

ONDINE

*Americascapes 2:*

# AMERICAN OPUS

Walker | Crumb | Revueltas



Basque National Orchestra

Robert Treviño

**GEORGE WALKER** (1922–2018)

**Address for Orchestra** (1959)

**17:47**

- |   |                               |      |
|---|-------------------------------|------|
| 1 | Poco adagio – molto più mosso | 8:10 |
| 2 | Molto adagio                  | 2:20 |
| 3 | Dramatico                     | 7:09 |

**GEORGE CRUMB** (1929–2022)

- 4 **A Haunted Landscape** (1984)

**16:28**

**SILVESTRE REVUELTAS** (1899–1940)

**La Coronela (*The Lady Colonel*), Ballet** (1940)

**33:11**

(Reconstructed by Eduardo Hernández Moncada and José Limantour)

- |   |  |       |
|---|--|-------|
| 5 | Los privilegiados ( <i>The Privileged</i> )                    | 4:42  |
| 6 | Los desheredados ( <i>The Disinherited</i> )                   | 7:21  |
| 7 | La pesadilla de Don Ferruco ( <i>Don Ferruco's Nightmare</i> ) | 8:48  |
| 8 | El juicio final ( <i>The Last Judgement</i> )                  | 12:12 |

**BASQUE NATIONAL ORCHESTRA**

**ROBERT TREVIÑO, conductor**

## Americascapes 2: American Opus

Robert Treviño continues his welcome explorations of *Americascapes*. This vital and varied young musician – Mexican-American by origin, raised and trained in Texas – is now both the Music Director of the Basque National Orchestra and the Principal Guest Conductor for the RAI National Symphony in Turin. To make things even more international, his *Americascapes* albums, of which this is the second, have been made in the Basque Country for the Finnish label Ondine.

None of the pieces on this recording are particularly well-known, even to scholars that specialize in music from the United States and Mexico, and so this gathering is valuable in itself. *Address for Orchestra* was the first work for large ensemble that the late composer **George Walker** (1922–2018) ever wrote. He drafted the three movements in 1958 and orchestrated them in 1959 but then had to wait until a Belgian performance in 1971 to hear the whole piece. Fortunately, Walker had been well trained at the Curtis Institute of Music by Rosario Scalero, who also taught Samuel Barber, Lukas Foss and Gian Carlo Menotti. In 1996, Walker would win the Pulitzer Prize for Composition for his piece *Lilacs*; he was the first African-American to receive the honor. It was Walker's expressed hope that Treviño would record *Address for Orchestra*. It is in three movements, the first marked *Poco adagio – molto più mosso* which is followed by a languorous *Molto Adagio* and then a sort of passacaglia appropriately marked *Dramatico*.

In a homage to Walker published in the Los Angeles Times on the 100th anniversary of his birth, the critic Mark Swed summed up Walker's work with rare acuity: "Walker's music is uncompromising," Swed wrote: "It can be thorny. Like Bach, Stravinsky and Webern, he made music with a jeweler's precision, and he didn't wear his emotions on his sleeve. Like their music, his work demands – and magnificently rewards – deep listening."

**George Crumb** (1929–2022) wrote *A Haunted Landscape* in 1984 for the New York Philharmonic, which presented the premiere under Arthur Weisberg the following year. The composer's fascination with unusual instrumental textures led him to include no fewer than 20 percussion instruments in his orchestration. "Crumb's palette has a precision of nuance and specificity that brings Takemitsu's sound gardens to mind, while his subtle alterations of color from one source to another are akin to Schoenberg's and Webern's painting with



Composer George Walker together with Robert Treviño attending the première of his Symphony No. 4, Music Hall, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, 2013

Klangfarbenmelodie (literally, 'tone-color-melody')," the theater and music scholar Thomas May observed of the 17-minute piece.

