

Symphony No. 2

JOHN CORIGLIANO

B. February 16, 1938, New York City

Premiered November 30, 2000 by the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Seiji Ozawa.

Scored for 11 violins, four violas, four cellos and two basses (approx. 40 minutes).

Among the accolades bestowed upon acclaimed composer John Corigliano are the 2001 Pulitzer Prize in Music for his Symphony No. 2 and an Academy Award for *The Red Violin*, his third film score. His second symphony was commissioned by the Boston Symphony to celebrate the centennial of the orchestra's Symphony Hall. Corigliano conceived the work as a quartet that evokes the idea of death and expands upon the theme of departure explored in his 1995 string quartet written for the disbanding of the Cleveland Quartet.

The emotional intensity of the symphony is created through extremes in range and texture rather than through contrasts in dynamic levels. The prelude is a short movement but artfully sets the stage for what appears in the following movements. The piece opens with a low and restless theme in the basses that progresses chromatically into the higher register of the violins. The sense of distortion that results is achieved through a purposeful displacement of entries as opposed to a consistent synchronization among the instruments. The unfocused texture of the movement slowly progresses into the basic material of the symphony only to disappear into silence. Gently muted tones are employed throughout to further evoke the theme of departure.

The scherzo begins dramatically with high-pitched repetitive chords that build toward a frenzy and give way to a more placid theme with a repeated bass line before a return to the opening material. Where the serenity of ensuing nocturne is concerned, Corigliano claims to have drawn inspiration from a vacation he took to Morocco. Recalling his experience of being awakened by sounds from the mosques, the composer explains that he heard "First one, then another, and finally dozens (of prayers)..., and at one moment all of the calls (happened to) hold on to a single note." This movement invites the listener into this personal experience, closing with the silence before daybreak.

The *Fugue* and *Postlude* further expand upon the thematic material introduced in the previous movements. The fugue presents the ferocity and tension of this symphony within a traditional format. Calling forth the emotion of parting, a muted, sweetly tempered violin solo opens the final movement over a soft and distant backdrop of lower voices. This intensifies into a sonority approximating that of a siren, thereafter fading to a quiet close.

This is the Detroit Symphony Orchestra premiere of John Corigliano's Symphony No. 2.

DSO SHOP @ THE MAX RECOMMENDS:

Corigliano, Symphony No. 2, John Storgaards conducting the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, Ondine 1039.

Program note by Aja Burrell Wood, a graduate student in ethnomusicology at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance.