

Berklee College of Music

The Birth of a Lake

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Master of Music in Scoring for Film, television and Video Games

Supervisor: Lucio Godoy

by **Tania Valle**

Valencia Campus, Spain

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to describe in a simple way the whole process, from beginning to end, of creating our final music piece. This includes discussions about the methods of finding a script, the composing process, recording preparation and post-production of the recording session at London AIR Studios. This thesis aims to demonstrate the development of the concept through all of the stages: initial concept, research, writing of the music, preparation needed, recording and mixing the final audio. This is the culmination experience of our Scoring for Film, Television and Video Game (SFTV) program on Berklee Valencia, and our chance to expose our talent and acquire knowledge on the last year.

Keywords: composition techniques, film scoring, reflective paper, composition process, recording, mixing.

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One of the best things of this experience, was to meet my amazing classmates, fellow musicians and colleagues; who impressed me every day with their music and talent. Thank you for all the support, acceptance and time we spent together. This year would never have been the same without you.

Most importantly, I want to thank my family and friends, who have always been there encouraging and supporting me with love and patience. To my partner for always being my rock and inspiration, I am honored and lucky to have you in my life. Special thanks to my beloved parents and sister for giving me the opportunity and trust to continue my studies in this amazing industry. You have believed in me since I decided to take this path, and none of this would have been possible without you.

1. Introduction

Growing up in a place where music is not highly valued, especially if it is not popular or commercial, meant a challenge to develop it with imagination and creativity. However, I was lucky enough to be trained in academic composition, which allowed me to have a wider vision of what music is really about. I was able to learn and understand the theory in terms of composition, orchestration and harmony; as well as diverse styles of music that included rock, jazz, latin, as well as Peruvian music. This is how I learned to appreciate the variety of music in my country and the great interest it has generated in various places around the world.

On the other hand, within my university experience, I was able to discover and realize that the world of film scoring was always present and influential in my life. This is why I was convinced to enter this incredible industry, which surprises me every day with the different styles, forms and innovations that leads us to discover.

From that point onwards to finishing my Master in Scoring for Film, Television and Videogames, not only have I learned different styles and ways of scoring, but also met incredible composers with a very diverse cultural background. Moreover, during this year, I focused myself to find my own voice and style, and eventually, I start to understand who I really am as an artist and composer. Although, I would not want to be bound to a certain style, I know that my vision and personal taste is related to incorporate part of my culture as something new and unique.

With this project, I want not only to proof myself, but to inspire other Peruvian artists and students to take their cultural background as a competitive advantage to create their own “trademark”. Moreover, as the Peruvian music industry is growing, I want to be part of the change by innovating and creating opportunities in the artistic field that shows a little bit of who we are.

2. Assignment Overview

For the culminating experience, the SFTV students were required to compose, arrange, orchestrate and conduct a three minute piece for an orchestra of 51 musicians, which was going to be recorded at Air Studios in London. This project would not only serve us as an incredible experience but also as a taste of a professional practice, as well as high quality recording for our portfolio. For the assignment, each student was asked to contact directors, game designers, or other owners of visual media to obtain material to score; as it was our responsibility to obtain a footage that we considered convenient and inspiring. Additionally, we were offered the possibility that, if it was not possible to find any visual material, we could write a script with a clear and interesting narrative, and score it.

In my case, *The Birth of a Lake* is based on a script of a Peruvian myth about the birth of the Titicaca Lake, one of the best known for its breadth and importance in the Inca Empire. The goal that I choose for this piece, was to be able to demonstrate myself on a personal level that my culture could influence the score without sounding only ethnic or not cinematic. Also, as I realized the low awareness of the type of music, melodies or scales used in the Andes, it seemed like an opportunity to show and display a tiny part of this culture in a very basic and simple way.

In order for the piece to be written, although there was not a deep research on the ethnic treatment in film scoring, it did involve a search and analysis of Andean music as well as types of orchestration, harmony and arrangements in film scoring and academic compositions. This research will be explained in a very simple and easy way to understand.

3. Plan of Action

3.1 Idea

From the moment I knew that my final project would be a recording with a professional orchestra in a renowned studio in London, I had no doubt that with that piece I was going to try to find a cultural identity. This idea came to me before applying to Berklee Valencia and knowing that my path would be the film scoring industry

3.1.1 Peruvian Identity

Before graduating from the University as a musician, I began to do some research to find interesting and innovative ways to “boost” the orchestral and academic movement in Peru, since at that time the panorama of this industry was quite pessimistic.

One of the most important things I found, was the total disconnection between the academic music and the Peruvian popular music, that includes diverse Andean, Afro-Peruvian, jungle and creole styles; which by this time had begun to merge and create different and more “attractive” styles for the general public.

Therefore, I decided to focus my thesis on how the influence of Peruvian music can change the social concept of “elite” that most people have about orchestral music, and based my argument on a concert given by the National Symphonic Orchestra with three Peruvian music artists.

