

***Danzon No. 2***  
**Arturo Márquez**

In the struggle for success in life it is good to have a champion (or two) for one's cause. This is especially true for the composer of classical music. The Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra is doing its part in championing young composers, and we will have a fine example of this tonight with the World Premiere performance of Jonathan Cziner's *Violin Concerto* which was commissioned on the basis of his very successful stint as composer-in-residence here last season.

The relationship between Arturo Márquez and Gustavo Dudamel is a matter of strengths enhancing strengths. While it is great for a composer to have as a champion the, arguably, most popular and charismatic conductor in the world, Márquez has also come to the aid of Dudamel. This was during these ongoing troubled times for Venezuela, whose regime cancelled Dudamel's tours with the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela. Dudamel was desperately striving to find a way to continue to work with the young musicians of the Americas. As chronicled in the recent documentary, ¡Viva Maestro!, Márquez was the driving, organizing force for Dudamel to conduct an orchestra of 160 youths ranging from the NAFTA countries to Venezuela and Argentina in concert in Mexico City in 2018. While Dudamel led the orchestra in works by Dvořák and John Williams, Márquez conducted his own *Alas (a Malala)* described in the LA Times as "an electrifying Caribbean-style dance.... The orchestra musicians swayed in their seats, and a local youth chorus executed stirring hand movements while it sang."

Márquez has a trans-American and even European family and musical history. He was born in Álamos Mexico in 1950 where his father was a mariachi musician. Márquez moved with his family to La Puente, California, when he was 12 (hence his perfect English). After learning the violin and band instruments in high school, he moved to Mexico City, where he enrolled in the Conservatory of Music and the Institute of Fine Arts. He won a scholarship to study in Paris, where he worked with Jacques Castérède. He received a Fulbright Scholarship and used it to earn a graduate degree in composition from the California Arts Institute in Valencia, where he worked with Morton Subotnick and Mel Powell.

*Danzón No. 2* is Márquez's most well-known and popular composition; it is likely the most famous Mexican orchestral composition outside of Mexico. It surely helped that Dudamel took the piece on tour across the US and Europe with the Simón Bolívar Orchestra and has made both audio (Simón Bolívar) and video (LA Philharmonic) recordings of it. Yet, as wildly popular as *Danzón No. 2* has become, it is **NOT** the unofficial "Second National Anthem of Mexico" as some presumptuous U.S. annotator put in his 2017 notes and that numerous, sheep-like, program commentators have copied. There is absolutely no dispute among Mexicans that the unofficial "Second National Anthem of Mexico" is the *Huapango* (1941) by José Pablo Moncayo.



# Huapango

From Márquez's program notes for the 1994 premiere:

The idea of writing the *Danzón No. 2* originated in 1993 during a trip to Malinalco with the painter Andrés Fonseca and the dancer Irene Martínez, both of whom are experts in salon dances with a special passion for the danzón, which they were able to transmit to me from the beginning, and also during later trips to Veracruz and visits to the Colonia Salon in Mexico City.

From these experiences onward, I started to learn the danzón's rhythms, its form, its melodic outline, and to listen to the old recordings by Acerina and his Danzonera Orchestra. I was fascinated and I started to understand that the apparent lightness of the danzón is only like a visiting card for a type of music full of sensuality and qualitative seriousness, a genre which old Mexican people continue to dance with a touch of nostalgia and a jubilant escape towards their own emotional world; we can fortunately still see this in the embrace between music and dance that occurs in the State of Veracruz and in the dance parlors of Mexico City.

The *Danzón No. 2* is a tribute to the environment that nourishes the genre. It endeavors to get as close as possible to the dance, to its nostalgic melodies, to its wild rhythms, and although it violates its intimacy, its form and its harmonic language. It is a very personal way of paying my respects and expressing my emotions towards truly popular music. *Danzón No. 2* was written on a commission by the Department of Musical Activities at Mexico's National Autonomous University and is dedicated to my daughter Lily.

Sometimes a "dance" can express a poignancy and depth of feeling, even philosophic musings that are more associated with the esteemed sonata form in symphonies. The *Danzón No. 2* opens with a wistful melody in the clarinet -- rhythmically accompanied by the claves, a percussion instrument of handheld cylinders of hardwood which are struck together. This melody is the glue that holds the piece together coming in various instrumental tones and tempos. There are more forceful rhythmic episodes including one with the low brass and cellos and finally an exultant trumpet solo leading to an exuberant final crescendo. (In one performance of *Danzón No. 2* at the London Proms, Dudamel had his young, Bolívar charges crouch as the crescendo started softly and leap to their feet with the final fortissimo chord.)

- IPO Board Member Charles Amenta M.D.