

Amauta

Amauta, for baritone and piano.
Duration: 7 minutes.

Back in 1995, when I was a 16-year-old high schooler and aspiring composer, I was admitted to the counterpoint class of Enrique Iturriaga at the Béla Bartók Institute in Lima, Peru. I only lasted a few weeks. I rebelled against the seemingly endless amount of rules to which two simple melodic lines were incessantly being subjected, and I would often knowingly break the rules, only to get humorously reprimanded by Enrique and, as a result, embarrassed in front of my fellow pupils. I came to the conclusion that I was too good for that class, continued ignoring the rules, and searched for a new teacher. A couple of years later, I was begging Enrique to take me back as a private student. He did so reluctantly, charging what, for me, was a large amount of money at the time. Gradually though, as the weeks went by and I was able to demonstrate my skills, he began charging me less and less. By the end of the year, I was getting lessons for free.

Enrique Iturriaga is one of the greatest musical personalities in the history of Peru. One of South America's foremost composers, he is also remembered for teaching several generations of musicians and non-musicians from all backgrounds and walks of life. His good-humored demeanor, passion for music and love for teaching touched countless lives; I was one of them. I met this patriarch when he was 77 years old, and had the once-in-a-lifetime privilege to have him as my composition teacher. His harmony lessons were all-encompassing in nature, taking everything into account, from acoustics, to history, to personal taste. To explain to me a single rule of counterpoint he would extract, from his extensive personal library, at least three or four different counterpoint methods, all carefully organized, but all showing signs of wear and tear, an indication that he had used them over and over again. He didn't want me to follow the rules blindly, he wanted me to comprehend the logic behind each one of them, inviting me to think and analyze critically the works of the great masters. His mind was a treasure trove of knowledge that I was eager to scrutinize every week during our lessons, which would sometimes go on for up to eight hours on end. His anecdotes with Stravinsky, Copland and Honegger would brighten up my day and lit my imagination, making me want to travel the world and meet such luminaries one day myself. He left an indelible mark in me. At the time of his passing I was very close to completing this song, which was intended to be premiered at a private event for his 102nd birthday in 2020. He won't get to listen to it with his ears, but I am hopeful that it will reach his soul. This song, for which I wrote the lyrics myself, is an outpouring of love, appreciation and respect for all he did for me personally, and for many others whom he touched during his wonderfully long and blessed life. May it stand as an homage to the man who, like no other, encapsulates the meaning of the Quechua word Amauta: master, teacher, the wise one. May you rest in peace, beloved Enrique.

Amauta

Setenta y siete años
tenías, gran Amauta
la tarde en que mis pasos
siguieron por tu senda.

La joven arrogancia
cerró, erguida,
las puertas a tu juicio,
mi mente a tus palabras.

El tiempo, sin embargo,
maestro inquebrantable,
posó —ahora humilde—
mi mano entre tus manos.

Abrióse entonces
ante mi vista,
de luz y de destellos,
un mundo otrora oculto;
el reino del sonido.

Fluyó ininterrumpida
desde lo más profundo
la fuente incorruptible
la onda, el pulso, el timbre
la reverberación más pura.

Enrique, sabio, dínos:
¿Qué ven tus ojos, vate?
¿Qué enciende tu intelecto?

¿Será la torre armónica?
¿O el rítmico camino?
¿El gran telar melódico?
¿El don contrapuntístico?

Tus labios se rehúsan
a develar misterios.
Tus manos reticentes
a capturar silencios.
Tu mente, sin embargo,
inspira aún legiones
que heredan tu legado;
que te honran, gran pionero.

Iluminaste un siglo,
mil vidas transformaste.
Tesoro incalculable,
de una nación orgullo.

Mas cuando yo te observo
no veo sino al hombre que
que alimentó mis ansias
de delinear arpegios,
de subyugar galante
los seductores ecos,
los nientes susurrantes;
y que avivó en mi seno
el fuego creativo;
que cultivó en mi alma
y cosechó radiante
la vibración eterna.

Enrique, di, profeta:
¿Qué escuchan tus oídos?
¿Qué escuchan, Enrique

© Jimmy López Bellido

Amauta

Seventy seven years old
you were, great Amauta
the afternoon my steps
followed on your footsteps.

Youthful arrogance
closed, proudly
the doors to your judgment,
my mind to your words.

Time, however,
inexorable teacher,
placed - now humbled -
my hand between your hands

Then opened
before my eyes
of light and flashes,
a once hidden world;
the kingdom of sound.

Flowed, continuous,
from the greatest depths,
the incorruptible source
the wave, the pulse, the timbre
the most pure reverberation.

Enrique, wise one, tell us:
What do your eyes see, seer?
What ignites your intellect?

Is it the harmonic tower?
Or the rhythmical path?
The great melodic loom?
The gift of counterpoint?

Your lips refuse
to reveal mysteries.
Your hands reluctant
to capture rests.
Your mind, however,
still inspires legions
that inherit your legacy;
that honor you, great pioneer.

You illuminated a century,
transformed a thousand lives.
Inestimable treasure,
pride of a nation.

But when I look at you
I only see the man who
fed my desire
to draft arpeggios,
to subjugate, gallantly,
the seductive echoes,
the whispering nientes;
and who stirred in my bosom
the creative fire;
that cultivated in my soul
and reaped, radiant,
the eternal vibration.

Enrique, tell us, prophet:
What are your ears listen to?
What do they listen to, Enrique?

*Free English Translation by the
author*