

## FUGA CON PAJARILLO

### COMPOSER BIOGRAPHY

Aldemaro Romero (1928-2007) was a Venezuelan pianist, arranger, composer, and conductor. He was born in Valencia, Venezuela, the country's third largest city, located on its northern coast.

Romero is considered to be the creator of the Venezuelan "New Wave" (*Onda Nueva*) genre, derived from the *joropo* (Venezuela's national dance music, a musical style resembling fandango. "*Alma Llanera*," a *joropo* is Venezuela's unofficial nation anthem.).

Romero collaborated with many musicians, including Dean Martin, Jerry Lee Lewis, Stan Kenton, and Tito Puente, across the many genres he mastered. He was popularly known for his record-breaking *Dinner In...* series as an arranger at RCA Victor in New York.

As he gained in notoriety, he became the founding conductor of the Caracas Philharmonic Orchestra in 1979 and would guest conduct the foremost orchestras around the world.

### PROGRAM NOTE

Aldemaro Romero | Suite para Cuerdas (Suite for Strings) was written for the English Chamber Orchestra and premiered in London in 1976. It is dedicated to the Venezuelan composer Juan Bautista Plaza.

The first movement, *Fuga con Pajarillo* is performed on this program.

According to the composer, he had nothing else to do while in London and decided to write the work in response to those who said he couldn't write a complex work because he hadn't studied musical counterpoint. He insisted that he knew the rules of counterpoint better than those who studied formally and set out to prove it!

The complexity Romero was committed to demonstrate is a delicate interplay of thematic statements – a fugue, in the spirit of a canon, but more intricate

because as each instrument enters with the fugue theme, instruments already playing must continue with musical material that adds to the musical discourse without interrupting that theme. In contrast, a canon is a series of imitations without further expansion of the material.

A *pajarillo* is a typical Venezuelan waltz. Its musical character is somewhat off-putting because the emphasis is felt on the weak second beat of each bar rather than the reassuring first beat found in European waltzes. This “weak beat” emphasis gives a characteristic jauntiness found in dominant Venezuelan musical forms.

## ROCOCO VARIATIONS

### Program Note

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Tchaikovsky was far from happy with his teaching duties at the Moscow Conservatory, which left him less time for composing than he wished. One of the positive aspects of the job, however, was that he was able to meet some fine musicians in the course of his work, one of whom was the sonorously named German professor of cello at the school, Wilhelm Carl Friedrich Fitzenhagen. Fitzenhagen, like Tchaikovsky, was rather shy and introverted, and a nice friendship sprang up between them; it was for Fitzenhagen that Tchaikovsky composed his *Rococo Variations* in 1876 and premiered in Moscow in 1877.

The theme of the *Variations*, original with Tchaikovsky, is prefaced by a subdued introduction. After a brief, vaguely Eastern-sounding interlude for double reeds that looks forward to the nationality dances in *The Nutcracker*, the cello presents the first of the seven variations. The opening two variations are decorated versions of the theme, each ending with a strain for double reeds. Variation 3 presents a long-breathed *cantabile* (broad, singing) in a new key and tempo. The fourth variation resumes the earlier tempo, and includes some dazzling, airborne scale passages that exploit fully the tone, agility and range of the solo instrument. The next variation allots the cello a trilled accompaniment to the theme, played by the flute; a cadenza closes this section. The penultimate variation slips into a minor mode that both balances the preceding tonalities and creates a good foil to the virtuosic closing variation that immediately follows. When the redoubtable Franz Liszt heard the *Rococo Variations* at a concert in Wiesbaden in 1879, his comment could not have been more cogent or more apposite: “This,” he pronounced, “is indeed music!”

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## CELLO CONCERTO “FLOWING SLEEVES”

