Vigilante Justice

PATAOFFA BUNAM FROG



An opera project

by

José Vítores & Javier Andrade Córdova

Vigilante Justice

Por mano propia

An opera project in nine scenes

Music: José Vítores / Libretto: Javier Andrade Córdova

Original language: Spanish

Duration: approx. 1 hour 30 min.

The social context and the historical moment

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified social injustice conditions in poor countries and revealed the absence of the state and structures of lacerating corruption. In Ecuador, for example, while the pandemic has ravaged several cities, which have experienced Dantesque scenes of unburied corpses and fully collapsed health systems, several cases of overpricing have already come to light in the acquisition of medical supplies and biosecurity. Many cases of abuse of power have also been discovered relating to the access to the few vaccines that have arrived in the country, etc., while at the same time the difficult living conditions of the majority of citizens have worsened. The relationship between politics, the justice system, the police, the security forces with the drug mafias and human trafficking. On the other hand, the pandemic seems to be a type of threat that will increasingly appear in a world ravaged by the global destruction of nature and climate balances. There are signs that this pandemic will not be fully defeated and will become an endemic phenomenon and that other infections may be life-threatening in the future.

The myth of Antigone and its reenactment

The Greek myth of Antigone, about a young woman who defies an order from Creon, the head of state, to leave her brother Polinices unburied for his rebellion against the city, serves as a reference in this context.

In the plot of this opera, Ana, a rebellious young woman, struggles to find her boyfriend and activist partner, Paúl, who has been apprehended by security forces. Ana will also be imprisoned and tortured for her involvement in the rebellion, and while she is being tortured, she will understand that Paúl and other activists, who are apparently infected, are being guarded in the general hospital.

Cracio, the head of state, personally oversees Ana's martyrdom and threatens to abandon Paúl in an open field to die anonymously and end up in a mass grave if she does not cooperate.

Ana manages to escape and embarks on a search for Paúl, but she is unable to locate him or his body. However, Ana will ascertain that Paul has fulfilled his destiny by ending up becoming "dust mixed with the dust of the people"; his body has disappeared, mixed with thousands of other anonymous dead that are being mourned for by the country. With the last remnants of strength, since -in her efforts to find Paúl- Ana has also become infected, she decides to take justice into her own hands. Thus, wearing biosecurity clothing, Ana threatens to commit suicide in front of the general hospital if Cracio, the supreme chief, does not appear before her. Cracio, for his part, is embroiled in the anxieties of his corrupt power: he must permanently negotiate with powerful partners, please those who sustain him, and violently dispose of those who confront him. The appearance of a young woman threatening suicide in front of the general hospital, precisely on the day of the state celebration of the regime's anniversary, also presents an opportunity to improve his image. Therefore, he decides to turn to the young woman's call, assuming that she is just some sick health care worker that has lost her nerves. His purpose in front of the television cameras is to execute an act of heroism and compassion: to reassure the young woman, also promising her the best future. Only too late will he understand that he has made a mistake. Therefore, he decides to turn to the young woman's call assuming that she is just some sick health care worker that has lost her nerves. His purpose in front of the television cameras is to execute an act of heroism and compassion: to reassure the young woman, also promising her the best future. Only too late will he understand that he has made a mistake.

Dramaturgy

The work relates the desperate pursuit of justice in a world mired in corruption and disrespect for basic rights. This struggle culminates in an illegal but somehow legitimate act: taking the law into one 's own hands, which is an expression of a dead end, to which many human groups have been forced into, abducted by power structures subjected to interests far from common sense and good. The opera puts an extreme act on the table of discussion, a symbol of the agony which entire societies have been driven to and updates the myth of Antigone, as a reference to a human sensitivity that is revealed with particular clarity in youthful fortitude to risk one's integrity in order to defend collective values.

