

Interview with Victor Pichardo 9-17-19

- **Victor Pichardo** - Yes.
- **Robert Danziger** - We did it. Well, I guess this will take about a half hour or something if that's okay.
- **Victor Pichardo** - Okay.
- **Robert Danziger** - Just asking your permission for me to share this with my class and the University--
- **Victor Pichardo** - --Yes.
- **Robert Danziger** - Great.
- **Victor Pichardo** - I'm sorry. Which university is this?
- **Robert Danziger** - California State University Monterey Bay.
- **Victor Pichardo** - Cal State. Which one?
- **Robert Danziger** - Monterey Bay.
- **Victor Pichardo** - Monterey, great. I love that city. My girls used to be in the Air Force. Beautiful, beautiful place. You're living in paradise.
- **Robert Danziger** - We love it here. Hopefully, we'll get you out here one day. As I was telling you, your version of the 3rd Brandenburg Concerto is one of my two favorite versions in the whole world, and I've reviewed hundreds of them. Why did you decide to do the Brandenburg on your album [*Esta Tierra es Tuyo*, by Sones de Mexico]?
- **Victor Pichardo** - Well, the idea came when I got a master of the traditional jarocho music tradition, which is very popular now, all the world. Mostly in California and many places, people start to play jarocho music in the traditional style. So when my old friend came in el guero Vega, Andres Vega from Tlacotalpan Veracruz, it's a little town in the south of Veracruz in the Gulf of Mexico, I had this music for many years in my head, and I realized that kind of related with the jarocho music, which is a traditional music of Veracruz. When he came, I asked him, listen to this, and he started to listen to the Bach Brandenburg Number 3. He said, well, this is el zapateado and I said, well, it's exactly what I wanted to hear because you are the master of the tradition and you relate with your music, that's what I wanted to do. At that point, I decided to make it more into the traditional folk way. I started to figure out how to add the traditional instruments jarana zapateado and donkey jaw, cajón, and jarana. All the traditional instrumentation that we used for this song, but especially in zapateado which is the foot tapping. So that point, I started to develop my version in my computer, working on my ideas, and I transcribed the whole--I didn't have the digital version. I transcribed all the

Concerto. While I was transcribing, I realized the points of relation rhythmically with the zapateado tradition and Son. So, I started to seek every section, every phrase with the strumming and the rhythmic section of traditional music, and at that point, I started to develop this kind of arrangement. Because this is divided in two, part one and part two, I decided that the D Major part, when starting D Major, to make a little gap, a little place to really show the percussion sound of our version, following the phrase of Bach but using my traditional instruments, donkey jaw, drum set, et cajón, maraca, and zapateado - the foot tapping. I based what I heard in the hometown of Andres Vega. So after that, I decided to keep the zapateado doing the second part of the piece when the D Major starts and developed some part with the zapateado] and some parts with just the strumming of the jarana, and also the harp. I'm sorry, I forgot the harp. The harp is a very important instrument, even though in this case diatonic - my son, who is the one who plays the harp, he gets harp with a little more levers to use it more chromatically, and that's the way I followed all the chromatic sections that Bach put in this arrangement. So, we added the harp, which is a beautiful and very important sound in the Mexican music, and I kept in the same phrases, trying to follow all the rhythmic phrasing of the song. So, the song came along, but at that time, we had a collaboration with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. They wanted to play with us with a brass quintet. So, that's the way I transcribed it to brass quintet because we just had it for the strings. And when I transcribed it by then with the horn in F, and I did the same idea of Bach for trumpet one and trumpet two, following violin one and violin two. The trombone and the tuba was the contrabass. So, that was my whole idea, and it worked very well with the brass quintet, so we decided to record it in this album with the same structure and the same people that were working with us at that time. That's a little review.

- **Robert Danziger** - Well, that is pure genius. It truly is. What you did is absolutely brilliant.
- **Victor Pichardo** - Thank you.
- **Robert Danziger** - I congratulate you as much as I've congratulated anybody in my life. That's just brilliant.
- **Victor Pichardo** - I really appreciate it.
- **Robert Danziger** - Wow . . . How did you come across the Brandenburg originally? When did you first hear the Brandenburg or Bach? Why did it grab you?
- **Victor Pichardo** - I had to follow the Bach because it is my gut. I always follow Bach because the Baroque music is very close to the Mexican traditional music. When the Jesuits came to America in the 1600s, they brought their own tradition in the Baroque time at Baroque time or mostly 1700s. So, we adopt all that feeling, all that burden of the Baroque music into our own version of Mexican traditional music. We can see that indigenous music and in the Mestizo music - the people from the little villages or towns. So, I was keeping that in mind when I started to study Mexican folk music. I studied three years of ethnomusicology in Mexico City, and I was very close to listening to classical music but mostly in the Baroque period. So, I love the Baroque period. I love Bach. I love Telemann, all the guys.

