

Millennium Dances program note

Millennium Dances is intended as a celebration of Maestro Jesus Lopez-Cobos's first ten years as music director of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. As celebration and dance are two things that naturally go together, the piece quickly developed into an essay on this relationship. I have recently become interested in dance (particularly folk dance, as inspired by the work I've done with Jewish folk music). It has become clear to me that folk art of all kinds is immensely powerful and can serve as an inexhaustible source for the development of concert music. Of course I am far from unique in this realization. Most composers come to it at one point or another in their lives but I began to feel the power of folk music and folk dance as if I, rather than Bartok, Stravinsky, Dvorak, and all the others, had been the one to discover and utilize its genius.

With the exception of the first, each movement is self-contained and limited to the development of its own musical material. The first movement, however, offers glimpses of the others to come, as if the dancers are waiting behind a screen which is being coyly lifted a little from time to time. For example, the baritone sax (the main character of the fifth movement) makes its initial entrance unexpectedly in the first. Some of the dances refer to specific places and times, with unexpected twists. The third dance, 'patches purple,' for instance, moves tantalizingly in and out of the world of a Bach invention. The fourth dance, "returns", floats over the spirits of Schumann and Faure. Others, like 'transcendental blues,' make less obvious references. \

While writing this work, I was well aware of the virtuosity of the musicians of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. As I have lived off and on in Cincinnati for a number of years, I have come to know the sound of the orchestra, as well as the sound of Music Hall. This knowledge has most certainly crept into the aesthetic world of Millennium Dances. It would be entirely correct to hear the piece as composed for the unique combination of this orchestra under this conductor performing in and for this city. I was most honored to have been offered the commission, and I dedicate the work with great respect to Music Director Jesus Lopez-Cobos.