

Symphony No. 1

John Corigliano

John Corigliano was born into a musical family; his father (John Corigliano, Sr.) served for more than two decades as concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic. As a young composer, he studied with Otto Luening at Columbia University and Vittorio Giannini at the Manhattan School of Music and worked for nearly a decade with Leonard Bernstein on the CBS broadcasts of the New York Philharmonic Young People's Concerts. Following an early period during which his music — as he has described it — was a “tense, histrionic outgrowth of the ‘clean’ American sound of Barber, Copland, Harris, and Schuman,” he embraced a posture in which Romantic grandeur can rub elbows with a modernist musical vocabulary. The New York Philharmonic has a long and deep history with his work, having performed 15 of his symphonic compositions since 1980.

His Symphony No. 1, created during his tenure as composer-in-residence of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, earned him both the 1991 Grawemeyer Award and a 1991 Grammy award for Best Contemporary Composition. The same year, the piece was awarded a Grammy for Best Orchestral Performance, honoring its inaugural recording, by Daniel Barenboim and the CSO. Symphony No. 1 has been acknowledged as one of the most compelling artistic statements related to the AIDS crisis. Corigliano subsequently adapted the symphony's third movement into a choral incarnation titled *Of Rage and Remembrance*, and in 1996 the recording of that work, by the National Symphony Orchestra conducted by Leonard Slatkin, also received the Grammy for Best Classical Album.

Corigliano's career has been filled with distinctions. The Metropolitan Opera's production of his *The Ghosts of Versailles* (1987)

represented the first time in two decades that the company presented a new work it had commissioned. In March 2000 Corigliano won another notable honor: an Academy Award for *The Red Violin*, his third film score, music that has gone on to become popular as a concert work quite apart from its original cinematic context. This was not the only distinction accorded to his music for *The Red Violin*; it also won the Canadian Genie Award for best film score, the Quebec Jutra Award, and the German Critics' Prize. With his Symphony No. 2 (an expanded re-composition of his 1995 String Quartet) he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 2001. Since 1991 Corigliano has been a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters; in 1992 *Musical America* named him its first Composer of the Year; and in 2002 he was honored with the Gold Medal of The National Arts Club in New York City. He serves on the composition faculty of The Juilliard School and also holds the position

In Short

Born: February 16, 1938, in New York City

Resides: in New York City and Kent Cliffs, New York

Work composed: 1988, on commission from Meet the Composer and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra

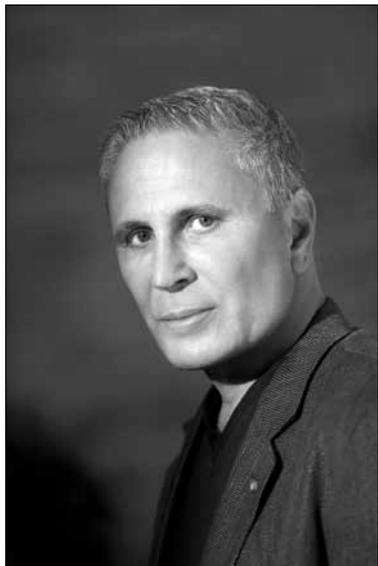
World premiere: March 15, 1990, at Orchestra Hall in Chicago, Illinois, by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Daniel Barenboim, conductor

New York Philharmonic premiere and most recent performances: January 9–14, 1992, Leonard Slatkin, conductor, which marked the New York Premiere

Estimated duration: ca. 46 minutes

In the Composer's Words

An extended program note that John Corigliano wrote for the premiere of his Symphony No. 1 includes these observations:



Cast in free, large-scale A-B-A form, the first movement (*Apologue: Of Rage and Remembrance*) is highly charged and alternates between the tension of anger and the bittersweet nostalgia of remembering. It reflects my distress over a concert-pianist friend. The opening (marked "Ferocious") begins with the nasal open A of the violins and violas. This note, which starts and finishes the symphony, grows in intensity and volume until it is answered by a burst of percussion. ... A distant (offstage) piano is heard, as if in a memory, playing the Leopold Godowsky transcription of Isaac Albéniz's *Tango* (made in Chicago in 1921), a favorite piece of my pianist-friend.