- **Robert Danziger** - Can I just circle back briefly? So, if I understand you correctly and I've never thought of it before, of course, so in the 1600s and 1700s, as there was more and more people immigrating from Spain, Europe, and also from Asia coming in the 1600s/early 1700s, of course the Baroque music was there and the music of the different places. But then, Mexico was there, and that kind of mixed together in some way. Did I understand that correctly?
- **Victor Pichardo** - Well, yes. That's what I understand. Different people brought all that tradition to Mexico and to America.
- **Robert Danziger** - I never thought of that. It makes so much sense. Monterey is very connected to that.
- **Victor Pichardo** - They brought the instruments, but they built their own version of the instrument. the violin but not the quality of the European violins, but the violins they brought that were mostly different shapes and mostly handcrafted, whatever. So, they also developed their own instruments - based on the Baroque instruments.
- **Robert Danziger** - I had never thought of that before. That makes complete sense. That's amazing. I would also think the sounds of the instruments, the trumpets and other things, on your version, to me, tell the story of the Brandenburg better than any other trumpet sound I've heard. Do you agree with that?
- **Victor Pichardo** - Yes, yes.
- **Robert Danziger** - The emotion of the Brandenburg is expressed I think in those trumpets better than anything I've heard.
- **Victor Pichardo** - It was a piccolo trumpet. The guy who played, his name is John Hagstrom of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. After he learned the song and whatever, he get in love also. As a trumpet player he never thought he could play Bach in that range, that register, because its range is very high. That's why he used the piccolo trumpet. He was strong and he was very happy to do it. And I really cannot say anymore because he fell in love with this version, it was the best for me. A musician of this amazing quality from the Chicago Symphony.
- **Robert Danziger** - Amen, I totally understand. I'm certainly an unknown in this area and for me, my goal was to have people like that respect what I do. That was my goal. I understand that feeling when you get someone of that caliber to appreciate what you did, as the arranger has to feel awfully good. Did you consider doing any of the other Brandenburg concertos?
- **Victor Pichardo** - The only reason I chose that one is because it's in 6/8. Originally, it's in 12/8. I wrote it in 6/8, which is the way we play the Mexican music. In the different areas of Mexico, they play 6/8. It's the pattern that we use all the time. So, that's why I decided for this because it's in 6/8 or 12/8. I love the other Bach music, but that was the most important because it was played in 6/8.

- **Robert Danziger** - That all makes so much sense.
- **Robert Danziger** - There are some questions that I ask everyone I interview because it often leads to interesting answers, and one of the questions that I ask is: What music, what lullabies, what songs your parents sang to you as a baby to go to sleep or as a child that you were exposed to? And is there any connection between that and the music that you're doing today?
- **Victor Pichardo** - My mom was a professional singer in her hometown of Saltillo, Coahuila which is in Northern Mexico, very close to the American border, and she loved to sing all the time. I think of the music that she sang to me at that time it was mostly popular music - boleros and romantic music that she loves to sing all the time. So I think even though it's not very traditional, it was the music that accompanied me my whole life because my mom was the first person with whom I really appreciated music because she was singing all the time in my house. So, I think that was a very important part of my life that my mother loved to sing all the time. I think so.
- **Robert Danziger** - I interviewed Christian McBride, and Derrick Hodge, and Regina Carter and some different people, and they all talk about their mothers singing to them.
- **Victor Pichardo** - Really!
- **Robert Danziger** - Every last one of them. What about for your children? What did you sing your children?
- **Victor Pichardo** - Well, my kids was a little different because by the time I had my children I knew a lot of Mexican folk music. So at that point, I learned many, many lullabies in the different traditions we have in Mexico. So, I sang songs like huecanias Isabel Parra It's a beautiful song. Nahuatl - which is a Native Mexican language, and the main language that we have in Mexico more than a million people still speak Nahuatl. So, I learned some music from different languages from Mexico - Purépecha from Michoacan, or songs from the north from the Yaqui's, and also from a very well-known composer for music for children. His name was CriCri. He was a guy who composed thousands of songs for children, and I also took some of those songs to play for my sons and my daughter.
- **Robert Danziger** - Did you ever record an album of those kinds of songs?
- **Victor Pichardo** - Yeah, not certainly those songs, but we have an album called *Fiesta Mexicana* , and we have some of those songs in modern music for children. So, I took some of the lullabies and some that I used to sing, and I actually - Ella Jenkins the African-American lady, a very well-known singer in America, she sang that song for children, also like a lullaby. It was a beautiful version. She sang a song for us in this album, but most of the songs are traditional, not very lullaby. All the albums we have, some lullaby in each. I sing these all the time these to my elder daughter mostly because for me she is a girl. Even though she's 25.
- **Robert Danziger** - She'll always be your baby.

- **Victor Pichardo** - Yes, she will be.
- **Robert Danziger** - I will now re-study your albums with that in mind. What's coming up for you? What are you doing next?
- **Victor Pichardo** - Well now, we are working in the 25th anniversary of the band, and we are trying to record now a different album, a new album. So hopefully, we can have something for the next year but still working on the concept and the repertoire we want to include on this album. We are doing something big next year because it's the 25th anniversary of my band.

End of Interview