

An opera project by José Vítores & Javier Andrade Córdova

Por mano propia

(Into her own hands)

An opera on the great contradictions of the present pandemic Music by José Vítores / Libretto by Javier Andrade Córdova

<u>1. Description of the project</u>

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified social injustice conditions in poor countries and revealed the absence of the state and structures of lacerating corruption. In Ecuador, for example, whilst the pandemic has ravaged several cities, which have experienced Dantesque scenes of unburied corpses and fully collapsed health systems, several cases of overpricing have already come to light in the acquisition of medical supplies and biosecurity. Many cases of abuse of power have also been discovered relating to the access to the few vaccines that have arrived in the country, etc., whilst at the same time the difficult living conditions of the majority of citizens have worsened.

On the other hand, the pandemic seems to be a type of threat that will increasingly appear in a world ravaged by the global destruction of nature and climate balances. There are signs that this pandemic will not be fully defeated and will become an endemic phenomenon and that other infections may be life-threatening in the future.

The myth of Antigone and its reenactment

In this context, we have taken as a reference the Greek myth of Antigone, a young woman who defies an order issued by Creon, the head of state, which goes against the laws of the gods: to leave her brother Polinices unburied for his rebellion against the city.

In the plot of this opera, Ana, a rebellious young woman, struggles to find her boyfriend and activist partner, Paúl, who has been apprehended by security forces. Ana will also be imprisoned and tortured for her involvement in the rebellion, and whilst being tortured, she will understand that Paúl and other activists, who are apparently infected, are being guarded in the general hospital. Ana will escape and go in search of Paúl, but everything will be futile, she will not be able to find him, nor find his body. However, Ana will ascertain that Paul has fulfilled his destiny by ending up becoming "dust mixed with the dust of the people", his body has disappeared mixed with thousands of other anonymous dead that are being mourned for by the country. With the last remnants of strength, since - in her efforts to find Paúl - Ana has also become infected, she decides to take justice into her own hands. Thus, wearing biosecurity clothing, Ana threatens to commit suicide in front of the general hospital if Cracio, the supreme chief, does not appear before her. Cracio, for his part, is embroiled in the anxieties of his corrupt power: he must permanently negotiate with powerful partners, please those who sustain him, and violently dispose of those who confront him. The appearance of a young woman who threatens to commit suicide in front of the general hospital, precisely on the day of the celebrations for the supposed triumph over the first pandemic, ten years ago, whilst on one hand unbalancing his propaganda attempts, on the other, is still an opportunity to clean his image. Therefore, he decides to turn to the young woman's call assuming that she is just some sick health care worker that has lost her nerves. His purpose in front of the television cameras is to execute an act of heroism and compassion: to reassure the young woman, also promising her the best future. Only too late will he understand that he has made a mistake. Once there, Ana calls the people to rebel facing the cameras. Before she is shot down by security agents, she kills Cracio, who at the last moment recognizes the rebel who he tortured days previously.

Dramaturgy

The work relates the desperate pursuit of justice in a world mired in corruption and disrespect for basic rights. This struggle culminates in an illegal but somehow legitimate act: taking the law into one's own hands, which is an expression of a dead end, to which many human groups have been forced into, abducted by power structures subjected to interests far from common sense and good. The opera puts an extreme act on the table of discussion, a symbol of the agony which entire societies have been driven to and updates the myth of Antigone, as a reference to a human sensitivity that is revealed with particular clarity in youthful fortitude to risk one's integrity in order to defend collective values.

The opera is built on the protagonist-antagonistic tension between Ana and Cracio, configured on a conflict of personal, social and political traits that has a tragic ending. A series of co-primary appearances is set up around these characters, Paul, Ana's boyfriend, and Tiresia, the symbol of the past, which appear in the dreams of the two main characters, respectively, and reveal their contradictions, fears, and desires. In this sense, Ana and Cracio are multifaceted representations, not only of heroism and villainy, but of human complexity, of their strengths and virtues, as well as of their weaknesses and uncertainties. The difference between them is therefore in Ana's consequential action in relation to her certainties and beliefs, while, on the other hand, Cracio is a sign of the dissolution of all values in order to increase his power, in the face of which he has become a mere slave.

