

What Makes Superstar Conductor Gustavo Dudamel So Good?

Brian Phillips, *New York Times Magazine*, November 1, 2018

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/01/magazine/gustavo-dudamel-los-angeles-philharmonic.html>

Late one afternoon in the difficult spring of this year, Gustavo Dudamel stood onstage at the Barbican Center in London, preparing to enter the realm of the higher beauty. His baton was raised; 218 musicians, his chosen companions on the voyage he was about to undertake, looked up at him.

Not so many people believe in higher beauty these days, but Dudamel, the conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, believes in it. He believes in truth too, and in joy—especially in joy—and in the brotherhood of humankind and the freedom of the human spirit. Everywhere he goes, he brings a dog-eared copy of Rousseau’s “Confessions” and the battered “Also Sprach Zarathustra” that he has carried around since his youth in Venezuela. Now he and his orchestra, along with the chorus of the London Symphony, were about to tackle one of the purest expressions of the ideals he finds most stirring—the final movement of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, the “Ode to Joy.”

Dudamel has been the music director of the L.A. Phil for almost a decade, since he was hired as a 28-year-old wunderkind out of Caracas. He has become one of the most famous conductors in the world, renowned for the energy he brings to live performance; he has been called the savior of classical music so often that there’s an entire grumpy subwing of classical-music criticism dedicated to proving he isn’t. At 37 his famous hair, the weightless black curls that have thrashed magnetically on posters and billboards all over the world, is noticeably beginning to silver, but he was dressed boyishly, in a dark T-shirt, Levi’s and black Chuck Taylor sneakers. This was only a rehearsal, so all the musicians were in everyday clothes—the starched shirts and black dresses wouldn’t come out until evening.

The tip of Dudamel’s baton dipped. BOOM! BADADA-DOOM! The timpani thundered in the empty auditorium. Then came the slashing string and wind lines, like rain blowing sideways, with which Beethoven conjures maximum chaos and desperation before the bass soloist suddenly breaks through, singing

O Freunde! Nicht diese Töne!

Sondern lasst uns angenehmere anstimmen, und freudenvollere.

O friends! Not these sounds!

Let us instead strike up more pleasing and more joyful ones!

When Dudamel conducts an orchestra these days, he feels a ghost at his shoulder. The ghost belongs to his mentor, the Venezuelan conductor and educator José Antonio Abreu, who gave him both his musical training and his philosophy of life, and who had died just a few weeks earlier, in March, at age 78. “I lost Maestro physically,” Dudamel says, “but every time I do *this*”—he raises his hands as if he’s about to conduct—“*a levare*, to the orchestra, he’s there. He’s in the sound. I can hear him all of the time.”

So even though these musicians had played the Ninth countless times, and Dudamel was merely fine-tuning, he remembered what Abreu taught him: Each opportunity to make music is a chance to bring about a better world, and each encounter with beauty is something to be taken seriously. And so, again and again, he signaled the orchestra to stop. “We have to get out of the routine of the music,” he said,

“and bring the feeling back. We have to believe in the text. *Freude, Freude!*” he sang—Joy, joy! “We have to end by embracing each other!”

The instrumentalists were jet-lagged after their flight from Los Angeles. Dudamel himself spent the morning conducting a youth orchestra and then presided, onstage at the Barbican, over the release of a manifesto on the future of the arts written by young people from Los Angeles and Britain. He was exhausted, and he was starting to lose his voice. Slowly, though, over the course of the next hour, the music started to change.

There are conductors who, when they hear something they don't like, rant and rage and throw music stands, but Dudamel has never been dictatorial; he prefers collaboration to control. He drew the singers' attention to a strange thing Beethoven does, a place where he accents the second syllable of the word *allegemensen* instead of the first, and he talked about the thrilling unexpectedness of that slight shift of emphasis. “That real beautiful delicious mistake,” he called it. “You have to show that like crazy.” Dudamel uses the word “magic” without hesitation when he talks about music; what happened now was that the Ninth began to be magical. Dudamel moved his hands on the air like a person describing the ocean, and the strings melted. He shook his fist like a king defying god, and happy avalanches crashed down on the empty seats. This, this was what he loved, the plummet and swell of it, the rumble, the hush, the roar when he lifted his arms. The beauty! The joy! The music!

When everything comes together like this, when hundreds of people work as one to create something so special, he knows he is right to believe what Maestro Abreu taught him. What can sound naïve and superficial in hard times is actually fundamental. Music can unite the world. The hope of human freedom lives in art. The world will change—he believes this sincerely—if people only listen.