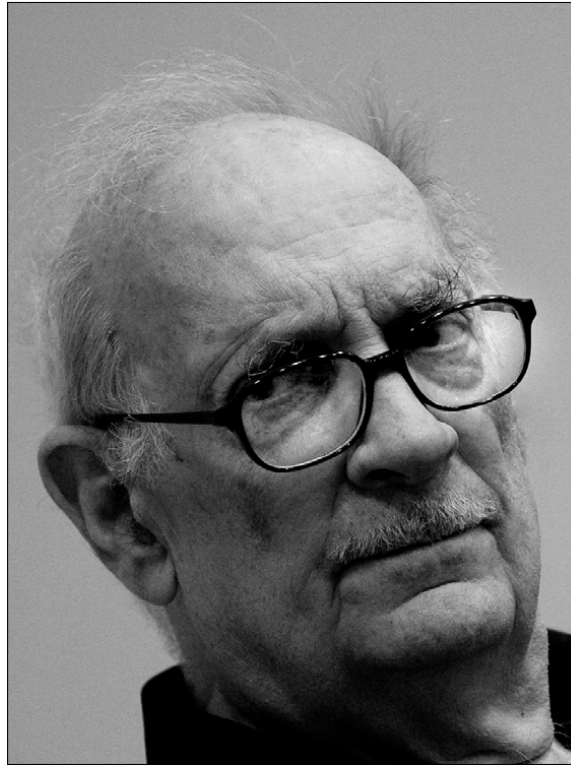
Covering a performance of the work for the New York Times, the critic John Rockwell called *A Haunted Landscape* a mostly quiet meditation. "Rather like Mahler in one of his nocturnal reveries, Mr. Crumb uses the orchestra less for concerted ensemble statements than as a resource for chamber sound effects," Rockwell continued. "The effects are lovely, though."

The music of **Silvestre Revueltas** – born on the last day of the 1800s (December 31, 1899), dead from alcoholism at the age of 40 – has finally become popular in the past three decades. During his brief, scantily documented existence, Revueltas distinguished himself as a child prodigy in his native Mexico; studied violin and composition in gangster-era Chicago; served as concertmaster for something called the Aztec Theater Orchestra in San Antonio, Texas; fought alongside the communists in the Spanish Civil War; returned to Mexico where he drifted in and out of mental hospitals; lived poor; died young.

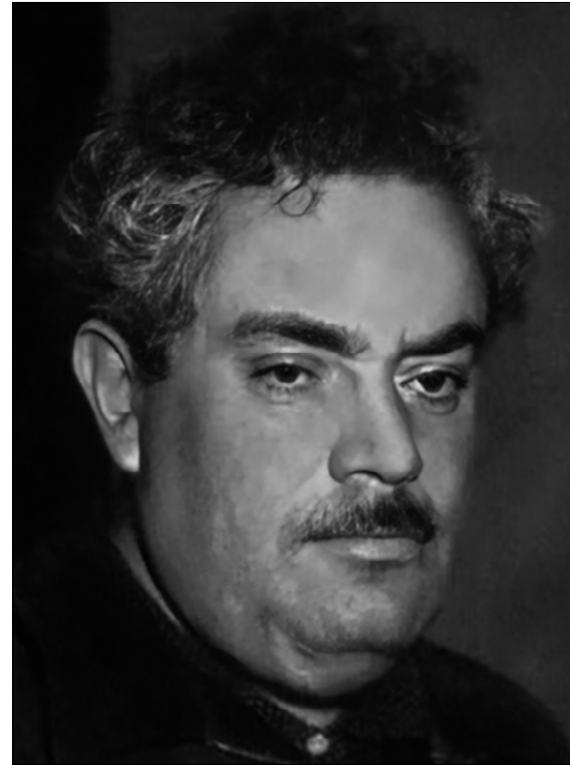
He never got to hear his final work *La Coronela* ('The Lady Colonel'), which received its premiere a few months after its composer's death. Revueltas received the commission in 1939 from Mexico's Fine Arts Ballet. The production was inspired by the horrific engravings of the illustrator José Guadalupe Posada and the story is said to have concerned a "people's revolution" that overthrew an oppressive dictatorship in a country that might be Mexico. After that, the work is shrouded in mystery and it is even unclear how much of it Revueltas wrote himself. (We need an authoritative biography of this great composer!)

The story goes that a younger Mexican composer named Blas Galindo (1910–1993) completed the last movement of *La Coronela*, entitled *El juicio final* or 'The Last Judgement'. (The others were entitled *Los privilegiados* or 'The Privileged,' *Los desheredados* or 'The Disinherited,' and *La pesadilla de Don Ferruco* or 'Don Ferruco's Nightmare'. — All very Revueltas.)

*La Coronela* was then orchestrated by Candelario Huizar, but the version played at its world premiere on November 23, 1940, disappeared soon after, along with all of the composer's sketches. Nearly two decades later, conductor Jose Limantour decided to 'reconstruct' the score. Limantour knew his Revueltas — he assembled the suite from *La Noche de los Mayas* that is usually presented in concert. Yet it is a fair question how closely



George Crumb



Silvestre Revueltas

it resembles the original version, as the Revueltas score and sketches seem to have never been recovered.

