Anacaona, The Golden Flower Songs is a 30-minute work, in one long, through-composed movement, for nine instruments and solo voice, with a libretto written by Edwidge Danticant, and vocal part co-composed with, and specifically for, the internationally renowned singer, Emeline Michel. The work, in some way, is a semi-staged monodrama, with Ms. Michel dressed in traditional Taino-influenced dress, and a simple, yet elegant set and stage design. Theatrical lighting and dramatic musician positioning adds to the overall effect of storytelling, creation stories, loss, and legacy.

As a Haitian-American composer, I am excited by the notion of storytelling from a perspective informed by my Haitian culture and heritage, and how Haitian people have their own history—one that spans back centuries—and, as has always been the case, involves strong, powerful women, at its core. Anacaona was a Taino chief, ballet dancer, composer, and her people, the Tainos, were known for telling wild, ornate, creation stories.

We are mid-fifteenth-century, on the mountainous island the Tainos called Ayiti or "land on high". Anacaona, whose name means Golden Flower, is part of the matriarchal lineage that rules the region where she was born. Anacaona is immersed in the cultural practices of her people, which demand that she creates pottery, writes sanbas or songs, and perform dances at public ceremonies called arietos...Columbus and his men arrive. The Tainos are forced into hard labor. Tricked into thinking she is going to a meeting to work out a peace treaty, Anacaona walks into an ambush and is hanged by the Spanish, starting a genocide that would wipe out her people. This is a story about beginnings, but about endings too. The end of an era that would begin what would later be known as the new world, a new world continually washed in endless streams of blood.

Edwidge Danticant

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