Gustavo Dudamel, famous, handsome and rich, lives as if he wants to disprove Rousseau's famous maxim on happiness. What was it Rousseau said? Ah, yes: He said we lose our happiness as soon as we gain it. We feel happy, he said, when we pursue the things we desire. But getting them leaves us unsatisfied. Thus we are *heureux qu'avant d'être heureux*, happy only before being happy.

In Los Angeles, Dudamel conducts one of the best-paid, most critically acclaimed and most financially stable orchestras in America. The base pay for an L.A. Phil musician is more than \$150,000, with the top principal making \$500,000 or more; Dudamel himself earns just over \$3 million a year. The orchestra reported \$141 million in revenue in its 2016 tax filings and \$170 million the year before that. Dudamel works in one of the world's great palaces of music, the Walt Disney Concert Hall, a shining silver confetti-burst designed by his close friend Frank Gehry. At times there's something almost comical about the ease with which the Phil's success has toppled conventional wisdom. At a moment when classical music is said to be divided between traditionalist audiences and progressive musicians, the Phil draws large, enthusiastic crowds to concerts of challenging new music. At a time when classical music is said to be exclusively for rich white people, hundreds of children from diverse racial and economic backgrounds participate in the Phil's education program, Youth Orchestra Los Angeles, which Dudamel helped found as one of his first acts after being hired in Los Angeles. Soon YOLA will have a new center in Inglewood, also designed by Gehry.

The L.A. Phil's current season, 2018-19, is its 100th. This fall, it started an ambitious centennial celebration, a yearlong dazzle of world premieres and spectacular performances, with Dudamel squarely

at the center. There have been parades, parties, concerts with pop stars. All over the city, on the poles of streetlights, advertising banners show him in the throes of performance, his face rapturous, his baton crashing down, his curls flying. Dudamel loves making music in Los Angeles. “We are doing something here that is an example of how things can work,” he says. “That is bringing people together. For people to feel included. You know?” The orchestra was in great shape before he arrived, under its previous music director, the acclaimed Finnish conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen, but under Dudamel, it has soared. “You cannot imagine,” he says. “I see people here sitting, they can be Democrats, they can be Republicans, they can be Catholics, they can be Protestant, or they can be whatever. But they are sitting listening to music. And they say hi and they embrace each other and they talk.”

Many conductors see their roles as explicitly political. Daniel Barenboim campaigns for the rights of Palestinians; Leonard Bernstein was famously ridiculed by Tom Wolfe, in his essay “Radical Chic,” for hosting a Black Panthers fund-raiser at his apartment. Dudamel’s approach is more circumspect. A central part of his message is that music is not ideological. It is a way of “building bridges,” he thinks, a language “that talks to everybody.” The danger of thinking ideologically, he feels, is that “you get stuck in one or the other side, and we don’t want that. I don’t believe in that. I don’t believe in one or the other. I believe in the people that I see.”

There are critics, especially in Venezuela, who say that his optimism is callow. Dudamel’s home country is suffering from a horrific and ongoing social and economic crisis. Millions of people have fled the country; those who have stayed face widespread shortages of food and medicine, monetary collapse (inflation is expected to reach 2.5 million percent this year, according to the International Monetary Fund), corruption and spiraling crime. Dudamel’s emphasis on unity over ideology, his critics charge, is irresponsible in the face of such a disaster, a way to justify living the high life in California while failing to offer meaningful resistance to the increasingly authoritarian regime of Nicolás Maduro. “I simply do not buy the P.R. froth and fund-raiser clichés of ‘hope’ and ‘dreams’ and ‘empowerment,’ ” the Venezuelan pianist Gabriela Montero wrote on her Facebook page in 2016, after Dudamel gave a sunnily apolitical speech at the White House, “when those three luxurious abstracts are so far from reach for the majority of Venezuelans.”

Those who love Dudamel rush to defend him. His good friend, the Oscar-winning Mexican film director Alejandro Iñárritu, points out that no American artist is expected to speak for the entire United States. So how is it fair to ask Dudamel to speak for Venezuela? Besides, he has criticized Maduro; he wrote an Op-Ed in *The New York Times* just last year accusing the regime of flouting the Venezuelan constitution. The government responded by canceling one of his tours. When you are under pressure to be the voice of a whole country, Iñárritu says, “the weight of it can be destroying. And I think he hasn’t been destroyed.” Dudamel is aware of what some people say about him. He tries to tune it out. “People will always criticize,” he says. “People will always create stories. If you get inside of that, then you don’t live, you don’t have a life.”