Still, it is a pleasure to have any more from this composer to listen to, in whatever condition it survives. Perhaps the cultural historian and concert producer Joseph Horowitz summed up Revueltas' appeal most succinctly before a Washington performance by the group he founded there, the PostClassical Ensemble. "He exceptionally embodies fusion with the vernacular," Horowitz said. "His musical language is a churning kaleidoscope of mestizaje [the mixture of ethnic and cultural groups in the country's history], bristling with the grit and energy of Mexican streets, streaming with poetic folklore and song."

**Tim Page**

*Professor Emeritus of Musicology at the University of Southern California and the winner of the 1997 Pulitzer Prize for Criticism for his writings about music in the Washington Post. He was a friend and associate of the late Glenn Gould and edited a posthumous collection of the pianist's writing, 'The Glenn Gould Reader,' that has remained in print for more than 40 years.*

## **Robert Treviño on his 'American Opus' album**

Those who love the arts, and perhaps especially artists themselves, often superimpose their experiences and impressions onto works of art. It's one of the many elements that make the arts so impactful to us, we 'see' our own story in the art. Where my first 'Americascapes' album looked at lesser-known major American works that had influenced European composers (rather than the other way around), for this follow-up, I went back to a more basic thought – "What is America?". Since America is many things to millions of people, I realise that my question had to mean, "What is America to me?"

I, like many art lovers, tend to process life through music – and vice versa – and found myself thinking again and again about three composers, who each encapsulate major aspects of my experiences of America. In a way, they form a kind of musical, mini-autobiographical impression, or better yet, an "auto-sonographical impression", of my journeys through America and American music.

Being born in Fort Worth, Texas, to a Mexican family, my musical exposures were very diverse to say the least, and had nothing to do with 'Classical Music'. Now, having lived a life of music all around the US and the world, this traveling life has somehow given me depth and at the same time a distance from America, that allowed these works to stand out all the more clearly. So, if an 'opus' suggests a journey through a body of art, this album is, in a sense, my (first) American Opus.

Selecting the composers for this American Opus took well over a year; the list of music I want to record being enough to fill 12 'Americascapes' Albums. Yet I eventually refined the list to these three composers, with all of whom I feel a close kinship and all of whom are deeply meaningful to me. Two of them I even had a direct artistic relationship with. As a group, they also embody some of the diversity and the radically different aesthetics that thrive in the Americas – because to me, as a Mexican-American who sees and experiences how a sense of America permeates Latin America, just as Mexican, Brazilian, many other immigrants and influences traverse the US, "America" infers all of the Americas.

George Walker I knew personally and he was a friend. His music is a metaphor for what America felt it was in his time: there is forthrightness, clarity of purpose, directness, and a sense of optimistic belief in America's future. There are also all sorts of other American



influences in there, from folk music to gospel – they're disfigured, taken apart, but they are there. It's a bit like looking at the Statue of Liberty in a cubist rendering, to the point that you can't easily tell that's what it is, but the spirit of liberty and freedom are clear.

Walker's *Address for Orchestra* is a reference to a seminal moment of American history, the Gettysburg Address – not only among the most important speeches ever given in the USA's history, it contains some of the most substantial and consequential elements of what it is to be an American. The power that Lincoln must have had to convey this message, still more so given the context of enormous suffering and death – there is a sense of overcoming present circumstances to reach for an ideal of the future. George's work conveys all of that, the size, the profundity, and the sense of a crucial part of the USA's heritage, not to be forgotten.

I met George in Cincinnati when I was working with him on the premiere of his Symphony No. 4, '*Lilacs*', with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. Like his music, George was full of vitality, even in old age when I knew him. He walked with this very fast step, with purposefulness. When anyone spoke to him, he listened with a smile on his face, had a hyper-awareness of every word said and a genuine desire to engage. So both George and his music are a definitive part of my American musical experience. All those years ago he asked me directly to record *Address for Orchestra* for him. It was an honor and a gift to have been asked to do that; it took me some time, but it's a promise I've finally made good on, and now that he is no longer with us, I hope this can stand in tribute to the great man and composer that he was.

