

Composing Carlos: One Ragdale Resident's Inspiration and Work

By Laura Briskman

CARLOS RIVERA, RAGDALE COMPOSER AND recipient of the 2007 Bill and Solange Brown and Herb Alpert Fellowships, has been surrounded by music since childhood. His father is a spectacular singer, despite never having learned to read music. Rivera acknowledged that his father has been an inspiration, and that he has always admired his father's uninhibited personality, seeing himself as more self-

conscious. This, Rivera believes, is because having his own music performed is much more personal than performing the work of someone else.

For further inspiration, Rivera looks to the music of other cultures, which integrates into the currently popular styles of music to create a unique and engaging tone. He also finds inspiration in fellow artists, such as Rufus Wainwright and Elton John.



Carlos Rivera

“Music has always been informed by other music,” Rivera said. “The key is to imitate through one’s own creative filter.”

During his Ragdale residency in June, Rivera was working on a lullaby for his daughter. “I don’t think I’ve ever had this much time to work,” Rivera said. “It’s a good test of your time management. You get to be actively composing 100% of the time.”

When playing, Rivera has certain voices for every piece, certain intentions and statements in every note. His lullaby-in-progress, for example, is comprised of two voices. They represent a conversation between two parents. When asked how he can convert such vivid, typically verbal interactions into musical notes, Rivera demonstrated by playing a few passages of the piece, and effectively showed the vibrant conversation without speaking a word. Rivera did point out that a lot of this process is more reliant on the context of mood than anything else, and commented on what he believes to be the most difficult part of the composition process:

“It’s hard to make the piece take shape,” he explained. “The creative part is easier. Connecting it is where the skill comes in.”

And what better place to work through this complicated process than Ragdale? One particular moment of inspiration that Rivera recalled was during a walk on the Ragdale grounds on a sunny day with the flowers in full bloom and the trees providing gentle shade; it was, as Rivera described, a “right” moment.

“I felt like I was in a movie,” he said.

Rivera has big plans for his future. His Los Angeles guitar quartet will be playing his concerto, conducted by Joann Falletta, which will premier in the spring of 2009. Also, his *Popol-Vuh* will be performed next April.

“I want to share the love of lyrical music that is part of my upbringing,” he explained.

Now receiving commissions for new musical works, Rivera also intends to compose three or four independent pieces and work on two or three commissions a year. His primary goal is to produce worthy music out of the commissions.

Even as he told of his background and career, Rivera was picking out notes on the piano on the side. Like his lullaby, his passion for his art seemed almost unnecessary to verbalize, and it became clear that this Ragdale resident will be one to watch—or rather, listen to.