This is how, my interest in Andean music began and a personal goal of developing my own voice started. When I entered the world of film scoring, I could see different types of approaches to ethnic music and a huge diverse of possibilities that one has to innovate. This is

why, for my culminating experience, I decided to put all my effort and knowledge into creating and searching for something with which I can demonstrate my idea.

3.1.2 Myth

As I mentioned before, it was the responsibility of each student to look for something visual or narrative to score. Therefore, having already a strong concept in my mind, I began my search around February where I started contacting film directors, animation students, videogame developers and even producers, friends and other people involved in the Peruvian audiovisual industry. By the end of March, I was in a dead end as I had been able to contact and speak with some directors, and I even got some shorts, but in either case I felt that it would fit the orchestra. Also, in my search for video games I could not find something of quality with an interesting narrative, and most of them didn't even have a cut scene. On the other hand, I found a very interesting animated project called *Ainbo*, but unfortunately it is still on the stage of presentation and fundraising, so they have not started to develop it yet.

At this point, I began to question myself whether I should abandon my initial idea and focus only on finding material that allows me to compose music without taking the cultural influence into account. Therefore, as a second option, I decided to concentrate my efforts on finding animated shorts or cut scenes; and finally, ended up with four options with a lot of potential to score with orchestra. Among these options, I chose the short *Lou* of Pixar due to the narrative and quality, in addition to the different states that it has.

It is at this moment that I had to make a decision on whether to continue with the short film or try once more with something Peruvian. Being always my first choice, I decided to try one more time, and after talking with some professors and classmates, I was convinced that this

was the path I should take. This is how I decided to find a Peruvian myth with an interesting narrative that would allow me to structure a solid composition and boost my imagination for possible scenes.

3.2 Research

As I mentioned at the beginning, although there was not a deep investigation and analysis, there was an honest and clear interest to learn and inform myself through examples and books that could help me to create something interesting and attractive both conceptually and musically.

3.2.1 Myths and book

At the beginning of my quest to find a Peruvian myth, I found legends based on several themes and cultures that included modern myths of the coast, ancient pre-Inca, other related to the Inca mythology, and curiously several dark myths of the jungle related to beliefs of evil spirits or animals of this region.

Additionally, during my research, I had the opportunity to obtain a book that is considered to be the “bible” of the Andean pre-Inca world called *Gods and men of Huarochi*, which was compiled in 1598 and translated from the native Peruvian language “quechua” to Spanish by Jose Maria Arguedas, a peruvian writer, novelist, poet, translator, teacher, anthropologist and ethnologist; considered one of the three great representatives of the indigenist narrative in Peru¹. In this book, I was able to find various myths explaining the creation of the Andean world, as well

¹*Wikipedia*, s.v. “Jose Maria Arguedas,” accessed June 28th, 2018, https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/José_Mar%C3%ADa_Arguedas#Enlaces_externos.

as the appearance of their gods and customs;² nevertheless, as it was very old and translated to Spanish, a deep and repeated reading was required in order to understand and extract with a solid narrative the concept of the myths, since there were words or even phrases that could not be translated properly.

On the other hand, I also found another book called *The Inca Gods* by Herbert Harlon Ore Belsuzarri, in which you can discover a great variety of Peruvian myths that come from the pre-Inca times to the empire itself. In this book, I was able to locate the two most popular and known legends: The Legend of Manco Capac and Mama Ocllo, and the one of the Ayar Brothers.³ Both of them deal with the beginning of the Inca empire with different perspectives and stories, but I decided not to use them since they have been overexploited and overused in Peru. However, when reading them carefully, I realized the historical and cultural importance of the Titicaca lake, especially in the legend of Manco Capac and Mama Ocllo, in which they are divine beings born from the lake itself. Likewise, the author also mentions that the Incas had their version for what would have been the “universal flood” and that in the city of Cusco, considered the capital of it the Inca Empire, and its surroundings legends related to this are narrated as an explanation of the creation of the lake.⁴ Fortunately for me, I could find some of these myths in the same book, and decided to pick *the Birth of a Lake* since it was interesting in a cultural, historical and narrative way.

²Jose Maria Arguedas and Francisco de Avila, *Dioses y Hombres de Huarochirí* (Lima: [Museo Nacional de Historia y el Instituto de Estudios Peruanos], 1966). Ch 1-5.

³ Herbert Oré Belsuzarri, *Los Dioses Incas [The Inca Gods]* (Lima: [Tres Puntos Editores], [2017]), 317-323.

⁴Belsuzarri, 278.

3.2.2 Peruvian Music

To begin with, I want to clarify that in this case I am specifically concentrated on what denotes to Peruvian Andean music. This type of music refers to the one generally found in the Andes or highlands of South America, on which the Inca Empire was developed. We can find a very diverse and different styles and forms of this music, depending on what region you are in, since it even varies considerably from city to city. However, something general that is common in most of these styles are the nostalgic melodies based on a pentatonic or doric scale, and the use of Andean instruments such as quena, zampoña, antara; and even charango and some percussive instruments. For my project I decided to use only two woodwind instruments for their unique and characteristic sound: the quena, an ethnic flute traditional of the andes made of cane or wood; and the zampoña, a traditional Andean panpipe split across two rows of pipes, also known as “siku”.