The opera is built on the protagonist-antagonistic tension between Ana and Cracio, configured on a conflict of personal, social and political traits that has a tragic ending. A series of co-primary appearances is set up around these characters, Paúl, Ana's boyfriend, and Tiresia, the symbol of the past, which appear in the dreams of the two main characters, respectively, and reveal their contradictions, fears, and desires. In this sense, Ana and Cracio are multifaceted representations, not only of heroism and villainy, but of human complexity, of their strengths and virtues, as well as of their weaknesses and uncertainties. The difference between them is therefore in Ana's consequential action in relation to her certainties and beliefs, while, on the other hand, Cracio is a sign of the dissolution of all values in order to increase his power, in the face of which he has become a mere slave.

The composition

From a voice type point of view, Ana is built for a soprano voice with characteristics of youthful heroism. Cracio, on the other hand, is a bass-baritone with threatening sounds. They are accompanied by: on the one hand, Paúl, written for a tenor comparable to Ana's sound quality, since both are two faces of the same coin, that of the committed youth still ready to fight and utopia; and on the other hand, Tiresia, the voice of the past, performed by a mezzo-soprano with dramatic features. Finally, the secondary characters are two healthcare workers and two guards, who could be performed by the same singers, a tenor and a baritone, since these duets do not appear together. Furthermore, some extras of a figurative stage role join the main characters.

The composition is based, in essence, on the already existing tradition of dramatizing the text. The ensemble, which consists of only ten musicians, generates a kind of "dialogue" with the singers, trying to accentuate the dramatic peaks and the essence of the characters.

The music is not based on any existing orthodox compositional method, but in fact uses several of them, in combination with different non-traditional styles for opera, which gives it a certain eclecticism and, above all, a special dynamic, both elements being framed in what could be called "classic" in terms of form, but without avoiding experimentation, always emphasizing the drama in this way.

Instrumentation

1 transverse flute, 1 oboe, 1 clarinet in B flat, 1 bassoon 5 singers: soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, baritone and bass-baritone 1 violin 1, 1 violin 2, 1 viola, 1 cello 1, 1 cello 2, 1 double bass Electronic music

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Characters

Ana, a young rebel - Soprano
Cracio, the Supreme Chief - Bass-Baritone
Paúl, a rebellious young man, boyfriend and partner of Ana - Tenor
Tiresia, the symbol of the past - Mezzo-soprano
Healthcare worker 1 - Tenor
Healthcare worker 2 - Baritone
Guard 1 - Tenor
Guard 2 - Baritone
Cameraman, other guards, bystanders, -actors and actresses

Plot

Scene I
Present time
The square in front of the general hospital

A young woman wearing biosecurity clothing, threatens to commit suicide amid coughing attacks, if Cracio, the head of state, does not appear before her. She points a firearm at her temple. This situation takes place in the midst of the preparations for a major state celebration, attracting the attention of all media outlets, which broadcast the event live on social media and television.

Scene II Flashback, recent past An underground cell

Ana is tortured in a dark dungeon to force her to reveal the names of the leaders of the revolt that agitates the country. Cracio, the head of state, suggests that he has already apprehended some, including Paúl, Ana's boyfriend. The young rebels have contracted the virus, and might be imprisoned in the general hospital. If Ana does not confess some useful information, they will be abandoned in some wilderness, so that they can agonizingly die and end up as corpses in a mass grave. Despite her fear, the young woman does not reveal any information.

Scene III

The same cell at night

Ana has a fever and is delirious. Paúl appears to her in the dream, which reminds her of their origins, the neighborhood from which they came, their struggles, and affirms that no matter what happens, they will always remain together, since their bodies have fed each other, becoming one. Ana confesses her fear and tries to understand what Paúl wants to tell her. Meanwhile her own health condition deteriorates, she is also infected.

Scene IV

Government office

Cracio has been in power for more than a decade. He keeps it through bloodshed and fire from his office with the complicity of powerful partners with whom he negotiates on the telephone amid agreements of interest, blackmail and threats. Cracio assures them that the political situation is completely under control. However, at that moment, an agent arrives with alarming news: on the streets of several cities, the social rebellion is becoming more intense and violent.

Scene V

An underground cell

Ana dreams that Paúl is murdered. She is present during his torture but, despite her desperation, cannot do anything to help him. In the nightmare, Paúl asks Ana to save herself, but she refuses. At that instant, a guard violently wakes her up to take her away and make her disappear. Ana defends herself and attacks him with all the forces she still has left, spits him out and tries to assault him with her teeth and fingernails. The guard is distracted in his distress to avoid contagion and Ana gets to take his weapon away, and then under threat, handcuffs him to the cell bars. Then she escapes with the weapon and bio-safety suit that she snatched from the guard.

Scene VI

Luxury bedroom

Cracio has a nightmare. His past visits him in the form of an elderly woman, Tiresia, who comes to recriminate his transformation: he was once a young politician with ideals, and now he is a decadent tyrant. The old lady warns him that he has already surpassed the point of no return and that only torments await him. Cracio wakes up with fever and panics, as he believes he has become infected. In that state, he orders on the telephone that the imprisoned rebels continue to be tortured and demands answers and results from his henchmen.

Scene VII

General hospital lobby

Armed and hidden under the bio-safety suit, Ana has made her way to the general hospital in search of Paúl. She wandered aimlessly through rooms that had sunk into chaos until she reached a hallway that had been transformed into a warehouse full of black body bags containing corpses. Without being seen, she watches as some health workers bring in more unnamed body bags and leave them at the site, talking about rumors of executions and the disappearance of rebels. Once Ana is alone, she desperately dares to open these bags. The sight that greets her is one of distorted faces, a clear sign of a painful death, which, however, anonymously unites them all. She cannot find Paúl and thinks about his visits in her dreams. Regardless of where his body is, Ana feels that Paúl has fulfilled his fate as "dust that mixes with the dust of the people" in a mass grave. At that point she understands that her destiny will be to do justice with her last remaining strength.

Scene VIII A grand banquet hall

After the official events, the regime loudly celebrates another anniversary in a large banquet hall with exclusive guests, partners, and friends. Fragments of Cracio's morning speech are shown on various screens, but no one pays attention to them amidst the bustle and dancing. At the height of the festivities, Cracio appears carefree, under the influence of drugs and alcohol. In a corner of the hall, the ghost of Paúl appears to him. Shortly after, he hears the voice of Tiresia, who, transformed into a pop diva, finally enters the room and performs a show for the delirious crowd. The head of state becomes increasingly bewildered as he recognizes in her the archaic voice of his conscience. At the peak of the celebration, the screens suddenly flood with images from the square in front of the General Hospital: an infected young woman threatens to commit suicide unless Cracio appears before her. The guests, in their drunkenness, view the situation as entertainment and are aware that this unfavorable situation provides Cracio with the opportunity to polish his image, tainted by corruption and negligent complacency in the face of illness and death. They begin to pressure him. Consequently, he announces, to the approving applause of the crowd, that he will calm the feverish young woman, assuming she is nothing more than a sick healthcare worker who has lost her nerves.

Scene IX Return to the present The square in front of the general hospital

Cracio has arrived on the scene dressed in biosafety gear and has ordered his security agents to keep their distance, while he, accompanied only by a television cameraman, who is broadcasting the entire scene, approaches the young woman. Condescendingly, he asks the young woman to put down the gun and assures her that he will personally take care of her future. Then, Ana turns directly to the camera, as if she were speaking to a distant person. Remembering her boyfriend, she thanks him for the shared happiness and for having shown her the path of dignity and resistance. Subsequently, she speaks to the citizens who are watching the broadcast: there is only one way for the ordinary man: the daily struggle not to let dignity be taken away from him. She accuses Cracio of taking advantage of the emergency to assassinate activists, increasing his own wealth and continuing to sell the country to the highest bidder, while death reigns in the streets. Cracio already suspects who she may be, but before he can do something, Ana changes the direction of the weapon and aims it at him. While removing her mask she affirms: whether living or dead, they are treated like waste and the only way to do justice is taking the law into one's own hand. Before bursts of bullets from security officers end with Ana's fragile body, she unloads the projectiles into Cracio and kills him.