In times of global crisis, we believe that a work should go down to the foundations of today's society and to discuss common values of humanity, without which we are all condemned.

The composition

From a voice type point of view, Ana is built for a soprano voice with characteristics of youthful heroism. Cracio, on the other hand, is a bass-baritone with threatening sounds. They are accompanied by: on the one hand, Paúl, written for a tenor comparable to Ana's sound quality, since both are two faces of the same coin, that of the committed youth still ready to fight and utopia; and on the other hand, Tiresia, the voice of the past, performed by a mezzo-soprano with dramatic features. Finally, the secondary characters are two healthcare workers and two guards, who could be performed by the same singers, a tenor and a baritone, since these duets do not appear together. Furthermore, some extras of a figurative stage role join the main characters.

The composition is based, in essence, on the already existing tradition of dramatizing the text. The ensemble, which consists of only ten musicians, generates a kind of "dialogue" with the singers, trying to accentuate the dramatic peaks and the essence of the characters.

The music is not based on any existing orthodox compositional method, but in fact uses several of them, in combination with different non-traditional styles for opera, which gives it a certain eclecticism and, above all, a special dynamic, both elements being framed in what could be called "classic" in terms of form, but without avoiding experimentation, always emphasizing the drama in this way.

The instrumentation consists of:

1 transverse flute, 1 oboe, 1 clarinet in B flat, 1 bassoon 5 singers: soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, baritone and bass-baritone 1 violin 1, 1 violin 2, 1 viola, 1 cello 1, 1 cello 2, 1 double bass Electronic music

2. Characters and plot

Por mano propia

(Into her own hands) Opera in nine scenes Music: José Vítores / Libretto: Javier Andrade Córdova

Characters:

Ana, a young rebel - Soprano Cracio, the Supreme Chief - Bass-Baritone Paúl, a rebellious young man, boyfriend and partner of Ana - Tenor Tiresia, the symbol of the past - Mezzo-soprano Healthcare worker 1 - Tenor Healthcare worker 2 - Baritone Guard 1 - Tenor Guard 2 - Baritone Cameraman, other guards, bystanders, – actors and actresses

Scene I

Present Time

The square in front of the general hospital

A young woman wearing biosecurity clothing, threatens to commit suicide amid coughing attacks, if Cracio, the head of state, does not appear before her. This situation takes place in the midst of the preparations for a major state celebration for the triumph over the first pandemic, years ago. All the media and networks cover the situation live.

Scene II

Return to the near past

An underground cell

Ana is tortured in a dark dungeon to force her to reveal the names of the leaders of the revolt that agitates the country. Cracio, the head of state, suggests that he has already apprehended some, including Paúl, Ana's boyfriend. The young rebels have contracted the virus, and might be imprisoned in the general hospital. If Ana does not confess some useful information, they'll be abandoned in some wilderness, so that they can die and end up like many other as corpses in a mass grave. The young woman, despite her anguish, does not reveal any information.

Scene III

The same cell at night

Ana has a fever and is delirious. Paul appears to her in the dream, which reminds her of their origins, the neighborhood from which they came, their struggles, and affirms that no matter what happens, they will always remain together, since their bodies have fed each other, becoming one. Ana confesses her fear and tries to understand what Paul wants to tell her. Meanwhile her own health condition deteriorates, she is also infected.

Scene IV

Government office

Cracio has been in power for more than a decade. He keeps it through bloodshed and fire from his office with the complicity of powerful partners with whom he negotiates on the telephone amid agreements of interest, blackmail and threats. Cracio assures them that the political situation is completely under control. However, at that moment, an agent arrives with alarming news: people are rebelling on the streets of several cities.

Scene V

In an underground cell

Paúl appears again in Ana's dreams. He comes to say goodbye and ask her to abandon her search of his body and save herself. When Paúl's image begins to drift away, Ana despairs and asks him not to leave her alone. At that instant, a guard violently wakes her up to take her away and make her disappear. Ana defends herself and attacks him with all the forces she still has left, spits him out and tries to assault him with her teeth and fingernails. The guard is distracted in his distress to avoid contagion and Ana gets to take his weapon away, and then under threat, handcuffs him to the cell bars. With the weapon and biosecurity elements that has stripped the guard of, she flees.