The most universally known theme that has stand out in the Andean music, without a doubt, is the “Condor Pasa”, a melody that has been over exposed and shown to the world for many years. On the other hand, in Peru we can find some well-known songs and melodies such as valicha and matarina, and styles such as huayno, huaylas, yaravies, tuntunas, etc.

However, for my piece I decided to focus on something a little bit more contemporary, and got influenced by Lucho Quequezana, a Peruvian multi-instrumentalist and composer, who fuses Peruvian music with different rhythms and instruments from all over the world. As I listened to his compositions, I decided to pay attention to his second album, *Kuntur* (2014) and specifically to his pieces: “Tiempo”, “Camino al carnival” and “Kuntur”; as well as in his presentations and arrangements made with the national symphonic orchestra of Peru.

Likewise, I found interesting the work of Manuel Miranda, a Peruvian composer who mixes Peruvian melodies and rhythms with more modern styles and harmonies, giving an innovative and fresh sense to his music. I focus specially in his songs: “Desde la montaña” and “Danza para los ancestros” from his second album *Tinku* (2002), and “Los Amautas” from his album *Los Brujos Voladores* (2008).

3.2.3 Film Scoring

To have a wider idea of how ethnic music is being managed in the film scoring industry, I decided to analyze certain soundtracks that I considered to be interesting in terms of arrangements, ethnic sounds, mixing with the orchestra and musical narrative.

The scores on which my study was based on the matter of melodies and the use of ethnic instruments were the soundtracks of *Gladiator* by Hans Zimmer and Lisa Gerrard, and *Troy* by James Horner; since both of them have an adequate and precise use of sounds to transport us culturally and historically to a different time or environment.

Furthermore, in the case of more orchestral scores, I based my analysis on arrangements of certain ones like John Powell’s *How to train your dragon*, in which I was able to find an interesting orchestration especially in his cue “This is Berk”, in which he achieves a perfect mix between the orchestral sound and the ethnic instruments resulting in an epic cue. Personally, this piece helped me a lot to structure and separate the different colors and voices that I wanted for my piece.

Moreover, narratively speaking I took as an example mainly two scores: *The lord of the rings* by Howard Shore, as it is one of the most influential ones in terms of the development of themes and motifs; and something more modern and hybrid like the soundtrack of *Wonder*

Woman by Rupert Gregson-Williams, which caught my attention for its vision and way of using the ethnic and epic sound at specific moments to match perfectly the narrative of the scenes.

3.3 Concept

Although the myth has a coherent narrative, I needed to imagine the possible scenes and continuity of them to be able to compose and create a structure. Likewise, the assignment made it clear that if we chose to make a script we had to develop it in a way that it contains timecode and hit points in order to justify the composition.

3.3.1 *The Birth of a Lake*

Regarding to the concept based on the writing of the script, I did not see the need to add or arrange many things about the myth, since it already has a simple, concise and interesting narrative. Nonetheless, what I did need to do was to translate it, since it was originally in Spanish (see Appendix A).

On the other hand, concerning the development of a more detailed script, as I mentioned earlier I had to imagine the scenes and its continuity. In this way, I began by separating the myth into three main parts: the beginning in which we can see a paradise, the appearance of evil, and then the calm after the storm. This division actually helped me a lot to start creating and thinking about the concept for composing, despite the fact that I did not have specific timecodes yet. Nevertheless, I must admit that by this time, I began to imagine the melody of the first part of the piece and even start having ideas about the specific instrumentation that I wanted, of which I will speak later.

Not being sure how to assign specific times to each part, in other words putting the timecode and making the hit points, I decided to ask my teachers and colleagues for advice, which was actually really helpful since they gave me many ideas. Among these, the most appropriate for my piece was to record myself relating the myth and then, use this recording to set times for each part and develop a proper structure. In this case, I must admit that I chose this technique since from the beginning I imagined this myth as an introductory scene to something bigger: a short, movie or cut scene. I was very influenced by the first scene of *The Lord of the Rings: The community of the ring*, in which they describe with a voice over the whole story before the movie. This is why, before recording myself, I decided to write a basic description of the scenes and subdivide the legend into more parts, in order to narrate it in a more coherent way with what I imagined. The subdivision parts were: the landscape of the valley, the men living in harmony, the rule or prohibition, the appearance of the evil being, the temptation, the climbing to the top, being surprised by the gods, the punishment, the weeping of the god, the surviving of the couple and finally, the new landscape. With this deeper division, I was able to find and assign the important sync points, as well as to give more intonation, pause and narrative to my story.

