

MUSIC ACCORD

GABRIELA FRANK *Quijotadas* (2007)

Program Notes

Quijotadas (2007) for string quartet is inspired by *El Ingenioso Hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha* by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547-1616). Widely considered the first modern novel, this tale satirizes post-Conquest Spain by relating the tale of a middle-aged lesser nobleman who undertakes absurd adventures in pursuit of romantic — and seriously outdated — knightly ideals. Cervantes' brilliant and colorful resulting social commentary still reverberates for us today in the arts and popular culture at large. **Quijotadas**, which is the Spanish word for extravagant delusions wrought in the Quixotic spirit, is in five movements. They are:

I. Alborada: Traditionally a Spanish song of welcome or beginnings, this is in the style of music for the *chifro*, a small high-pitched wooden panpipe played with one hand. It is often employed by a traveling guild worker to announce his services as he walks through the streets of town.

II. Seguidilla: This free interpretation of the spirited dance rhythms of Don Quijote's homeland of La Mancha also evokes two typical instruments — the six-stringed guitar, and its older cousin, the bandurria, which finds its origins in Renaissance Spain.

III. Moto Perpetuo: La Locura de Quijote: This movement is inspired by an early chapter in the novel that describes Don Quixote sequestering himself in his hacienda, reading nothing but novels of chivalry, the pulp fiction of his time. The teasing promises of grandeur make him dizzy and he eventually goes mad.

IV. Asturianada: La Cueva: The style of this traditional mountain song (whereby a young male singer issues forth calls that rise and fall with great emotion and strength) is used to paint a portrait of the Cave of Montesinos. In an important episode of the novel, Don Quijote fantasizes about the legendary hero Montesinos trapped under enchantment in a highland cave.

V. La Danza de los Arrieros: Throughout the tale, Don Quijote is constantly rubbing up against *arrieros* (muleteers) who, for Cervantes, are the embodiment of reality in contrast to Don Quijote's fantasy world. The encounters with these roughnecks are always abrupt and physical, usually resulting in a sound thrashing for Quijote. Each beating brings him closer to reality, and in the end, he must poignantly reconcile himself to the fact that his noble ideals do not find a hospitable home in the contemporary world.

— Gabriela Lena Frank

Reviews

- Gabriela Lena Frank is the real deal: a modern composer with a personal style, one that manages to integrate a wide range of sounds and performing techniques into a cohesive language that unapologetically includes melody and tonal harmony without ever sounding anachronistic. She clearly manages to remain true to herself, but she doesn't have to write down to her listeners in order to share her thoughts and feelings. This is just good music.

Quijotadas is a string quartet based on Cervantes' Don Quixote. Its second movement, *Seguidilla para la Mancha*, has to be one of the most charming pieces of its kind since the scherzo of Ravel's Quartet, which it resembles in some ways (lots of pizzicato).

The performances, with the composer's participation where the piano joins in, and presumably her supervision where it does not, are uniformly excellent, and so are the sonics. A wonderful disc of inventive, fresh, characterful music, plain and simple. *David Hurwitz, classicstoday.com, 22/03/2011*

- **Quijotadas** for string quartet (2007) features some of Frank's most imaginative instrumentation. The work's five movements depict scenes from Cervantes' novel. In the second movement, "Seguidilla para la Mancha," the players — Bowers, Walker, violinist Alison Gooding and violist Chris Farrell — pluck and strum their instruments, mimicking the sound of a Spanish guitar. The vertiginous string notes in the third movement, "Moto Perpetuo: La Locura de Quijote," readily call to mind Don Quixote's descent into madness. *John Pitcher, The Nashville Scene, 03/03/2011*
- The moods in Frank's **Quijotadas** are much brighter, its angular and fanciful material vividly conveying the various misadventures of Don Quixote. The five movements paint pictures of the Knight of the Woeful Countenance in striking contemporary terms. The strings explore every technical weapon in their arsenal as they conjure eerie, whimsical and romantic scenes.

Frank hints of folk sources without quoting specific tunes. Instead, she unfolds atmospheric devices deftly, while taking the strings in tipsy and gutsy directions. The Brentano gave the collection all of the energy and definition it needed to make a fervent impact.

Donald Rosenberg, The Cleveland Plain Dealer, 18/03/2008

- ...**Quijotadas** was entirely delightful.

Its five brief movements take their inspiration from Cervantes' tale of Don Quixote, suggesting though not (I think) drawing literally on Spanish folk music. They are colorful, sharply drawn vignettes, rhythmically pungent and spiced with stinging little dissonances. The first, for the two violins alone, has the melodic confidence and the metrical quirkiness of one of the Bartók duos. Later come bravura moments for the cello (Lee sailed through movement III's double-stopped intricacies) and the viola (in IV, a wandering rhapsody against an eerie tone-cluster-laden backdrop). V ends with another bright-edged violin tune.

Frank's textures were engaging, frequently recalling Bartók, though full of characterful conceits of her own. A passage in movement IV stood out for me, when the widely separated first violin and cello mirror each other with a bizarrely snaking legato line that comes to take over the rest of the texture between them. Other striking details are the funky pizzicato beginning of movement II and the nagging violin lines in minor seconds that occasionally tease the piece's protagonist. *Michelle Dulak Thomson, San Francisco Classical Voice, 05/03/2008*

- Gabriela Lena Frank's **Quijotadas** might have already received its official world premiere in Wellington, but it came with the adrenalin of a first performance. Leader Mark Steinberg introduced the character of Don Quixote, the inspiration for Frank's five portraits, as living on the border of fantasy and reality — this substantial work seemed to traverse countless musical borders in its 20 minutes.

Bursting upon us with Bartokian gusto and ending with a bullet-train Seguidillas, it embraced a wealth of music, punctuated by pizzicatos of every hue. They were especially savage in the fourth movement, a mountain song, passionately voiced by Misha Amory's viola.

Quijotadas

Composer: Gabriela Frank

Instrumentation: string quartet

Premiering Artists: Brentano String Quartet

Duration: 20'

Publisher Contact

Schirmer

<http://www.schirmer.com/Default.aspx?tabid=2539>

Artist Contact

Brentano String Quartet official site

<http://brentanoquartet.com/>



Brentano String Quartet. Credit: Christian Steiner

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