



## VIOLA

### A New, Dynamic Duo: *Danzas Latinoamericanas* by José Elizondo

by Korey Konkol

Every once in a blue moon, a new composition comes along that is musically sophisticated, satisfying and to put it simply, extra special. The first time I heard José Elizondo's *Danzas Latinoamericanas*, I was immediately engaged, intrigued to learn more about the composer and inspired to program the work myself. I discovered *Danzas* on a social media platform after a former MM/DMA student, Laura Vici (De St. Croix), violist and founding member of NouLou Chamber Players, posted a riveting performance

of the viola duo version of the work with her husband, Evan Vici, assistant principal viola with the Louisville Orchestra. Both the piece and presentation certainly left a smile on my face! Since then, I've noticed *Danzas* being programmed by numerous music camps, festivals, and orchestras around the world.

*Danzas Latinoamericanas* embraces Latin American culture by featuring three movements that offer a dynamic and distinct soundscape for string music. The first movement, *Otoño en Buenos Aires* (*Autumn in Buenos Aires*), is a passionate tango offering plenty of opportunities for performers' own stylized interpretations (think of the synchronized, abrupt but graceful dancers' movements!). Elizondo indebted this movement to the "concert-style tangos of Astor Piazzolla as well as the extraordinary songs of Carlos Gardel." This movement has taken on a life of its own, and is very effective as a brilliant encore. You can catch it being performed by none other than Yo-Yo Ma and Maximilian Hornung in a two-cello rendition on YouTube. *Pan de Azúcar* (*Sugar Loaf*), named after the imposing mountain jutting out of

Rio de Janeiro, is an A-B-A form offering a lilting lamentation framed by conversational pizzicato sections. Elizondo states that it "echoes the sensuous music of Antonio Carlos Jobim and the exuberant vitality of the works of Heitor Villa-Lobos." Descriptive indicators such as *playful, flirtatious, reverent, teasing, mysterious, introspective, and relaxed and smooth, like a bossa nova* pepper the score. The finale, *Atardecer Tapatio* (*Sunset in Guadalupe*), is inspired by Mexican folk-dance and the sound of mariachi bands, a tribute to



Violists Evan and Laura Vici performing José Elizondo's *Danzas Latinoamericanas* available here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Agcf4O3R\\_Lw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Agcf4O3R_Lw)

the composer's homeland.

The whole work is approximately 10-12 minutes long, making this a delightful addition to any program. I've already had a pair of doctoral students perform the work on their degree recitals, and they thoroughly enjoyed working on *Danzas* and appreciated the variety they added to their programs, not to mention being quite the crowd pleaser! Latin music has been a force in popular music for many years, and its sounds and rhythms are compelling and dramatic. Bringing these sounds to the classical tradition reflects the growing influence that Latin America has had on all culture across the globe.

Now for a mind-blowing announcement: there are no less than 62 (yes, SIXTY-TWO!) arrangements of *Danzas Latinoamericanas* on Mr. Elizondo's website at [joseelizondo.com](http://joseelizondo.com).

Some arrangements have audio and video samples; for example, there is a link to the aforementioned Vici's performance. While I am partial to the viola duo adaptation of *Danzas* as I find it particularly effective, a plethora of versions including

orchestral (many with soloists) and various chamber music combinations are available with instrumentations involving cello, double bass, piano, flute and alto flute, oboe, English horn, clarinets (B-flat, E-flat, bass), bassoon, saxophones (alto, tenor), trumpet, guitar, and accordion. There are also several versions for voice (poetry included) in different keys, one featuring the bandoneon, a concertina popular with tango ensembles.

While visiting Elizondo's website, please check out his biography which details his education at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard University as well as his work in the fields of science and engineering, revealing him to be a true Renaissance man. Numerous global venues that his works have been performed at are documented along with the celebrated artists and orchestras that have given life to his compositions. Of note to fine-instrument connoisseurs, there is even a paragraph devoted to the exceptional historical instruments that renowned artists have used to play Elizondo's compositions including Stradivarius, Tecchler and Rugeri. One can also explore other works/arrangements for viola by Elizondo including *La Alborado de la Esperanza* (*The Dawn of Hope*), *Unter dem Sternenhimmel des Rheins* (*under the starry sky of the Rhein*), *Die Nachtblume* (*The Night Flower*), *Die Legende des edlen Ritters* (*The Legend of the Noble Knight*), *Crepúsculos* (*Alpenglow*), *Limoncello*, *Chez*, *Canción de Cuna* (*Lullaby*), and *Princesa de Hadas* (*Fairy Tale Princess*).

At the time of preparing this article, all variations of the *Danzas Latinoamericanas* were free to download, so please hurry to discover this gem and consider it for future programming. You won't regret it!

*Korey Konkol is celebrating his 29<sup>th</sup> year as Professor of Viola at the University of Minnesota. Having received numerous teaching awards, he has also enjoyed performing over the course of his tenure as violist of the acclaimed string trio Ensemble Capriccio as well as the year-long substitute/guest viola section positions with the Minnesota Orchestra and St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. †*