George Crumb, whom I met when I lived in Chicago, represents a vastly different school to George Walker. Crumb was more of the experimental, avant-garde school of American composer. I put him alongside Carter, Ruggles, William Schumann, even Barber, and later-era Copland. He had the experimentalism of a Cage or Cowell, that also gave birth to minimalists like Philip Glass. Whereas George Walker, 40 years after he wrote a piece, could tell you why he wrote every note, when I would ask Crumb what he meant by a particular musical gesture in the score, he would say, "I don't really remember!". So one got the sense that Crumb was much more about the impulse of the creative process, and the imagination of what he was creating in the moment. To me his music is indeed very impressionistic, much more about sound-sculpting and landscapes than harmonic or formal rigor.

Crumb's music is exceptionally difficult to re-create, which I why I think his music has largely been left to the realm of his chamber works. The creative difficulty stems from the fact that he doesn't use "typical" classical structures like sonatas and so on, nor do his scores visually resemble 'conventional' notation styles. Crumb is very much creating through painting complex and subtle soundscapes, including bringing in sounds from other realms into a classical music environment. So as a conductor you have to try to focus on what kind of sounds he wanted. For instance, when a composer writes a B flat on a piano, to be played at forte, there are a range of sounds you can select that would be appropriate for that marking. However, when one encounters the music of Crumb, it's best to have the mindset of an adventurous explorer. He writes in *A Haunted Landscape* to alter the inside of a piano, place a mute on a string and strum with alternative devices – sticks/metal/wood/plastic – a notation more in line with the creation of a Jackson Pollock canvas than a "Classical Composer"! So you need to search for the kind of sound that makes sense of what he's trying to describe. *A Haunted Landscape* is a piece to experience in that way; it lives at the crossroads of performance art and sound painting.

Thanks to the music and interaction I had with Crumb, I learned to open my mind towards a greater diversity of sounds and, again, to ask that question "what kind of sound does the composer intend?". My encounters with this creative genius, and his vibrant – and very American – spirit of curiosity, have helped form many of the lasting questions I explore in my musical life.

Silvestre Revueltas is a composer whose history in some way mirrored my trajectory as a Mexican-American (Revueltas was Mexican, he lived in Texas for some time and eventually arrived in Chicago, as I also did). I dreamt since I was 19, that if I were lucky enough to have the chance one day, I would record Revueltas.

I place him in the catalogue of composers, like Bernstein, who were almost like chroniclers of all the musics of their age. One of the reasons Revueltas is forgotten in part is because he doesn't fall into any particular school of composition (and if it weren't for Bernstein's enormous fame as a conductor and a composer of musicals, perhaps he might have suffered a similar fate). As was the case with Bernstein, Revueltas also had a lot of success with film music. The work represented on this album is the last work of Revueltas, written for a ballet.

In Revueltas's music, one flies through a high-octane mixture of so many elements that were pulsing through the Americas – Mariachi, Mexican folk tunes, Native American folk, jazz, television music, cartoons, polytonalism, atonalism, serialism, experimentation, all in this remarkably vivid, technicolor manner. Revueltas is an iconoclastic Americana composer.

As a student I first encountered his music in the library – his score *Sensamaya*, and was instantly astonished that this incredible music isn't performed much more. There was something about the way that every next bar of his music seems so fresh and imaginative and new, and yet in retrospect you realise it could never have been any other way; those characteristics reminded me of my cherished Richard Strauss.

One thing I find offensive is that Revueltas's music usually gets confined to orchestras' Latino-themed nights! It's a practice that is patronising both to the audience and the composer. It's like saying, 'you are Mexican so you must only like tejano music' and that 'this is the only classical work/composer you could understand'. Similarly, in the years before George Walker's death, years before it became fashionable to program his music for 'extra-musical' reasons, it was near-impossible for me to convince orchestra administrators to put what was dismissed as his "overly academic and intellectual" music on a program. Though I have an issue with check-the-box mentality in all manifestations, at least on some level I'm happy that George, and now maybe Revueltas, may be heard more. I genuinely believe in the quality of this music being long-deserving of performance and respect, well beyond any current trend of political expediency.

Recording all of this with the wonderful musicians of the Basque National Orchestra, I encountered yet again – as on the first *Americascapes* album – that they don't have an ounce of prejudice against any of these composers. Sometimes when you program something unfamiliar you find resistance from musicians, but my colleagues from the Basque National Orchestra found this journey of ours – this "American Opus" – new and fresh, and exciting. I hope you will, too. Thank you for joining us!

