

OSVALDO GOLIJOV

Born December 5, 1960 in La Playa, Argentina.

Sidereus (2010)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Memphis, Tennessee, October 16, 2010

Memphis Symphony Orchestra

Mei-Ann Chen, conductor

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 8 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, two horns, two trumpets, two trombones, tuba, timpani and strings

In our increasingly interconnected world, the multi-cultural music of Osvaldo Golijov speaks in a voice that is powerful yet touching, contemporary yet timeless. Golijov's parents, a piano teacher mother and a physician father, emigrated from Russia to Argentina, where Osvaldo was born on December 5, 1960 in La Playa, thirty miles from Buenos Aires, into a rich artistic environment in which he was exposed from infancy to such varied musical experiences as classical chamber music, Jewish liturgical and klezmer music, and the *tango nuevo* of Astor Piazzolla. He studied piano and composition at the local conservatory before moving in 1983 to Jerusalem, where he entered the Rubin Academy as a composition student of Mark Kopytman and immersed himself in the colliding musical traditions of that city.

Golijov came to the United States in 1986 to do his doctoral work with George Crumb at the University of Pennsylvania, and spent summers at Tanglewood on fellowship studying with Lukas Foss and Oliver Knussen. In 1990, he won Tanglewood's Fromm Commission, which resulted in *Yiddishbuk*, premiered by the St. Lawrence String Quartet at Tanglewood's Festival of Contemporary Music in July 1992 and winner the following year of the prestigious Kennedy Center Friedheim Award. Golijov's works, with their syntheses of European, American and Latin secular cultures and their deep spirituality drawn from both Judaism and Christianity, have brought him international notoriety and, in 2003, a coveted MacArthur Foundation "Genius Award." He was named *Musical America's* "2005 Composer of the Year," and in January and February 2006, Lincoln Center in New York presented a festival called "The Passion of Osvaldo Golijov." He is currently working on a commission for the Metropolitan Opera. Golijov has been on the faculty of the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts since 1991; he also teaches at the Boston Conservatory and the Tanglewood Music Center.

Golijov's *Sidereus* was commissioned by a consortium of 35 orchestras in honor of the recently retired Henry Fogel, who was the President of the League of American Orchestras from 2003 to 2008 after having served as Orchestra Manager of the New York Philharmonic, Executive Director of the National Symphony Orchestra and President of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. The piece reworks some material on which Golijov collaborated with composer, accordionist and friend Michael Ward-Bergeman for the soundtrack of Francis Ford Coppola's 2009 film *Tetro*. Golijov and Ward-Bergeman agreed that each could use ideas from the score in other works: Golijov transformed them in *Sidereus* and Ward-Bergeman expanded them for *Barbeich* for accordion and ensemble.

Sidereus takes its title and inspiration from *Sidereus Nuncius* ("Starry Messenger"), the epochal treatise that Galileo Galilei published in March 1610 to announce his unprecedented observations of the heavens through a telescope and his theory that the earth revolves around the sun, a notion that was condemned in 1632 by the Catholic Church "as false and contrary to Scripture." The Inquisition found Galileo "vehemently suspect of heresy" and sentenced him to house arrest for the last ten years of his life after he was forced to recant his theory.

Golijov wrote of his *Sidereus*, "The observations of Galileo included new discoveries on the surface of the moon. With these discoveries, the moon was no longer the province of poets exclusively. It had also become an object of inquiry: Could there be water there? Life? If there was life, then the Vatican was scared, because, as Cardinal Bellarmine wrote to Galileo: How were the people there created? How would their souls be saved? What do we do about Adam? Wasn't he supposed to be the first man? How do we explain the origin of possible life elsewhere? What about his rib? It's the duality: the moon is still good for love and lovers and poets, but a scientific observation can lead us to entirely new realizations.

"In *Sidereus*, the melodies and the harmony are simple, so they can reveal more upon closer examination. For the 'Moon' theme, I used a melody with a beautiful, open nature, a magnified scale fragment that my good friend and longtime collaborator accordionist Michael Ward Bergeman came up with some years ago when we both were trying to develop ideas for a musical depiction of the sky in

Patagonia. I then looked at that theme as if through the telescope and under the microscope, so that the textures, the patterns from which the melody emerges and into which it dissolves, point to a more molecular, atomic reality — like Galileo with his telescope.... There is a dark theme that opens the piece and reappears in the middle. It's sort of an ominous question mark that tears the fabric of a work, which is essentially spacious and breathes with a strange mixture of melancholy and optimism.”