

Ode to Carmen Miranda (2023)
CLARICE ASSAD * BORN 1978

Composer, pianist, vocalist and educator Clarice Assad, daughter of renowned guitarist Sérgio Assad, was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1978 and has performed professionally since the age of seven. She studied piano, jazz and traditional Brazilian styles with Sheila Zagury and Leandro Braga, and continued her education with Natalie Fortin in Paris and at Boston's Berklee School of Music, Roosevelt University in Chicago, and University of Michigan; her composition teachers include Ilya Levinson, Stacy Garrop, Osvaldo Golijov, Michael Daugherty, Evan Chambers and Claude Baker. Among Assad's many honors are residencies with the Albany Symphony, Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, Boston Landmarks Orchestra, MacDowell Colony and Moab Music Festival, Aaron Copland Award, Gould Young Composer Award, Samuel Ostrowsky Humanities Award, several ASCAP awards in composition, Meet the Composer's Van Lier Fellowship and McKnight Visiting Composer Fellowship. In 2009, her *Danças Nativas* for guitar quartet was nominated for the Latin Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Composition, and her album *Archetypes*, performed with her father and Chicago-based Third Coast Percussion, received 2022 Grammy nominations for the Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance and Best Contemporary Classical Composition, and in 2025 won a Meyer Foundation Achievement Award for "innovation and community involvement."

Clarice Assad's music, which blends classical and jazz elements subtly infused with the Latin rhythms of her native Brazil, has been commissioned and performed by such leading artists and organizations as Carnegie Hall, Philadelphia Orchestra, Louisville Symphony, violinists Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg and Iwao Furusawa, cellist Yo-Yo Ma, pianist Anne-Marie McDermott, and recorded on the Sony Classical, Universal Music, NSS Music, Nonesuch, Chandos, Telarc and Rob Digital labels. As a pianist and vocalist, Clarice Assad has received acclaim for her performances of both her original compositions and her arrangements and performances of popular Brazilian songs and jazz standards. She has appeared throughout her native Brazil, the United States and Europe at such distinguished venues as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Pick-Staiger Concert Hall in Chicago, Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts in California, Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Le Casino de Paris and Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels. Clarice Assad has also developed a pioneering music workshop called VOXPplorations, which explores new ways to create, teach and understand music for both musicians and non-musicians.

Assad wrote that *Ode to Carmen Miranda*, composed for Houston's ROCO Chamber Orchestra and premiered by them and conductor Johannes Debus on November 11, 2023, "explores the captivating story of the Brazilian bombshell who took Hollywood by storm in the 1940s. Born in Portugal in 1909, Carmen Miranda immigrated to Brazil as a young girl. With her energetic dance moves and dazzling fruit-topped costumes, Miranda rose to fame in the 1930s as a samba singer in Brazil, becoming an icon of tropical exuberance.

"In 1939, Miranda was brought to the United States to star in Fox's *Down Argentine Way*, launching her Hollywood career. Dubbed 'The Brazilian Bombshell,' Miranda was exoticized and typecast in outrageous musicals as the very stereotype of the 'Latin spitfire.' Though enormously popular, she faced criticism in Brazil for caricaturing the country's culture. Trapped by her Hollywood image, Miranda's popularity declined in Brazil to the point where she was booed offstage in the same place that had made her famous fifteen years earlier. She fell into a significant depression, and her vibrant spirit diminished. Miranda died unexpectedly in 1955 at age 46 after suffering a heart attack, a tragic end for a star who had glowed so brightly.

"This piece captures Miranda's larger-than-life persona and the contradictions of her meteoric career. The energetic Latin rhythms and bright orchestration reflect Miranda's stage vitality and flamboyance, but subtler sections hint at the exploitation and loneliness beneath the glamor. Also, lounge-inspired interludes represent the more superficial phase of her career. Overall, the composition celebrates and mourns an incredible talent whose complexity is challenging to comprehend. There are more questions about why she went so far in pursuing brilliance and fame beyond what she already had accomplished. Yet, ultimately, being a vast Carmen Miranda fan (and someone who shares the same birthday), my goal is to commemorate Miranda's trailblazing legacy as an immigrant artist who introduced Brazilian music to the world. Before her, there were none."

