

“Postcards from Kannibalia stages a general view of the southern rim of the Caribbean (Venezuela and Colombia) in musical hybrids, combining ethnically rooted material with more abstract digressions that put the former into various perspectives. Our region is bursting with social and cultural upheavals, and music is often the centerpiece of many identities—genres that remain widely unknown to broader audiences throughout the world.

This work, which could be seen as a suite of local-genre cocktails, is by no means a folkloric showcase; I would say it is ‘anti-folklore’ because it builds highly individual, particular expressions using strands of ethnic music DNA grafted onto totally unconventional contexts. There is a slow and natural hybridization which happens in ethnic music when certain traditions reach the cities and start to combine in the most unexpected ways (jazz, tango, salsa are some of these hybrid forms.) Here I have tried to mimic (and accelerate) something of these historical processes in the laboratory of concert music, expanding the original rules of interplay as well as the scope of the borrowed elements. The tools of Western chamber music, where these musical ideas can be handled and recombined as abstract entities, have been used for this purpose many times in different periods and places, but seldom in Latin America.

The title evokes the uncharted territories on the ancient maps of the Caribbean and Northern South America: the ‘Land of Cannibals’ where many musical and cultural territories remain unknown to Western culture. Ironically, I feel these ‘savage forms’ are sometimes so intense that they can literally swallow the tamer ‘civilized’ musical ways of concert music, transforming the canons of performance, something we have seen happening in the youth orchestras of Venezuela under the baton of Dudamel, even in classical works.

Each of the four movements proposes a different kind of experiment, or fantasy, based on freely transcribed and transformed material (at least two different genres in each movement). The opening idea in *Gypjab*, a nod to Bartók’s roots in Middle Europe combined with a Caribbean dance, is a gypsy element trapped in a tropical traffic-jam; from there on rhythm is the driving force, making it an intense, restless choreography, rather than a dissertation on the ethnic roots of Latin American music. *Cari Kum Ba* is a Colombian cumbia cocktail with an obsessive cricket-song nocturne. *Gnossienne Tonada* (a play on words that sounds like the Spanish *no siento nada* [I feel nothing]) combines the slow Venezuelan tonada with an interlude of frogs in a Satie-esque neo-classical context. *Sapokalypse* is a set of variations on *El Sapo*, a popular Venezuelan song that could be seen as a ternary calypso.

This trio was made possible thanks to the support of the Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in the United States, the Chevron Corporation through the Venezuelan Sounds music series as well as the Verdehr Trio and Michigan State University."

—Paul Desenne

The world premiere of *Postcards from Kannibalia* was on October 24, 2010 at the Music Room, The Phillips Collection, Washington D.C.

Paul Desenne (born 1959, Caracas, Venezuela) began composition studies at the age of fourteen, and as a cellist, he was a founding member of the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra. He moved to Paris, performing classical and tango music and adapting the elaborate musical figures and ideas of popular South American music to chamber formats. Returning to Caracas, he performed with the Simón Bolívar Symphonic Orchestra for four years and taught cello performance and chamber music studies at the Simón Bolívar Conservatory.

Desenne was Fellow at Civitella Ranieri Center in Umbria, Italy (2006), a Guggenheim Fellow (2009), and a Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University (2010). Awarded the Premier Prix in cello from the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris, he has received composition grants from FESNOJIV (El Sistema) in Caracas and Meet the Composer in New York among many others. In 2002–2004, Desenne created a weekly political satire for radio which aired in Caracas. He published satirical essays in Colombia's renowned arts magazine *Revista Número*, and was a music columnist for Venezuela's national newspaper *El Nacional*. In 2009, he was named Best Actor by San Francisco's Golden Gate Fiction and Documentary Festival for his role in the film *Andante ma non troppo*.

Desenne's work is steeped in the counterpoint of Bach, music of the sixteenth century, and contemporary techniques; he is influenced in many ways by the rich forms of Latin American music. His works have been performed in major venues around the world, including Alice Tully Hall at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts and the Joan and Sanford I. Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. *Gran Cacerolazo*, a composition for piano, percussion, and strings, was premiered at the Laeishalle in Hamburg by pianist Gabriela Montero with Kremerata Baltica. Montero also played and recorded music by Desenne on her EMI release promotional tour throughout Germany in 2010. *Jaguar Songs*, a collection of Desenne's cello works performed by cellist Nancy Green, was *Strings* magazine "Choice of the Month" (Cello Classis, 2010). The CD *La Revoltosa* (Clarinet Classics, 2010), with two important works for clarinet and piano by clarinetist Jorge Montilla, also received important reviews.

Desenne is working on a tragi-comic chamber opera linking the parallel roots of Latin American music and the history of coffee, delving into the multiculturalism of Latin America and the Caribbean and deconstructing their musical origins. As of 2016, he is Composer in Residence with the Alabama Symphony Orchestra.

Additional information is available at www.pauldesenne.com.