

Program Notes for Rhythms on Fire Oct. 9-11

Danzón No. 2 **ARTURO MÁRQUEZ (B. 1950)**

Composed in 1994.

Premiered on March 5, 1994 in Mexico City, conducted by Ronald Zolman.

Arturo Márquez, born in Alamos Sonora, Mexico in 1950, began his musical training in La Puente, California in 1966, and subsequently studied piano and music theory at the Conservatory of Music of Mexico and composition at the Taller de Composición of the Institute of Fine Arts of Mexico with Joaquín Gutiérrez Heras, Hector Quintanar and Federico Ibarra. Márquez also studied privately in Paris with Jacques Castérède, and at the California Institute of the Arts with Morton Subotnick, Stephen Mosko, Mel Powell and James Newton. Márquez, today one of Mexico's most respected musicians, has received commissions from the Organization of American States, Universidad Metropolitana de México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Festival del Caribe, Festival de la Ciudad de México, 1992 Seville World's Fair and the Rockefeller Foundation, and grants from the Institute of Fine Arts of Mexico, the French Government, the Fulbright Foundation and other prestigious organizations. In 1994, he was awarded the composition scholarship of Mexico's Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes. Márquez's professional appointments have included leader of the Navojoa Municipal Band, teacher of composition at the National School of Music of Mexico, and a residency at the National Center of Research, Documentation and Information of Mexican Music at the National University of Mexico.

Márquez has composed four works for varied instrumentation titled *Danzón*. In 1942, after a good-will visit to Cuba, Aaron Copland wrote his *Danzón Cubano*, and gave the following description of the form: "The popular Cuban dance style known as *danzón* has a very special character. It is a stately dance, quite different from the rumba, conga and tango, and one that fulfills a function rather similar to that of the waltz in our own music, providing contrast to some of the more animated dances. The *danzón* is not the familiar hectic, flashy and rhythmically complicated type of Cuban dance. It is more elegant and curt and is very precise, as dance music goes. The dance itself seemed especially amusing to me because it has a touch of unconscious grotesquerie, as if it were an impression of 'high-life' as seen through the eyes of the populace — elegance perceived by the inelegant." Of his colorful and melodic *Danzón No. 2*, commissioned by the Music Department of Mexico's National University, Márquez noted, "I discovered that the apparent lightness of the *danzón* hides a music full of sensuality and rigor, music of nostalgia and joy that our old folks live with, a world that we can still grasp in the dance music of Veracruz and the dance halls of Mexico City. *Danzón No. 2* is a tribute to the world that nurtured it. It tries to get as close as possible to the dance, to its nostalgic melodies and its monotonous rhythms, and although it desecrates its intimacy, form and harmonic vocabulary, it is a personal way of expressing my admiration and feelings towards real Mexican popular music."

***El Amor Brujo ("Love, the Magician")*, Ballet with Songs in One Act** **MANUEL DE FALLA (1876-1946)**

Composed in 1913-1914.

Premiered on April 15, 1915 in Madrid.

After his years in Paris absorbing the riches of what was then the world's most vibrant musical city (and simultaneously befriending Debussy, Ravel and Dukas), Falla retreated to Spain in 1914 in the face of the German invasion of France. Soon after his arrival, Pastora Imperio, the reigning donna of Gypsy music, asked him to provide the accompaniment for a "song and dance" for her act. For some authentic inspiration, Pastora arranged for her mother, Rosario la Mejorana, to meet with Falla and the playwright Gregorio

Martínez Sierra, who was to provide the text for the song. So fervent was Rosario's singing of the traditional songs and recounting of the Gypsy legends that Falla and Martínez Sierra decided to create not just a "song and dance" but a full ballet. The playwright devised the scenario and Falla worked feverishly on the score, completing it in five months.

