

ONLINE AUDIO GUIDE 8.6

ELECTROACOUSTIC MUSIC

title: *Nic Quetza Tohuenhueuh* (I Erect My Drum)

performing forces: solo tenor (Tucker Fischer), solo soprano (Alice Del Simone), electronics, chorus (University of California, Davis Early Music Ensemble, directed by Will Cooper)

composer: Gabriel Bolaños

text: attributed to Nezahualcōyotl (1402-1472)

language: Nahuatl

form: free, multisectional

function: for performance

source: recording courtesy of Gabriel Bolaños and the University of California, Davis Early Music Ensemble

Listen for:

- interactions among the soloists (tenor and soprano), electronics, and the full choir
- whispering, speaking, shouting, and singing
- rapidly repeated gestures that create dense, unusual textures
- electronic sounds versus traditional musical utterances
- vocal glissandi
- ending on a traditional chord

Timing	Structure and text	What happens
00:00	Introduction Nic quetza tohuehueuh	tenor soloist begins the piece with a long, sustained note (D) followed by speech and accompanied by an abstract, crackling electronic sound representing the drum
00:13	niquin nechicohua	choir joins in, whispering “nechicohua” (“my friends”) very quickly, ad lib
00:23	To—Aya!—cnihuanon in mehelquiza, niquin cuicatia.	tenor soloists long note returns (on the syllable “to”) choir immediately interrupts by screaming “Aya!” and cutting off some of the whispering and the electronics
00:32		tenor soloist speaks again, this time followed by a wind-like, airy sound in the choir, an orchestrated silence
00:46	Section 1 ... cuicatia	tenor soloist repeats previous phrase

00:49	--tia, --tia, repeated in chorus	<p>("I make them sing")</p> <p>women's voices in the choir begin singing, at first coordinated</p> <p>women's voices then begin repeating very quickly, ad lib, creating a dense, overlapping texture</p>
1:01		tenor soloist sings over the dense texture, music becomes increasingly chaotic
1:08		tenor soloist continues singing over chorus
1:18	Tiyazque ye (yuhcan)	<p>tenor holds the syllable "xi"</p> <p>chaos of previous passage subsides</p>
1:24	Xi . . . quilnamiquican. Xi ya mocuiltonocan.	tenor speaks
1:32	Aya!	shout in chorus
	in tochihuan	tenor sings long note (on the syllable "in") before saying "tochnihuan" ("my friends")
1:38	Section 2 tochnihuan	<p>choir joins in, whispering "my friends"</p> <p>whispers gradually grow louder and more chaotic, almost to the point of screaming</p>
1:48		the near-screaming is suddenly interrupted, revealing the electronic sounds in the background
1:49		shouting resumes, is again interrupted to reveal electronic sounds
1:55		choir whispers "tohuehueh" ("my drum"), now silencing the electronics
2:00	Section 3 Ohuaya, ohuaya!	<p>tenor soloist speaks "Ohuaya, ohuaya"</p> <p>soprano solo begins singing on a D,</p>

2:05	In cuix oc no ihuiyan, canon ye yuhcan?	the same note as the tenor's long, sustained note at the beginning
2:18		tenor whispers only the consonants of the text, together with the soprano
2:22	Cuix ox no ihuiyan canon ximohuayan?	soprano does a vocal glissando on "Aya!"
2:43	Ohuaya ohuaya!	choir begins quietly whispering in the background
2:52	Ma tihuiyacan. Yece ye nican in xochinahuatilo.	soprano continues singing, higher pitches
		low voices in the choir
		electronics return
		tenor sings a melody similar to that of the soprano
3:09	section 4 xochinahuatilo, xochinahuatilo	choir whispers, repeating "xochinahuatilo" (the law of the flower)
3:27	yece ye nican in cuicanahuatilo	whispering repeated very fast, ad lib, while tenor sings over dense texture
3:40	Ehuaya!	electronics return
	Xi mocuiltonocan xi moquimilocan a in tocnihuan.	soprano and tenor sing
4:16	Ohuaya, ohuaya!	full choir sings as whispering continues quietly in the background
		ending on a D-major chord

English translation

I erect my drum,
 I assemble my friends.
 Aya!
 Here they find recreation,
 I make them sing.
 Thus we must go over There.
 Remember this: be happy.
 Aya! Oh, my friends!
 Ohuaya, ohuaya!

Perhaps now with calm,
and thus it must be over there?
Aya!
Perhaps there is also calm there in the bodyless place?
Aya! Ohuaya, ohuaya!
Let us go.
But here the law of the flowers governs,
here the law of the song governs,
here on Earth.
Ehuaya!
Be happy, dress in finery, oh friends.
Ohuaya, ohuaya!

Consider:

- Who was Nezahualcóyotl? How do you interpret the poem?
- Does the composer use word-painting, a concept we discussed in relation to music of the seventeenth century? How, more generally, does the music convey the text?
- What role do the electronics play in the piece? Are the sounds always noticeably electronic or modern-sounding?
- What do you think is the significance in combining speech, whispering, shouting, and singing?

The author thanks Gabriel Bolaños for contributing this online audio guide.