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Madison Symphony Orchestra Program Notes
by J. Michael Allsen
Subscription Program No. 7: Four the Soul
April 10-11-12, 2026

Guest conductor Laura Jackson leads this program, titled "Four for the Soul." We open with most popular work by Peruvian composer Jimmy López, his 2008 *Fiesta! Four Pop Dances for Orchestra*, an eclectic work that ends with a blazing *Techno* finale. We then have a work for four guitars and orchestra, the *Concierto Andaluz*, by the Spanish master Joaquin Rodrigo. This work drawers on the Andalusian flamenco music Rodrigo grew up with. Our soloists for this program, the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet, played the same work when they last appeared with the MSO in 2012. Our closing work is the *Symphony No. 2* of Sibelius, one of the great landmarks of early 20th century symphonic writing.

One of today's most prominent composers, Jimmy López channels a broad range of musical styles in his composition: Afro Peruvian music from his homeland, other Latin American styles, and a large range of popular music styles.

Jimmy López
Born: October 21, 1978, Lima, Peru.

Fiesta! Four Pop Dances for Orchestra

- **Composed**: 2007.
- **Premiere**: An initial chamber orchestra version was commissioned by conductor Miguel Harth-Bedoya for the hundredth anniversary of the Lima, Philharmonic Society, and was performed by them in 2007. Harth-Bedoya then conducted the full orchestra version heard here with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra on May 31, 2008.
- **Previous MSO Performances**: This is our first performance of the work.
- **Duration**: 10:00.

Background

Fiesta! was inspired in part by the various genres of dance music that fall under the broad heading of Techno. His hope is "to establish a connection with younger generations who are not usually drawn to concerts of classical music."

Chicago Sun-Times critic Andrew Patner has called Jimmy López "one of the most interesting composers anywhere today," Born in Peru, the award-winning López studied initially in Lima, before completing graduate degrees in composition at the Sibelius Academy in Finland and at the University of California, Berkeley. His *Fiesta!* was a relatively early work that has become very popular, with performances by well over 100 orchestras worldwide. More recently, he has premiered a successful opera, *Bel Canto* (2015), with the Chicago Lyric Opera. His symphonic poem *Aino* (2022), inspired by his studies in Finland, was premiered by the Orchestre de Paris, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra (Amsterdam), and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Regarding *Fiesta!*, López wrote in 2008 that

> *Fiesta!* draws influences from several musical sources including European academic compositional techniques, Latin American music, Afro-Peruvian music, and today's pop music. It utilizes elaborate developmental techniques while keeping the primeval driving forces still latent in popular culture… This is the first piece where I have made explicit use of elements from popular music, but it is certainly not the first time it's been done. Composers from the past, especially during the Baroque, would write suites that would consist of a series of dances with names such as allemande, gigue, sarabande, etc. These dances were very popular at European courts: the nobles would gather and dance to the accompaniment of a small, instrumental ensemble-in-residence. Later on, some composers decided to use these dances and make them more sophisticated. That was part of my intention when picking up the genres [that are used here]. I believe they have enough potential to justify further development, but always keeping those primeval driving forces present in them.

What You'll Hear

This work is set in four movements:

- *Trance 1*, serving as a kind of intense prelude.
- *Countertime*, which places intense rhythms above an underlying beat that is sometimes unplayed.
- *Trance 2*, a more percussion-dominated counterpart to the opening movement.
- *Techno*, a wild conclusion.

The opening movement, *Trance 1*, takes its name from a subgenre of electronic dance music (EDM) that was popularized in the 1990s and 2000s. Like most EDM, Trance is based upon a fast and unvarying drum beat, but it often incorporates moments with no drum, where atmospheric sounds and melody take precedent. However, López also notes that "I also use the word 'trance' in its original meaning, thus trying to convey the hypnotizing state achieved while listening to a constantly shifting melody against a static background, much like in Hindu music, where melodies unfold through a series of melismas [long vocal passages on a single syllable] against a pedal note and over a span of several minutes." Though the single-minded drum beat of Trance music is missing in *Trance I*, the rhythmic energy is all there in twittering motives tossed around the orchestra. There is a sense of relaxation at the end when the low strings introduce a longer theme.

In explaining the title of the second moment, López notes: "The word *Countertime* has been derived from 'counterpoint', which in the realm of music theory defines the rules of coexistence and interaction between two or more melodies, the goal being to produce a harmonious whole. I use the word countertime to underline the interaction between an underlying steady pulse (not written out in the score) and the actual rhythms playing against it." *Countertime* is fiercely rhythmic from the opening bar. There is a slight slackening near the middle, but it ends as it began.

