

# CABRILLO FESTIVAL *Program Notes: Memory & Meaning*

## ***Kabbalah, op. 96* (2004)**

**Marlos Nobre** (b. 1939)

[West Coast Premiere]

*Kabbalah*—composed in two connected parts representing light and energy—was inspired by the fundamental rules of “cabal,” meaning “that which is received” in Hebrew. In the interpretation of Hebrew scripture, “cabal” is the source of energy and knowledge and unveils the ways to Superior Knowledge. The orchestral work *Kabbalah* was conceived starting with the cabalistic numbers that define its rhythmic and melodic structure.

According to “cabal,” normal humans use only 3 or 4 percent of their actual brain capacity, while the remaining 96 or 97 percent remains unused. Our five senses prevent us from seeing through the illusion of time, and we are not conscious that past and present are always among us. Yet according to cabalistic science, everything we want is light and energy. But for me, personally, the most important concept is that imagination and inspiration represent the basic, fundamental truths and unlock the unseen wonders of the universe.

Therefore, I constructed my work *Kabbalah* in two levels: one rigorously mathematical in organizing the micro and the macro structure of the piece. And the second in a totally free form of intuition, exploring how the use of so called “mistakes” and casualties of composition allow a lack of conscious control—we may also simply describe this phase as spontaneous inspiration.

Essentially rhythmic, the composition traverses constant and slow creation of tension, reaching two culminating points. In one of them, the piece turns inwards onto itself, referring to the past and present, and then leads to a coda that combines all elements used in the music.

For thematic ideas, I found a song from the Xingu Indians particularly strong in relation to the “kabbalah” principles and used it almost literally in the first rhythmic section of the work. In this sense, so called “primitivism” encounters the most elaborate musical language. The work finishes with a “Coda” that combines all elements used in the music.

—Marlos Nobre

*Kabbalah* was commissioned by the 35th International Winter Festival of Campos de Jordão, São Paulo. It was premiered at the Campos de Jordão Festival Auditorium on July

23, 2004, by the Academic Orchestra of the Festival, conducted by Roberto Minczuk.

Not commercially recorded

## ***Oceana* (1996)**

**Oswaldo Golijov** (b. 1960)

*Oceana* was commissioned by the Oregon Bach Festival for its 1996 concert series Cantatas of the Americas. Four composers were asked for modern choral works in the spirit of the greatest composer of cantatas, Johann Sebastian Bach. Golijov chose to work with the opulent pop/jazz voice of Brazilian singer Luciana Souza, a chorus from Venezuela, Latin-American instruments and musical styles, and poetry from South America's Nobel-Prize-winning poet, Pablo Neruda. Of the choice of Ms. Souza as soloist, he says, “Luciana's voice was a great part of the inspiration for this work. I mean, not a particular melody that she sings, but the quality of her voice, which embodies the pain and sensuality of Latin America.”

For the work's premiere, the composer wrote:

*...My aim in Oceana was the transmutation of passion into geometry. This is, in my mind, the clue to both Bach's and Neruda's work. ...[One hopes that the emotion evoked by the work] is the emotion of hearing order, inevitable and full of light: every note in its place, as in Bach, every word in its place, as in Neruda.*

*Giants such as Bach are fated to be used as mirrors by composers and performers of every era, who will see their own image reflected there. ...In their own ways they were all correct in their fruitful misreadings of Bach's music, and I feel that Oceana is my own misreading.*

*Neruda is our Latin American Bach. Like Bach, he is Midas, able as if by magic to transform everything on this Earth into poetry. ...I think I have discovered the clue [to setting his poems to music]: Neruda's voice is a chorus, too powerful for a single voice to handle...*

*I do hope that water and longing, light and hope, the immensity of South America's nature and pain, are here transmuted into pure musical symbols, which nevertheless should be more liquid than the sea and deeper than the yearning that they represent. And if I have misunderstood Bach, then so be it, in the spirit of Picasso, who could see only a dove when everyone else saw clearly that it was the number two.*

**1. Call.** For his text Golijov chose the poem “Oceana” from Neruda's 1961 collection *Cantos Ceremoniales*. As Bach's cantatas invoke the grace of God upon believers, Neruda's verses passionately invoke the thrilling, mysterious presence of the ocean goddess. The vocalist sets the mood of sensuous longing in the first movement, intoning the name “Oceana,” accompanied only by harp and two guitars.