In a way, it’s a strange problem he faces. Most of us are worried about *how* to be happy. Dudamel already *is* happy. He spends his life sharing the music he loves with audiences who adore him. His evenings are a long montage of applause, flowers and someone else holding the door. He recently married the Spanish actress Maria Valverde; he has a young son, Martin, from his first marriage, to the Venezuelan journalist and actress Eloísa Maturén, which ended in divorce in 2015.

The problem is whether the world will let him *stay* this happy—whether joy can be a viable artistic perspective in a time of social crisis; whether the ideals he cherishes can hold up against the unrest and chaos of history.

Those are hard questions. But for now? The music is marvelous, the long days are full of pleasure and all the time, he says, “I get more and more and more in love with what I do.” Didn’t Rousseau say somewhere that we carry our own happiness with us, in our hearts?

The first time Dudamel stepped onto the conductor’s podium, at just 11 or 12, he meant it as a joke. His parents were both musicians. His father, Oscar, played trombone in a salsa band, and his mother, Solange (she went by Sol), gave singing lessons. As a little boy, he would arrange his Fisher-Price figurines in the shape of an orchestra, then put classical LPs on the record player and conduct them.

That first day, though, he was only clowning around. This was in Barquisimeto, Dudamel’s hometown, the capital of the northwestern Venezuelan state of Lara. The teacher didn’t show up for his orchestra class, so Dudamel got up from his seat in the violin section and pretended to lead the rehearsal. His friends laughed. But then something happened that no one could explain. The mood in the room changed. He asked the class to play a passage, and he found that being up there, directing the music, felt perfectly natural to him. He seemed to know what to say, and how to move, to make the young musicians follow him. His friends stopped laughing and started working on the piece. The teacher, arriving late, watched from the back of the room. Afterward he asked Dudamel to be his assistant conductor.

This class took place in a *núcleo*, a community music center, run by a government-sponsored initiative that offered free training in classical music to children after school. This initiative, which still exists, is known formally as the National System of Youth and Children’s Orchestras of Venezuela, but no one calls it that. Across Venezuela, and in the hundreds of places around the world where it has inspired similar programs, it is known simply as “the system”—*El Sistema*.

El Sistema is legendary in Venezuela. There is no way to talk about Gustavo Dudamel, its most famous product, without reckoning with the ways in which El Sistema influenced him or with the ways in which he was molded by its director, José Antonio Abreu.

Abreu: almost as legendary in Venezuela as the institution he founded. Picture him: A gaunt, penetrating man, bald, with a prominent brow, glasses and a crooked mouth. Jacket and tie; heavy overcoat even in the summer. In 1975, Abreu, who studied economics as well as music, and who served in the Venezuelan congress, started a new youth orchestra, dedicated to the idea that music can inspire social change. The first meeting was held in a parking garage. The “orchestra” was made up of a handful of teenagers. He had a gift for uniting followers behind his vision; within a year, he had built an ensemble, taken it to a festival in Scotland and won critical praise for his work. He persuaded the government to finance what he soon began to see as his movement.

Today, even in the midst of social collapse, El Sistema reaches more than 500,000 students, in hundreds of *núcleos* all over the country. It’s the most important institution within Venezuelan classical music, if not Venezuelan culture. It has given rise to countless imitators—there are nearly 200 Sistema-inspired programs in the United States alone, including the L.A. Phil’s YOLA—as well as books, documentaries and academic studies. Not all this attention has been positive; some studies have raised questions about

whether Sistema has benefited its students as much as it says it has, and a few years ago Oxford University Press published a book by an English music writer, Geoffrey Baker, who depicted Abreu as a Manichaeian leader obsessed with his own personality cult. Still, when people talk about whether there is hope for classical music in the 21st century, El Sistema almost always comes up.

The genius of the program was how easy it was to spread. Everything was voluntary. Anyone could join. There's a persistent misconception in English-language journalism that El Sistema is exclusively aimed at the poor. In fact no young person is turned away. Show up, get an instrument, participate. Anyone who wanted to come to class could come, and anyone who came could eventually teach, and almost anyone who taught could start a *núcleo*. Students who had been in the program awhile would be put to work with younger students. Then when they moved from Caracas to new towns or cities, they might think, This could work here, too. It replicated itself.