The second movement (*Tarantella*) was written in memory of a friend who was an executive in the music industry. He was also an amateur pianist, and in 1970 I wrote a set of dances (*Gazebo Dances* for piano, four hands) for various friends to play, and dedicated the final, tarantella, movement to him. ... The tarantella, as described in *Grove's Dictionary*, is a "South Italian dance played at continually increasing speed [and] by means of dancing it a strange kind of insanity [attributed to tarantula bite] could be cured." The association of madness and my piano piece proved both prophetic and bitterly ironic when my friend, whose wit and intelligence were legendary in the music field, became insane as a result of AIDS dementia.

The third movement (*Chaconne: Giulio's Song*) recalls a friendship that dated back to my college days. Giulio was an amateur cellist, full of that enthusiasm for music that amateurs tend to have and professionals try to keep. After he died, I found an old tape-recording of the two of us improvising on cello and piano, as we often did. That tape, dated 1962, provided material for the extended cello solo in this movement. [The movement includes] a series of musical remembrances of other friends In order to provide themes for this interweaving of lost friends, I asked William M. Hoffman, the librettist of my opera *The Ghosts of Versailles*, to eulogize them with short sentences. I then set those lines for various solo instruments and, removing the text, inserted them into the symphony. ...

The final part (*Epilogue*) ... is played against a repeated pattern consisting of waves of brass chords. To me, the sound of ocean waves conveys an image of timelessness. I wanted to suggest that, in this symphony, by creating sonic "waves," to which purpose I partially encircled the orchestra with an expanded brass section. ... Against this, the piano solo from the first movement (the Albéniz / Godowsky *Tango*) returns, as does the tarantella melody (this time sounding distant and peaceful), and the two solo cellos, interwoven between, recapitulate their dialogues. A slow diminuendo leaves the solo cello holding the same perpetual A, finally fading away.

of Distinguished Professor of Music at Lehman College and of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

When he unveiled his Symphony No. 1, Corigliano wrote:

Historically, many symphonists (Berlioz, Mahler and Shostakovich, to name a few) have been inspired by important events affecting their lives, and perhaps occasionally their choice of the symphonic form was dictated by extra-musical events. During the past decade I have lost many friends and colleagues to the AIDS epidemic, and the cumulative effect of those losses has, naturally, deeply affected me. My First Symphony was generated by feelings of loss, anger and frustration.

Instrumentation: four flutes (three doubling piccolo), three oboes and English horn, four clarinets (one doubling E-flat clarinet, and one doubling bass clarinet) and contrabass clarinet, three bassoons and contrabassoon, six horns, five trumpets, four trombones (two tenor and two bass), two tubas, timpani, orchestra bells, crotales, vibraphone, xylophone, marimba, chimes, snare drum, tom-toms, roto-toms, field drum, tenor drum, two bass drums, suspended cymbal, tam-tam, finger cymbals, temple blocks, tambourine, anvil, metal plate (with hammer), brake drum, triangle, flexatone, police whistle, whip, ratchet, harp, two pianos (onstage and off-stage), and strings (with two stands of violins doubling mandolin).

Sources and Inspirations

Audience members at the 1992 New York Premiere of John Corigliano's First Symphony inscribed the names of AIDS victims they knew on a fabric panel that then became part of The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt, which was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize and remains the world's largest community art project. That panel — as well as other panels honoring New York City musicians who died of AIDS — are on display on the David Geffen Hall Grand Promenade during these performances.

The composer relates how the project directly affected his Symphony No. 1:

A few years ago I was extremely moved when I first saw The Quilt, an ambitious interweaving of several thousand fabric panels, each memorializing a person who had died of AIDS, and, most importantly, each designed and constructed by his or her loved ones. This made me want to memorialize in music those I have lost, and reflect on those I am losing. I decided to relate the first three movements of the symphony to three lifelong musician-friends. In the third movement, still other friends are recalled in a quilt-like interweaving of motivic melodies.

— The Editors

Philharmonic concertgoers add names to a panel that was incorporated into the AIDS Memorial Quilt, 1992