After placing the recording in a Digital Audio Workshop (DAW) and assign specific timecodes to each part, I decided to focus on developing further details into the scenes to inspire me more when composing (see Appendix B). Moreover, I decided to give more importance to certain changes and complete the initial ideas I had before, among which included starting the script with a small introduction into the myth. As you can see in Appendix B, each part of it is assigned to a particular timecode, which syncs with the changes in the composition, the same happens with the hit points that don't go unnoticed since they suggest the most notorious musical changes.

3.3.2 Composition

As for the composing element, after creating a solid structure of the script, I was able to start writing with a clear direction and assertiveness. As I mentioned before, I had initial ideas which were based on including ethnic instruments, as well as a sketch of the melody and orchestration for the first part of the piece. Nevertheless, when I started writing I had to organize my ideas and respect what was already established, to avoid wasting precious time.

When imagining the scenes, I was convinced to use only ethnic instruments for the introductory part and then give away the magic and epicness with the help of the orchestra, to then continue with the different stages of the legend. As mentioned before, the ethnic instruments I thought I could use were the quena and zampoña. Charango was also in my mind, but in the end it had to be discarded as it seemed to have a particular sound that would not fit the orchestra or could be more difficult to mix with at the end.

On the other hand, when beginning to think about the composition, one of the first things that I took into account was to use a melody that refers to the Andean culture. So, I took several things into consideration like: the type of scale, I looked for a melody on the pentatonic or doric scale; small arrangements such as grace notes, and rhythms generally used in this type of music such as triplets, gallops and inverted gallops. To be honest, this search took me a lot of time, since it was difficult for me to create a melody and accompaniment that has a cultural influence without stop sounding cinematic. I remember that the first thing I wanted to write was the melody, and I even talked to teachers, especially Lucio, since he is more familiar with the Andean sound; to give me advice and ideas on how to handle this type of influence. The clearest and most helpful guidance was to mix the scale with a more modern and interesting harmony, like it has already been done in other types of styles.

By the end of the spring semester, I had already done the first 10-30 seconds of the piece and even had a very advanced sketch of the orchestration, but still did not feel comfortable about the melodic part. Consequently, I delayed my progress since I was having constant changes and rewritings for the initial part of the piece. At the end, since I was going nowhere and did not have much time, I decided to put this part aside and keep developing what was missing in the composition, which actually was easier for me since I already had several ideas and references in mind. Intriguingly, when all the composition was finished and I went back on concentrating in the melody, which by this time had suffered many changes, I chose to take another chance with my initial idea, and from one moment to the other it seemed to fit perfectly.

By this time, I was in Peru, since I went back home for the semester break, and took advantage of asking for opinions about the melody and composition in general, without mentioning that it was supposed to have some Peruvian influence. Surprisingly, most people, although they could feel some ethnic taste going on, were not able to differentiate that it was Andean or Peruvian. On the other hand, my fellow musicians, could distinguish certain arrangements, especially the scales and grace notes of the melody, but they did not feel it was overloaded. This for me was a relief, since that was one of my main concerns during the whole composition process.

If we now go to the theoretical part, in the first bars of the piece I start with a doric taste to give an Andean and Inca sound, especially in the melody of the clarinets that then goes to the violins.

Figure 1 shows a musical score for the first seven measures of 'The Birth of a Lake' by Tania Valle. The score is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 121. It features parts for B♭ Clarinet 1 & 2, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Contrabass. The music is based on a Dorian scale. Dynamics range from pianissimo (pp) to piano (p).

Figure 1: Tania Valle, *The Birth of a Lake*, passage based on a doric scale mm. 1-7.

Figure 2 shows a musical score for rehearsal A of 'The Birth of a Lake' by Tania Valle. The score is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 119. It features a melody based on a pentatonic scale. The dynamic is mezzo-forte (mf).

Figure 2: Tania Valle, *The Birth of a Lake*, melody based on a pentatonic scale, rehearsal A

On the other hand, to achieve a more cinematic perception I decided to use a modern and simple functional harmony. For example, on the second part, although the melody is on the pentatonic scale of G, the harmony plays with its relative minor (E minor). Furthermore, I wanted to create motion, so as learned in class, I based it on the strings, especially on the lower ones and violas, since the violins were supporting the melody. Moreover, while the piece develops the low brass starts to take more prominence as the situation turns to get more tense and dark. Later on, when the tension begins to reach its maximum point, I liked the idea of creating a

sensation of “war”, that matches narratively with the myth; therefore I maintained a strong rhythm and highlight the percussive elements like the snare drum until its final “explosion”. At the end, when everything is calmed again, we can hear the violins and woodwinds as the melody shines in the first ground. As this part develops, the other instruments appear until the whole orchestra ends up suddenly with a tension chord. I intended to finish my piece this way, since the myth finishes with the beginning of something rather than with an ending, and it seemed to me that this way was more coherent narratively speaking.

As far as for orchestration, as I mentioned earlier, the melody is based on ethnic instruments and they are supported by the violins and high brass in specific times. Additionally, I wanted to maintain a solid rhythmic pattern based on playing with ternary and binary rhythms to give more variety and polyrhythmic sensation.

