Tania LEÓN

Stride

In Short

Born: May 14, 1943, in Havana, Cuba
Resides: in New York City
Work composed: 2019, on commission from the New York Philharmonic, Jaap van Zweden, Music Director, as part of Project 19, its commissioning initiative marking the centennial of the ratification of the 19th Amendment; and the Oregon Symphony, Carlos Kalmar, Music Director; dedicated “In honor of Susan B. Anthony” and “to the visionaries Deborah Borda and Jaap van Zweden”
World premiere: February 13, 2020, by the New York Philharmonic, Jaap van Zweden, conductor
Estimated duration: ca. 15 ½ minutes

About the Composer

Born in Havana, Cuba, composer / conductor Tania León is recognized for her accomplishments as an educator and advisor to arts organizations. A longtime New York resident, she has played important roles at New York institutions, including Dance Theatre of Harlem, Brooklyn Philharmonic, American Composers Orchestra, and the New York Philharmonic, where she served as New Music Advisor. Ms. León is the founder and artistic director of Composers Now. She is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of CUNY.

Recent premieres include works commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the International Contemporary Ensemble, and Ursula Oppens with the Cassatt Quartet. New projects include an orchestral work commissioned by the League of American Orchestras in honor of Jesse Rosen; an orchestral work for the NewMusicUSA Amplifying Voices Program of co-commissions; and an extended choral work commissioned by The Crossing.
Tania León has received Grammy and Latin Grammy nominations for Best Contemporary Classical Composition. Her honors include induction into the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; recognition from the Fromm, Koussevitzky, and Guggenheim foundations; the ASCAP Victor Herbert Award; and a 2018 United States Artists Fellowship.

**In the Composer’s Words**

When the New York Philharmonic reached out to me about writing for this project celebrating the 19th Amendment, I confess I only knew about it generally. I started doing research, reading Susan B. Anthony’s biography, her statements. It was tremendous to see the inner force that she had. Then I started looking for a title before starting the piece — not the way I usually do it. The word “stride” reflected how I imagined her way of not taking “no” for an answer. She kept pushing and pushing and moving forward, walking with firm steps until she got the whole thing done. That is precisely what I mean by Stride.

Stride has some of what, to me, are American musical influences, or at least American musical connotations. For example, there is a section where you can hear the horns with the wa-wa plunger, reminiscent of Louis Armstrong, getting that growl. It doesn’t have to be indicative of any particular skin tone; it has to do with the American spirit.

When I discovered American music, Louis Armstrong actually was the first sound that struck me. When I moved here, the only composers I knew anything about were Leonard Bernstein and George Gershwin. The night I arrived at Kennedy Airport, I was picked up by a Cuban couple from the Bronx, who allowed me to stay on their sofa. I looked at the stairs outside of their building, and I started crying “Maria!” They were confused, and I explained that in Cuba I’d heard the song by Leonard Bernstein. I later worked with Bernstein, and we were very close in his later years. When I first arrived here I couldn’t speak English ... but I knew how to say “Maria.”