

Josefina Maldonado returns to Cleveland Orchestra for Julia Perry's *Stabat Mater*

by Mike Telin



Following Josefina Maldonado's Cleveland Orchestra debut in November 2022 in John Adams' *El Niño*, Stephanie Manning wrote for *ClevelandClassical.com* that the mezzo-soprano "more than held her own amid such a strong cast. Her round and resonant voice projected well in all registers, consistently controlled..."

On Thursday, March 21 at 7:30 pm, Maldonado will return to

Severance Music Center for performances of Julia Perry's *Stabat Mater*. Under the direction of Dalia Stasevska, the program also includes Einojuhani Rautavaara's *Cantus Arcticus* and Jean Sibelius's *Symphony No. 2*, and will be repeated on Friday, March 22 at 7:30 and Saturday, March 23 at 8:00. Tickets are available [online](#).

"The Cleveland Orchestra is world-class, and I look forward to coming back and working with Dalia Stasevska. She's an excellent conductor," Josefina Maldonado said during a telephone conversation.

The *Stabat Mater* is a 13th-century hymn to the Virgin Mary depicting her suffering during the crucifixion of her son Jesus Christ. Its title is taken from the hymn's first line, *Stabat Mater dolorosa* — "the sorrowful mother was standing."

Composed in 1951, Julia Perry's *Stabat Mater* is written in ten sections and scored for mezzo-soprano and string orchestra. "The way that she sets the text is stunning — the drama and the music flow together so naturally," Maldonado said. "She dedicated her *Stabat Mater* to her mother, and it's the piece that launched her career."

Learning the work was also Maldonado's introduction to the African American composer and her music. Born in 1924 in Lexington, Kentucky, Perry moved to Akron with her family ten years later. While attending Akron Public Schools, Perry excelled in voice, piano, violin, and composition. She entered the University of Akron in 1942 and a year later, with a scholarship from the Knight Memorial Education Fund, she attended Westminster Choir College earning both her bachelor's and master's degrees.

In 1951 Perry moved to Italy to study with composer Luigi Dallapiccola. There she earned acclaim as a composer and as a vocal soloist in performances of her *Stabat Mater*. She won two successive Guggenheim Fellowships, allowing her to remain in Italy for several years. She also traveled to Paris to study with Nadia Boulanger.

"She was the first Black woman to have her music performed by the New York Philharmonic," Maldonado said, adding that it's terrible that it has taken so long for her name to start appearing on concert programs. "I definitely want to spend more time with her music."

Click [here](#) to access the Akron Symphony's Julia Perry Project. The website is a treasure trove of information.

In addition to holding a bachelor's degree from the University of North Texas, Maldonado was a young artist with The Dallas Opera Outreach Program in multiple roles in 2019. That year she also made her European debut as a principal artist in the modern-day premieres of two 17th-century *serenatas* by Johannes Schmelzer — *Le veglie ossequiose* and *Die sieben Alter stimmen zusammen* — for the Olomouc Baroque Festival in the Czech Republic.

"Singing was a big part of my life growing up," she said, "and my high school choir gave me stability." But it was her first opera role that changed everything. "I was Cherubino in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*. It was so much fun to be somebody else — and in this case a different gender as well."

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