Trance 2 has the same outlines as the opening movement, but here percussion takes the lead, particularly in a Latin-flavored trio of congas, bongos, and timpani. López notes that "*Techno*, the fourth and final movement uses Latin American rhythms, such as merengue." Once again, this is musical for unrelenting rhythmic intensity. Near the end, bass drum, timpani, and cymbals replicate the simple drum machine beat that underlies most Techno dance pieces,

Rodrigo, one of Spain's leading composers in the 20th century, and one of the great masters of writing for the guitar, wrote this work for Celedonio Romero and his sons in 1967. It remains the most popular work written for guitar quartet and orchestra.

Joaquin Rodrigo
Born: November 22, 1901, Sagunto, Spain.
Died: July 6, 1999, Madrid, Spain.

Concierto Andaluz for Four Guitars and Orchestra

- **Composed**: 1966-67 for guitarist Celedonio Romero and his sons.
- **Premiere**: The Romeros were soloists with the San Antonio Symphony Orchestra at the premiere on November 18, 1967.
- **Previous MSO Performances**: 1988 (the Romeros); 2012 (Los Angeles Guitar Quartet).
- **Duration**: 24:00.

Background

Nearly blind from early childhood onwards, Rodrigo had a long and amazingly diverse career. As in this work, much of Rodrigo's music draws upon the rich folk music of Spain.

In a long multifaceted career, Joaquin Rodrigo worked as a pianist, music critic, university professor, radio executive, and as an activist for the Spanish National Organization for the Blind. (Rodrigo was almost completely blind from age three as a result of Diphtheria.) However, from the 1940s onwards he was also recognized as one of Spain's foremost composers. As a young man, he studied in Paris, the center of the *avant garde*, but Rodrigo described his own style as *neocasticista* (neo-traditional, or neo-classical). His mature music was rooted in distinctly Spanish forms and rhythms, and he was particularly focused upon the guitar, the most prominent instrument of Spanish traditional music. Here he was drawing on a Spanish guitar tradition that stretches back to the Renaissance and incorporates a host of rich folk styles. His 1939 *Concierto de Aranjuez*—undoubtedly the most popular of all guitar concertos—was only the first of several Rodrigo orchestral works with solo guitar, guitar duo, or guitar quartet. He also composed a large number of important works for solo guitar.

The *Concierto Andaluz* was composed in 1967 in response to a commission by Celedonio Romero, and it is dedicated to Romero and his sons Celin, Pepe, and Angel. Celedonio (1913-1996) was among the leading guitarists and guitar composers of his generation. He composed well over 100 works of his own for solo guitar and combinations of guitars and orchestra but also commissioned works from major Spanish composers. Escaping from the repressive Franco regime in 1957, Romero and his family settled in California, and from the 1960s onwards, he toured extensively with his three sons: they were soloists for our first performance of the *Concierto Andaluz* in 1988. (The Romero quartet continues today with Celedonio's sons Celin and Pepe, and grandsons Celino and Lito.) The members of the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet are the direct inheritors of this tradition: the four

original members of the ensemble met at the University of Southern California in 1980, when they were all students of Pepe Romero.

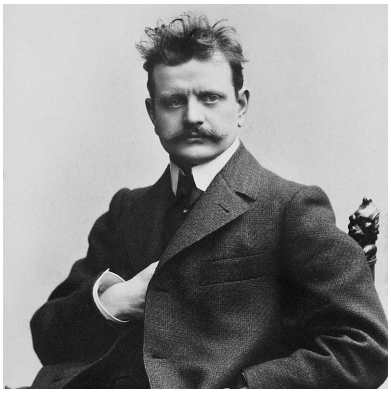
What You'll Hear

The work is set in three movements:

- An opening movement based upon the *bolero* and other Andalusian forms.
- A slow movement based upon a baroque-style *chaconne* figure,
- A final movement based upon two contrasting dances, one graceful and the other aggressive.

As in all of Rodrigo's music, Spanish influence is clearly audible in the *Concierto Andaluz* (*Andalusian Concerto*)—a reference to the culturally rich region in southern Spain that is home to *Flamenco* and other styles. Its "classicism" is evident in its small orchestra and its clear-cut musical forms. It is set in three movements, or "scenes." The first of these (*Tempo di bolero*) has the guitars and orchestra constantly trading roles, with the incisive *bolero* rhythm always present. This moves into what Rodrigo describes as a section of "typically Andalusian" style—more lyrical and melancholy The opening movement closes with a spirited *bulieras*—a *Flamenco* guitar pattern rich in cross-rhythms. In the second movement (*Adagio*) the opening section refers to the Baroque *chaconne*: a constantly repeating descending figure with guitar and woodwind arabesques around it. There is a livelier middle section centered on a long passage for the guitars—an extended cadenza—before a return of the solemn *chaconne* figure. The closing movement (*Allegro gentile*) returns again to themes that are based on Andalusian forms: its two main themes are inspired by a flowing *sevillanas* (a festival dance that alternates triple and duple meter) and a more aggressive *zapateado* (the *macho* solo man's stomping dance of *Flamenco*).