**2. First Wave–Rain Train Interlude.** The string orchestra enters as the tempo speeds up, and the choral voices respond to the siren call of the goddess. The composer calls for an enthusiastic, not overly-refined vocal sound: “open voice, like pirates at sea calling their goddess.” Beginning together, the two choruses eventually begin vying and echoing each other in their complex rhythms. Suddenly, the choruses and the strings fall silent for a “Rain Train Interlude,” in which two flutes and a piccolo are accompanied by the guitars and harp in a free “improvisation” reminiscent of Andean pipers.

*Oceana nupcial, cadera de las islas,  
Aquí a mi lado, cántame los desaparecidos  
Cantares, signos, números del río deseado.*

*Oceana, bridal Oceana, thigh of the islands  
Sing to me here, by my side, the vanished  
Chants, signs, numbers of the desired river.*

**3. Second Wave.** The choruses return with a swaying, churning incantation. Their counterpoint becomes more involved as the strings rejoin them, so that the poetry of nocturnal mystery and wave-washed reefs swirls ever more alluringly.

*Quiero oír lo invisible, lo que cayó del tiempo  
Al palio equinoccial de las palmeras.  
Dame el vino secreto que guarda cada sílaba:  
Ir y venir de espumas, razas de miel caídas  
Al cántaro marino sobre los arrecifes.*

*I want to hear the invisible, that which fell  
From time to the equinoctial mantle of the  
palm trees.  
Give me the secret wine contained in  
each syllable  
The coming and going of foams, of races  
of honey  
Fallen to the marine vase over the reefs.*

**4. Second Call.** The vocal soloist returns to make her wordless suggestion of the goddess's siren call, with an alto flute added to the accompaniment and all the strings except contrabass dropping out. This section is more

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up-tempo than the "First Call," with a breezy, samba-like feel.

**5. Third Wave.** The choruses and string orchestra take over once more. Their music is easy-going at first, becoming more and more frenzied as they evoke the repeatedly crashing waves of the sea.

*Oceana, reclina tu noche en el Castillo  
Que aguardó sin cesar pasar tu cabellera  
En cada ola que el mar elevaba en el mar  
Y luego no eras tú sino el mar que pasaba,  
Sino el mar sino el mar*

*Oceana, recline your night in the castle  
That awaited forever your mane coming  
In each wave that the sea elevated in the sea  
And then it wasn't you the one coming,  
But the sea but the sea*

**6. Aria.** Strings and choruses break off at the climax, and the guitars and harp begin a conversation with Latin and African percussion instruments, beginning with talking drums and shekere. Vocalist and alto flute moan in wordless unison their swaying incantation. Golijov says, "In this movement I tried to write a melody that, like Bach's own, 'reinvents itself' continually, that is always reborn—of course my style is different and I'm a fly next to Bach, but the idea is the same." Later, one or more children's voices sing of timeless lava monuments carved by the sea.

*Tengo hambre de no ser sino piedra marina  
Estatua. Lava, terca torre de monumento  
Donde se estrellan olas ya desaparecidas  
Mares que fallecieron con cántico y viajero  
I'm craving to be nothing but marine stone,*

*Statue, lava, tower, a monument  
Where the waves that crash have  
disappeared:  
Seas that died with chant and traveler.*

**7. Coral del Arrecife (Chorale of the Reef).** The voices drop out, and the instrumental sounds become increasingly thinner and higher, finally coming to rest on soft, long-held chords as the choruses begin the finale. Gently swelling and withdrawing, the two choruses repeatedly invoke the name of Oceana, occasionally dissolving in receding echoes of forgotten memory. The bulk of the movement is sung without accompaniment, as the voices hypnotically recall ancient images of reefs and shells and seafarers, fading to a final chord of unresolved longing.

*Oceana, dame las conchas del arrecife*

*Parta cubrir con sus relámpagos los muros,  
Los Spondylus, heroes coronados de espinas,  
El esplendor morado del murex en su roca:  
Tú sabes como sobre la sal ultramarina*

*Oceana, give me the shells of the reef  
To cover the walls with their lightning  
The Spondylus, heroes crowned with thorns  
The splendor of the murex on the rocks:  
You know how, over the ultramarine salt,  
In his vessel of snow, the Argonaut sails.*

—Nick Jones

*Oceana was premiered at the Oregon Bach Festival in Eugene on June 27, 1996, by vocalist Luciana Souza, New World Guitar Trio, Schola Cantorum of Caracas, and the Oregon Bach Festival Orchestra, conducted by Maria Guinand.*

*Recommended Recording:* Golijov: Oceana, Tenebrae, 3 Songs. Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, conducted by Robert Spano. Deutsche Grammophon.

## **Symphony No. 1 (1988)**

**John Corigliano** (b. 1938)

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 extramusical events. I have lost many friends and colleagues to the AIDS epidemic, and the cumulative effect of those losses has, naturally, deeply affected me. My Symphony No. 1 was generated by feelings of loss, anger, and frustration.

