

Berklee College of Music

A Diamond's Roots:
A Journey of Introducing Canary Folklore to Film Music

Submitted in Partial fulfillment of the Degree of
Master of Music in Scoring for Film, Television and Video Games

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Abstract

A Diamond's Roots is a very personal project, born from the merger of cinematic music and the folklore from Gran Canaria, the place of my birth . I composed the music for a 3 minutes video-spot that shows the island in a really different way than usual, like a fairytale. Through this paper, I would like to display the process of analyzing every little detail of the pictures, narration and sound design, to compose the music for it, as well as how I did the fusion between epic and fantasy genre combined with the island folklore. Furthermore, I also explained about my experience with the directors and producers of the short movie, explaining the problems that we had and how we resolved them. Finally, I showed the more technical part: from mockup to orchestration, how organize we must with all the preparation be before the recording at Air Studios in London (score, parts, conducting, etc.), during it (be always there before your recording time, to place correctly each part..) and after it (to organize all the material and mix it). I hope that this can help future students to be more prepared for this kind of recording sessions, as well as to know a little how to deal with directors and producers.

Keywords: music fusion, composing for media, recording, orchestration.

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Finally I want to thank my family, my parents and my sister for being there during the recording day, always supporting me and also to my aunt and uncles.

To my grandad for always trust in me more than myself and for being with me during my recording, giving me all the strength wherever he was.

1. Process before Composition

1.1. Choosing between a Video and a Script

This is the first step to consider for the London recording. Since the first semester teachers have explained us about our possibilities to compose the music, we can choose between making music for a 3 minute video (that length is really important because in Air Studios we can not record more than this time unless any of our classmates gives us some seconds if he/she does not need them, that was my case because I had 3 minutes and 7 seconds and one classmate who composed 2 minutes 45 seconds gave me that 7 seconds) or searching/drafting our own script. I have to say that for me it was really clear since the beginning that I wanted the video option. First of all, due to the main purpose of the SFTV program, to compose for audiovisual media, is much more attractive if I find a good material. Hence, I did not spend much time thinking about the second option. I opted for choosing a video.

1.2. Searching Videos about Gran Canaria and Choosing One

I knew that I wanted something related with my island, Gran Canaria. That is because I had in my head the idea of combining the cinematic epic orchestra sound from London with some elements from the canary folklore. I started searching different videos about this thematic and there were a lot of materials, but all of them were pretty much the same with nice images but nothing different or special for me. I continued searching, and suddenly I saw one that captivated my eyes from the very first minute until the end. This one is called: *Gran Canaria, Fairytale Island*, and it shows the island from a totally different perspective with a “Storyteller” that is guiding us to different magical areas of the island, submerging us in a fairytale full of emotional and epic moments. This one, because of the emotional burden and

the beauty of the pictures, was clearly for me, it fits perfect for this unique recording with a full orchestra in Air Studios .

2. Contacting the Director and Producers

2.1. First contact

My first intention was trying to contact the producers of the short movie to ask them if it would be possible to have the video file, the narration, and sound design ways for doing the mix after that with my music, only with academic proposals. Coincidentally, a friend of my family knew the producers and spoke with them about it. Through him, I get their contact and sent them a mail explaining my project.

After talking a lot during some days about the project, they told me that they really liked the idea and they would like to participate in creating a making-off of the process and doing a kind of relaunch of the video. I was very happy with this news because it was totally unexpected for me. After that I travelled to Gran Canaria to have a personal meeting with all of them: the producers, director and the representative from the government entity that promotes the tourism of the island, that is called "Patronato de Turismo de Gran Canaria".

2.2. Meeting in Gran Canaria

When we had the meeting, I was explaining them deeply about my project. After that the producers and director started explaining their intention to the representative from el Patronato: to make a new video that would have shots from my recording in London (of me conducting, the musicians playing, etc.), and some new shots with new characters and new pictures from the island, with the message of how our island can inspire people, like in my

case composing a musical piece for it. Everybody was really excited with the idea of this new project and they finally got the approval from our government to go ahead with this project and went to record new materials in London. This means that they also needed another approval from Air Studios to record there.