Sibelius has a well-deserved reputation as one of the early 20th century's finest symphony composers. His *Symphony No. 2* of 1901 is a true symphonic masterwork and remains the most frequently-performed of his seven symphonies.



Jean Sibelius
Born: December 8, 1865, Hämeenlinna, Finland.
Died: September 20, 1957, Järvenpää, Finland.

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 43

- **Composed**: 1901.
- **Premiere**: Sibelius conducted the premiere in Helsinki, Finland, on March 8, 1902.
- **Previous MSO Performances**: We have played this work five times previously at these concerts, between 1942 and 2011.
- **Duration**: 44:00.

Background

In his symphonies, Sibelius placed the focus on the music itself, rather than programmatic inspiration. The *Symphony No. 2* contains some wildly creative musical forms in it four movements.

In the opening years of the 20th century the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius was enjoying ever-increasing international renown. He had already found his distinctive musical voice and was recognized in his homeland and throughout Europe as Finland's leading composer. With success came the opportunity to travel, allowing Sibelius to meet other musicians, hear new works, and conduct his own music. He spent the first half of 1901 in Italy, where he took time off from his travels to compose. Most of the *Symphony No.2* was written during that spring, in a small, rented villa in the hills near Genoa. He returned to Finland later that year and added the finishing touches to the work.

Sibelius is often heard as a Finnish nationalist—an impression strengthened by popular symphonic poems on Finnish themes such as the *Lemmkäinen* cycle or his well-known *Finlandia*. However, he was after something different in his symphonies. In a 1934 interview, he noted that:

> My symphonies are music conceived and worked out solely in terms of music, with no literary basis. I am not a literary musician—for me, music begins where words cease. A scene can be expressed in painting, and a drama in words, but a symphony should be music first and last. Of course, it has happened that, quite unbidden, some mental image has established itself in my head in connection with a movement I have been writing, but the germ and fertilization have been solely musical.

The *Symphony No.2* is no exception. There is a lasting controversy about a hidden program for the symphony, supposedly confided by Sibelius to his friend, the conductor Georg Schéevoigt. The "program" was a vaguely defined set of

impressions of Finnish culture and politics, but the composer himself never commented on it in public. If we are to take any "mental image" away from the *Symphony No.2* it might be just this sort of vague impression of a Finnish landscape. However, the symphony's movements do not need any literary support: they are worked out with a logical simplicity that makes this one of the most immediately appealing of Sibelius's symphonies.

What You'll Hear

This work is set in four movements:

- An unorthodox first movement in which longer themes are assembled from a series of short motives and then dissolve at the end.
- A slow movement set in variant of sonata form.
- A relatively conventional three-part scherzo, which leads directly into the finale.
- A finale, which like the second movement is in an innovative sonata form.

In the opening movement (*Allegretto*), Sibelius turns conventional first-movement form on its head. In place of the usual exposition that presents a few long melodies for later dissection and development, this movement begins with a series of several little melodic jewels, which are laid out quite simply, and in rapid succession. As the movement continues, he gradually interweaves these ideas into ever-longer phrases, particularly during a lengthy development section. There is a rather subdued high point that closes the development. At the end, all of this grand music dissolves back into its constituent parts, and the movement ends as quietly as it began.

The lengthy second movement (*Andante, ma rubato*) is set in an only slightly more conventional sonata form. The opening group of themes begins with bassoons playing a lugubrious melody above *pizzicato* triplets in the basses. This bassoon melody is gradually joined by the remaining woodwinds, strings and brass. After a clearly defined break, the strings begin a contrasting second group of ideas with a long, flowing melody. The development concentrates on material from the first group and ends with another sharp break. In the recapitulation, Sibelius begins with material from the second main theme, but merges themes from both groups into new combinations. Once again, the movement ends on a quiet note.

Beginning with the symphonies of Haydn and Mozart, third movements were traditionally set in a three-part form. Sibelius's scherzo (*Vivacissimo*) stays within this tradition, but he still manages to put his own stamp on the form. The opening section combines perpetual motion in the strings with a brief minor-key motive

passed through the woodwinds. The middle section is a quiet folklike melody presented by the solo oboe. This pastoral interlude is rudely interrupted by a return of the opening music, but Sibelius works in another statement of the oboe melody before ending the movement with a lively coda. This leads without pause into the finale (*Allegro moderato*).

The finale's opening theme is a broad melody carried by strings and brass. After an agitated transition, the lower strings have a repeated figure that serves as the background for the second main theme, begun by the solo oboe. A brief fanfare from the brass closes the exposition and the development begins quietly, with the first theme heard in the upper woodwinds. Much of the development is concerned with motives from the first theme, which build gradually towards a immense climax and a return of the opening music. Sibelius's restatement of the second theme is extended and grows inexorably towards a conclusion. A return of the brass fanfare signals the beginning of the end, and Sibelius starts the coda with a final statement of the opening melody. Trumpets, and eventually the entire brass section take up a final, transformed version of this melody to close the symphony

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