

## ONLINE AUDIO GUIDE 7.5

### SYMPHONIC MUSIC OF PROTEST

**title:** *Sensemayá: A Chant for Killing a Snake*

**performing forces:** symphony orchestra, directed by Fernando Lozano

**composer:** Silvestre Revueltas

form: free

function: symphonic music with likely political intent

**source:** *Mexico City Philharmonic Orchestra and Fernando Lozano* (Forlane, 2009)

#### Listen for:

- several ostinati (plural of ostinato)
- large percussion section requiring three players (xylophone, claves, maracas, rasping stick, gourd, small Indian drum, bass drum, high and low tom-toms, cymbals, large and small gongs, glockenspiel, celesta, piano)
- variety of timbres
- speech rhythm of words of poem replicated in orchestral writing
- short, fragmented melodies
- *fff* (triple *forte* or extremely loud)

Timing	Structure	What happens
00:00	Section 1 ostinato 1	tom toms and bass drum mark speech rhythm of word “sen-se-may-á”  enhanced by gong and bass clarinet low-pitched, “dark” sounds
00:11	ostinato 2	bassoon
00:13	ostinato 3	clave
00:22	“snake theme” in tuba	narrow melodic range
00:32	ostinato 2	accompanies snake theme, enhanced with string bass
00:47	snake theme continues	French horn (with mute) punctuates the snake theme
00:55	snake theme, repeated	enhanced with trumpet and other instruments
1:26	snake theme repeated	higher-pitched instruments

1:58	ostinato 4	<p>(piccolo, flute)</p> <p>introduced in strings, with speech rhythm of the incantation “mayombe bombe mayombe”</p> <p>ostinato 4 in dialogue (antiphonally) with brass</p> <p>fragmentary themes, some related to “snake” theme</p> <p>buildup of intensity, multiple themes and ostinato</p>
2:58	ostinati	drop in dynamics
3:04	new theme, pentatonic flavor (trumpet)	
3:40	pentatonic theme fades out	<p>drop in dynamics</p> <p>woodwinds and trumpet</p>
3:46		further drop in dynamics (sneaking up to kill the snake?)
3:48	<p>Section 2</p> <p>loud, strident chords</p>	<p>high-pitched instruments (flute, piccolo) play loud, dissonant chords, contrasting with lower-pitched chords</p> <p>short motives in brass add intensity</p>
3:58	climax	speech rhythm of the word “sensemayá” in trumpets and strings, repeated, now in double time
4:22	drop in dynamics	bass clarinet and percussion recall beginning of piece but now with greater activity in one of the drums
4:32	ostinato 2, ostinato 3	bassoon and clave, as in beginning motives in brass, hint of “snake”

5:04	theme with pentatonic flavor	<p>theme in tuba, suspense builds but then falls off . . .</p> <p>flute, enhanced by xylophone, interjections from trumpet</p> <p>suspense begins to build again</p> <p>interjections from brass more insistent, music surges to . . .</p> <p><i>fff</i> (triple forte)</p> <p>climax sustains itself, full orchestra, slower note values</p> <p>killing the snake?</p>
6:09	Section 4	<p>“snake” theme, pentatonic theme, along with ostinato 2 (bassoon) and ostinato 4 (“mayombe bombe mayombe”)</p> <p>dramatic silence</p> <p>final chords <i>fff</i> (triple forte)</p>

**Consider:**

- What role is the tuba assigned in this piece? What is its normal role in a symphony orchestra? In a band?
- Look up the term “mute” in its musical sense. How do mutes for different instruments work and what do they look like? Besides making the instrument quieter, how does a mute affect the timbre of particular instrument?
- What is the role of the ostinati in this piece? Note that Online Audio Guide 7.5 does not indicate each one. How does an ostinato contribute to or diminish the sense of teleological direction common in Western European classical music?