

Chapel Hill Philharmonia

Sunday, 11 December 2022
7:30 p.m.

Moeser Auditorium
University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill

Vincent L. Povázsay,
Guest Conductor

A Mosaic of Music

Overture in C Major

Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel (1805-1847)

Conga del Fuego Nuevo

Arturo Márquez (b. 1950)

Intermission

Symphony No. 1 in E Minor, Op. 39

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

Andante ma non troppo; Allegro energico

Andante; Stringendo al doppio movimento; Andante

Scherzo: Allegro; Lento; Allegro

Andante; Allegro molto; Andante assai; Allegro molto; Andante



North
Carolina
Arts
Council
Fifty years
of leadership

This program is supported by the Orange County
Arts Commission and the North Carolina Arts
Council, a division of the Department of Natural
and Cultural Resources



ORANGE COUNTY
ARTS COMMISSION

A Mosaic of Music

Music is, for me, like a beautiful mosaic which God has put together. He takes all the pieces in his hand, throws them into the world, and we have to recreate the picture from the pieces. — Jean Sibelius

In our concert we present the musical pictures that three composers made from the pieces they found: the only symphonic work by the sister of the more famous Mendelssohn; one of the many symphonic dance works in Latin rhythms by Márquez; and the first of the seven symphonies by Sibelius.

Mendelssohn-Hensel: Overture in C Major

In a time when women in the affluent classes were expected to play their defined roles in society, it was difficult for a great artistic talent like Fanny Mendelssohn's to be fulfilled. The older sister of Felix, she also showed her musical gifts early. (At 14, for her father's birthday, she played from memory all 24 of the Preludes from Bach's *Well-tempered Clavier*.) Both children were given ample scope to develop, with excellent teachers and opportunities to play and compose — for the enjoyment of the family and their friends. But when it came to being recognized outside that circle, by public performance or publication of compositions, Fanny was blocked for a long time. A few of her songs were published (with her permission) under Felix's name.



When she married artist Wilhelm Hensel in 1829, things changed. In 1830, after giving birth to their only child, she returned to composing, this time in larger forms. After three cantatas for voices and orchestra, she wrote her only work for orchestra alone, the Overture in C. Unlike Felix, she had not learned instruments other than the piano, so her understanding of instrumentation was somewhat limited. But with his helpful advice she learned quickly, as the wind parts in the overture show. Unlike her parents, her husband saw to it that a good deal of her work was published. But the overture was not included; it was rediscovered in 1996.

Her overture has echoes of those of Felix, especially *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*. There is a slow introduction and a transition passage for violins leading to the main body, a fast *Allegro*. Most of the melodic material is assigned to the violins and woodwinds, with some fanfare passages for brass.

Márquez: Conga del Fuego Nuevo

Arturo Márquez grew up in a family of performers. His grandfather was a well-known folk musician, and his father played in *mariachi* bands. He started writing music at age 16, and studied at the Mexican Music Conservatory. His music has mostly been in the traditions of his native country, especially its dance forms.

Interest in his work was heightened by the performances of his *Danzon No. 2* by the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra directed by Gustavo Dudamel in their 2007 world tour. [The Chapel Hill Philharmonia performed that work in 2019.]



Márquez's *Conga del Fuego Nuevo* is a 2005 concert piece for symphony orchestra, based on the dance called conga. The title refers to a ceremony of the Aztecs, who had two calendars: a "ritual" one of 260 days, and a "daily" one of 365 days. Once every 52 years the beginning of those two calendars would coincide. This was regarded as the start of a new world, and to make sure it began appropriately the ceremony of the "new fire" was performed, when all fires were extinguished and new ones started. (There was more ritual, involving human sacrifice, but...)

Like other dances that trace their origins to African slaves of the Caribbean islands, the conga was developed in Cuba. And like some of the others, at first it was regarded as disreputable and even banned from public use. In the typical cycle, it went from low-class to acceptable to popular to *passé*. Here is the conga rhythm as used in a popular dance step (for example, in a conga line):



Márquez uses many Mexican styles in his treatment of the conga. Notable is a long section for trumpets in *marachi* style. But underneath it all is the infectious beat of the conga rhythm.