Despite the popularity of Imperio and her troupe, the premiere of *El Amor Brujo* gained little success. Perhaps the combination of such an earthy subject with Falla's new style, which distilled native folk music to its most elemental components, was not to the audience's taste; or perhaps the small instrumental ensemble of the original version (piano, flute, oboe, trumpet, horn, viola, cello and double bass) may have been too limited to fully realize the glowing orchestral colors inherent in the music. At any rate, Falla immediately began revising the score, mainly by cutting some numbers and expanding the orchestra. In so doing, he created a work that seems the very quintessence of the spirit of his native land.

El Amor Brujo is one of the great works of an era that witnessed an explosion of interest in indigenous folk music as the basis for concert compositions. Bartók, Vaughan Williams, Chávez, Enesco and Ives were only a few of those who drew inspiration and models from the music of their countries. Falla, working with the care and precision of a watchmaker, penetrated into the heart of the Spanish musical idiom to find its unalloyed essence. "Falla's work reacts against the turgid romanticism of the 19th century and reverts to the clarity of the 18th-century clavecinists," wrote A.A. Fraser. "The dry flower of the guitar gives it movement, the song of the people gives it life." In his book on Spanish music, Gilbert Chase summarized Falla's compositional style: "There is not a superfluous note, not an ounce of padding, in the finely wrought, muscular texture of his scores. The sinews of his art are tense, yet flexible; they pass from meditative repose to dynamic action with dramatic rapidity. His creative reflexes respond with sensitive alertness to every emotional impact, yet the process of musical transmutation is achieved with the most painstaking care, with a ceaseless, disciplined striving for perfection." Distilled from Gypsy *cante jondo*, Andalusian melodies and rhythms, flamenco and other aspects of the Spanish *melos*, Falla's music shows him to be, in the words of Georges Jean-Aubrey, "a poet of Spanish emotion."

El Amor Brujo is set in Andalusia. A passionate motto theme, which runs through the ballet, is heard at once in the introduction. To the accompaniment of singing, the heroine of the ballet, Candelas, appears. She has been in love with a dashing Gypsy, recently dead, who lives on in her memory and keeps returning to haunt her. Always Candelas remains under the influence of this specter. A live and handsome villager, Carmelo, loves Candelas and wants to marry her but the ghost intervenes. His sorcery prevents her from granting Carmelo the kiss of perfect love. Desperately, Candelas tries to drive off the specter through a ritual fire dance. She fails, so Carmelo tries to trick the ghost, whose habits were known to him in life. Since the deceased always had a strong taste for attractive women, Carmelo decides to use Lucia, a companion of Candelas, as a decoy. Carmelo comes to woo Candelas. Jealous, the specter appears, but when his eye is caught by the pretty Lucia, he ignores Candelas and follows her friend. Carmelo convinces Candelas that his own devotion to her is greater than that of the ghost. As morning dawns and the bells of the village sound, the pair at last exchange the perfect kiss and exorcise the ghost forever.

Concerto for Guitar, Bandoneón and String Orchestra, "Hommage à Liège" **ASTOR PIAZZOLLA (1921-1992)**

Composed in 1985.

Premiered on March 15, 1985 in Liège, Belgium, conducted by Léo Brouwer with guitarist Cachó Tirao and the composer as soloists.

The Argentinean tango, like American ragtime and jazz, is music with a shady past. Its deepest roots extend to Africa and the fiery dances of Spain, but it seems to have evolved most directly from a slower Cuban dance, the habanera (whose name honors that nation's capital), and a faster native Argentinean song form, the milonga, both in duple meter and both sensuously syncopated in rhythm. These influences met at the end of the 19th century in the docklands and seamier neighborhoods of Buenos Aires, where they found fertile ground for gestation as the influx of workers streaming in from Europe to seek their fortunes in the