2.3. Difficulties and Solutions

After great enthusiasm with all of this, we had a lot of difficulties to close the project until the last day before recording in London. It was basically for a few points. First of all, it was a little dangerous of having two or three people there with cameras and moving around while I was recording. Since any little noise could destroy my recording, I carefully explained this to everyone and they told me that it was not going to be any problem with that. They were serious and professional people and Lucio and I trusted them. So after that they were waiting a response from Air Studios during a huge time. It was a delicate situation because the proposal of the recording was promoting the tourism in the island, and the contract that Berklee Valencia has with Air Studios clarify that we can not use our music recorded there for lucrative purposes. It took a lot of time to explain to Air Studios this is not pure tourism that was going to be shown on the TV, it was something different, another way to approach people to Gran Canaria, in a creative way. Finally, Air Studios accepted the project, but telling them that they will have to buy my piece from a musical library store (in Air Edel), for a little price. It was a really tedious process and I was a little stressed about it, because it took all the time that I was composing and preparing all my material until the last day. But, it finally worked.

3. Start of Composing

3.1. First Musical Ideas

As I wrote before, my first idea with the video was making this music cinematic epic fusion with canary folklore, so I started investigating about my own folklore by going to the library of my city, asking teachers from my conservatory, reading and listening canary music, etc. With all this information collected, I had enough materials to go ahead and inlaying them with the video, giving them a meaning.

3.2. Analyzing the Video and Creating a First Sketch

I started analyzing the video through the special website that they did for this shortmovie (<http://grancanariafairytaleisland.com/>). They divide the story in four chapters, so what I did was searching in what specific place of the island happened each chapter, and after that I searched a song from our folklore that represents each place:

Table 1.

CHAPTER	AREA WHERE IT HAPPENS	SONG RELATED TO THAT PLACE	ORIGINAL AUTHOR OF THE SONG
The Perfect Guardian	Roque Nublo Natural Monument	<i>Sombras del Nublo</i>	Néstor Álamo
The Legendary Dragon's Tail	Visible from Mirador el Balcón, Agaete	<i>La Rama</i> (song performed by a street band because of a typical celebration in the village of Agaete)	Unknown
Verdant Splendour	Tamadaba Natural Park	<i>Tamadaba</i>	Néstor Álamo
Swim in Sand	Dunas de Maspalomas, Special Nature Reserve	<i>Maspalomas y tú</i>	Néstor Álamo

I analyzed each song, and extracted the musical cell that I considered more representative of each, and then I did some changes adapting them to my orchestration and the mood that I was searching for. I will explain this more detailed in the next point.

3.3. Writing the Music

In this section, I will explain the important musical motives and elements that I used along my piece. One that I totally created from zero and another ones that I modified from the canary folklore songs.

The very first motive that I want to introduce happens in the very beginning, totally naked with a flute solo in a middle-low register:



Figure 1.

I created this motive through all the other ones (the folklore song melodies), and what I did was taking an specific interval of each song and bring them together to make this new melody. This motive is appearing along the piece with little changes and variations in harmony, rhythm etc. played by different instruments from the orchestra. I will show all the examples by the order in which they appear along the piece:

Violin I, horns and oboes:

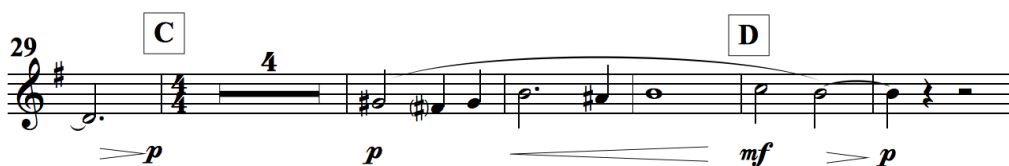


Figure 2.

Trombones and trumpets:



Figure 3.

Violin I starting with a fourth interval instead of a third:



Figure 4.

