

I grew up in Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital, but every year, I would make the trip up north with my family to a town called Plaine-du-Nord, my father's hometown. Plaine-du-Nord is less than 10 miles from Cap-Haïtien, where my mother spent her youth, and where my grandparents lived for almost 10 years.

Composing my first orchestral work to celebrate Cap-Haïtien's 350 years was a great honor for me. The city is steeped in history – it was Haiti's first capital during its early years of independence, and it played a critical part in the Haitian Revolution.

The first movement of *Lavil Okap*, was inspired by the journey of King Henri Christophe and the Haitian Revolution. It includes a Yanvalou rhythm. Yanvalou has roots in the slavely era of Haiti. That traditional rhythm emerged among the African slaves who brought their cultural traditions and spiritual practices to the island.

Henri Christophe is a key figure in Haitian history, he rose from slavery to become not only Haiti's president but also its self-proclaimed King Henry I. His remarkable journey and legacy symbolize the resilience of the Haitian people. *Lavil Okap* was also written in 2020 to commemorate 200 years since the death of Henri Christophe.

In the second movement, I aimed to capture a jubilant atmosphere – what Cap-Haïtien must have been like in its hay days after gaining the independence. However, as the movement unfolds, it transitions to a somber tone, symbolizing the ongoing struggles Haiti has faced since becoming the world's first free black republic.

The third movement was inspired by the Haitian people's resilience, with a repeated melody representing their unwavering determination. It starts with the trombones mimicking Haitian bamboo instruments playing Rara music. Rara originated as a form of expression for enslaved Africans during the Haitian Revolution and has become a very popular form of festival music used for street processions throughout Haiti and among Haitian communities abroad.

The work concludes with a joyful Rara celebration, symbolizing hope and optimism for a brighter future in Haiti.

- Sydney Guillaume