3.4 Recordings

Our recording was made at Air Studios in London, in which several well-known film composers have recorded. This is why it was such a magnificent experience for which preparations had to be made both musically and psychologically. Personally, this experience had a unique value for me since it is something that I would have never imagine in my most precious dreams. Moreover, I must confess that before coming to Berklee Valencia, I had never had the opportunity to listen to my music played by an orchestra or a chamber group, since this type of recordings are not common in the Peruvian music industry. Therefore, this for me was extremely important since, despite the fact of having the opportunity to conduct smaller groups in Berklee and have the remote-control session with Budapest; the atmosphere, place, professionalism and

talent of everyone involved in this session added up to this experience as something unforgettable and pleasantly precious to me.

3.4.1. Preparation

As mentioned earlier, there had to be a proper preparation before the recording, especially regarding the materials that we had to deliver and take to London. To start, I must say that for each recording we had on the past year, we had to deliver several materials that included: the recording session in Pro Tools, where you could find the mockup, the stems and the click track; the complete score and the parts for each instrument. Only in the occasions in which the recording was made in Berklee or in the Palau de la Musica, we had to take care of printing and taking the parts and score to the sessions. However, for our last recording we were responsible for carrying all of the scores that we would need, which meant being more responsible and careful with our things.

For this occasion, being our final experience in a professional studio, we had the opportunity to have a special type of paper for the parts and score. I know this may sound like something unimportant, but this type of details add up in terms of professionalism and the image you want to project. Having explained this, I never thought it would be so difficult to handle the pressure of having everything perfect before printing your materials. We were advised to review our scores continuously, as well as having peer reviews to be sure of what we were going to deliver. For this recording, I decided to make two copies of the parts, one as a backup and the other one on the special paper. Also, I had three copies of the full score since two would be in A3 to conduct and for the booth, and other one in A4 for the engineer.

On the other hand, the other type of preparations prior the recording was to practice the conducting of the piece. One of the most helpful tips that my colleagues and teachers gave me was to know my piece by heart, every part of it, and also to have notes that would help me not to waste time when recording. I must admit that one of my biggest concerns regarding this project was precisely the conducting, since I am aware I am not the most expressive nor the best conductor. Luckily for us, we had office hours to prepare it, in which despite knowing my piece I was still not comfortable with some parts of it. This was notorious for our professor Sergio, who after giving me certain indications to improve my performance, told me a phrase that stuck in my head: “Don’t be just a metronome”. This made me trace a personal goal: to be more expressive without exaggerating since my lack of experience could also play against me. As I mentioned before, I was planning to study my piece in detail, since I knew that it would made me feel more comfortable. This is something I learnt from the first time I had to conduct in Berklee, when I didn’t have enough time to analyze my work and the nerves took over me making me lose concentration and end up making basic mistakes. Fortunately, I took this as a lesson, and on the second recording I studied my piece, and although the nerves were always there, I was much better than on the first time.

On the other hand, having already had at least four recordings where I was conducting, I wanted this time to be the best of them all. For this, I had everything clear: my piece had three phases that required different types of expression: the beginning was something more expressive, legato and beautiful; the middle part was more rhythmic and aggressive; and the ending returned to this expressiveness and legato feeling.

3.4.2. Recording at Air Studios – London

For both days of recording, we had to arrive at the studio approximately one hour before the recordings, which were at ten o'clock. Personally, I wanted to have my shift the first day, and fortunately I was third on the list.

On Monday June 4th, I arrived at Air Studios at nine o'clock. I was surprised by the incredible place and the good energy you could feel, but most of all for the kindness and professionalism of everyone there. After inspecting the big studio and seeing its impressive booth, the first four composers on the list had to order and place the parts on each stand. At this time, with all the anxiety and nerves, I tried to organize myself to be able to distribute the materials without mishap. Ironically, I had a moment of panic because at the beginning I couldn't find my Tuba part, and despite searching several times it was not in my folder. This is when I understood the importance of having a second copy of scores, since having a backup can save you at any time. Happily, after distributing some parts I was able to find the Tuba part and after that, everything was set to start recording.

Before it was my turn, I had the opportunity to listen to the cues of two friends and I could see the great level and quality of the musicians and the compositions. On the other hand, Lucio, the program director, invited every student a turn before theirs, to sit outside the booth so each one of us could get used to the click and the sound of the room with the headphones. I found this quite helpful, since it not only helped me with that, but also helped me to concentrate and start assimilating everything. However, when it was my turn, I have to admit that the nerves were still there and when I got on the podium I could not believe what was happening. If there is something that I regret was not being able to let go a little bit more at that moment, since I feel that I should have enjoyed myself more on that stage.