Trombone:

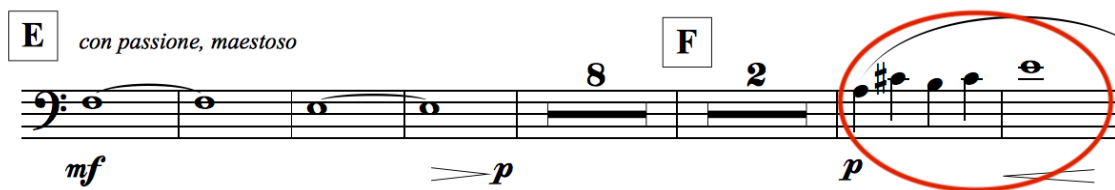


Figure 5.

Horns, Violin I and II:

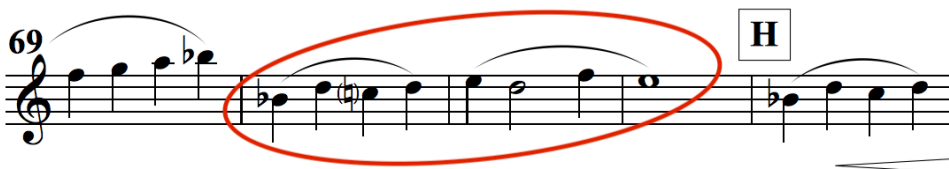


Figure 6.

Violin I and II:

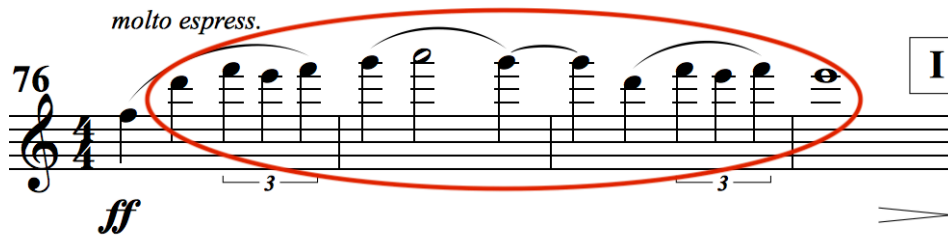


Figure 7.

After this motive and the variations, I used an important element from canary folklore: the “timple sound”. The timple is a typical canary music instrument and I wanted to emulate the sound with the orchestra. Some people told me the option of recording a real timple after the orchestra and then mixing it, but as I explained at the beginning, for me the challenge was doing this folklore-cinematic fusion just with the orchestra. So I decided to use violin II for this effect, and what I did was, first of all writing the chords using all the strings and trying to get a comfortable position for them with the harmony that I was searching for. After that I wrote the arpeggio indication and also the movement directions (up and down with arrows) emulating how a timple player usually plays the instrument, I also indicated to play in pizzicato and in a “guitar position”. So finally it was something like this:



Figure 8.

Further on, I use the first motive from the song *Sombras del Nublo* (by Néstor Álamo). In this section, which is *The Perfect Guardian* chapter and section A in my musical scheme (attached in the point 3.5) the video shows our most emblematic natural monument: Roque Nublo. So I chose the song *Sombras del Nublo* because as the title says it is dedicate to this monument, like it will happen with the rest of the places and songs related to them. The original motive by the original composer is this one, usually played by a timple player:



Figure 9.

I changed the seventh of the chord by using the eight. I introduce this motive in the cello and bassoon first, into a really delicate way with a high and soft strings accompaniment, while the narrator is talking about how the man is in his way to the Roque Nublo, running, jumping and climbing:

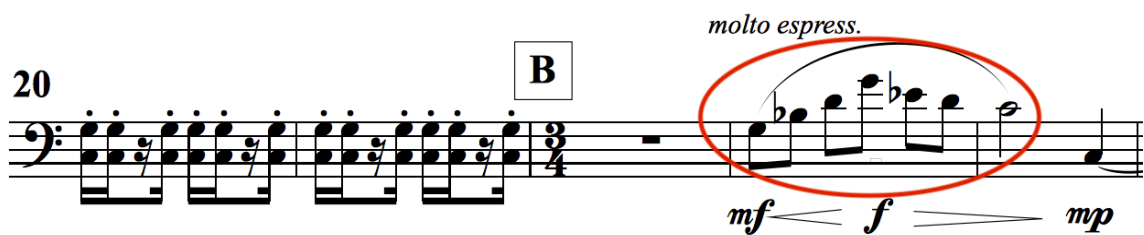


Figure 10.

