

ARGOT PICTURES

PRESENTS

**BÉLA FLECK:
HOW TO WRITE A BANJO CONCERTO**



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BÉLA FLECK: HOW TO WRITE A BANJO CONCERTO

“Béla Fleck: How To Write A Banjo Concerto” follows banjo trailblazer Béla Fleck through one of his most challenging musical journeys, into the world of the Symphony Orchestra. Béla is commissioned to compose a banjo concerto, possibly the first of its kind, for banjo and 80 piece symphony orchestra. It begins before he has written a note, and concludes a year later, with the sold out premiere concert with the Nashville Symphony. An intimate look at the process of composition and collaboration, “How to Write a Banjo Concerto” features Earl Scruggs, Chick Corea, Edgar Meyer, Chris Thile, Zakir Hussain, Abigail Washburn and other close musical friends of Béla’s.

LONG SYNOPSIS:

Banjo master Béla Fleck has taken on the lifelong task of emancipating his instrument from stereotype and misconception. In 2006 he went to Africa to research the banjo’s roots, and jam with incredible acoustic musicians around the continent. This resulted in the award-winning documentary “Throw Down Your Heart”. Now, Béla is back on screen with a new musical adventure: He’s been commissioned to write a major banjo concerto for the Nashville Symphony. Despite having no experience creating orchestral music on his own, no ability to read and write standard music notation, and no formal training in classical composition or orchestration, he takes on the project with his customary single-mindedness, creating an amazing new work - all in front of the cameras.

The film begins before he has written the first notes, and ends a year later with a sold out premiere performance with the Nashville Symphony. Pressures build throughout, and viewers can see, from the closest vantage point possible, the amount of work it takes to visualize, create and perform such an ambitious and groundbreaking piece. Some of the film was shot by Béla himself during the composition process, and these scenes capture the ephemeral moments when creative forces galvanize, and music is created before the viewers’ eyes and ears. Throughout the film, a window is also let open to Béla’s private life, with friends (and musical luminaries) like Earl Scruggs, Chick Corea, Edgar Meyer, Chris Thile, Zakir Hussain and Abigail Washburn making appearances.



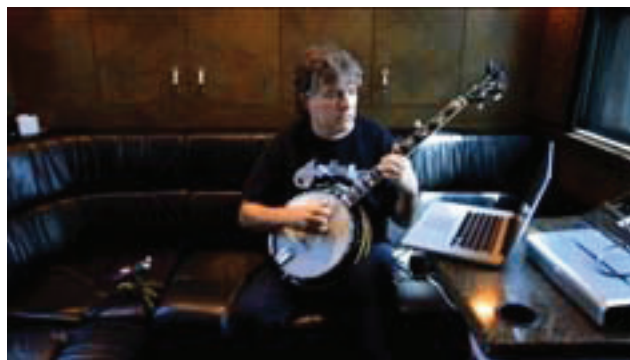
Other important relationships explored in the film are with Béla's classical "big brother", Edgar Meyer, Béla's wife Abigail Washburn, and Béla's stepfather Joe Paladino, who played cello and exposed Béla to chamber music at a young age. Joe passed away since "How to Write a Banjo Concerto" was made, and the film is also dedicated to him. Other cameos by Hilary Hahn, Pope Benedict XVI, the Sesame Street funky chickens, Béla Fleck and the Flecktones, and many others add breadth to the film.

Béla is also forced to deal with some of his own demons in this film, mostly involving the "father issues" he has accumulated. His parents split when he was a year old, and he didn't meet his father until his forties. Béla's father named him after three classical composers, including Béla Bartok, and Béla has been reticent to embrace Bartok's music - until now. Writing the piece becomes a cathartic experience for Béla, and this reckoning with his father, and his namesake, makes the importance of creating something truly great all the more vital.

Lastly, the film chronicles Béla's own exploration of the classical orchestra through interviews with the principal orchestra musicians, and by having them demonstrate and explain their instruments and what they love about them. These scenes crackle with life, as the classical performers excitedly play for Béla, and fill him in on the quirks and qualities of their respective instruments. Many people don't understand or have exposure to the orchestra in the modern world, and this film serves as a thrilling gateway to understanding the intricacies and interactions of the symphony concert hall.

Béla is used to being an outsider, as he has spent much of his life putting the banjo into unusual settings. In this concerto he imagines the banjo as an "impostor", sneaking into a masquerade party (in this case the symphony orchestra) and making believe it belongs. And while his instrument keeps up the charade for a while, at the very end of the piece Béla lets the cat out of the bag with a blast of Earl Scruggs-style bluegrass banjo, and the audience (and the orchestra) finds out that it doesn't really belong there. Or does it?

One part personal journey, one part exploration of modern day classical music-making, and one part joyful concert film, 'How To Write A Banjo Concerto' delights as much as it informs, and provides an intimate and revealing look at the creative process of one of modern music's giants.



