

Nueve: How I Was in Two Places at One Time

By Gary Karr

*[Editor's Note: This is a preview of an article that will run in the Fall, 2010 issue of Bass World, the ISB's membership magazine. Learn more about the September release of a new recording of José Serebrier's **Nueve** by ISB founder Gary Karr at www.naxos.com/catalogue/item.asp?item_code=8.559648.]*

“How would you like to record **Nueve** with the Bournemouth Symphony in June of next year?” Before giving my answer to the composer, José Serebrier, several thoughts popped into my mind. I had to tell him that I no longer traveled anywhere by plane with my bass and that I had retired in 2001. Also, it had been several decades since I last performed **Nueve**, and I couldn't remember the music. I hated saying “no” to Serebrier, but I couldn't come up with a polite response that would reflect my joy in having been asked. So, after telling him about my retirement, I said, “give me a few days to think about it and I'll get back to you.” I then pulled out my score of the aleatoric, twelve-tone-like piece, and was struck once again, after all these years, by its inherent lyricism and long phrases (which is my cup of tea). I really wanted to be involved in the project, but the thought of traveling all the way to England with my bass was a strong deterrent. The increasing problem of flying with my instrument was one of the main reasons why I took early retirement.

Since **Nueve** was written specifically for me, Serebrier had my sound in his mind, and it was that soloistic double bass sound that he wanted on the recording. He urged me to think about it some more. So, for several weeks I gave the matter considerable thought. Then the phone rang. It was Serebrier, and I never heard him so excited! My first thought was that in his inimitable style, he had found a way to bring the entire Bournemouth Symphony to Victoria, Canada (where I live), to record **Nueve**. He said, “I was talking to Carole who had a great idea.” Carole Farley, his wife (I played at their wedding!), is a Metropolitan Opera star who became famous in her soprano role in **Salome**. Carole said to José, “Since much of the solo bass writing is without orchestra accompaniment, perhaps Gary would be willing to record the solo line in the comfort of his own private studio?” I was trapped. How could I say, “no” to such a logical and easy solution? “OK,” I said to José. “I'll record my part, send it to you for your expert opinion, and then you can decide if it'll work.” Later, this is what Serebrier had to say:

“After discussions with the production team, we agreed that it [multitracking in various locations] was a great idea for this particular work. By the way, my friend Thomas Shepard, ex-CEO of RCA/BMG, and a producer of some 500 recordings (mostly with the Philadelphia Orchestra including Ormandy) recently made an opera recording with the London Symphony Orchestra, and added all the singers

later in NY! You cannot tell the difference. What matters most in recording are the final results.”

He also told me that the recording engineer would be Phil Rowlands, with whom I worked before, and who is regarded as one of the top men in the business.

There were still two problems that I wanted Serebrier to address. I suggested that a real actor instead of me should read the Shelley poems included in **Nueve**. His response was, “You recited the words wonderfully in many of our concerts together in Cleveland, Cape Town etc., but I’ll ask Simon Callow, the great British actor, if he’ll consider doing it.” Fortunately for me, since I was a big fan of his, Callow loved the idea and eventually recorded, in London, six versions of the poems from which Serebrier could choose for the recording. My other concern was the short pizzicato sections that I felt should be done by another bassist at the recording session who could work in conjunction with the drums. To my delight, Serebrier said, “It’s a brilliant idea because the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra is blessed with one of the best bass players I have encountered.” He then later emailed me, “I am delighted to tell you that the wonderful, brilliant solo bass of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, David Daly, is quite happy to record the jazz passages in **Nueve**. I know you will be pleased.” And indeed I was!

As they say in the UK, I’m “gobsmacked” and absolutely delighted with the finished product. It’s an engineering and musical *tour de force*.

This is what José Serebrier wrote about the music:

NUEVE

*“Commissioned by the Plainfield Symphony Orchestra for their 50th anniversary, I wrote **Nueve** for and in homage to Gary Karr. He was living in Plainfield, New Jersey at the time. We premiered **Nueve** there, and played it in Cleveland and even in South Africa among other places.*

*I wrote **Nueve** during my two seasons as composer-in-residence of the Cleveland Orchestra. It was a companion piece to my harp concerto **Colores Mágicos**. Both concertos have much in common: aleatoric writing, distance between the musicians, and, most disturbing for conductors, no bar lines at all. In **Nueve**, conductors could not do what they basically do, beat time. The harp piece became a ballet with the Joffrey Ballet, and toured the United States. In it, the only musician on the stage was the harp soloist, with the orchestra in the pit, like in an opera. In **Nueve**, the solo bass is surrounded by the string orchestra, while the only woodwinds, two clarinets, are “incognito” in the audience. During one of the variations, a jazz segment, the two clarinetists stand up and play along, and surprise the unsuspecting audience. At the climax of the jazz variation, the brass erupts in the balcony. All along, the soloist also reads poetry, a poem*

by Shelley. In the concerts Gary Karr did the poetry reading beautifully. For the recording, he suggested that an actor do the reading. We had the great fortune to have the incomparable Simon Callow. At the end of **Nueve**, while the orchestra reaches a tremendous climax on one note in unison, a choir emerges from the distance and can be heard in an ethereal chant, adding an element of timelessness and perhaps eeriness. This is in direct contrast to the noisy jazz variation in which two opposite jazz drummers have a sort of "combat," alternating and finally joining in the game. The work has nine variations and uses mostly nine notes. The reason for the title and the concept was that my New York apartment was, and remains, on 99th street, on the ninth floor. **Nueve**, of course, is Spanish for nine. While **Nueve** may be a "period piece," unsurprising at the time it was conceived, something about its concept remains close to me, and when compared to previous or later works, it is not different in its ultimate message, regardless of the different language used."