Scene VI

<u>Luxury room</u>

Cracio has a nightmare. His past visits him in the form of an elderly woman, Tiresia, who comes to recriminate his transformation: he was once a young politician with ideals, and now he is a decadent tyrant. The old lady warns him that he has already surpassed the point of no return and that only torments await him. Cracio wakes up with fever and panics, as he believes he has become infected. In that state, he orders on the telephone that the imprisoned rebels continue to be tortured and demands answers and results from his henchmen.

Scene VII

General hospital lobby

Ana, wearing a biosecurity suit and carrying her weapon, has made her way to the general hospital in search of Paúl. She has futilely wandered through rooms in chaos until she comes to a hall that has been turned into a cellar of black bundles full of corpses. Without being seen, she observes how two healthcare workers bring some bags without labels and leave them next to the others. Once alone, Ana anxiously dares to open those bundles, however she does not find Paúl. The images which she confronts are those of deformed faces, matched in the grimace of a painful death, which, however, anonymously sister them. She thinks about Paúl and his visits in dreams, and she begins to understand that he has finally fulfilled his destiny, regardless of where his body is, because it has already turned to dust, mixed in the dust of the people. Then Ana understands that her destiny will be to do justice with her last remaining strength.

Scene VIII

Government office

Cracio addresses the public in front of television cameras and invites them to the ongoing celebrations. He promises a prompt return to normality since the terrorist shadows, which have threatened the state's peace have been eliminated. He announces some necessary economic measures and ensures that, in the medium term, welfare will reach the country. In the middle of the speech, he is interrupted by an official who whispers into his ear what is happening in the square in front of the general hospital. In effect, the cameras transfer the television broadcasting to that place. However, Cracio understands that the unsuitable situation offers him the possibility of cleaning his image, marked by corruption and indolent negligence in the face of illness and death. He announces publicly that he will personally go to calm the feverish young woman, whom he assumes to be just a sick healthcare worker who has lost her temper.

Scene IX

Return to the present

The square in front of the general hospital

Cracio has arrived on the scene dressed in biosecurity gear and has ordered his security agents to keep their distance, while he, accompanied only by a television cameraman, who is broadcasting the entire scene, approaches the young woman. In front of the camera, he announces that the salaries of medical personnel will not decrease, despite the necessary austerity measures, and that the medical

personnel will be the first to receive the new vaccine. Condescendingly, he asks the young woman to put down the gun and assures her that he will personally take care of her future.

Then, Ana turns directly to the camera, as if she were speaking to a distant person. Remembering her boyfriend, she thanks him for the shared happiness and for having shown her the path of dignity and resistance. Subsequently, she speaks to the citizens who are watching the broadcast and her farewell speech turns into a harangue: there is only one way for the ordinary man: the daily struggle not to let dignity be taken away from him. She accuses Cracio of taking advantage of the emergency to assassinate activists, increasing his own wealth and continuing to sell the country to the highest bidder, while death reigns in the streets. Cracio already suspects who she may be, but before he can do something, Ana changes the direction of the weapon and aims it at him. While removing her mask she affirms: whether living or dead, they are treated like waste and the only way to do justice is taking the law into one's own hand. Before bursts of bullets from security officers end with Ana's fragile body, she unloads the projectiles into Cracio and kills him.

3. Example recordings

Pictures II, III and VII of the opera are already completely written. From these pictures four fragments have been selected as below:

- 1. Scene II. Fragment of Ana and Cracio.
- 2. Scene III. Fragment of Ana and the spirit of Paúl, who appears in her dream
- 3. Scene VII. Fragment of two healthcare workers of the general hospital.
- 4. Scene VII. Fragment of Ana

The following musicians have participated in the recordings:

In Colombia - Vocal soloists:

Laura Gómez, soprano (Ana); Christian Correa, tenor (Paúl, healthcare worker 1); David Garzón, baritone (Cracio, healthcare worker 2)

In Ecuador - Woodwinds:

Jorge Layana, transverse flute and oboe; Melecio Layana, clarinet in B flat; María Varich, bassoon

In Germany - Strings:

Rodrigo Bauzá, violins 1-2; Jenny Marielle Dilg; viola; Gabriela Tews, violoncellos 1-2; Samuel Ortega, double bass