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.

Cast in a 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 contracting the disease. 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 repeat of this angry-sounding note climaxes, this time, in the entrance of the full orchestra, which is accompanied by a slow timpani beat. This steady pulse—a kind of musical heartbeat—is utilized in this movement as the start of a series of overlapping accelerandos interspersed with antagonistic chatterings of antiphonal brass. A final multiple acceleration reaches a peak climaxed by the violins in their highest register, which begins the middle section.

As the violins make a gradual diminuendo, a distant (offstage) piano is heard, as if in a memory, playing the Leopold Godowsky transcription of Isaac Albeniz's "Tango" (made in Chicago in 1921), a favorite piece of my pianist-friend. This is the start of an extended lyrical section in which nostalgic themes are mixed with fragmented suggestions of the "Tango." Little by little, the chattering brass motives begin to reappear, interrupted by the elements of tension that initiated the work, until the lyrical "remembrance" theme is accompanied by the relentless, pulsing timpani heartbeat. At this point, the lyrical theme continues in its slow and even rhythm, but the drumbeat begins simultaneously to accelerate. The tension of a slow, steady melody played against a slow, steady accelerando culminates in a recapitulation of the multiple accelerations heard earlier in the movement, starting the final section. But this time the accelerations reach an even bigger climax in which the entire orchestra joins together, playing a single dissonant chord in a near-hysterical repeated pattern that begins to slow down and finally stops. Unexpectedly, the volume of this passage remains loud, so that the effect is that of a monstrous machine coming to a halt but still boiling with energy. This energy, however, is finally exhausted, and there is a diminuendo to piano. A recapitulation of the original motives along with a final burst of intensity from the orchestra and offstage piano concludes the movement, which ends on a desolate high A in the first violins.

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. This was a jaunty

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little piece whose mood, as in many tarantellas, seems to be at odds with its purpose. For the tarantella, as described in Grove's Dictionary of Music, 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.

In writing a tarantella movement for this symphony, I tried to picture some of the schizophrenic and hallucinatory images that would have accompanied that madness, as well as the moments of lucidity. This movement is formally less organized than the previous one, and intentionally so, but there is a slow and relentless progression toward an accelerated "madness." The ending can only be described as a brutal scream.

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 several years ago, 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. Notating Giulio's improvisation, I found a pungent and beautiful motto which, when developed, formed the melody played by the solo cello at this point in the symphony. That theme is preceded by a chaconne, based on twelve pitches (and the chords they produce), which runs through the entire movement. The first several minutes of this movement are played by the violas, cellos, and basses alone. The chaconne chords are immediately heard, hazily dissolving into each other, and the cello melody begins over the final chord. Halfway through this melody a second cello joins the soloist. This is the first of a series of musical remembrances of other friends (the first friend having been a professional cellist who was Giulio's teacher and who also died of AIDS).

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. These melodies are played against the recurring background of the chaconne,

interspersed with dialogues between the solo cellos. At the conclusion of the section, as the cello recapitulates Giulio's theme, the solo trumpet begins to play the note A that began the symphony. This is taken up by the other brass, one by one, so that the note grows to overpower the other orchestral sonorities. The entire string section takes up the A and builds to a restatement of the initial assertive orchestral entrance in the first movement. The relentless drumbeat returns, but this time it does not accelerate. Instead, it continues its slow and somber beat against the chaconne, augmented by two sets of antiphonal chimes tolling the twelve pitches as the intensity increases and the persistent rhythm is revealed to be that of a funeral march.

Finally, the march-rhythm starts to dissolve, as individual choirs and solo instruments accelerate independently, until the entire orchestra climaxes with a sonic explosion. After this, only a solo cello remains, softly playing the A that opened the work, and introducing the symphony's final part (Epilogue).

This last section 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." Against these waves, the piano solo from the first movement (the Albeniz/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.

—John Corigliano

*Symphony No. 1 was commissioned by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in honor of the Orchestra's Centennial as a part of the MEET THE COMPOSER orchestra residency series. The work was the winner of the 1990 Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition, and two 1991 Grammy Awards for Best Orchestral Performance and Best Contemporary Composition. It was premiered at Orchestra Hall, Chicago Symphony Center on March 15, 1990, by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Daniel Barenboim.*

*Recommended Recording:* Corigliano Of Rage and Remembrance; Symphony No. 1. National Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Leonard Slatkin. RCA Red Seal, BMG Music. Winner of the 1996 Grammy Award for Best Classical Album.