



Young People's Chorus of New York City™  
-Presents-

# RADIO RADIANCE™

## BROADCAST LISTENING GUIDE

**"Two Mountain Songs"**  
by Gabriela Lena Frank



### Background:

After reading the poem **"Two Mountain Songs"** in the pre-broadcast listening guide, audiences can listen to the broadcast of the original composition by Gabriela Lena Frank and explore how young choral voices add expression and imagery to the original poetry.

Identity has always been at the center of Gabriela Lena Frank's music. Born in Berkeley, California, to a mother of mixed Peruvian/Chinese ancestry and a father of Lithuanian/Jewish descent, Frank explores her multicultural heritage most ardently through her compositions. Inspired by the works of Bela Bartók and Alberto Ginastera, Frank is something of a musical anthropologist. She has travelled extensively throughout South America and her pieces reflect and refract her studies of Latin-American folklore, incorporating poetry, mythology, and native musical styles into a western classical framework that is uniquely her own. She writes challenging idiomatic parts for solo instrumentalists, vocalists, chamber ensembles, and orchestras.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> G. Schirmer Inc., "Gabriela Lena Frank," G. Schirmer Inc., Associated Music Publishers, Inc., [http://www.schirmer.com/default.aspx?TabId=2419&State\\_2872=2&composerId\\_2872=2388](http://www.schirmer.com/default.aspx?TabId=2419&State_2872=2&composerId_2872=2388).



This piece introduces breath as an example of one way to organize sound in music. “**Two Mountain Songs**” challenges listeners to consider the possibilities of what music can do. The voices are layered within a certain tessitura (*vocal range*) that when combined with specific phrasing and breathing techniques depicts the people, images and elements found within the Andean Mountain range. This guide also introduces and defines the term “vocal extreme” as a foundation for teaching listeners the specific vocal extreme of breath and breathing cycle renewed through the performance of the piece.

In this guide the concept of “journey” through the images that music can create is introduced. “**Two Mountain Songs**” takes the listener on a journey through life: the first breath, parents, and personal identity, all within the elements of the Andean Mountains.

“**Two Mountain Songs**” was commissioned by the American Composers Forum for the Glen Ellyn Children’s Chorus, San Francisco Girls Chorus and Young People's Chorus of New York City™.

### Lesson Plan for Teachers:



#### Aim:

To introduce students to the newly commissioned work **Two Mountain Songs** and exploring the concept of “**Seeing the Voice**” in music. This broadcast lesson explores the vocal extreme of breath and the breathing cycle renewed as it demonstrates how young choral voices can expand and enrich the expression of poetry when it is put to music.



#### Objective:

Students will be able to:

1. Understand that the voice, as an instrument, can create images through the use of text, rhythm, harmony, tessitura and vocal technique.



2. Describe how the voice can create imagery of nature in the form of the elements – the wind, the rain, the sounds heard against nature’s forms (against the mountains and valleys).
3. Describe the story they hear through the music.
4. Identify musical elements within the music such as rhythm, breath, patterns.
5. Describe how the music is evocative of life in the Andean mountains and depicts the culture of its people.



### **The Lesson and In-Class Activities**

#### **Engaging your class:**

Remind your students of the composer’s words below and ask them to consider them as they listen:

*“these texts have always stirred my imagination for ways to evoke Andean vocal practices within a western choral practice.”*

#### **The Lesson:**

##### **Part 1: Students listen to the broadcast performance.**

1. Have students listen to the **WNYC broadcast performance of Two Mountain Songs**.
2. After the broadcast use the following questions to launch a class discussion:
  - Does the poem change when it is put to music? Why or why not?
  - What did you hear or notice as you listened to the voices? What kinds of sounds or instruments did the voices emulate? (*Whispers, pan pipes, wind, etc.*)
  - How are these unique sounds important to the story this music tells? (*Emulating the environment, traditions and instruments of the Andean cultures.*)



- Did any individual musical phrases create an image for you? Do you think the composer used certain phrases to evoke specific animals or “characters” to tell her story in this poem?
- If the music is created only by voices then these voices are the instruments. How do the voices sound similar or different than the instruments and sounds you heard in the prior recording (*see the Pre-Broadcast Listening Guide*) Do these voices replicate or evoke the sounds of other traditional Peruvian instruments?
- What is the picaflor and what sounds heard in the piece that represents this?
- How is the voice used to tell not only one story but several individual stories of the characters within the poem?
- How do you think the voices tell the story of a journey? What kind of journey do they tell?

**Part 2: Students listen to the interviews with the composer.**

1. Have students listen to the interviews with the composer (<http://www.ypc.org/transientglory/radioradiance>)
2. After your students have listened to the interview have a second class discussion and ask your students the following questions:
  - *What did you learn from the composer?*
  - *How did their discussion of their work inform your understanding of the role of breath in vocal technique and what music is?*

**Part 3: Students go back and listen to the performance a second time.**

1. Have students listen to the performance a second time, after having heard the interview with the composer.
2. After your students have listened, ask them the following question:
  - *Did your response to the music change after hearing what the composer had to say?*



- *Was the music different (in your eyes) after learning more background from the composer?*



### **Summary and Wrap-up:**

1. The voice has the capacity to create images we see when we hear music.
2. The composer employs breath, layering, phrasing, rhythm, and tessitura as ways to create a wide and innovative group of sounds.
3. The voice creates its own form of poetry as it enriches and fulfills the words it expresses.
4. In this composition for young voices the music and the language of poetry combine to tell a story that takes the listener on a journey through life.



### **Lesson Extension (for advanced students)**

- Distribute a copy of the narrative ***Las Sombras de Los Apus*** (adaptation by Gabriela Lena Frank from Ian Cameron's Kingdom of the Sun God--see below) to your students.
- Ask each student to read this descriptive work and then write their own illustrative poem and/or music to describe the harsh world envisioned in Ms. Frank's description below.
- Have each student share his or her work with the class and follow with a performance and exhibit of their works.



## ***LAS SOMBRAS DE LOS APUS***

**by Gabriela Lena Frank**

The Andes, that magnificent mountain range of Peru and Bolivia, is awesomely terrifying terrain. It is a wilderness of jagged, near-unclimbable peaks, foamwhite rivers fed by melted snow, and narrow valleys twisted and fissured by volcanic upheaval. The cold is so intense that steel shatters like glass, the wind has a touch of death, and almost the only living creatures are condors, soaring on unseen air currents over the slopes of ice-coated scree. Human beings, if they can survive the severe altitude sickness, are made to feel intruders. According to Quechua mythology, each of the mountain peaks of las montañas andinas is inhabited by a minor divinity known as the apu. Temperamental in nature, the apu is easily irritated by negligent villagers who trespass through the rugged naturaleza without offering up a prayer or leaving a simple gift of food. At certain times, mist (neblina) warns the careless travelers that the apu is about to unleash a huayco, or avalanche. Such huaycos wreak havoc, uprooting boulders and ancient trees, leaving a stench of sulfur in the zigzagging rips through woodland, field and pueblo. The groans (gruñidos) and grindings (machacas) of the deepest geological plates can be heard across the entire span of the "eternal hills" during such an onslaught. In the aftermath, a stunning silence reigns.

(Adapted from Ian Cameron's Kingdom of the Sun God )