pampas and cities of South America came into contact with the exotic Latin cultures. The tango — its name may have been derived from a word of African origin meaning simply “dance,” or from the old Castilian *taño* (“to play an instrument”), or from a type of drum used by black slaves, or from none of these — came to embody the longing and hard lives of the lower classes of Buenos Aires, where it was chiefly fostered in bawdy houses and back-alley bars by usually untutored musicians. The texts, where they existed, dealt with such forlorn urban topics as faithless women, social injustice and broken dreams. In the years around World War I, the tango migrated out of the seedier neighborhoods of Argentina, leaped across the Atlantic to be discovered by the French, and then went on to invade the rest of Europe and North America. International repute elevated its social status, and, spurred by the glamorous images of Rudolph Valentino and Vernon and Irene Castle, the tango became the dance craze of the 1930s. Tango bands, comprising four to six players (usually piano, accordion, guitar and strings) with or without a vocalist, flourished during the years between the Wars, and influenced not just the world’s popular music but also that of serious composers: one of Isaac Albéniz’s most famous works is his *Tango in D*; William Walton inserted a tango into his “Entertainment with Poems” for speaker and instruments, *Façade*; and Igor Stravinsky had the Devil in The Soldier’s Tale dance a tango and composed a *Tango for Piano*, which he also arranged for full orchestra and for winds with guitar and bass.

The greatest master of the modern tango was Astor Piazzolla, born in Mar Del Plata, Argentina, a resort town south of Buenos Aires, on March 11, 1921, and raised in New York City, where he lived with his father from 1924 to 1937. Before Astor was ten years old, his musical talents had been discovered by Carlos Gardel, then the most famous of all performers and composers of tangos and a cultural hero in Argentina. At Gardel’s urging, the young Astor moved to Buenos Aires in 1937, and joined the popular tango orchestra of Anibal Troilo as arranger and bandoneón player. Piazzolla studied classical composition with Alberto Ginastera in Buenos Aires, and in 1954, he wrote a symphony for the Buenos Aires Philharmonic that earned him a scholarship to study in Paris with Nadia Boulanger, the renowned teacher of Copland, Thomson, Carter and many other of the best American composers. Boulanger, as was her method, grounded Piazzolla in the classical European repertory, but then encouraged him to follow his genius for the tango rather than write in the traditional concert genres. When Piazzolla returned to Buenos Aires in 1956, he founded his own performing group, and began to create a modern style for the tango that combined elements of traditional tango, Argentinean folk music and contemporary classical, jazz and popular techniques into a “Nuevo Tango” that was as suitable for the concert hall as for the dance floor. He was sharply criticized at first by government officials and advocates of the traditional tango alike for his path-breaking creations. “Traditional tango listeners hated me,” he recalled. “I introduced fugues, counterpoint and other irreverences: people thought I was crazy. All the tango critics and radio stations of Buenos Aires called me a clown, they said my music was ‘paranoiac.’ And they made me popular. The young people who had lost interest in the tango started listening to me. It was a war of one against all, but in ten years, the war was won.” In 1974, Piazzolla settled again in Paris, winning innumerable enthusiasts for both his Nuevo Tango and for the traditional tango with his many appearances, recordings and compositions. By the time that he returned to Buenos Aires in 1985, he was regarded as the musician who had revitalized one of the quintessential genres of Latin music, and he received awards from *Down Beat* and other international music magazines and from the city of Buenos Aires, as well as a Grammy nomination for his composition *Oblivion*. Piazzolla continued to tour widely, record frequently and compose incessantly until he suffered a stroke in Paris in August 1990. He died in Buenos Aires on July 5, 1992.

The unique fusion of European classical music and Argentinean tango that Piazzolla achieved in his later works is distilled in the concerto that he composed for guitar and his own instrument, the button accordion known as the bandoneón, in 1985 for performance at the Fifth International Guitar Festival in Liège, Belgium; he was joined for the premiere of this “Hommage à Liège” by Argentinean guitarist Cacho Tirao, a member of his quintet, and the respected Cuban composer and conductor Leo Brouwer leading l’Orchestre de Liège. The Concerto opens with a ruminative *Introducción* for the two soloists that proceeds without pause into the second movement, a *Milonga*, a form related musically to tango but differing in its dance steps. The finale, with its sensuous rhythms, subtle interplay between soloists and ensemble, and distinctive emotion is a prime example of Piazzolla’s genre-crossing *Tango Nuevo*.