Concerto No. 2 for Violin and Orchestra in G minor, Op. 63
SERGEI PROKOFIEV * 1891-1953

When Prokofiev returned to Russia full of allegiance to the socialist cause late in 1933 after his long residency in the West, he dedicated his art to fulfilling the dream of the Revolution. In his brief *Autobiography* of 1946 he wrote, "It is the duty of the composer, like the poet, the sculptor or the painter, to serve his fellow men, to beautify human life and point the way to a radiant future. Such is the immutable code as I see it." Once back in his homeland, Prokofiev wasted no time in putting into practice his theory of creating music that would communicate simply and directly to listeners, and within three years, he wrote some of his most popular scores: *Lt. Kijé*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Peter and the Wolf* and the Violin Concerto No. 2.

The Concerto's lyrical expression and clean formal lines are evident from its first gesture. The slightly melancholy main theme, built around a simple triadic figuration, is presented simply by the unaccompanied violin. The orchestra takes over the melody, allowing the soloist to apply to it some figurative arabesques that serve as the transition to the second subject, given by the violin above a quiet, undulating accompaniment. The development section is an elaboration of the two main themes. The recapitulation is begun by cellos and basses, and continues with the second theme soaring high into the soloist's range. A brief coda, based on the main theme, brings the movement to a hushed, mysterious close. The second movement is one of the most rapt, transcendent inspirations of 20th-century music, and, like the opening movement, is unabashedly romantic and filled with a haunting bittersweet emotion. The finale is in the traditional rondo form. Its theme is an ebullient dance melody that exudes some of the fiery spirit of a Gypsy fiddler.

Suite from The Firebird (1909-1910, 1945 Version)
IGOR STRAVINSKY * 1882-1971

Fireworks. There could not have been a more appropriate title for the work that launched the meteoric career of Igor Stravinsky. He wrote that glittering orchestral miniature in 1908, while still under the tutelage of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, and it shows all the dazzling instrumental technique that the student had acquired from his teacher. Though the reception of *Fireworks* was cool when it was first performed at the Siloti Concerts in St. Petersburg on February 6, 1909, there was one member of the audience who listened with heightened interest. Serge Diaghilev was forming his Ballet Russe company at just that time, and he recognized in Stravinsky a talent to be watched. He approached the 27-year-old composer and requested orchestral transcriptions of pieces by Chopin and Grieg for the first Parisian season of the Ballet Russe. Stravinsky did his work well and on time.

During that same winter, plans were beginning to stir in the creative wing of the Ballet Russe for a Russian folk ballet — something filled with legend and magic and fantasy. The composer Nikolai Tcherepnin was associated with the Ballet Russe at that time, and it was assumed that he would compose the music for a plot derived from several traditional Russian sources. Tcherepnin, however, was given to inexplicable changes of mood and was also losing interest in ballet at the time, so he withdrew from the project. Diaghilev inquired whether Stravinsky had any interest in taking it over, and he agreed. The triumphant premiere of *The Firebird* in Paris on June 25, 1910, rocketed Stravinsky to international fame.

The story deals with the glittering Firebird and the evil ogre Kashchei, who captures maidens and turns men to stone if they enter his domain. Kashchei is immortal as long as his soul, which is preserved in the form of an egg in a casket, remains intact. The plot shows how Prince Ivan wanders into Kashchei's garden in pursuit of the Firebird; he captures it and exacts a feather before letting it go. Ivan meets a group of Kashchei's captive maidens and falls in love with one of them. The princesses return to Kashchei's palace. Ivan breaks open the gates to follow them, but he is captured by the ogre's guardian monsters. He waves the magic feather and the Firebird reappears to smash Kashchei's vital egg; the ogre expires. All the captives are freed, and Ivan and his Tsarevna are wed.

Stravinsky drew three orchestral suites from *The Firebird*. The third, from 1945, begins with the *Introduction* and *The Dance of the Firebird*, which accompany the appearance of the magical creature. Three *Pantomimes* follow: *Pas de Deux of the Firebird and Ivan Tsarevich*, *Dance of the Princesses*, and *Round Dance of the Princesses*, which uses the rhythm and style of an ancient Russian dance called the *Khorovod*. The *Infernal Dance of King Kashchei* depicts the madness engendered by the appearance of the Firebird at Kashchei's court after the revelation to Ivan of the evil ogre's vulnerability. The haunting *Berceuse* is heard when the thirteenth princess, the one of whom Ivan is enamored, succumbs to a sleep-charm that saves her from the terrible King while Ivan destroys Kashchei's malevolent power. The *Finale*, initiated by the solo horn, confirms the life-force that had been threatened by Kashchei.

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