Fiesta! Program Notes
By Joe Milicia

JIMMY LÓPEZ BALLIDO
Born Lima, Peru, 21 October 1978.
Fiesta!, four pop dances for orchestra
Composed 2007 as a chamber piece for the Lima Philharmonic Society; version for full orchestra premiered in May 2008 with the Baltimore Symphony, Manuel Harth-Badoya conducting. The score calls for 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, congas, bongos, bass drum, cymbals and strings. Duration 10 minutes.

THIS IS THE FIRST SSO PERFORMANCE of *Fiesta!*

Jimmy López Ballido wrote *Fiesta!* at the invitation of a fellow Peruvian, conductor Manuel Harth-Badoya, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Lima Philharmonic Society. Originally writing it for 14 wind and percussion players, López Ballido later created a version for symphony orchestra which Harth-Badoya introduced to the Baltimore, Chicago, Boston and other symphony orchestras.

Fiesta! is in four short movements, marked *Trance 1*, *Countertime*, *Trance 2* and *Techno*. The composer has noted in an interview that the two *Trance* movements "start out with a lot of energy but end up in a calm way," while the other movements "keep the level of energy up all the way." Throughout *Fiesta!* three sets of drums are prominent against the strings and winds: the congas, the smaller bongos, and the timpani.

López Ballido plays upon the double meaning of "trance": traditionally a hypnotized state of mind but in today's music a branch of "techno," electronic dance music with a powerful, indeed hypnotic beat. *Fiesta!*'s musical "trance," as he describes in a program note, is evoked by "a constantly shifting melody against a static background."

However, against the steady pulse of techno music López Ballido imposes a rich complexity of Latin American syncopation. He invents the word "Countertime" to refer to a counterpoint of rhythms, in which the listener must imagine the underlying techno pulse against the "actual rhythms playing against it." Only in the final dance does the techno pulse, at times, become explicit. He has remarked that the piece reflects his love of the energy of big cities. (A native of Lima, he has lived in Helsinki, Paris and Berkeley as well.)

A prolific composer and currently one of the Western Hemisphere's most prominent in classical music, López Ballido has written three symphonies, eight concertos for a great variety of instruments, a good deal of chamber and vocal music, and a ballet for children. His 2015 opera, *Bel Canto*, based on the Ann Patchett novel in which terrorists hold an opera singer as well as political opponents captive, was presented by the Lyric Opera of Chicago and broadcast on PBS.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART
Born Salzburg, Austria, 27 January 1756; died Vienna, 5 December 1791.

Piano Concerto in C major (No. 21), K. 467
Written February-March 1785 and premiered 10 March 1785 at the Imperial Court Theater, Vienna, with the composer as soloist and conductor. The work calls for flute; pairs of oboes, bassoons, horns and trumpets; timpani and strings, in addition to solo piano. Duration about 30 minutes.

PREVIOUS SSO PERFORMANCES: second movement only: 14 March 1981, Tess Weber pianist, William Block, conductor, Urban Junior High School Auditorium; **full concerto:** 11 May 1996, Laura Spitzer, pianist, Guy Victor Bordo, conductor, Kohler Memorial Theatre..

Mozart's piano concertos were enthusiastically received by the Vienna public, for whom he wrote Nos. 11 through 27, but largely neglected during the 19th Century. It was only well into the 20th Century that these concertos (especially Nos. 19 through 25 but more recently others as well) came to be staples of the concert repertoire and celebrated as masterpieces along with the greatest of his operas, symphonies, chamber music and choral works. The one in C major listed as No. 21/K. 467 had an extra burst of popularity after its slow movement was used for the soundtrack of the 1967 Swedish film *Elvira Madigan*, in which a pair of runaway lovers picnic and embrace in lush woodland settings. (For years thereafter, LP and CD covers proclaimed it "The Elvira Madigan Concerto.")

Mozart wrote most of his Vienna piano concertos for himself to perform in subscription series at public theatres like the Mehlgrabe, where in later years Beethoven would perform as well. (The name means "Flour Pit"—the site was once a grain storage facility.) He premiered No. 20/K.466, in D minor, at the Mehlgrabe, but for K.467, completed less than a month later, he rented the grander Burgtheater: the Imperial Court Theatre. As was customary (and like some conductor-pianists of today, such as Daniel Barenboim), he led the orchestra from the keyboard of his fortepiano.

K.467 opens, **Allegro maestoso**, with a march—but a playful, genial one rather than stern or majestic. The strings enter with a light step before the winds' stronger statement with kettledrums and trumpets adding to the festive martial air. At the end of the orchestral exposition oboe, bassoon and flute solos in turn seem to invite the piano to join in. At this point the piano not only takes up the march theme but goes on to introduce entirely new themes, while interweaving the musical texture with threads of sixteenth notes. Much of the challenge for the soloist is to play these runs with not only concision but also a sparkling wit.

