

# **Symphony No. 1 (1989)** composed by John Corigliano

dedicated in memory of Sheldon Shkolnik

first performances: Chicago Symphony Orchestra: March 15, 16, and 17, 1990, conducted Daniel Barenboim

## **I. Apologue: Of Rage and Remembrance**

musical quotation of Sheldon Shkolnik

ABA ternary form

A section: multiple shards of ideas

- anguish in face of friend's impending death = unison A by strings (growing in volume, vibrato, bowing)

rage through:

- aleatoric freefall in piccolo
- chaotic and violent fanfares in brass
- "nasty" dissonant triplets

B section:

lyrical remembrance idea (marked *desolate*) in counterpoint with a quotation of pre-existing music for solo piano

- this preexistent music is played by an offstage pianist, musically identified with Shkolnik, who performs Leopold Godowsky's transcription of a tango by Albéniz (a piece Corigliano recalled Shkolnik having often played).
- disembodied, haunting, nostalgic, out of time with the symphony
- what does this quotation tell us about the "past anterior, or absent presence"?

## **II. Tarantella**

- in memory of Jack Romann, amateur pianist and former director of concert/artist dept. of Baldwin Piano Company
- orchestration of fourth movement from Corigliano's *Gazebo Dances* (1972) originally written for piano four hands and dedicated to Romann and his friend photographer and pianist Christian Steiner
- music concerns madness—jaunty and feverish, playful and grotesque
- ending is a brutal scream

## **III. Chaconne: Giulio's Song**

- string chaconne of slowly shifting, nonfunctional harmonies—embedded in these is a twelve tone row that emerges later in the movement
- "Giulio's Song" is the main theme is a melody improvised and recorded in 1962 by cellist Giulio Sorrentino with Corigliano accompanying him on piano.

- However, Corigliano does not play the recording or even transcribe it precisely—instead he privileges live performance by the onstage cellist.
- The melody includes some codes of mourning—descending half steps and whole-tone tetrachord (maybe connecting to Bach and/or Alban Berg)
- the complete melody is a reflection of Sorrentino's individual improvisatory style
- then, a second solo cello enters—this duet between the two cellos is the first of a series of musical remembrances of friends.
  - this first remembrance of a friend was a professional cellist who was Giulio's teacher and also died of AIDS—Fortunato Arico. The two cellos expound on the theme in a musical dialogue, *quasi recitative*
- Next, over the second iteration of the chaconne is a succession of new brief melodies in the winds and brass that bear traces of epitaphs. Playwright and librettist William M. Hoffman wrote short phrases naming and describing mutual friends who had died; Corigliano set these to music and then erased the text—only the names are given, and only in the conductor's score
  - Nine friends named in the score—revealed to conductor but concealed from audience. This was inspired by the AIDS quilt.
- Chaconne closes with final duet between solo cellos.
- Conclusion of section: trumpet begins "A" that opened the symphony—this is taken up by other brass and overpowers the orchestra. Rage motifs return. Perhaps a hint of the *Dies irae*
- The rhythm of a funeral march emerges and leads to an explosive orchestral climax
- Only solo cello remains, softly playing A that opened the work

## **IV. Epilogue**

- repeated pattern of waves of brass chords
- piano solo from first movement returns, as does a distant version of the tarantella melody. Two solo cellos recapitulate the dialogue of the third movement.
- slow diminuendo leaves solo cello cello holding the same perpetual A and finally fading away. A very special meaning to the warmth of vibrato here.