What Abreu's message consisted of—what sort of social change El Sistema was meant to promulgate—was not always precisely clear. His statements tended toward the gnomic: The orchestra is an ideal image of society; music strengthens the spiritual development of the country; students who play in an orchestra develop a different set of values. He was also a canny politician who knew how to frame El Sistema's message to suit the priorities of whatever government happened to be in power. Are you a revolutionary socialist with strong authoritarian tendencies? Meet our symphony, which projects a proud national image and elevates children in poverty. (Please remember these keywords when it's time to renew our funding.)

Almost 20 years into this experiment, Abreu learned of a young talent named Gustavo Dudamel, who was dazzling the Barquisimeto *núcleo*. Abreu, who also grew up in Barquisimeto, took Dudamel under his wing and resolved to make a conductor of him. Dudamel remembers riding in a car—he must have been 16 or so then—while Maestro Abreu put him through mental exercises. Abreu might hum a tune and then ask Dudamel to sing it back and then for him to sing a melody while Abreu harmonized in canon. And then he would ask Dudamel to harmonize in canon and then to sing the melody backward. Dudamel would think, Well, surely I can't do *that*, and then try it and find that he could. It was amazing! They spent hours talking about philosophy, about literature, about the role of arts in society.

The older maestro was no fool. He knew what he had when he saw it. One reason it matters that all children have access to the arts, after all, is that the history of the world is a graveyard of lost geniuses. Think about the poems, songs and paintings that might have been, if a wider range of people had been given the tools to create them; if women, say, had been encouraged to explore their creativity rather than having it forcibly repressed for millenniums or if poor children had been taught to read. The mind reels. The symphonies we don't have are greater than the symphonies we do.

Dudamel wasn't destitute, but he belonged to a class of people who don't typically become great conductors, because they aren't typically encouraged to go anywhere near the sources of intensive training and study that great conductors need. No doubt Abreu knew all this. Not that it was ever the purpose of El Sistema to locate individual star talents, but he must have wondered, now and again, what might come loose if he gave the tree a big enough shake. "This is what Maestro Abreu put on us, put on me," Dudamel says. "To be visionary. Don't see the moment *here*. Stand a little bit up and see *there*, you know. See this in *years*."

What makes a great conductor? When people saw Dudamel as a young man and gasped—as Deborah Borda, the orchestra president who eventually heard about his talent and brought him to Los Angeles, did—what were they seeing?

There's the physical element, of course: the ability to communicate the rhythm, flow, texture and shifting moods of a piece of music through a set of traditional (yet freely elaborated) gestures. Conducting is a kind of strange, proactive dance. You move your body not in response to music but in anticipation of it. You need a perfect sense of tempo—you can have the most fluid wrists in the world, but that won't matter if you can't keep good time.

You also need a keen analytic intelligence to decode the structure of a piece, to ascertain how its parts fit together. If the first violins play a phrase in the fifth minute of a movement and an oboe plays a variation of the same phrase in the 12th minute, neither the violins nor the oboe may know they are part of a pattern, but the conductor has to know, because it is through the development of such patterns that the form of a piece, the story, expresses itself. This means you have to be able to hear the music before a single note has been played. In some irreducibly mysterious way, your philosophy and your technique have to turn the dots on the page into an interpretation that will say something to listeners. You have to *imagine* the music meaningfully.

The Venezuelan director Alberto Arvelo, who became a close friend of Dudamel's while filming a 2006 documentary about El Sistema, remembers giving Dudamel a copy of the score for the film, music he had never seen before. Dudamel read it as if it were a poem, turning the pages, smiling at the happy parts, looking sad when the mood darkened.

"I mean, I can read music," Arvelo says. "But for me, it's complicated. It's like, well, you know, you have to sit there, and then O.K., this is A, C, B, O.K., whatever. But he was *hearing* it. And then I understood that I was in front of someone who was totally possessed by music. He belongs to music more than to himself in some ways."

Those are some of the tangible components of conducting talent, or at any rate some of the semitangible components, the parts you can at least begin to explain. Combine them, and you can start to trace a conductor's musical personality, the reason, say, Wilhelm Furtwängler's grand, ponderous Beethoven sounds nothing like John Eliot Gardiner's fleet, bright Beethoven, or why Dudamel's high-energy readings of Schubert are so different from Bruno Walter's warm and patient ones.