Also in this specific moment of the video (00:32), we can see a grandiose landscape shown through a really long shot, and I wanted to play with the contrast of suddenly making really little and subtle orchestration but espressivo, to catch the spectator attention when they listen for the first time this melody.

After that I made a crescendo that ended with the same motive in violins, in a epic and *espressivo* mood, because in this scene we see the man finally arriving to the Roque Nublo, and observing that “Protector of our Land” so I wanted to make this moment full of emotion:

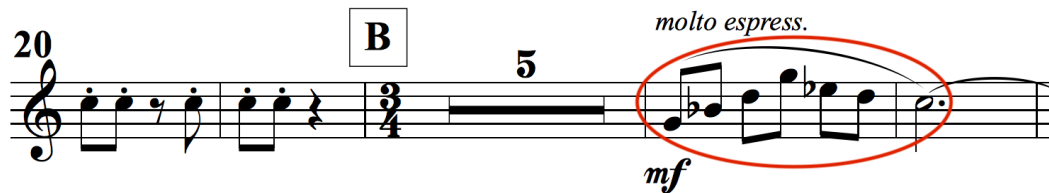


Figure 11.

Then, I arrive to chapter 2: *The Legendary Dragon’s Tail*, where I use the motive from the song *La rama*. This is because on the video, in this part the narrator guides us to a place where we can see grandiose rocks from Agaete, and that song is the most representative of Agaete village. The original melody is this one, that is normally played by a street brass band:

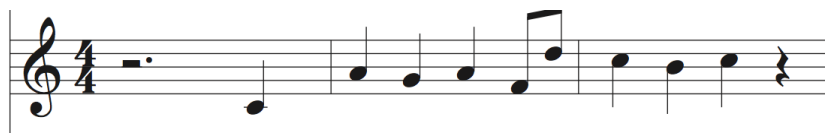


Figure 12.

In this case, I kept the original one, changing the key, instrumentation (I wrote it in horns) with an epic mood and I did not use the last two notes:

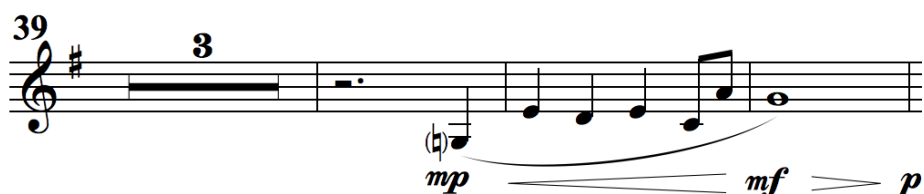


Figure 13.

Chapter 3: *Verdant splendor*. In this section, that shows Tamadaba Natural Park, I took the song *Tamadaba*, as the title says it is about this magical park. So what I did was taking a

specific part from the song where the singer is telling: *Ay pinar de Tamadaba* (he is talking about an emblematic tree from that park). I show the original melody in here:



Figure 14.

I made some changes in this melody. First, wrote in a oboe solo. In this case I did not use the two first notes, then the third note (in the original melody the fundamental, D) I changed it using the seventh of the chord (in my case the note E, because I am in C#m, but I am doing the melody on the IV grade Major, this is : F#-A#-C#). Also I did not do the three notes following exactly like the original I used a “passing tone”, because in my opinion is more melodic than the option of maintaining the same note three times. So this is the result:





Figure 16.

Next, we are near to the end of the piece and we arrive to the climax, where all the orchestra is in *tutti*. Violin I is doing the main motive a little bit transformed (the one that I presented with the flute at the very beginning), and at the same time, trumpets are playing a contra-melody which is from the song *Maspalomas y tú*, with a little different rhythm and different context of course. So knowing the song we know that we are in the final chapter: *Swim in Sand* that shows *Dunas of Maspalomas*. The original melody, which says:

Maspalomas y tú (in english *Maspalomas and you*) like the title, is this one:



Figure 17.

The one that I wrote in trumpets is this one:



Figure 18.

