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Fort Worth Symphony offers appealing new work by Antonio Juan-Marcos, uninspired Brahms and Ravel

The new work, 'Canto de Semillas,' variously evokes seeds germinating, water and fire, and birdsongs in modern Mexican impressionism.



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By [Scott Cantrell](#)

2:39 PM on Oct 27, 2018 CDT



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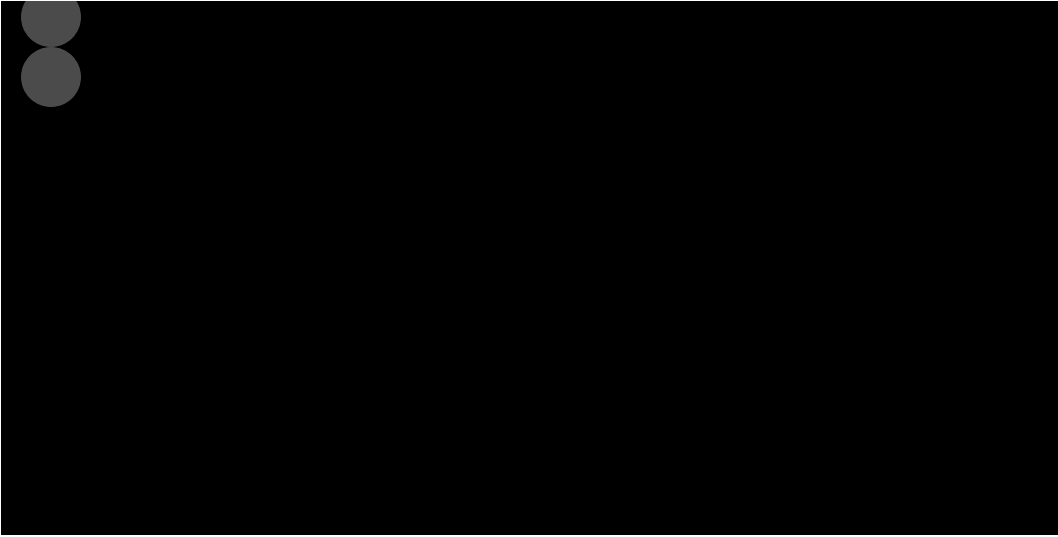
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FORT WORTH — While Latinos swell North Texas populations, the Dallas Symphony Orchestra has evinced no interest in contemporary Latin-American music. By contrast, Fort Worth Symphony music director Miguel Harth-Bedoya, Peruvian-born, has made quite a point of exploring and programming works by Latin-American composers born here and south of the Rio Grande.



The Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra tunes up before a Bass Performance Hall concert on Oct. 26, 2018 (Scott Cantrell/Special Contributor)

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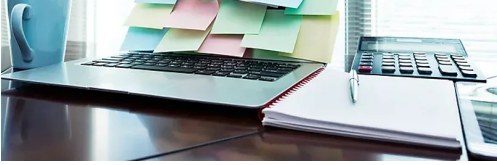
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In pre-performance comments, Juan-Marcos explained that the 18-minute, three-movement work was inspired by his love of nature — and, specifically, by excerpts from poems by Octavio Paz.

The first movement evokes seeds germinating, as if interpreting time-lapse videos in sound. Pointillistic effects contrast with more sustained music, little bits of melody emerging from solo violin (played by concertmaster Michael Shih) and paired bassoons and oboes. The second movement contrasts "fire asleep" and "water that wakes laughing," with meandering flutes and sinister outbursts of brass. The finale evokes a poem's singing bird with musical renderings of actual Mexican birds' songs, from muted violin and, later, trumpet. Quiet percussion suggests woodpeckers at work.

I suppose you'd call this modern Mexican impressionism, and the imaginative colors and textures proved appealing. Barely audible sound effects added nothing to the experience, and might as well be omitted.

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The piece was a logical setup for a classic of French impressionism — also evoking burbling waters and birdsong — the Second Suite from Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*. It began unpromisingly, the "Sunrise" movement evincing no wonder whatsoever, no urgency. Principal flutist Jake Fridkis spun out lovely lines in the ensuing "Pantomime," and Harth-Bedoya made sure the concluding "General Dance" razzled and dazzled. I always feel cheated, though, when the chorus parts are omitted, as they were this time.



Piano Soloist Alessio Bax performs with the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra at Bass Performance Hall in Fort Worth on Oct. 26, 2018. (Lawrence Jenkins / Special Contributor)

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Why do conductors insist, without any authority in the score, on starting the piece slowly rather than at the marked *allegro non troppo*? One of the greatest of cello solos was made utterly charmless, too, with exactly the same vibrato on every single note. But there were moments of magic from the clarinets.

Formerly classical music critic of The Dallas Morning News, Scott Cantrell continues covering the beat as a freelance writer. Classical music coverage at The News is supported in part by a grant from the Rubin Institute for Music Criticism, the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and the Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation. The News makes all editorial decisions.

Details

Repeats at 7:30 p.m. Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday at Bass Performance Hall, Fourth and Commerce, Fort Worth. \$22 to \$96.80. 817-665-6000, fwsymphony.org



Scott Cantrell, Special Contributor. Staff classical music critic of The News from 1999 to 2015, Scott Cantrell continues contributing as a freelance writer on classical music and art.

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