

LEONARDO BALADA

Born 22 September 1933 in Barcelona, Spain

Symphony No. 6, "Symphony of Sorrows" (2005)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Barcelona, 26 February 2006; Barcelona Symphony Orchestra; Salvador Mas-Conde, conductor

THESE PERFORMANCES MARK THE AMERICAN AND PSO PREMIERE

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 20 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, two flutes, three oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, piano, harp and strings

Leonardo Balada came to music early. The son of a tailor in a family of opera-loving tailors in Barcelona, he began piano lessons at the age of nine, and his ambition to become a composer followed soon thereafter. Looking back on his youthful years, Balada recalled, "I felt how nice it was to play the music of somebody else; and then I felt it was *not* good enough — it's nicer if somebody plays *your* music. I must have been fifteen." After beginning his professional studies at the Barcelona Liceo Conservatory, he came to the United States as a student in 1956, enrolling first at the New York College of Music and, two years later, at the Juilliard School, from which he graduated in 1960. His composition teachers included Vincent Persichetti, Norman Dello Joio, Alexander Tansman and Aaron Copland; he studied conducting with Igor Markevitch. Balada subsequently taught at the Walden School, United Nations International School and Aspen Institute before joining the faculty of Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh in 1970, where he is University Professor of Composition.

Balada's creative catalog comprises an impressive list of compositions, recordings and performances: six operas (including *Zapata*, written in 1984 for Sherrill Milnes; *Christopher Columbus*, for José Carreras and Monserrat Caballé, premiered in 1989 at the Gran Teatre de Liceu in Barcelona in anticipation of the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America; and *Faust-bal*, premièred at the Teatro Real in Madrid in February 2009); six symphonies and more than a dozen other orchestral pieces; twenty concertos (including one each for bandoneón and castanets); and works for solo voice, organ, chorus, piano, guitar, and chamber ensembles. His music has been performed by leading orchestras in this country and abroad, and recorded on the Deutsche Grammophon, Naxos, Albany, Louisville, Serenus and Grenadilla labels; Lorin Maazel's performances with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra of the *Steel Symphony* and *Music for Oboe and Orchestra*, with soloist Cynthia Koledo DeAlmeida, were released on New World Records.

Though he composes in a modern, cosmopolitan idiom, Balada has been much influenced by the traditional view of music as a means of communication — the way in which human emotions may be translated into musical terms. In a feature article by Peter Eliot Stone in *The New York Times*, the composer stated, "The audience is important to me, but on my own terms. If a piece is good and it reaches the audience, it is twice as good. While I write, I sit mentally in the concert hall. I write the music I like to hear. Bobby Fischer, the chess player, said he was looking for the destruction of his enemy. I compose, sometimes, for the annihilation of my audience. I like to see the audience — not dead — but crying or screaming." Balada, like many composers today, aims at a synthesis of the music by which he has been influenced during the course of his career. Though he is ready to employ the technical innovations of such 20th-century masters as Varèse, Penderecki and Ligeti, his compositions also show a deep awareness of the continuity of the musical traditions of his native Spain. "In 1975, with *Homages to Casals and Sarasate* for orchestra, I initiated a new aesthetic period," he said. "Before that time, I wrote in the so-called 'avant-garde' style; that is, textures, aleatoric [chance] devices, orchestral color, etc. Now I incorporate old techniques with these new ones, such as melody, modulation and occasionally traditional harmonies. A sense of rhythm has always been detectable in my music, whatever the aesthetic tendencies might have been. In short, I blend the old and the new, hopefully in a personal style, which seeks as its ultimate goal the expression of the human soul and drama." Balada believes that folk song and dance, simple melodic lines and triadic harmonies may be blended with tone clusters and complex textures "to result in something different and fresh."

Balada's Symphony No. 6, subtitled "Symphony of Sorrows," was commissioned in 2005 by the Barcelona Symphony and National Orchestra of Catalonia to mark the seventieth anniversary of the start of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939); the Barcelona Symphony, conducted by Salvador Mas-Conde,

premiered the work on February 26, 2006. Balada's publisher, Music Associates of America, has supplied the following information about the "Symphony of Sorrows," which is dedicated to "the innocent victims of the Spanish Civil War":

"The catastrophic event of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) can be assessed by the merciless fighting of a divided country and by its consequent human tragedy. Both sides were losers. In the Symphony No. 6, Balada tried to picture musically those two aspects of the war in their psychological perspectives, and in so doing, the music brings desperate tensions as well as desolated intimate moments. The work does not present any programmatic or partisan perspective. The tragedy of the war resounds on both sides like a volcano and like an intimate, dramatic cry caused by one's own doings.

"The single-movement, twenty-minute Symphony evokes an atmosphere that ranges from quiet, desolate suffering to volcanic explosiveness and brutality. As musical materials, aspects of two hymns are used: the *Himno de Riego*, which was the flag song of the Republican forces, and *Cara al Sol*, which was identified with the insurrectionist armies of General Franco. The martial rhythms of war pervade the work. In addition, a two-note melodic interval appears obsessively throughout, relentlessly reminding the listener of the fateful hopelessness endured by all who were drawn into the fray. Its stark simplicity stresses enormous pain."