Finally, we are in the end of the piece, last bars where we can listen to different elements. First one, a familiar melody on all violins, firsts and seconds, that we listened to it during chapter one: *The Perfect Guardian* (see Figure 9 and 10), but this time I wrote the

melody like the original one because it is the last time that the Roque Nublo appears on the video, for doing that node more obvious:



Figure 19.

Last nod but not least, is one musical motive that we can listen in horns. This motive was extracted and changed in meter and rhythm, also context and harmony from another important song from our folklore called *Gran Canaria* by Manuel R. Melián. I chose this song for doing this last nod because I think it was the perfect one. Like the title says is a tribute to our whole island Gran Canaria (not only to a specific place like all the other ones) so I thought that a nice way of ending was with this little detail. The original melody singed by a famous music folklore group called “Los Gofiones” (the lyrics mean: “I hold you in my heart”):



Figure 20.

I did meter and rhythm changes, writing the melody in horns:



Figure 21.

3.4. Showing the Mockup to the Director and Making Some Changes

After finishing my first and full version, I sent the mockup to the director and producers explaining what is a mockup, that obviously it would sound quit better and more “human” with the orchestra. At first they liked it but also was a little difficult because they were more used to the original music that they had, that it was library music that was not composed for that video. After listening to it more times, they really liked it and gave me a few suggestions that they considered appropriate for the story, such as the need to have more basses in general. So I did that in specific moments, giving more emphasize to the basses and duplicating to low octave. Also, in one specific part that the narrator was talking about dragons tails, at first I had a flute doing the melody but it was so sweet, so I changed that melody to horns and I added some bass drum and a little *ostinato* in violins one. The same idea totally changed the mood like they wanted, making the melody more powerful. After that little changes we were ready to record.

3.5. Final Musical Scheme

When I compose a new piece, I usually do a final scheme with a musical analysis to clearly understand what I did in each moment. Here I am going to explain a little my way of analyzing the music before showing the scheme.

I have included the different sections of my piece. In *Table 2* you can see an Intro, different sections and the Coda. I divided it in different sections because they have different moods and instrumentation following the story, but they always have common elements through different music motives. Also, the color choice for each section is not selected randomly. If we read each cue’s title and see that part in the video (following the timing

section that I wrote in the scheme) we will understand why each color for a certain section was used.

Table 2. *Gran Canaria, Fairytale Island - "A Diamond's Roots": Musical Analysis*

Section	Intro	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	A'	Coda
Cue's title	<i>Once Upon a Time...</i>	<i>The Perfect Guardian</i>	<i>Tongues of Flame</i>	<i>The Legendary Dragons Tail</i>	<i>Held the Sky in his Hands</i>	<i>Verdant Splendour</i>	<i>Walk on the Water</i>	<i>Swim in Sand</i>	<i>Come...</i>	<i>Fairytale Island</i>
Time (on the video)	00:00 - 00:32	00:32 - 00:46	00:47 - 01:09	01:10 - 01:22	01:23 - 01:37	01:38 - 02:05	02:06 - 02:31	01:32 - 02:42	02:43 - 02:54	02:55 - 03:07
Instruments used	Flute solo -> Strings without basses -> basses and woodwinds to add color	Celli, bassoons and high strings -> Strings, timpani, cymbals, bass trombone, tuba, horns and flute	Strings plus some woodwinds -> get in horns and percussion and then trombones and trumpets	Strings, one trumpet and two horns	TUTTI	Oboe plus strings -> I add some woodwinds and trombones	Strings -> horns and timpani get in -> orchestral crescendo	TUTTI	Strings, percussion and some woodwinds -> horns get in	Strings, chimes and horns fading out
Tonality	Gm -> C Maj -> Cm	Cm	Cm->A Maj	F Maj	Am	C#m	C#m->Dm	Dm	Dm->Fm	Fm
Harmony	I -> I -> VI-I	VI-V6-I-IV	IVM-VI -> I (with Major sixth)	I-III	IV-III6-V-VI-IV-I-V6	IVM-I-III-VI-IV	VI -> VI-I-VI	I-V-VI-I-V	IV-V7+ -I-V6 -> VI	VI

4. Recording Preparation

4.1. ProTools Session

It is extremely important to bring to London a clean and clear Pro Tool Session, with everything in the correct place to avoid spending unnecessary time during our recording. I always insist in checking each marker, carefully with the general score and also with each parts. The same with bar numbers, tempo and meter changes and check that the mockup work

with all these elements. It is important to follow Berklee instructions and put two bars before bar one, where music starts. And finally we check all the rules that our mixing professor, Pablo, has taught us, such as the sound of the click (it should be MPC classic click). Also to activate the grid, to have the main big counter, etc.