More mysterious is the gift of communication. How do you put across your understanding of a musical work to the group of musicians whose performance of it will usher it into existence? Musicians who work with Dudamel tend to say that what sets him apart from other conductors isn't anything grand or obvious; it's an accumulation of small moments. How he speaks to them. How he listens to them.

And then comes the most mysterious attribute of all: the hold over an audience. The power to move. Not everyone gets that, among those to whom the rest is given. Many don't. When Dudamel was in his 20s, he toured the world with the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra, a group of the best musicians in all of El Sistema. The concert would be traditional — Beethoven, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, core-canon stuff. Then the lights would go down. When they came back up for the encore, the musicians would be wearing shiny track jackets patterned after the Venezuelan flag. Dudamel wore one, too. The drums started. It was a

mambo! Trumpeters stood up, horns aimed at the ceiling. Bassists twirled their basses. Dudamel danced at the podium. Maybe this sounds tacky or even cynical. You could make a case that the Bolívars were playing to international expectations for how a Latin American symphony should act. You could make a not-unrelated case that they were serving as soft propaganda for Hugo Chávez at a time when his *colectivos* were killing protesters in the streets. What couldn't be denied is that audiences loved it.

A few weeks after the "Ode to Joy" in London, Dudamel leaned back on his stool at the Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, frowning down at the orchestra. Rehearsal was going badly. He was thinking about Rousseau.

It was the end of May, the end of the season. On Friday night, the Phil would begin its final run of performances before moving for the summer from the Disney Hall (indoors, posh) to the Hollywood Bowl (outdoors, Sting plays there, you can eat a Snickers in your seat). For the finale of the orchestra's 99th season, essentially the lead-in to this year's centennial extravaganza, Dudamel was putting on "Das Paradies und die Peri," Schumann's gigantic concert oratorio: nearly two hours long, renowned singers in dramatic roles, a huge chorus, shattering climaxes, tunes for days. The text tells the story of a Peri, a kind of benevolent fallen angel, who can gain admission to heaven only by bringing the proper gift to the gates of paradise. She tries three times, in escalatingly romantic-allegorical ways, and it's the third gift, the last tear of a sinner who repented on his deathbed, that causes the gates to open. The Peri enters heaven, to cloudbursts ax

Famous in Schumann's lifetime, "Das Paradies," composed in 1843, is seldom performed now; Dudamel came across it a few years ago and immediately felt he'd discovered a masterpiece. "I was like, my God," he whispers, recalling the moment. "What is this? My God, how to deal for such a long time with that amount of beauty?"

The difficulty seemed great enough when he was studying the score on his own, but once he began working with the musicians, it became even more pronounced. On Tuesday of that week, when the full chorus came in to rehearse with the soloists, Dudamel realized that the production design had caused them to be seated too far back, all the way behind the stage, in seats normally reserved for audience members, from which hinterland they couldn't see him properly and couldn't hear the soloists. The chorus members had little LED lights that clipped onto their music folders so they could see their scores in the dark; from the podium, they looked like a sea of distant white pinpricks. Then on Wednesday, when the singers were joined by the full orchestra, it became clear that the location of the soloists' elevated platform, which was positioned above and behind the instrumentalists, would make it hard for the Peri and others to be heard over the strings and winds. Now the singers were all out of sync, and the orchestra members were playing too loudly, because they weren't listening to the singers at all.

Dudamel's jean jacket was draped over his seat back. His sneakers, dangling above the floor, tapped on the stool's chrome ring. He insisted on moving the chorus closer to the orchestra—moving them onstage, out of the audience seats, a change that demanded a serious reconfiguration of the planned arrangement of forces. Then he addressed the musicians. When Rousseau was a young man, he said, he loved to talk more than to listen. But as Rousseau grew older, he came to understand that listening was sometimes more important. "It is so important here, this concept," he said. "It's not about not playing—I'm not telling you not to play. But if you aren't willing to do this kind of *listening*-playing, then you'll never be able to do this. We'll never have the space of the—the magic of that uniqueness. It's not about where the singers

are. They could be here in front, and I'm sure we would still have this problem. It's about finding the way to be in the service of this"—he tapped the score—"and how it asks us to create that for the singers. So please."

