

Lord of the Air

Instrumentation

- 2 Flutes (2nd doubling Piccolo), 2 Oboes, 1 Clarinet in Eb, 1 Clarinet in Bb, 2 Bassoons (2nd doubling Contrabassoon)
- 4 Horns in F, 2 Trumpets in Bb
- Timpani; Perc. 1: Woodblocks, Crash cymbals, Snare Drum, Large suspended cymbal; Perc. 2: Snare Drum, Crash cymbals, Triangle, Tam tam, Bass Drum
- Harp
- Solo Violoncello
- Strings

Lord of the Air, cello concerto.

Duration: 22 minutes.

One of the best places to get a glimpse of the majestic Andean condor in its natural habitat is the Colca Canyon, in the south of Peru. This breathtaking natural formation and –more importantly- its winged dwellers, served as a source of inspiration for this piece. The first movement, “Leap to the Void”, is written in a quasi recitativo style, with the soloist and orchestra alternating constantly and imitating each other. As the Condor approaches the abyss and prepares to throw itself into it, the canyon echoes its jolts and forceful wing movements until all motion stops and the Condor takes command of its natural element: the air.

“The Ascent” embarks us on a journey in search of greater heights. In this goal-driven movement, the cello rises above the orchestra, the latter providing an underlying perpetual motion. It is here, detached from earth, that the condor is able to expand its wings and use air currents to ascend to regions that no other life forms can reach.

In the third movement, “Soaring the Heights”, the condor reaches the highest point of its journey, its body completely still, gliding through the altitudes. It is a moment of great intimacy, stillness and solitude permeating the whole movement. The cello plays a soothingly slow melody in harmonics with strings in the background as the harp keeps the pulse with slow figurations (also in harmonics). The intensity builds up gradually toward the middle section where the orchestra enters in full force before fading away, allowing the cello to emerge once again calm and triumphant. A rousing cadenza follows, leading to a quiet closing section.

“Homecoming”, the fourth and final movement, chronicles the descent from the skies of this great Andean bird. Pizzicato is used prominently; the dialogue between soloist and orchestra intensified and motifs reminiscent of the second movement are featured prominently. The cello leads with a short melody consisting of three ascending notes (later picked by the orchestra) and accompanied by the strings playing *col legno*, leading to an imposing final section where elements from the first movement are brought back, bringing the piece to a close.

“Lord of the Air” was commissioned by the Texas Christian University and it is dedicated to Jesús Castro-Balbi.