Sibelius: Symphony No. 1 in E Minor, Op 39

Jean Sibelius had his first piano lessons at age seven. At ten he was given a violin and set himself the goal of becoming a concert artist. But he also began composing, without any instruction. He started law school, but soon switched to the music conservatory in Helsinki, where he had his first lessons in composition. A year in Berlin and another in Vienna followed, during which he gave up hopes of a solo career, having concluded that he started too late. Returning to Helsinki, he immersed himself in Finnish legends and began writing tone poems about them. Performances of his works obtained for him a ten-year grant which allowed him to devote himself entirely to composing (this was later extended for life). At this time his orchestral works were almost entirely programmatic, descriptive of Finland, its history, its beauty, and its legends.

In 1898 he began work on his first symphony. It was a time of patriotic fervor because the Czar was curtailing Finland's autonomy within the Russian Empire. Sibelius composed a series of tableaux about Finnish history, in response to the suppression of a newspaper. The last of these, *Finland Awakens*, became after small revisions the tone poem *Finlandia*, by far Sibelius's most popular work.

The symphony was well received at its Helsinki premiere in 1899, but Sibelius was unhappy with part of it and revised it for a European tour with the conductor Robert Kajanus and his orchestra. This was a great success and gave Sibelius international recognition as an important composer.



Already in this symphony Sibelius exhibits his "organic" approach, building big statements from small earlier ones. There are yearning melodies reminiscent of Tchaikovsky, whom Sibelius admired, but they are typically of the step-wise type that he favored: moving from one note to another closely above or below. (Think of the big melody in *Finlandia*.)

The symphony opens with a solo clarinet, over soft rumbling tympani, playing a forlorn melody. The second violins burst in before the clarinet is quite finished, the first violins announce the first theme of the *Allegro*, and the movement is underway. Four distinct themes are introduced, each by a different part of the orchestra. The third of these, first played by the flutes, with a four note motif marching up and down the scale, dominates the development. The recapitulation begins as the upper strings slip in with the second theme while the rest of the orchestra is continuing the development. After a short coda the movement ends quickly with two strong pizzicato chords.

The *Andante* second movement begins with a calm step-wise melody in violins and cellos, completed by the clarinets:

1st Violin, Cello (in octaves)

Clarinets

The first two bars contain the basic elements for most of what follows. In the middle section there is a long *stringendo* until the tempo is exactly doubled. While the strings run up and down with rapid notes, the main theme returns in the original tempo, *fortissimo* in the winds. But suddenly things quiet down and the scene of the opening returns as the violins and cellos restate the melody one last time.

Sibelius gives the tympani the first statement of the basic motif of the scherzo, over strumming pizzicato chords in the strings. This pattern is passed around and then developed in a contrapuntal manner. The slower middle section features the winds. In the brief coda the drums pound out the motif while the strumming strings and winds rush toward the end.

Tympani

f

The finale opens with the clarinet melody from the start of the symphony, now proclaimed by the whole string section. This is followed by an accelerating introduction to the *Allegro molto* section, built on a folk dance tune. The tempo increases and the intensity rises, with crashing chords. Suddenly the rest of the orchestra stops; the violins play a rapid descent from high D to low B, setting up the *Andante* second theme, a step-wise melody Tchaikovsky might have been proud of:

Violins

mf

The *Allegro* returns with *fugato* passages leading to a long crescendo, preparing the emotional high point of the movement, indeed of the whole symphony: the reprise of the second theme. First played softly by the solo clarinet, it soon breaks out in an impassioned unison statement by the strings, a reminder that Sibelius remained at heart a violinist. The second part of the melody is passed to the winds and brasses while the strings play a sustained B in six octaves. After the climax the tonality returns to the home key of E minor for a short coda, and the work closes with a pair of soft pizzicato chords over a fading tympani roll. No triumphant resolution, no heroic tragedy, perhaps more like a resigned sigh.