When the orchestra began to play, I realized how different my piece sounded since I could pay attention exactly to how everything was mixed and feel which instruments stood out, which didn't and in what part. Also, I realized that things sounded different from the booth, since, for example, I could not hear the percussion or the low brass so clearly, but maybe I was just nervous or distracted. Fortunately, I had my beloved teachers, Vanessa and Sergio, helping me a lot in this situation, as I wasn't sure of giving many indications to the musicians seeing that I felt I was not hearing everything properly. They supported me on every take, giving indications with things such as changes on dynamics, expressions, rhythm, etc.

On the other hand, I did have some observations from musicians, especially the timpani, brass and viola. In the case of the timpani, his observations were more a suggestion in terms of rhythm and, despite having everything checked many times, for a wrong note. As for the violas, it was a "problem" that will serve me a lot as an experience. Violas were asked to have more dynamic in certain passages, but eventually they said that they were already at their maximum. In this case, I would have had to measure better the number of people who were actually playing the violas, in order to balance the orchestra a little bit more. This was an observation and a mistake that I hope not to make again since from now on I'm going to keep that in mind.

3.5 Mixing

After the recordings, all we had to do was wait for the session in pro tools to start the editing and mixing process. Fortunately, the sessions were delivered to us quite quickly, since we recorded a Monday and that same Friday we had everything to start working. I recalled, the first time I listened to the session, it sounded incredible and I could verify the quality of musicians and recording we had. Before going to the mixing masterclass with Pablo, I listened to all the

four whole takes that I had, to finally choose the last one since it had better expression and dynamics. In the masterclass, Pablo explained the characteristics of each track and mic, which was very useful to start mixing.⁵ Besides, I realized that we did not have much to do with the session because it sounded pretty good from the beginning. The only thing that I did, as advised, was to import the data of the panning and volume session that was given to us, which made everything sound a little bit clearer. However, I still had to add some tracks to have everything ready for the mixing office hours.

3.5.1. Adding Stems

In addition to what was recorded in London, I had to add stems of instruments that could not be played at the same time or that we didn't have available. In my case, these stems were those of harp and percussion. However, when listening to the mix repeatedly, I realized that the melodic parts, despite having the violins 1 and 2 supporting the lead line, didn't stand out from the rest like I wanted to. That is why I made a stem of High Strings, only for the melodic parts: the beginning and the end of the piece.

On the other hand, being able to mix the stems with the orchestra was quite simple in the case of the harp and high strings, in which I tried to place them in the same space as the orchestra with the help of reverb. However, when doing the same with the percussion, although everything sounded rhythmically and dynamically right, and in the same space; there was a strong low end that destabilized the mix a bit. This was happening because in my percussion stem there were taiko and bass drums. Fortunately, in the mixing office hours, Pablo help me cleaning all of these frequencies.

⁵ Pablo Schuller, Mixing London Piece, Masterclass at Berklee Valencia, June 11, 2018.

3.5.2 Ethnic Instruments

As mentioned before, I had planned to record two Peruvian ethnic instruments: quena and zampoña. I decided to record them after London, since I preferred to have a pre-mix of the orchestra as a guide for the new recording. Both instruments were recorded in Lima-Peru, in *Eclipse*, a studio of a colleague and friend Cristian Espejo, who was also the engineer of the recording. Likewise, the person who recorded the ethnic instruments is Adrian Vargas, a Peruvian musician, which I had the pleasure of knowing in past projects playing different ethnic wind instruments.

Before recording, I contacted Pablo to ask him for advice for the recording, since it would be mixed with the orchestra, to which he responded with a concise answer: recorded it as best and as clean as possible. Luckily, I was confident and trusted the ability of both, producer and performer, for which I had no doubts or fears that the recording would be great.

Before the day of recording, I sent both the parts and the session of pro tools, so that there wouldn't be delays on the recording day. We first started to record the quena, which in the first part of the piece was perfect and we only took different takes for expression and dynamics. However, in the last part I realized that because of the change of tonality some notes were not accurate, as for the instrument performing half tones is not that easy and usually they are a bit out of tuned. This is why after the session, I had to use Melodyne to tune certain notes.

On the other hand, the difficult part while recording the zampoña was especially in the first part of the piece, since it was very demanding in terms of tempo and rhythm (twelve bars of four triplets at a tempo of 120). Even though, I had left some spaces to breath and rest, they were not enough and I decided to simplify the line, since the piece only required the color of the

instrument . Moreover, the end of the cue was not a problem for the zampoña, because we did have another one tuned in the corresponding key for the end of the cue .

Finally, when I already had both instruments recorded, I edit some things in the session, especially cutting some breaths and choosing the best takes for each part. When I was done with the editing part, I included the instruments in the session of the orchestra to be able to mix the whole thing. After that, I had the mixing office hours with Pablo, where we were able to make everything sound in one place and well mixed with the orchestra.

4. Results

All the materials of the project are complete, as the production of the mix and the script are already finished. However, as a part of my personal goal, I would love to make a video related to the project. My original idea was to have an animation short according to the script, but as this may take longer than expected I am considering the idea of having different time lapse footage of the lake and its surroundings.