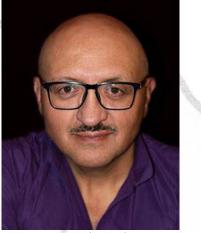
Editing & Mastering: José Vítores

José Vítores

private photograph

He was born in Guayaquil, Ecuador in 1962. He is a composer, producer, arranger, guitarist and teacher. He studied music in Ecuador, Germany and Spain. He was a student of classical guitar of the teacher Ryuhei Kobayashi at the Antonio Neumane Conservatory in Guayaguil. He has participated in international seminars on composition and music for films in various European countries. As a performer he was a member of the renowned ensemble Cantango Berlin, with many performances, among others, at the Berlin Philharmonic. He earned a Master in Arranging and Orchestration degree from the renowned Berklee College of Music (online edition). As a composer, however, he considers himself self-taught. He has written works for orchestra, theater, chamber music and music for multimedia projects. He has made several recordings on CD and DVD with different ensembles in Germany. Some of his works have been published in Europe by Verlag Neue Musik and Mesa Music Publishing. In his compositional work and as an arranger he has collaborated with the Orguesta de Barro (Peruvian youth orchestra), the Berlin Symphony Orchestra, the Brandenburg Symphony Orchestra, the German Ensemble Aventure (Festival Musica Viva 2012 in Quito, Ecuador), the orchestra Berliner Symphoniker, the Trier Symphony Orchestra and the double bassists of the Berlin Philharmonic Edicson Ruiz and Klaus Stoll. He was the winner of the 1st Prize in the category of instrumental music at the Song Expo Wettbewerb 2001 competition (Holland). His short-opera "Historias de Piratas", for soprano, ensemble, electronic music and video projection, incorporating poems by Ana C. Blum and Y. Magrini, was premiered in Berlin in 2019. He is currently working on a second chamber opera. He is a board member of the music academy Deutsch-Lateinamerikanische Musikakademie. José Vítores has been based since 1986 in Berlin, Germany, dedicated to composition and teaching.

Javier Andrade Córdova



private photograph

He was born in Cuenca, Ecuador in 1966. He is a playwright, opera and theater stage director, and university teacher. He studied at the National Conservatory of Music and at the Teatro Estudio in Quito, and completed a bachelor's and a master's degree in stage directing at the Hochschule fuer Musik und Theater in Munich, Germany, and a master's degree in Performing Arts at the University of Sevilla, Spain. Furthermore, he was the scenic artistic director of the Sucre National Theater and the Bolívar Theater of Ecuador. He has written and directed his own theatrical works, among which are "Crónicas del agual", "La inmortal" o "Ciudadanas celestes", as well as the librettos for the operas "Rumiñahui" and "La audición". As a director, he was the recipient of a Foerderpreis award from the International Competition for Stage Direction and Scenography, Ringaward en Graz, Austria, 2003. He has directed contemporary opera and musical theater, dramas, and performative, experimental and multimedia performances. Some representative pieces are: "Eunice" (world premiere) by L. Salgado in Cuenca, Ecuador; "Narrow Rooms" (world premiere) by A. Strauch and "Die Kluge" by C. Orff in Munich; Gluck's "Der Bekehrte Trunkenbold" in Shenyang, China; "Les Mamelles de Tirésias" by Poulanc and "The turn of the screw" by Britten in Bogotá, Colombia; "Cendrillon" by P. Viardot for the Gran Teatro Falla in Cádiz and the Teatro Villamarta in Jerez, Spain; "Manuela y Bolívar" by D. Luzuriaga (world premiere); "Tod im Grand Hotel", etc. He has also directed several experimental videos that have been presented at festivals such as the Wroclaw Biennale of Media Art, Poland; the Munich Film Festival and the Doku, Film and Video Art Fest in Kassel, Germany; the Friesland Media Art Festival, Holland, etc. His perfomative and experimental theater works have been presented at: Casa de América Barcelona; State Glyptothek Munich and Echtzeit-Halle Festival Munich; Museum of the City in Quito; Museum of the City of Cuenca, etc. Javier Andrade Córdova resides in Argentina and Ecuador.

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FOUR RECORDED FRAGMENTS

Full scores





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POR MANO PROPIA - Cuadro VII

Un vestíbulo del hospital general

Música: José Vítores Libreto: Javier Andrade Córdova





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