

## PROGRAM NOTES

by Phillip Huscher

### **Oswaldo Golijov – *How Slow the Wind***

*Born December 5, 1960, La Plata, Argentina.*

#### *How Slow the Wind*

Golijov composed *How Slow the Wind*, a setting of two poems by Emily Dickinson, in 2001. The original version, for soprano and string quartet, was first performed on May 5, 2001, at Tanglewood. The first performance of the orchestral version was given in March 2002, with Dawn Upshaw and the Minnesota Orchestra, Alan Gilbert conducting. The work is scored for soprano solo and an orchestra consisting of flute and alto flute, oboe and english horn, basset horn, clarinet and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, two horns, vibraphone, marimba, chimes, tam-tam, celesta, harp, and strings. Performance time is approximately eight minutes.

These are the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's first performances of Golijov's *How Slow the Wind*.

If constant migration has been the story of Oswaldo Golijov's life, as he suggests, then his music has become his passport, colored by the stamps of the countries where he has lived, the lands of his ancestors, the places he has worked. Now in his last season as our Mead Composer-in-Residence, Golijov first came in contact with music in La Plata, Argentina, his birthplace. "I grew up in a small town with a mediocre local orchestra and a beautiful little opera house that was burned at the end of Perón's life," he says. "Music was this thing that I loved." He learned about Bach and Beethoven—and eventually about Stravinsky and Bartók—from his mother, who was a pianist. Then one day, when he was ten years old, his parents took him to a hotel café to hear Astor Piazzolla, the great *nuevo tango* composer. It was a defining moment for him. Suddenly, music was no longer something found in the pages of a book, but was alive and real. "I could see not only life being distilled into music, but also how Bach and Bartók could be transmuted into something that was vital to Argentina at that moment, and into my life at that moment."

When Golijov was a boy, his uncle gave him a desk with a map of the world on top. What began in childhood as an imaginary adventure—roaming the globe instead of doing homework—eventually became a personal journey with a deep, lasting impact on his life and work—one that has traversed three continents, from Argentina to Israel, where he lived in the early 1980s, to the United States, where he settled in 1986.

Even in his biggest works, such as *La Pasión según San Marcos*—the Saint Mark Passion that first brought him international attention in 2000—and the opera *Ainadamar*, which the Chicago Symphony presented in 2008, Golijov never loses the knack for exposing the solitary personal moment when our sense of the world seems to change—for distilling life into music, the revelation he felt hearing Piazzolla’s music for the first time. And his smallest works, like *How Slow the Wind*, despite their miniature scale, are no less powerful in evoking highly personal memories and capturing feelings we can scarcely put into words.

*How Slow the Wind*, a setting of two short poems by Emily Dickinson, is Golijov’s response to the death of his friend Mariel Stubrin. With a few essential materials—a highly expressive soprano melody, the haunted cries of the basset horn and bass clarinet, a throbbing accompaniment—Golijov writes music that is devastating in its emotional directness. “I had in mind,” he says, “one of those seconds in life that is frozen in the memory, forever—a sudden death, a single instant in which life turns upside down.”

### **Text for *How Slow the Wind***

How slow the wind

How slow the sea

Is it too late to touch you, dear?

We this moment knew:

Love marine and love terrene,

love celestial too.

Oh, how late their feathers be.

*Phillip Huscher is the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.*

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