

## **Danzón No. 2**

### **Arturo Márquez**

The music of Mexican composer Arturo Márquez has been gaining currency with orchestras and audiences throughout his homeland and around the world. He is best known for his series of *danzóns*, works based on a Cuban dance that migrated to Veracruz, Mexico. Márquez' *Danzón No. 2*, in particular, is one of the most popular and frequently performed works written after 1950 from Latin America.

In February 2006, Arturo Márquez received the Medalla de Oro al Mérito de Bellas Artes (Gold Medal of Merit in the Fine Arts), the highest honor given to artists by Mexico's Bellas Artes.

Marquez wrote the following notes for the premiere of *Danzón No. 2*:

"The idea of writing the *Danzón 2* originated in 1993 during a trip to Malinalco with the painter Andrés Fonseca and the dancer Irene Martínez, both of whom [have] a special passion for the *danzón*, which they were able to transmit to me from the beginning, and also during later trips to Veracruz and visits to the Colonia Salon in Mexico City. From these experiences onward, I started to learn the *danzón's* rhythms, its form, its melodic outline, and to listen to the old recordings by Acerina Mariano Merceron and his Danzonera Orchestra. I was fascinated and I started to understand that the apparent lightness of the *danzón* is only like a visiting card for a type of music full of sensuality and qualitative seriousness, a genre which old Mexican people continue to dance with a touch of nostalgia and a jubilant escape towards their own emotional world; we can fortunately still see this in the embrace between music and dance that occurs in the State of Veracruz and in the dance parlors of Mexico City.

"*Danzón 2* ... endeavors to get as close as possible to the dance, to its nostalgic melodies, to its wild rhythms, and although it violates its intimacy, its form and its harmonic language, it is a very personal way of paying my respects and expressing my emotions towards truly popular music."

## **Concierto de Aranjuez**

### **Joaquín Rodrigo**

Spanish composer Joaquín Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* established him as one of Spain's foremost composers of the mid-20th century. Rodrigo is also largely responsible for extending and popularizing the repertoire of the classical guitar, although, interestingly, Rodrigo did not play guitar (he was a pianist). His guitar music, and the *Concierto de Aranjuez* in particular, reflects the rich legacy of Spanish musical history. It features suggestions of traditional vihuela music (the vihuela, considered the precursor to the modern classical guitar, was popular in 15th and 16th century Spain), as well as the stylized dance forms of Baroque music.

Rodrigo's specific inspiration for the *Concierto* came from the Palacio Real de Aranjuez, the palace and gardens built by Philip II in the 16th century, not far from Madrid, and rebuilt two centuries later by Ferdinand VI; only the gardens survive today. Rodrigo lost his sight at age three after contracting diphtheria, and therefore could not perceive the visual beauty of the gardens. Instead he sought, in his words, to depict "the fragrance of magnolias, the singing of birds and the gushing of fountains." Rodrigo added that the concerto "is meant to sound like the hidden breeze that stirs the treetops in the parks; it should be as agile as a butterfly, and as tightly controlled as a veronica [a term from bullfighting referring to a pass with a cape]; a suggestion of times past." Rodrigo's emphasis on "times past" may have been a conscious effort on his part to avoid associations with Spain's present: the turbulent aftermath of the Spanish Civil War, and the rise of Hitler across Europe.

In the Concerto, Rodrigo pays particular attention to orchestration, ensuring that the solo guitar is not overwhelmed by the orchestra. Much of the accompaniment has the quality of chamber music, as when a single instrument or section partners the soloist. Rodrigo only unleashes the full orchestra when the soloist is silent.

The Allegro con spirito features the fandango, an aristocratic dance of the Spanish court, characterized by rhythmic shifts between  $\frac{3}{4}$  and  $\frac{6}{8}$  time. Victoria Rodrigo's biography of her husband notes that the Adagio reflects both happy memories of the couple's honeymoon, and Rodrigo's heartbreak over the miscarriage, at seven months, of their first child. The yearning beauty of the main theme, heard first in the English horn, expresses both Rodrigo's wistfulness and his pain; Rodrigo once said of the Adagio, "If nostalgia could take form, the second movement would be its tightest mold." Like the opening movement, the Allegro con spirito showcases both Baroque-style dances with shifting meters and with Spanish folk songs.

### **Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64** **Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky**

"I desperately want to prove, not only to others, but also to myself, that I am not yet played out as a composer," wrote Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to his patron Nadezhda von Meck in the spring of 1888. With the benefit of hindsight, the idea that Tchaikovsky could think himself "played out" is puzzling; after he completed the Fifth Symphony he went on to write *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Nutcracker*, and the "Pathétique" Symphony. All artists go through periods of self-doubt, however; and Tchaikovsky was plagued by creative insecurity more than most.

If you ask a Tchaikovsky fan to name their favorite symphony, they'll most likely choose either the Fourth, with its dramatic "Fate" motif blaring in the brasses, or the Sixth ("Pathétique"). Sandwiched in between is the Fifth Symphony, often overlooked or undervalued when compared to its more popular neighbors. But the Fifth is a monument in its own right, showcasing Tchaikovsky's undisputed mastery of melody; indeed, the Fifth rolls out one unforgettable tune after another. Over time, the Fifth Symphony has earned its place in the canon of orchestral repertoire itself, but Tchaikovsky, along with 19th century music critics, wavered in his opinion of its worth. At the end of the summer in 1888, Tchaikovsky wrote to

von Meck, "It seems to me that I have not blundered, that it has turned out well," and to his nephew Vladimir Davidov after a concert in Hamburg, "The Fifth Symphony was magnificently played and I like it far better now, after having held a bad opinion of it for some time." After a performance in Prague, however, Tchaikovsky wrote to von Meck, "I have come to the conclusion that it is a failure. There is something repellent in it, some over-exaggerated color, some insincerity of fabrication which the public instinctively recognizes."

Critics dismissed the new symphony as beneath Tchaikovsky's abilities, and one American critic damned the composer with faint praise when he opined, "[Tchaikovsky] has been criticized for the occasionally excessive harshness of his harmony, for now and then descending to the trivial and tawdry in his ornamental figuration, and also for a tendency to develop comparatively insignificant material to inordinate length. But, in spite of the prevailing wild savagery of his music, its originality and the genuineness of its fire and sentiment are not to be denied."

The Fifth Symphony features a theme that recurs in all four movements. We hear it first in the lowest chalumeau register of the clarinet, which conveys an air of foreboding. The late critic and scholar Michael Steinberg described the theme's effects in all the movements: "It will recur as a catastrophic interruption of the second movement's love song, as an enervated ghost that approaches the languid dancers of the waltz, and ... in majestic and blazing E major triumph."

Tchaikovsky's gift for melody reached beyond the classical music world in 1939, when the poignantly wistful horn solo in the *Andante cantabile* morphed into the popular song *Moon Love*, which became a hit for big band leader and trombonist Glenn Miller.

© Elizabeth Schwartz

*NOTE: These program notes are published here by the Salina Symphony for its patrons and other interested readers. Any other use is forbidden without specific permission from the author, who may be contacted at [www.classicalmusicprogramnotes.com](http://www.classicalmusicprogramnotes.com).*

Elizabeth Schwartz is a writer and music historian based in Portland, OR. She has been a program annotator for more than 25 years, and her clients include the Oregon Symphony, the Spokane Symphony, Chamber Music Northwest, and a number of other ensembles around the country. Ms. Schwartz has also contributed to NPR's "Performance Today," (now heard on American Public Media). [www.classicalmusicprogramnotes.com](http://www.classicalmusicprogramnotes.com)