A softly pulsing triplet rhythm leads into the unforgettably lovely melody of the **Andante,** first played by muted violins. A second phase of the melody has striking leaps from high to low notes, and the music becomes tinged with minor-key harmonies, giving the movement a melancholy air. When the piano takes up the initial melody it is with the utmost simplicity. Soon the piano introduces a quite new theme, and will subtly transform the original melody when it reappears. As for the triplet pulse heard in the first bars, it continues in strings, winds or piano through the entire movement except for a breathtaking three bars in the middle. Overall, the movement casts a magical spell—"a sonic dream world," one critic calls it—with an indefinable combination of rapture and sadness.

The finale, **Allegro vivace assai**, features an impulsive, light-hearted main theme, first stated by the strings, though in its several returns the piano takes the lead. The movement is intricately constructed, blending rondo and sonata forms, but feels effortless and improvised, with delightful interplay between the strings, the winds and the piano.

JOHANNES BRAHMS
Born Hamburg, 7 May 1833; died Vienna, 3 April 1897.
Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68.
Composed 1854 -1876 and premiered 4 November 1876, with the Karlsruhe Court Orchestra led by Felix Otto Dessoff. The score calls for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, and strings. Duration about 45 minutes.

THIS IS THE FIRST SSO PERFORMANCE of Brahms' Symphony No. 1.

Brahms was approaching 40 years of age when he wrote to a conductor friend, "I shall never write a symphony! You have no idea what it feels like to be one of us, always hearing a giant (Beethoven) marching behind us." Actually, he had begun writing sketches for what became his First Symphony as early as 1854, when he was 21; by 1862 he was showing his great friend Clara Schumann a draft of the first movement; and on her birthday in 1868 he sent her a sketch of what he called the "Alpenhorn" theme of his finale (proclaimed by a French horn in the completed work). But it was not until 1876, when he was 43, having written several works featuring a full orchestra—his First Piano Concerto, the two Serenades, his *German Requiem* and his Haydn Variations—that Brahms felt ready to offer the world his First Symphony. Program annotators are fond of pointing out that he wrote his equally masterful Second Symphony over the course of one summer, the very next year.

I. Un poco sostenuto – Allegro. Hearing the astounding opening of this symphony, listeners may feel they have entered into the middle of an ongoing drama. A repeated timpani note, like a pounding heartbeat, accompanies the strings playing an ascending chromatic theme while the winds play a *descending* one, creating an overwhelming tension. Eventually the "heartbeat"—the repeated "C"—moves from timpani to pizzicato strings before continuing intermittently, but the intensity hardly lessens. An almost unbearably poignant oboe solo, echoed by the cellos, takes us to the main *Allegro* section of the movement, with its relentless fierce drive. There will be quiet moments—for example, a brief dialogue between clarinet and horn—but only as respites within the tempest. In the development section we hear echoes of the Scherzo of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (also in C minor), surely Brahms' subtle acknowledgement of his great predecessor. Near the end of the movement the tempo relaxes and the minor key shifts to C major, though perhaps out of exhaustion rather than triumph.

II. Andante sostenuto. Following the tumult of the first movement, the opening theme for strings is like a great sigh of relief, though the mood soon becomes more passionate or yearning. An oboe solo leads to a new theme with a rising arc, featuring some of the most gorgeous music for strings Brahms ever wrote. Yet another oboe solo and one for clarinet immediately follow. After the opening theme returns, a solo violin figures prominently in the rest of the movement.

III. Un poco Allegretto e grazioso. This brief movement serves as the scherzo of the symphony, though its main section has a duple rather than the usual triple rhythm, and it may not have the joking or teasing quality that the word "scherzo" usually implies. But it is warm-hearted, even a bit playful, beginning with a tune for clarinet, followed by a more dashing one, again for clarinet but passed to other winds. The trio section does have a triple rhythm and a more sweeping impulse. When the main section returns, the triplet rhythm continues to underlie the duple beat. Overall, the movement serves as a relatively relaxed interlude within the high drama of the rest of the symphony.

IV. Adagio – Piu Andante – Allegro non troppo, ma con brio. Brahms conceived his finale on an epic scale, beginning with an introduction so complex and varied in mood that the word "introduction" seems inadequate. The opening bars have a tragic weight. Two passages for rapidly accelerating pizzicato strings lead to a stormy outburst. Then the "Alpenhorn" theme arrives like a ray of sunlight, first played by the horn, then, soaringly, by the flute. The brass offer a solemn chorale, featuring the trombones (who have been silent during the first three movements). And only then do we move into the movement proper, though all the music heard so far will be transformed in the course of this *Allegro* finale.

The main theme ("not too fast, but with brio") is one of Brahms' most famous melodies: warm and confident in tone. When the winds take it up the music becomes more excited and impulsive. Later the Alpenhorn theme appears in new guises, and at the climax of the piece the chorale blazes forth before the music sweeps to its C major triumph.