On the other hand, there are a few things I would have done differently. The first one is, as mentioned before, not having more fun while I was recording my piece in London. Although, I enjoyed my time while I was conducting, I am aware that I was nervous and that at the beginning I was feeling a little bit uncomfortable. However, I do have to admit that at one point I realized I had to let go a bit more, and on the last two takes I started to be myself and enjoy the moment. Other thing that comes to my mind, is that I could have done a deeper research and analysis about different arrangements related to the treatment of ethnic sounds in film scoring, since I am aware that my influence has been really basic and careful as I tried not to overload the piece and the general idea of it.

5. Conclusion

This year I have learned more things than I could imagine, both academically and personally. In addition, the program has taught me to be more versatile in different styles and types of music. Moreover, for each assignment we had, I did some research, analyzed new music, studied transcriptions and, the most important thing, I learned to take ideas from different sources and turn them into mine. On the other hand, having several opportunities to not only write but conduct different types of ensembles helped me to gain confidence in terms of orchestration, conducting and composition.

Each of these things helped me to develop as a composer, and they were the basis of this project, not only from the musical aspect but from a personal one to create a more solid and cultural concept. Furthermore, I think I have reached a milestone in my career since during this project I was able to show myself as a versatile composer, with influence from my ethnic and cultural background; but most importantly, as an artist who wants to innovate and enter a competitive industry with her own voice and ideals.

6. Appendix A: Titicaca Myth

As an ancient Andean legend that has passed from generation to generation, there are different versions of the myth, and the one I used as a basis for the project, was the one found in the book *Los Dioses Incas* [2017] by Herbert Ore Belsuzarri. As mentioned before I had to translate and arranged the myth to make it fit the purposes of this project.

Titicaca Myth: *The birth of a Lake*

Thousands of years ago, in the region of the lake, there was a great, beautiful and fertile valley where man and woman lived in peace and harmony, blessed by the gifts that the “Pachamama”, Mother Earth, granted them. There was no room for ambition or greed as they lacked nothing and everything needed was obtained from earth and sky, light and rain. It is even said that death was not a cause of suffering, since there were no sorrows and neither arrogance nor hatred was known.

Those who watched over the welfare of humans were the gods of the mountains, known as Apus. These spirits did not forbid anything, except for one rule they had to follow: Never dare to reach the top of the mountain where a bonfire with the sacred fire was kept safe. As time passed by, our ancestors of the valley were obedient and complied with the Apus’s request, since they did not wish to disobey their protectors.

However, there was an evil spirit, which had been condemned to live in the regions of the shadows, the darkest and most desolated place on earth. This being did not tolerate the happiness and peace that humans enjoyed and he devised a plan to slip defiance and discord among them. Thus, he approached humans and urged them to test their courage by reaching the top of mountain, an act that will certainly challenge the gods. Hence, one day at dawn, the men full of

curiosity decided to climb the mountain showing what they thought was bravery. Little did they know, that the disappointed Apus were waiting for them halfway their journey, since they understood that humans' souls had been corrupted and needed to be punished. The gods attracted hundreds of thousands of pumas to devour the rebellious men, who begged to the evil spirit for mercy and help, but instead they were ignored, as he remained insensitive and satisfied with their misery.

Witnessing all this terrible spectacle was the god of sun, Inti, who when feeling helpless and sad of seeing such a destruction, started to cry. His tears were so abundant that in forty days and forty nights the valley was completely flooded, and only a man and a woman could be saved on a reed boat. When the sun shone again and the rain ceased, they could not believe their eyes: under the pure blue sky, they were in the middle of an immense lake that was lost in the distance. What were once peaks had been transformed into islands and in the middle of the water floated the pumas that had been turned into stone statues. Both, man and woman, understood they were granted a second chance to create an empire worthy of the gods, and so it was.

Time later, this same lake gave birth to the first Incas, and from that moment on was known as "Titicaca", which in the native language means "the lake of the stone cougars", to remind them never to defy the gods.

7. Appendix B: *The Birth of a Lake Script*

In order to make a proper script for the project, I had to imagine the scenes and assigned a timecode to each of them, in order to have a support for the development of the piece.

The Birth of a Lake Script

00:00:00:00 *MX IN*

Aerial shot of a beautiful time-lapse footage of the lake showing its deep and immense waters, the landscapes of the mountains and islands of the lake. A scene from sunrise to sunset.

VO: Lots of stories are told among the inhabitants of the Peruvian Andes...but the most famous one is the birth of the Titicaca Lake. It is said to be the origin of the Incas themselves.

00:00:16:18 *End of time- lapse with a sunset on the lake. Fades out.*

00:00:18:21 *Beginning of the myth. The scene starts with a sunrise in a valley; full of green and nature, located between the mountains of the Andes. The sun rises between the mountains and illuminates a paradisiacal landscape.*

VO: The myth tells of a story from thousands of years ago, in the region of the lake where there was a great, beautiful and fertile valley. A man and a woman lived in peace and harmony, blessed by the gifts that the “Pachamama”, Mother Earth, granted them.