The **Basque National Orchestra** is one of the most renowned symphonic ensembles in Spain and its activity is followed by thousands of people through its live concerts and various digital platforms. Fostered and developed by the Basque Government's Department of Culture, today, the Basque National Orchestra is an orchestra that is firmly rooted in its community, has extremely high standards and is strongly committed to the dissemination of symphony music from all periods. It places special emphasis on the creation and promotion of Basque music worldwide, thanks to numerous international tours and record distribution. Its latest albums, *Ravel*, *Americascapes* and *Ravel 2*, released under the Ondine label, have attracted the attention of global critics. Robert Treviño has been its main director since 2017 and, together, they work on progressive artistic improvement and new international positioning, with recent tours in Austria, Germany, Poland and Paris.

Thanks to its established and well-structured schedule, the orchestra regularly performs four concert cycles in Bilbao, Vitoria, San Sebastián and Pamplona. It also organises chamber music and a wide range of activities aimed at children and families. The orchestra is also invited to summer festivals, opera productions and special events.

The orchestra has shared the stage with great conductors such as Jerzy Semkov, Lawrence Foster, Yehudi Menuhin, Krzysztof Penderecki, Ruth Reinhardt, Gemma New, Juraj Valcuha, Jesús López Cobos, Juanjo Mena and José Ramón Encinar. Also, on the list of soloists are names such as Maria João Pires, Frank Peter Zimmermann, Mischa Maisky, Christian Zacharias, Leonidas Kavakos, Radu Lupu, Elisabeth Leonskaja, Alban Gerhardt, Pinchas Zukerman, Augustin Hadelich, Nikolai Lugansky, Yulianna Avdeeva, Joaquín Achúcarro, María Bayo, Carlos Mena, Ainhoa Arteta, Asier Polo, Pablo Ferrández, amongst many others. In a context of great choral tradition, the orchestra maintains a close relationship with the Orfeón Donostiarra, the Bilbao Choral Society and the Orfeón Pamplonés, amongst others.

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Mexican-American conductor **Robert Treviño** has rapidly emerged as one of the most exciting maestros of the younger generation performing today. He serves as the Music Director of the Basque National Orchestra and Principal Guest Conductor of the Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI.

The 2024/25 season will see Robert Treviño make debuts with the Minnesota Orchestra and Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Tokyo, while there will be welcome returns to regular collaborators including the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Orchestre dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Tonhalle Orchester Zurich, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre philharmonique de Strasbourg, Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana, Osaka Philharmonic and Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.

Other orchestras Robert Treviño has conducted include the London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic, Münchner Philharmoniker, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Dresdner Philharmonie, SWR Sinfonieorchester Stuttgart, NDR Hannover, Gürzenich Orchester Köln, MDR-Sinfonieorchester Leipzig, Bamberger Symphoniker, Wiener Symphoniker, Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, Orchestre de Paris, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Orchestre national du Capitole de Toulouse, Filarmonica della Scala and Helsinki Philharmonic. He has also conducted a wide variety of orchestras in North America – among them the symphony orchestras of Cleveland, Baltimore, San Francisco, Cincinnati, Utah, Toronto and Detroit. Further afield he has conducted leading ensembles such as the São Paulo Symphony, NHK Symphony, Tokyo Philharmonic, Osaka Philharmonic, China Philharmonic, Russian National Orchestra and St Petersburg Philharmonic. He has led orchestras at many leading festivals, among them Mahler Festival Leipzig, Milan Mahler Festival, Enescu Festival, Puccini Festival and Interlochen Festival. Treviño's opera work has included productions at Opernhaus Zurich, La Fenice and Washington National Opera.

His recording contract with Ondine has resulted in a widely-praised complete Beethoven symphonies cycle, two much-acclaimed Ravel albums, a Rautavaara album, Respighi's Roman Trilogy, and "Americascapes" ('Best Recording of 2021' – Presto Music, Gramophone Award-shortlisted). Additionally, a cycle of Bruch symphonies with the Bamberger Symphoniker was released by CPO, to universally positive reviews. Between them, Robert Treviño's recordings have garnered more than 15 accolades from respected reviews publications around the world.

Treviño burst into the international spotlight at the Bolshoi Theater in December 2013, leading a new production of Verdi's Don Carlo at short notice. The Russian press wrote, "There has not been an American success of this magnitude in Moscow since Van Cliburn." He was subsequently nominated for a Golden Mask award for "Best Conductor in a New Production".

Robert Treviño has commissioned, premiered and worked closely with many leading composers, among them John Adams, Philip Glass, Sofia Gubaidulina, George Walker, Jennifer Higdon, Andre Previn, Augusta Read Thomas, Shulamit Ran, Ramon Lazkano and John Zorn.

[www.robert-trevino.com](http://www.robert-trevino.com)

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