Bela Fleck Strums New Tunes for the Banjo in ‘Impostor’ Corinne Ramey, *Wall Street Journal*, August 12, 2013

For most of his professional life, the banjoist Béla Fleck has felt like an outsider.

This is not for lack of musical chops—Mr. Fleck has won 15 Grammy Awards and is widely considered the world’s pre-eminent banjoist—but because he frequently places himself and his instrument beyond its traditional habitat.

“I’m usually the weird duck,” he said in a phone interview from Oregon, where he and his wife (also a banjoist) and 2-month-old son (not yet a banjoist) were visiting family.

On his new album, “The Impostor,” which Deutsche Grammophon releases on Tuesday, Mr. Fleck places the stringed instrument in unfamiliar territory: first in front of an orchestra, then with a string quartet. He too is out of his comfort zone, making his first solo foray into classical composing with the two pieces.

The first, also called “The Impostor,” is a concerto for banjo performed with the Nashville Symphony and conducted by Giancarlo Guerrero. The second, “Night Flight Over Water,” combines banjo with the New York string quartet Brooklyn Rider. Mr. Fleck has been performing the concerto with orchestras around the U.S. since its premiere in 2011 and will next play it with the Philadelphia Orchestra on Aug. 21 in Saratoga, N.Y.

Mr. Fleck, 55 years old, described his ability to read traditional music notation as “rather primitive.” He has never had any formal composition training, though has co-written two concertos with bassist Edgar Meyer. (Mr. Fleck said Mr. Meyer did the heavy lifting.)

“The Impostor” concerto, while wordless, has a sketch of a story behind it.

“I have this idea of the impostor, of someone sneaking into a masquerade with a mask on,” Mr. Fleck said of the first movement, “Infiltration.” “Maybe he’s underclass, or he’s a scruffy guy from the Lower East Side like my grandfather. Nobody knows he’s not supposed to be there, and he makes believe.”

Its second movement, “Integration,” is slower and more melodic, a moment, he said, when “everyone gets comfortable with each other.” By the third movement, “Truth Revealed,” bluegrass—or what Mr. Fleck calls the banjo’s stereotypical image—emerges, and the impostor has been unmasked.

“Everybody is going to figure out by the end that I’m not a classical musician and I don’t belong there,” he said.



The Nashville Symphony commissioned the piece and to its conductor, Mr. Guerrero, Mr. Fleck's nonclassical roots are an asset. "It's a great way to get different audiences in the hall," said Mr. Guerrero.

Mr. Fleck got around his lack of notational fluency by writing orchestral parts in tablature, the system used to show fingerings for stringed instruments like the banjo, and then transcribing the parts into conventional music notation. He also used a software program called Sibelius ("Computers are a marvel," he said) to create the score.

"His compositional process isn't the same thing as what we hear with a composer like Mozart," said Nicholas Cords, Brooklyn Rider's violist. "Béla's process is more trial and error and doing it until he gets it right."

The quartet read his preliminary sketches at one member's Fort Greene apartment and then worked closely with the banjoist through the composing process. Mr. Fleck was meticulous, Mr. Cords added, sensitive to phrasing even for instruments that weren't his own. "His compositional voice shows that understanding and empathy of what we're doing on our instruments," he said.

Brooklyn Rider, whose members are nearly 20 years younger than Mr. Fleck, has cultivated its own outsider status. The quartet, which frequently finds its name behind words like "adventurous" and "genre-defying" in print, performs not just a diet of Beethoven and other standards, but works outside the classical tradition.

"We've learned a lot from him, not just musically, but about how to operate in the world," said Mr. Cords. "He's an amazing model to look to in terms of career-building, and how to build things in a way that no one else has done."

<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887324085304579008752108773762>



BÉLA FLECK: HOW TO WRITE A BANJO CONCERTO

Directed by Sascha Paladino and Béla Fleck

Produced by Béla Fleck

Edited by Amanda Laws and Béla Fleck

Assistant Editor: Josiah Signor

Camera: Thien Phan, Sascha Paladino, Blake McClure, Drew Weaver, Travis Nicholson, Josh Kletzkin, Béla Fleck, Abigail Washburn, Amanda Laws, Dan Griffin, Casey Driessen

Multi-camera shoot of the premiere: Robert Swope

Color Correction: Robert Swope

Premiere recording: Blanton Alspaugh and Gary Call

Supervising Sound Editor and Re-recording Mixer: Tom Paul

Post Production Audio: Gigantic Post, NY.

Graphics: Magnetic Dreams Animation Studios, Julian Herrera, Mike Halsey

Clearances: Susan Ricketts

Live Sound - Premiere and Flecktones: Richard Battaglia

Location Sound Mixer: Alex Altman

Copyist: Bruce Dailey

Featuring:

Edgar Meyer, Chick Corea, Marcus Roberts, Future Man, Julian Lage, Chris Thile, Earl Scruggs, Noam Pikelny, Abigail Washburn, Greg Liszt