

# Symphony No. 1: The Travails of Persiles and Sigismunda

## Instrumentation

- 3 Flutes (2<sup>nd</sup> doubling Piccolo, 3<sup>rd</sup> doubling Alto Flute in G), 3 Oboes (3<sup>rd</sup> doubling English Horn), 2 Clarinets in Bb (2<sup>nd</sup> doubling Clarinet in E-flat), 2 Bassoons (2<sup>nd</sup> doubling Contrabassoon)
- 4 Horns in F, 2 Trumpets in C, 3 Trombones, 1 Tuba
- Timpani; Perc. (2 players): Vibraphone, Snare Drum, Glockenspiel, Tubular Bells, Suspended Cymbal, Nipple Gong (medium), Tom toms: 2 sets of de 3 each (hi-med-lo), Triangle, Mexican Wind Whistle (silbato de viento), Crash Cymbals, Pea Whistle, Maracas, Tambourine, Claves, Bongos (hi-lo), Brake Drum, Tam tam, Xequerê, Gran Cassa
- Harp
- Celesta
- Strings

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**Symphony No. 1:** The Travails of Persiles and Sigismunda.

Duration: 45 minutes.

During my teenage years Cervantes' "Don Quixote" of became a personal obsession of mine. His handling of the Spanish language, his wit and sense of humor turned out to be irresistible to me. I read and reread the novel several times, always pen and paper in hand, to the point that my rather weighty notebook ended virtually without a single free page. For this reason, I find it very rewarding to be part of the celebrations for the fourth centenary of the death of Cervantes. Coincidentally, this year also marks 400 years since the publication of "The Travails of Persiles and Sigismunda" the last novel by the great Spanish writer, which he completed only a few days before his death and in whose prologue he writes prophetically: "Adieu to gaiety, adieu to wit, adieu my pleasant friends, for I am dying, yet hoping to see you all again happy in another world". This novel has been the source of inspiration for my first symphony.

The four movements of this work correspond to the four books that make up the novel, throughout which the two main protagonists encounter countless characters on their pilgrimage from the freezing Scandinavian lands to Rome. Persiles and Sigismunda, two Scandinavian nobles, pretend to be brothers throughout the novel, hiding their true identity and romance, which is only consummated when they join in marriage in Rome and kiss the feet of the Supreme Pontiff. A story of this magnitude needed an epic treatment, which is why I decided to write a symphony, a type of orchestral composition historically more ambitious and capable of accommodating within itself a whole universe of themes and musical motifs that become transformed over throughout its several movements.

Despite being based on the novel, this symphony is an abstract musical work that stands on its own, so prior reading of the novel is not a requirement to enjoy it. Moreover, I did not try any time describe the events that occur in the

novel in strictly chronological order, instead my intention was to convey the spirit, greatness and humor contained within each of its four books. Hence, this is not a symphonic poem. Nor do I use musical elements from the countries referred to in the novel or contemporary musical styles contemporary to Cervantes. It is, therefore, a personal reading of a composer who laughs, enjoy and grieves with Cervantes, and who besides being South American, is above all cosmopolitan, because in addition to my native country, Peru, I also have lived in Finland, France, and the United States.

The bulk of my catalog is made up of instrumental works and amongst them, orchestral compositions feature prominently. This is why writing a symphony was a natural and necessary step for me, a step that I would not have been able to take only five years ago, as the construction of a symphony is an enormously complex task. The symphonists I admire most are those who are economical in the use of their material but at the same time manage to exploit its full potential. Ideally the symphony is, for me, a self-sufficient organism that is born from a single cell, which grows and develops to reach large proportions and provides a solid structure in which all essential elements are structurally interrelated. This underlying unity coexists with the most incredible motivic, melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, and timbral diversity, and it is precisely this quality what gives the symphony its character as a self-sufficient universe.

"Symphony No.1: The Travails of Persiles and Sigismunda" begins with its most extensive movement in which I have ventured to regions previously which to me had lain unexplored. The second movement is calm in nature, and the woodwind instruments rise to prominence, leading this movement's melodic paths. The third movement is festive and Latin American in character, employing rhythms from this region and instruments like the maracas and bongo. The fourth and last movement is born from an ominous theme that dominates the first half and which leads, eventually, to a brief recap in which all preceding movements are cited, not literally, but rather seen under the veil from the fourth movement's own musical aura. Towards the end, the main theme of this movement reaches its climax, which is, in turn, the climax of the whole symphony, after which we return to the opening theme and finally culminate with the whole orchestra in full force and plenitude.

My sincere thanks to Felix Alcaráz Vellisca and the National Orchestra and Choir of Spain for this commission and to the Festival Internacional Cervantino for offering the ideal frame for the conception of this piece. First symphonies are an important step in any composer's career, and that is why I am delighted that the premiere has fallen into the hands of the brilliant David Afkham and the excellent musicians of the National Orchestra of Spain.

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