00:00:32:16 *Scene shows humans working the land, and collecting food. The landscape is full of trees, streams and animals living free in the wild.*

VO: There was no room for ambition or greed as they lacked nothing and everything needed was obtained from earth and sky, light and rain. It is even said that death was not a cause of suffering, there were no sorrows and neither arrogance nor hatred was known.

00:00:55:20 *Close up to the beautiful snow-covered mountains. Focus on their majesty and landscape: closeness of their peaks with the blue sky and their slopes with the green valley.*

VO: Those who watched over the welfare of humans were the gods of the mountains, known as Apus. These spirits did not forbid anything, except for one rule they had to follow:

00:01:09:23 *Scene goes deep into the mountains to discover the “sacred-fire”. The scene turns dark while entering the mountain and explaining the “rule”. Scene ends with a fade out focus on the fire.*

VO: Never dare to reach the top of the mountain where a bonfire with the sacred fire was kept safe.

00:01:17:24 *Humans are seen worshipping the mountains and taking care of the earth. They show no desire for disobedience. The scene shows houses made of straw, people collecting water and fruits from the trees.*

VO: As time passed by, our ancestors of the valley were obedient and complied with the Apus’s request. They did not wish to disobey their protectors.

00:01:28:26 *Darker scene: we can only see a shadow walking through a dark blue space with no one around. A sense of cold and loneliness. The shadow starts to approach us until there is only blackness.*

VO: However, there was an evil spirit, which had been condemned to live in the regions of the shadows, the darkest and most desolated place on earth. This being could not tolerate the happiness and peace that humans enjoyed and he devised a plan to slip defiance and discord among them.

00:01:52:00 *Shot of the humans living in the valley when suddenly, the evil spirit camouflages among the men and starts a malicious whisper which resonates among them. As it becomes louder, the shadow starts to grow until it covers the whole valley. Fade out.*

VO: Thus, he enticed the humans and urged them to test their courage by reaching the top of the mountain, an act that will certainly challenge the gods.

00:02:04:17 *Morning scene: The men start to dress for battle and begin their journey. One by one approaches the mountain and begin to climb. At the beginning, it is a sunny day, but as they start their trip the clouds begin to cover the sun until there is only dark.*

VO: Hence, one day at dawn, the men full of curiosity decided to climb the mountain showing what they thought was bravery.

00:02:13:19 *Hidden among the rocks of the mountain appear the Apus: Luminous and majestic beings. When they see the men, they disappear in a flash of light, similar to an explosion, causing a tremor on the mountain. For the first time, men were not able to see the gods since their eyes hurt because of that light.*

VO: Little did they know, that the disappointed Apus was waiting for them halfway into their journey. They understood that humans' souls had been corrupted and needed to be punished.

00:02:22:20 *After the earthquake, a call of war is heard. Hundreds of cougars begin to descend from above to pounce the men. For the first time, they have to fight for their lives. Fear seizes the men, as they start praying to every god they know. Consumed by panic, they beg evil beings to give them strength to defeat the punishment of the gods.*

VO: The gods attracted hundreds of thousands of pumas to devour the rebellious men, who begged to the evil spirit for mercy and help, but instead, they were ignored, as he remained insensitive and satisfied with their misery.

00:02:38:23 *Scene from the top of the sky, where when the clouds dissipate a ray of sun focuses on the battle. There is no wailing or shouting, only a slow-moving battle is seen.*

VO: Witnessing all this terrible spectacle was the god of the sun, Inti, who when feeling helpless and sad about seeing such a destruction, started to cry.

00:02:45:08 *The camera moves away from the battle to see a drop fall from the sky. Initiating how the floods begins. Lightning, rain and wind take over the scene. When the storm is over, we can only see a boat floating in the middle of the water.*

VO: His tears were so abundant that in forty days and forty nights the valley was completely flooded, and only a man and a woman could be saved on a reed boat.

00:02:52:26 *From the boat appears a couple: disoriented and amazed by what they see around them. The man stands up and tries to see the shore of the lake, while the woman touches the crystal-clear water.*

VO: When the sun shone again and the rain ceased, they could not believe their eyes: under the pure blue sky, they were in the middle of an immense lake that was lost in the distance. What were once peaks had been transformed into islands and in the middle of the water floated the pumas that had been turned into stone statues.

00:03:01:23 *Different shots of the lake showing the islands, rocks and peacefulness of the new landscape. The scene continuous with the couple admiring the new sunset together. While starting a fade out, we can see how the couple begins to walk away from the lake while a beam of sunlight illuminates their path.*

VO: Both, man and woman, understood they were granted a second chance to create an empire worthy of the gods, and so it was.

Time later, this same lake gave birth to the first Incas, and from that moment on was known as “Titicaca”, which in the native language means “the lake of the stone cougars”, to remind them never to defy the gods.

00:03:15:01 *MX OUT*

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