### COMPOSER BIOGRAPHY

Grammy-nominated Chinese-American composer Zhou Tian (*JOH TEE-en*) seeks inspiration from different cultures and strives to mix them seamlessly into a musically satisfying combination for performers and audience alike. His music — described as “absolutely beautiful...utterly satisfying” (Fanfare), “stunning” (the Cincinnati Enquirer), and “a prime example of 21st-century global multiculturalism” — has been performed by leading orchestras and performers in the United States and abroad, such as Jaap Van Zweden, Yuja Wang, the New York Philharmonic, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony, Hong Kong Philharmonic, Melbourne Symphony, “The President’s Own” US Marine Band, Dover Quartet, and Shanghai Symphony, where he recently served as the Artist-in-Residence. His Concerto for Orchestra—commissioned and recorded by the Cincinnati Symphony and Music Director Louis Langrée—earned him a GRAMMY Award nomination for Best Contemporary Classical Composition in 2018, making him the first Chinese-born composer honored in that category. In 2019, Beijing Music Festival named him “Artist of the Year.” The Wall Street Journal calls his compositions “accomplish two important things: They remind us of how we got from there to here, and they refine that history by paying belated tribute to contributors who might otherwise be forgotten.” Born into a musical family in 1981 in Hangzhou, China, Zhou moved to the United States when he was 19. Trained at the Curtis Institute of Music (B.M.), the Juilliard School (M.M.), and the University of Southern California (D.M.A.), he studied with some of America’s finest composers, such as Jennifer Higdon, Christopher Rouse, and Stephen Hartke. He is associate professor of composition at Michigan State University College of Music.

### PROGRAM NOTE

The inspiration for my cello concerto came from “flowing sleeves,” a type of costume and performance practice in traditional Chinese opera in which a performer uses extended, white silk sleeves to create different movements reflective of the inner thoughts of the characters. Whether it’s a light toss, a gentle brush, or a playful lift, the mesmerizing movements of the long sleeves become an extension of the performer’s body and a vehicle to transport different emotions.

Inspired, I set out to create a set of sonic “flowing sleeves,” with the cello being the musical protagonist. In fact, much like the “flowing sleeves” in Chinese

opera, for a musician, the instrument is an extension of the body and mind, and the music is expressed through sophisticated movements of the fingers and arms. The interplay of the two artistic traditions fascinates me. The four movements of the concerto, *Brush*, *Lift*, *Reflect*, and *Dance*, present four different characteristics of music. Together, the concerto strives to explore a dynamic palette of colors and timbre — some romantic, some wild — through an intimate dialogue between the soloist and the orchestra. Cello Concerto “Flowing Sleeves” was written for Jian Wang through a commission from the Hangzhou Philharmonic Orchestra.

— Zhou Tian

This performance features the first movement only, “*Brush*.”

## **VARIACIONES CONCERTANTES**

### COMPOSER BIOGRAPHY

Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983) was an Argentinian composer, born in Buenos Aires. Ginastera trained in music there, received further advanced training in the United States and is recognized as one of the leading composers of the Americas in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He incorporated traditional Argentinian musical elements into his work of varying periods.

Ginastera’s compositional output is extensive with significant contributions to symphonic, operatic, choral and film projects.

He spent his last fifteen years living in Switzerland after falling away from the turbulent political/military upheaval known as the última junta militar (“last military junta”) in Argentina. He is buried in Geneva.

### PROGRAM NOTE

The Variaciones concertantes were composed in 1953, during a difficult period where Ginastera supported himself by scoring films, as he had been since 1942.

The work’s inspiration derives from the open strings of the guitar, as heard in the harp under the solo cello statement of the theme at the beginning, and again before the final variation forms the basis of the work’s musical characteristics.

(These pitches – E, A, D, G, B – also supply variation material and represent the main key areas of the whole set.)

Two interludes (the first for strings, the second for winds) frame seven variations featuring different solo instruments within the orchestra. The first is for the flute (*Variazione giocosa*), which leads directly into an edgier variation featuring the clarinet (*Variazione in modo di Scherzo*). The haunting elegy for the viola (*Variazione drammatica*) is the longest of the seven. Its plaintive chords spill over into the next variation, a dusky duet for oboe and bassoon (*Variazione canonica*). The brief, brilliant variation for trumpet and trombone (*Variazione ritmica*) is basically a splashy fanfare for the ensuing violin whirlwind (*Variazione in modo di Moto perpetuo*). To close the central group of variations, the french horn offers a lyrical take on the original theme (*Variazione pastorale*).

The main theme returns, again accompanied by the harp but this time with the double bass taking up the tune. The final variation, for the full ensemble (*Variazione in modo di Rondo*), is a high-voltage malambo, the competitive gaucho dance that was another prime symbol for Ginastera. The steady repeated notes represent tapping feet, with virtuosic and jazzy flourishes coming from all instrumental points.