



LYRIC OPERA OF CHICAGO

Q&A with SIR ANDREW DAVIS

Sir Andrew Davis has served as music director and principal conductor of Lyric Opera of Chicago since 2000 and was named a vice president of Lyric's board of directors in 2011. He is the conductor for Bel Canto, and a member of the artistic team charged with bringing the book to the opera stage. Conductor laureate of the Toronto and BBC symphony orchestras and former music director of Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Sir Andrew has conducted extensively at opera houses and festivals worldwide, from the Metropolitan Opera and Covent Garden to La Scala and the Bayreuth Festival.

Q: How did you select the composer for Bel Canto?

SAD: As our first step, Renée [Fleming] and I talked about the opera, and then she and I spent a great deal of time looking at different composers and listening to recordings. From our interviews we both absolutely felt that Jimmy López was the person for this particular project.

Q: What was it about Jimmy López and his music?

SAD: Partly it's that he's Peruvian. À propos. He's very wedded to and excited by the story. He was a teenager when this famous event took place in Lima.

I like the fact that his writing encompasses a great many styles, but that he has a distinctive voice. *Fiesta!*, for example, is "up tempo" Latin. Both Renée and I also were touched by a beautiful piece we heard for voice and piano. Even though he hasn't written a lot of vocal music, we feel he has a natural instinct for writing for the voice, and that he will do some interesting and beautiful work.

I was struck by his intelligence and understanding of some of the problems of bringing this piece to the stage, but also the possibilities that opera as a medium offers for illuminating the story. The orchestra can accentuate the dramatic situation, but also can show the opposite of what's happening on the stage. It can convey the underlying turmoil, for example, that one might not see. That's just one of the opportunities opera offers as a medium. It's one that many composers miss and that Jimmy understands completely.

Q: Jimmy has described the book as having a soundtrack of its own. Is it tailor made for the stage?

SAD: *Bel Canto* is a very powerful drama if one gets the pacing and tension of it right. The fact that it deals with an opera singer suggests an operatic treatment, although that's another problem, as there will have to be some kind of quotations from the operatic repertoire. Jimmy and I have talked about how these can be approached, such as a brief allusion to the vocal line and the Chopin nocturne that is heard early on. These quotations will be woven into the texture and substance of Jimmy's own music. Judging from his work I think that's something he won't have any trouble doing.

What's exciting about this whole process is that we are all going to be involved. Jimmy is quite open to the idea of showing progress reports, and he's very welcome to pick my brain.

Q: Have you been involved in an operatic world premiere before?

SAD: I've done many orchestral world premieres. However, bringing a new opera to the stage is for me a first. But it will be a new experience, in a way, for all of us.

I love how music can enhance and transform a work of literature on the stage. This is an exciting project that we hope will produce something that has great dramatic power and beauty that people will enjoy seeing and hearing.

###