



Winter 1-28-1999

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Recommended Citation

Aaron, Bob, "John Corigliano, Award-Winning Composer, to Highlight IWU Contemporary Music Symposium, Feb. 8-9" (1999). *News and Events*. 712.
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Jan. 28, 1999

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John Corigliano, Award-Winning Composer, to Highlight IWU Contemporary Music Symposium, Feb. 8-9

"I think it is the job of the composer to reach out to his audiences with every means at his disposal . . . Communication of his most important ideas should be the primary goal."
--John Corigliano

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--Academy Award-nominated composer John Corigliano--a master of orchestral, chamber, and opera music--will headline IWU's annual Symposium of Contemporary Music, Feb. 8-9.

One of Corigliano's best-known works, the soundtrack to Ken Russell's "Altered States," a film about scientific drug experimentation, earned an Academy Award nomination in 1981.

Last September, the Venice Film Festival opened with Steven Spielberg's "Saving Private Ryan" and "The Red Violin," for which Corigliano composed his third film score.

Symposium Details

A Feb. 9 concert at 7:30 p.m. will cap the Symposium of Contemporary Music program. The concert will be in Westbrook Auditorium, Presser Hall (IWU School of Music), 303 E. University Ave., Bloomington. The concert is open to the public, free-of-charge.

A panel discussion on contemporary music issues with Corigliano is scheduled for 7:30 p.m., Feb. 8 in Westbrook Auditorium. This session also is open to the public, admission free.

While at IWU, Corigliano will be involved in dress rehearsals for various performances by several IWU student ensembles, including: Wind Ensemble, Collegiate Choir, Chamber Singers, and the Illinois Wesleyan Civic Orchestra. He also will participate in a master class on music composition and a coaching session with IWU students.

The yearly Symposium of Contemporary Music has brought prominent guest composers to IWU for performances of their music and other activities for more than 40 years. Recent guest composers have included Joseph Schwantner, David Diamond, Leslie Basset, and Karel Husa.

Recent Works, Performances

A new Corigliano work, based on poet Dylan Thomas' work, will premiere in March at Washington, D.C.'s John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and New York City's Carnegie Hall, with Leonard Slatkin conducting the National Symphony Orchestra. A 1996 Corigliano-National Symphony collaboration on the composer's "Of Rage and Remembrance" and "Symphony No. 1" earned the orchestra its first-ever Grammy award for Classical CD of the Year.

During the 1998-99 season, Corigliano's first opera, "The Ghosts of Versailles," also receives its European premiere. It was initially staged in 1991 by the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. Chicago's Lyric Opera produced the opera in 1995.

A New York Times' reviewer said of "The Ghosts of Versailles" that the opera "may be the most popular full-length opera written in a half a century."

A Corigliano biography points out: "The nationwide telecast of that original production [of 'The Ghosts of Versailles'] was released on videocassette and laser-disk by Deutsche Grammophon. Now a new production of 'The Ghosts of Versailles' opens a new opera house in Hanover, Germany, in April of 1999 . . . "

Symphony and AIDS

Commissioned by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO), where he was the orchestra's first composer-in-residence, 1987-90, Corigliano's "Symphony No. 1" is an impassioned response to the AIDS crisis. The work captured the 1991 Grawemeyer Award for Best New Orchestral Composition. CSO's recording of the piece on the Erato label won Grammy Awards for Best New Composition and Best Orchestral Performance.

A Corigliano biography, commenting on "Symphony No. 1," points out: "Although Corigliano had long declared that he would never write a symphony--he felt the world had enough of them already--his reaction to the AIDS epidemic finally compelled him to do so. The resulting 'Symphony No. 1' (1989), commissioned by the Chicago Symphony in honor of its centennial . . . is one of Corigliano's most profound artistic statements. In its expression of universal emotions, from blinding rage and grief to final acceptance, this symphony speaks to losses of all kinds. It is an eloquent testimony indeed to the human spirit."

Corigliano wrote the symphony, he said, because, "During the past decade I have lost many friends and colleagues to the AIDS epidemic, and the cumulative effect of those losses has, naturally, affected me. A few years ago, I was extremely moved when I first saw 'The Quilt.' This made me want to memorialize in music those I have lost, and reflect on those I am losing."

"While the Symphony, which has already been played by nearly 100 different orchestras worldwide continues to be scheduled by virtually all of the leading U.S. orchestras," another Corigliano biography points out, "it is only the most conspicuous entry in a catalogue of over 60 works that resounds with dramatic, ground-breaking essays in nearly all of the major musical forms."

Acclaimed Compositions

Among Corigliano's concerti, for example, is the "Pied Piper Fantasy: Concerto for Flute and Orchestra" (1981), which has been recorded on the RCA label by famed flutist, James Galway.

The San Francisco Chronicle reported that when Galway premiered the "Pied Piper Fantasy" with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Corigliano was so tense, he couldn't watch the performance. Instead, he stayed in Galway's dressing room, listening to the music from a speaker in the bathroom.

"I was hunched over the toilet seat," Corigliano told the newspaper with a laugh, "head in my hands."

Corigliano's chamber works include "Sonata for Violin and Piano," which won the 1964 Spoleto Festival's first chamber music prize.

A more recent chamber work by Corigliano is a 40-minute "String Quartet," commissioned by and for the Cleveland Quartet's valedictory performance. In 1996, the "Quartet" won Grammy Awards for Best Performance and Best New Composition, "making Mr. Corigliano," according to a biography, "the first composer to win twice in the history of that award."

Corigliano's second film score for the "British Revolution" received England's equivalent of an

Academy Award, the 1995 Anthony Asquith Award for distinguished achievement in film composition.

Honors, Critical Comment

Corigliano was elected in 1991 to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, an organization of 250 of America's most prominent artists, sculptors, architects, writers, and composers.

Here are some critical comments about Corigliano:

- John Hilferty: "Composer John Corigliano knows how to dazzle the ears, whether the genre be symphony, opera or concerto. The core of his artistry involves spinning out the most ravishing musical images from his impressive palette."
- USA Today commenting on "The Red Violin": "It's a work of increasing coloristic subtlety and burgeoning invention amid a tight, chaconne-like structure."
- Marc Shulgold in the Rocky Mountain News: "Music has never come effortlessly to John Corigliano. Though generally acknowledged as America's most important contemporary composer--and a popular one, too, judging by multiple Grammy Awards . . ."
- Byron Belt, Newhouse News Service, commenting on "Symphony No. 1": "[Corigliano's] labors have resulted in a vast memorial symphonic quilt in four movements of staggering emotional impact and musical grandeur."

Corigliano Profiled

Born in New York City on Feb. 16, 1938, Corigliano grew up surrounded by music. His father was concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic from 1943-66; his mother was a gifted pianist. Consequently, as a child, Corigliano met musical legends such as Arturo Toscanini, Bruno Walter, Fritz Kreisler, and Dimitri Mitropoulos.

He began composing music and playing the piano as a youngster. While attending a Brooklyn high school, Corigliano began teaching himself orchestration by following records with music scores.

Corigliano studied composition at Columbia College and the Manhattan School of Music.

After graduating from Columbia in 1959, Corigliano's composing career took him to radio and television, where he arranged rock music, produced recordings for Columbia Masterworks, directed a music festival, and taught at the Manhattan School of Music.

Corigliano has taught at the famed Juilliard School and the City University of New York.

About IWU

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 2,000 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and individual schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art, and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletics and recreation center, a \$25 million science center, a \$6.8 million residence hall, and a \$5.1 million Center for Liberal Arts.
