouts her lover’s name for the last time. After a brief moment of insanity, Florencia senses her lover’s presence in her singing and Catán evokes this realization with the *subito piano* in the orchestra. During the final peak, the union of the “Amazon music” with the “name” motive depicts Florencia’s transformation into the Emerald Muse butterfly.

CONCLUSION

To create a soprano heroine from the Latin American perspective, Daniel Catán combines the dramatic qualities of several European soprano heroines and blends them with colorful music and literary elements. His protagonist, Florencia Grimaldi, is dramatically comparable to “Contessa Almaviva” (Mozart), “Floria Tosca” (Puccini), and “Isolde” (Wagner).

Similar to Mozart’s heroine, Florencia is the last major character to be introduced in the opera; also similar, Catán introduces her with an aria that expresses her heartache as she longs for her lover. The vocal relationship between Susanna and the Contessa in Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro* is similar to that of Rosalba and Florencia in Catán’s *Florencia en el Amazonas*. While Florencia’s arias are lengthy and dramatic, Rosalba, usually cast with a lighter lyric voice than her counterpart, appears in more musical ensembles than Florencia and, therefore, has a longer role.

Like Puccini’s “Floria Tosca,” Florencia is a renowned opera singer. The high tessitura and dramatic lyricism of Florencia’s music compares to that of Puccini’s heroine. While both divas have successful singing careers, their lovers come from modest backgrounds: Tosca’s lover, Mario Cavaradossi, is a painter and Florencia’s lover, Cristóbal Ribero da Silva, is a butterfly hunter. Although both live for their art, the two divas cannot live without their respective lovers. However, Tosca’s suicide proves her to be among the fated women and Florencia’s character is the exact opposite: her transformation is an operatic representation of “magical realism,” which proves her to be a soprano heroine from Latin American culture.

Similar to Isolde's "Liebestod" from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, Florencia's final aria is an aria of transfiguration. While Isolde has a vision of her deceased lover before joining him in death, Florencia senses her lover's strong presence in the elements of the jungle before their mystical reunion. Like Wagner, Catán includes lush colors and various musical motives in the orchestra to denote the character's feelings, thoughts, and actions.

Florencia's Act I, Scene 2, aria, "Florencia Grimaldi," introduces her conflicting emotions. The vocal climaxes on "voz" (voice) and "mundo" (world) suggest her selfishness as she abandoned her lover in order to establish an international singing career. The introduction of the "Amazon music" at the end of the aria suggests the beginning of Florencia's transformation as she slowly returns to her origins.

During her Act II, Scene 17, aria, "Escúchame," Florencia completes her metamorphosis. Although initially weak, Florencia finds strength when she senses Cristóbal's presence. She acknowledges her lover as the source of her talent and the "butterfly" motive becomes prominent in the orchestra. The return of the "Amazon music" during her reiteration of "aquí" (here) demonstrates Florencia's merger with both the Amazonian jungle and Cristóbal.

In the course of his career, Catán began a tradition of Latin American opera. The successful reception of *Florencia en el Amazonas* was a step toward bringing Spanish-language opera into the repertory. In addition to lush music and literary elements, the opera presents a number of social issues, such as feminism, gender roles, marriage, and love. The exploration of these issues will reveal the Latin American perspective on these universal topics.

Finally, Catán says,

So when I confront myself in the mirror, I see a Mexican composer who, after many years, has gone back to live in his own country to write operas. During my travels I have thought a great deal about my own culture, about music and about opera. I have searched wherever I could in order to understand them and unravel their mysteries. In the end, I can see it clearly, I've been in in search of myself, of my place in the world, of my own voice. And when I feel extremely courageous and ask whether I have become what I once dreamed of becoming, I try to be kind with myself. I confess that, with all my heart, I'm still trying.¹

¹ Catán, "Composing Opera: A Backstage Visit to the Composer's Workshop," 9.

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LIST OF WORKS

Ballet¹

Ausencia de flores, 1983

Chamber Music

Quintet for oboe, clarinet, violin, cello and piano, 1972

Trio for violin, cello, and piano, 1982

Cuando bailas Leonor, for flute, oboe, cello and piano, 1984

Encantamiento, for two recorders, 1989

Encantamiento, for flute and harp, 1989

Encantamiento, for two flutes, 1989

Divertimiento, for two violins, two violas, cello, and double bass, 2004

Chorus

O Pardon Me, Thou Bleeding Piece of Earth, TTBB and Timpani, 2006

Music Theatre

El medallion de Mantelillos, musical play for singers, dancers, actors and chamber orchestra, 1982

Opera

Encuentro en el ocaso, 1979

La hija de Rappaccini, 1989

Florencia en el Amazonas, 1996

Salsipuedes: A Tale of Love, War, and Anchovies, 2004

Il Postino, 2010

Orchestral

Hetaera Esmeralda, 1975

El árbol de la vida, 1980

En un doblez del tiempo, 1982

Tu son tu risa tu sonrisa, 1991

El vuelo del águila, 1994

Florencia en el Amazonas, Orchestral Suite, 2003

Three Interludes from Florencia, 2003

Solo Orchestral

Caribbean Airs, for percussion and orchestra, 2007

Solo Voice and Piano

Comprendo, 2006

¹ G. Schirmer, Inc. "Daniel Catán: Work List."

http://www.schirmer.com/default.aspx?TabId=2419&State_2872=3&ComposerID_2872=2261&CategoryID_2872=0 (accessed January 5, 2013); Catán, "Composing Opera: A Backstage Visit to the Composer's Workshop," 11-12.

Vocal Orchestral

Ocaso de medianoche, for mezzo-soprano and orchestra, 1977

Cantata, for soprano, mixed choir and chamber ensemble, 1981

Mariposa de obsidiana, for soprano, chorus and orchestra, 1984

Tierra final, for soprano and orchestra, 1985

Contristada, song for tenor and orchestra, 1991