

Pas de Deux: Concerto for Violin, Violoncello and Orchestra

by Chris Brubeck

Program Notes

Early in 2016, Jaime Laredo conducted the Vermont Symphony Orchestra in an exciting performance of my recent composition, "*Affinity: Concerto for Guitar and Orchestra*," written for renowned guitarist Sharon Isbin. Maestro Laredo and I got to know each other during rehearsals and performances. It was evident that he was simpatico with my eclectic style of writing, and he proposed that I compose a double concerto for him as the solo violinist and his wife, virtuoso cellist Sharon Robinson. I was thrilled by this idea and imagined a 3-movement work that would be about 20 minutes in length. Jaime and Sharon requested that the new piece be written for a chamber-size orchestra with winds in pairs. After much discussion with the soloists about what kind of piece they wanted, a few strong concepts emerged. I envisioned the creation of a tonal piece that would be uplifting, filled with memorable melodies, and joyful in a way that would reflect the unique musical and personal partnership of Jaime Laredo and Sharon Robinson. We agreed on our vision for the piece, and so I started writing "*Pas De Deux: Concerto for Violin, Violoncello and Orchestra*."

Movement I, marked "*Allegretto*", starts dramatically with a variation of one of the main themes presented by Ms. Robinson in an unaccompanied setting. She is joined by Mr. Laredo, with the orchestral strings entering a little later playing some striking chords. After this introductory material the main melodic theme is presented in F Major and it quickly flows into a fast 3/4 time. It is dance-like but, unlike most dances, it is rhythmically unpredictable with bars of 5/4 and 4/4 popping up once in a while to keep everyone on their toes. A second theme is introduced and stays in a more consistent waltz time. But this is not the feel of a traditional Viennese Waltz: In my imagination, it is more of a wistful Latin Waltz. Towards the end of the first movement there is a section that is labeled "*Festivamente*" which has a 3-against-2 rhythmic feeling, producing an energetic forward motion.

Movement II - "*Andante ma Non Troppo*" is unabashedly romantic as I think is befitting a couple who have been making music together, both literally and metaphorically, for many years. I wanted to give them strong, passionate themes to play both individually and as a duo with intertwining melodies.

Movement III - "*Allegro con Spirito*" is decidedly light-hearted and up-tempo. One can hear the classical techniques of imitation and counterpoint contrasted with elements of a "walking bass" pizzicato which is a gesture towards jazzier influences.

As the music develops, the time signature changes to a quick 7/8. An ostinato in 7 provides the background for the featured cellist and violinist soloing and trading phrases over the repeated riff. The intensity builds and leads to an extended cello cadenza. Eventually the orchestral strings enter to provide some lush chords to support the continuing cello solo. When Ms. Robinson finishes her cadenza, Mr. Laredo enters to play his own solo commentary over some eerie polytonal chords. The music transitions into a variation of the opening 3rd movement theme which is presented in a whimsical way on the violin. Next, the audience will hear a nod to traditional swing styles. Not wanting to be completely predictable, I wrote the bridge of this jazzy variation in the time signature of 7/8.

When dancing a Pas de Deux, the leads trust each other to know the choreography and create a memorable interpretation. Sharon Robinson and Jaime Laredo play this "*Pas de Deux*" with a spirited give-and-take approach and combine their talents to create an artistic and uplifting performance. I am honored that they asked me to compose this new piece for them. This concerto is my heartfelt salute to their extraordinary musical partnership.

Chris Brubeck
Wilton, Connecticut