If we consider all these points we will have a perfect Pro Tool Session that will help us to have a nice recording and not losing time.

4.2. Score and Parts

It is crucial to have a clean score and parts, with a nice layout for the musicians' comfort. We must take into account to prepare the general score for the conductor (in this case we are conducting our music, but it is the same process): big meter numbers and bar numbers in each bar and everything with a big font and enough space between elements to a visual comfort.

About parts is more or less the same, to keep important elements with a big font that musicians can easily read (for example, percussionists and bass players need a bigger font than the rest of the instruments), also to indicate the mood that we want in specific places. With bar numbers we have different options, like writing one on the beginning of each system (which I prefer it, because like that the part is not overcharged) or writing all of them.

Finally we must always check that we have all our parts correctly transposed and doublecheck all instrument's register, just in case we made an error that we did not realize at the beginning.

4.3. Conducting

I think the most important issue to conduct in Air Studios with this orchestra is to show the emotions that you are searching for. They have a click so there is not big problem with the conducting in that respect (of course we must know really well our meter to not do a different one and confuse the players), so is more an introspective work of trying to make the most of the musicians. We had a 15 minutes session with Sergio, the conducting teacher, before our recording. In my case he gave me some advices such as control a little bit more my face expression, because I was not smiling or showing any emotion. I worked on that before going to London because it was not an easy thing for me, I usually do not enjoy conducting while other people are looking at me, but in this case I finally achieved to enjoy the moment. It was also really easy because I saw the musicians faces enjoying a lot playing my music, and that motivated me in that moment.

5. Post Production: Mixing the Project

I had to follow two different steps in my mixing process for the London piece. First one mixing the music itself, and then mixing it with the dialogue and sound effects.

For the music, first of all, I organized all the session. I took the good takes, importing the template that Pablo taught us to have an organize an clear session and put tracks groups by different colors for a better visual comfort. Then, I did the panning and I started working with automatization after deleting the microphones that I did not want to use (I did not use surrounds). I put the volume a little bit up to some solos and some percussion (the attack of the bass drum was not clear at all). I also put a reverb from *Altiverb* and start testing the amount of sending to have a good balance.

After I did this I had my mixing session with Pablo. He add some plug-ins from Ozone such as equalizer and limiter, to make the mix bigger and with a cinematic sound. I was really happy with the final mix because it sounded big, with space and understanding every instrument and solo passage.

After this I made a little mix with the dialogue and sound effects. In this case I was basically working with automatization, searching a final good balance between all the tracks together.

6. Conclusions

This year has been full of a lot of work but also a lot of emotions. I have learned a lot of new programs and technological knowledge that I did not know. I have met a big amount of talented people from different parts of the world, different cultures and backgrounds, not only in my program but in the whole campus. I have deal with deadlines and with all the assignments, learning something different of each one. I have conducted different ensembles with a huge variety of nice players, that in the most part of the recording they came to me to told me that they really liked the piece and they enjoyed to play it a lot, I was amazingly grateful for that details.

I had the opportunity of preparing my final project to record in Air Studios in London, a project that has emotionally touched me a lot, because is the mix of my passion, composing music for media, with the traditional music from my place of birth, Gran Canaria. I think that the music that I wrote for this project is the one that I can more identify with, and represents me as a composer better than any other one piece.

The day of my recording was a difficult day for me because of an unexpected personal issue that broke me. But I had to deal with it and finally it was a very special moment that happened thanks to all the persons that were there to support me: my family, my friends and my teachers, as well as the musicians that I felt were really kind with me. For me it has been an unforgettable recording and year.

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