Audio Samples

From scenes II, III and VII four fragments have been selected and recorded.

To listen to these excerpts and get further information, please visit the website:

www.javierandradecordova.com/vigilante-justice-demos

Creative team

José Vítores



He was born in Guayaquil, Ecuador, in 1962. A composer, producer, arranger, guitarist, and teacher, he persued his musical studies in Ecuador, Germany, and Spain. Under the guidance of Ryuhei Kobayashi, he studied classical guitar at the Antonio Neumane Conservatory in Guayaquil. He participated in international seminars on composition and film music across various countries. As a performer, he was a founding member of the ensemble Cantango Berlin, with which he gave many concerts at the Berlin Philharmonic, among other prestigious venues. He obtained a Master's degree in Arranging and Orchestration from the renowned Berklee College of Music. As a composer, however, he considers himself predominantly selftaught. He has composed works for orchestra, theater, chamber music, and multimedia projects. He has made several recordings in CD and DVD with different ensembles in Germany. Some of his works have been published in Europe by the publishers Verlag Neue Musik and Mesa Music Publishing. In his work as composer and arranger, he has collaborated with the Peruvian youth orchestra Orquesta de Barro, the Berliner Symphoniker, the Brandenburg Symphonie Orchestra, the German Ensemble Aventure (Festival Musicaviva 2012, Ecuador), the Ecuadorian Contemporary Music Festival, the Berlin Symphony Orchestra, the Trier Philharmonic Orchestra, and double bassists Edicson Ruiz and Klaus Stoll of the Berlin Philharmonic. He won the 1st Prize in the instrumental music category at the Song Expo Wettbewerb 2001 competition (Netherlands). His short opera Historias de Piratas (Pirate Stories), for soprano, ensemble, electronic music, and video, with poems by A. Blum and Y. Magrini, was premiered in Berlin in 2019. He currently resides in Berlin, focusing on composition and teaching.

Javier Andrade Córdova



He was born in Cuenca, Ecuador, in 1966. He is a playwright, opera and theater stage director, and university professor. He was trained at the National Conservatory of Music and the Teatro Estudio in Quito and completed a bachelor's and master's degree in stage direction at the Hochschule fuer Musik un Theater in Munich, Germany, and a master's degree in Performing Arts at the University of Seville, Spain. He was the stage artistic director of the Sucre National Theater and the Bolívar Theater in the capital of Ecuador. He has written and directed his own plays, among others: "Crónicas del agua I," "La inmortal," or "Ciudadanas celestes," as well as the librettos for several operas. As a director, he has been awarded a Foerderpreis of the Ringaward Competition in Graz, Austria. He has directed contemporary opera and musical theater shows, dramas, performances, and performative, experimental, and multimedia theater creations. Some representative pieces are: "Eunice" (world premiere) by L. Salgado in Cuenca; "Cendrillon" by P. Viardot for the Gran Teatro Falla in Cádiz and in Jerez, Spain; "Narrow Rooms" (world premiere) by A. Strauch and "Die Kluge" by C. Orff in Munich; "Der Bekehrte Trunkenbold" by Gluck in Shenyang; "The Turn of the Screw" by B. Britten in Bogotá; "Manuela y Bolívar" by D. Luzuriaga (world premiere), etc. He has directed several experimental videos and presented at festivals such as the Wroclaw Biennale of Media Art, the Munich Film Festival; the Media Art Festival Friesland, etc. His performances and creations of performative and experimental theater have been presented at Casa de América Barcelona; Glyptothek and Echtzeit-Halle Festival de Múnich.

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Fragment 1







POR MANO PROPIA An opera project by José Vítores & Javier Andrade Córdova www.javierandradecordova.com/por-mano-propia













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POR MANO PROPIA - Cuadro VII

Un vestíbulo del hospital general

Música: José Vítores Libreto: Javier Andrade Córdova

Fragment 3









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