***La Noche de los Mayas* ("The Night of the Mayas")**
SILVESTRE REVUELTAS (1899-1940)

Composed in 1939.

When asked why he did not quote existing songs and dances in his music, Silvestre Revueltas replied, "Why should I put on boots and climb mountains for Mexican folklore, if I have the spirit deep within me?" This philosophy, that true Mexican music lies in the hearts and everyday activities of its people rather than in some remote site, was not only an answer to a specific question, but also suggests the very essence of Revueltas' work. All of Revueltas' music derives from the lore, geography, sounds and soul of his native land, and the title and content of each of his works celebrates some unique Mexican trait. The rhythms, melodies and ethos of Mexico are the foundations of his style, as he pointed up in a somewhat sarcastic comment in a 1932 letter to the musicologist and authority on Latin American music Nicolas Slonimsky. "I like all kinds of music," he wrote. "I can even tolerate some of the classics, and some of my own compositions, but I prefer the music of the people of the ranchos and villages of my country."

Revueltas was born to a merchant family of small success in a little town in the northern state of Durango. He began playing the violin at an early age. At thirteen, he went to Mexico City to study performance and composition, and then lived in the United States from 1916 to 1920 to attend schools in Austin and Chicago. He pursued a concert career in Mexico in 1921 and 1922, but decided to return to Chicago to finish his course of study. Having gained additional experience while securing his diploma, he was accomplished enough as a performer to join the distinguished Mexican musician Carlos Chávez in a series of recitals in his homeland which introduced a number of important chamber works to that country. From 1926 to 1928, back in the United States, he worked as a theater violinist and orchestra conductor in San Antonio and Mobile, Alabama. In 1929, Chávez summoned Revueltas to Mexico to become his assistant with the newly formed Orquesta Sinfónica de México. It was during his seven years in that post, and with the encouragement of Chávez, that Revueltas undertook serious work as a composer. He also became involved with the cause of workers' and artists' rights during that volatile time, and in 1937, he went to Spain to conduct concerts of his own music in support of the Loyalist government. He returned to Mexico City the following year, overburdening himself with a plethora of activities in an attempt to defeat the poverty that had plagued him throughout his life, and he took to drink to ease the strain. On October 5, 1940, at the age of forty, Revueltas died of pneumonia precipitated by his crushing life style, an incalculable loss to Mexican music. In a fitting posthumous tribute, his remains were moved to the Rotunda de los Hombres Ilustres in Mexico City on March 3, 1976.

La Noche de los Mayas ("The Night of the Mayas") was composed in 1939 as the music for a film by that name directed by Chano Urueta with a script by Antonio Médiz Bolio. The Mexican conductor José Ives Limantour worked Revueltas' score into a four-movement suite for orchestra in 1960. The first movement, *Night of the Mayas*, begins and ends with a huge massed cry from the full orchestra, but the long central section contains a tender contrasting theme of short phrases connected by sustained notes. *Night of the Jaranas*, a dance type inherited from the days of the Spanish conquest of Mexico, is brilliant and fiery and heady with the excitement created by its vibrant cross-rhythms. *Night of the Yucatan* is largely lyrical and contemplative, and includes the quotation of a traditional native melody — *Konex Konex Palaxén* ("Come on, come on boys, the sun is about to set") — by the solo flute accompanied by drum. The finale (*Night of Enchantment*) is a showcase for percussion, whose violent, obsessive drumming patterns bring an orgiastic frenzy to this music. The suite closes with a reminiscence of the orchestral cry that opened the first movement.