He raised the baton, a *levare*. On his downbeat the orchestra began to play. The winds came in first, with a fey, lilting figure, light but energetic, like the sound of water splashing in a fountain. Then a quartet began to sing. They had rehearsed this number a dozen times over the course of the week, but now something had changed. The violins began to double the singers, while the winds played extravagant swirls around them. The effect was astonishing. Where the chorus had sounded diluted, it was now vividly alive and present in the music. By the time Dudamel finished his adjustments, one of the singers had called out to him: "Thank you!"

The way Dudamel looks at it, he's not a ruler; he's more like an ally of the players. He is on hand to offer his thoughts, help them sound their best. Cooperation gets better results. Musicians, he thinks, are like everyone else. Music is supposed to feel good. Doesn't everyone do their best when they feel good?

He does not like to think about getting older or about the ways in which he has changed. You could say that he has spent his whole career as a kind of accelerated child—he was a prodigy, then a wunderkind, a pupil, a good son, a golden boy—and that life has now taken him to a place where he will have to decide what his adulthood will look like.

Dudamel does not see it that way, however. From his perspective, life is a series of invisibly overlapping moments, and he has lived each one as sincerely as he could. "My path," he says, "this path has been so natural." All his experiences have led him here, to this place where he feels so happy. Why would he draw lines? Every day is new.

He goes hiking now, for instance. Maria, his new wife, takes him, and not in a million years could he ever have seen himself doing that. But he does it because he loves her, and because he loves her, he finds that he loves it, too. Being in love—nothing is more beautiful than that! Love is "pure, pure, pure inspiration," he says. Love expands your horizons in ways you never could have imagined. Life is not about measuring up to arbitrary stages. Life is about staying open to the experience of life.

He was sitting in his office, an hour or so before the season's final concert. Martin, his 7-year-old son, was encamped behind his desk, playing Minecraft on the iMac. Outside the door, Dudamel's assistant, Ebner Sobalvarro, a young man with a shaved head and rimless glasses, sat at his own desk, greeting the musicians going past with their instrument cases. An oboist was warming up down the hall. A soprano sang scales.

How to deal for such a long time with this amount of beauty? When so much of the world is not, cannot be, beautiful? It made him sad, he said, so sad, to see the suffering in the world, the hunger, the misery in Venezuela. "Very complex and very bad," Dudamel told me. In 2014, amid falling oil prices and violence in the streets, Dudamel and Abreu appeared on television with Maduro, to look at the blueprints for a new concert hall in Barquisimeto. It would be designed by Frank Gehry and named after Dudamel.

El Sistema views music as a source of social change, but depends on the good will of an authoritarian government for its survival; hence perhaps Dudamel's reluctance to speak explicitly about politics. The

more political he becomes, the more he puts his social movement at risk. Now he was rehearsing with the Bolívars, but only over FaceTime, and there were rumors on music blogs that he had been banned from going home or that Maduro would have him arrested if he tried. A Mi Maestro, the two-concert celebration of Abreu's life that he organized in June, was held in Chile, not in Venezuela. He told me he would go back to Venezuela. "It is not yet the time," he said.

He is sure, though, that he is right to believe in optimism over ideology. If only people could *hear* one another. He thinks that unrest—the unrest in Venezuela, the unrest in the United States—can be an opportunity for new understandings to take shape. The essential thing, he thinks, is not for one side or the other to win, but for people to come together. *Let us strike up more pleasing and more joyful sounds!*

But, I asked, what if avoiding ideology only plays into the hands of the people abusing their power? Is there a line beyond which the only possible response is resistance?

"I believe in people," he said gently. "It makes me sad sometimes. It makes me desperate. But at the same time, I take all of that to, to, I don't know, to the muscle, or to this part of the soul that is optimistic, and I see things can be better."

How to see the parable that connects one note to another? It occurred to him that the struggle to make a better world was like the struggle in "Das Paradies." "You cross all that"—you pass through the time of hardship, like the Peri through her trials, and then you find the tear of heaven, listening, music, togetherness—"You arrive to the paradise," he said. "And paradise is here. You cannot expect to see the paradise in another place. We have to think the paradise is here. In this planet we have to make the paradise work."

He remembered a quote he loved, about democracy and happiness. He couldn't remember who said it. It was a woman, he thought. A religious woman. How did it go?

"Democracy has to be *la suma*," he said. "*La suma*, let me ask Ebner, *la suma*."

Dudamel got up from his chair. He called to his assistant and asked for help translating the phrase. Ebner stood in the doorway, his head modestly bowed, light gleaming off his smooth scalp.

"It is the sum of the happiness of the people," Ebner said. "Democracy," Dudamel said, and smiled.