




Composer Osvaldo Golijov Sets Sights on Brazil's Sultry Beat

By Patrick Cole



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April 3 (Bloomberg) -- Argentine-born composer **Osvaldo Golijov**, who crosses musical boundaries with inspired abandon, plans to use the \$50,000 prize money he won from the Vilcek Foundation to venture into new rhythmic waters -- the sexy, sultry beats of Brazil.

"I would like to do some research for a piece in Bahia," the exuberant Golijov, 47, said in a recent interview before accepting the award in New York. "It's for a dream piece that I've always had in mind. I want to learn the language of that type of percussion."

The **Vilcek Foundation** was launched in 2000 by Dr. **Jan T. Vilcek** and his wife, Marica, to honor significant achievements by U.S. immigrants in science, humanities and the arts. Vilcek, a native of the former Czechoslovakia, became wealthy as the co-inventor of the widely used anti-inflammatory drug Remicade.

He uses the royalties to fund his foundation and philanthropy. In 2005, he donated \$105 million to New York University's School of Medicine, where he's a professor of microbiology.

Golijov and Dr. **Inder Verma**, a professor of molecular biology at the Salk Institute in La Jolla, California, were the third winners of the Vilcek prize. In 2006, artists **Christo and Jeanne-Claude** were the first to be selected for the no-strings-attached, cash award. They won for "**The Gates**," a billowing pathway of orange nylon sheets arrayed through Manhattan's Central Park.

Immigrants' Contributions

"We wanted the amount of the award to be meaningful, but not something that would change someone's life, because these people are accomplished," Vilcek said. "The real purpose of the award is to raise consciousness of the contributions of immigrants."

Robert Sirota, president of the Manhattan School of Music and a Vilcek juror who cast his ballot for Golijov, said the composer has "tapped into something that audiences respond to on a spiritual and emotional level."

He praised Golijov for his ability to "come up with a synthesis of various cultural influences that make his music accessible and universal."

Golijov, who won a \$500,000 John T. and Catherine D. MacArthur Foundation "genius grant" in 2003, signaled his arrival as an international sensation eight years ago with "**La Pasion Segun San Marcos**," a rethinking of the crucifixion story set to the beats and sounds of Latin America. Critics showered him with praise, and audiences followed.

'Like a Bomb'

'Pasion' drops like a bomb on the belief that classical music is an exclusively European art," Alex Ross

wrote in the New Yorker on March 15, 2001, following its performance by the Boston Symphony. ``It has a revolutionary air, as if musical history were starting over."

Programmers at New York's Lincoln Center were so impressed they honored Golijov with his own festival in 2006, aptly named ``The Passion of Osvaldo Golijov."

The recording of his one-act opera, ``Ainadamar" (Deutsche Grammophon), about Spanish playwright and poet **Federico Garcia Lorca**, earned him two Grammy Awards in 2007.

Also last year, **Francis Ford Coppola** picked Golijov to score his first film in 10 years, ``Youth Without Youth," about a Romanian man rendered young again after he's struck by lightning.

For Golijov, multiculturalism began at home. He grew up in La Plata, Argentina, in a household where the prevailing motif was Eastern European and Jewish, and the music he heard was a blend of classical, Jewish sacred songs, klezmer and tango, according to his Web site.

Eclectic Collaborations

After studying piano at a local conservatory, Golijov moved to Israel in 1983, then to the U.S., where he's become known for fusing classical and world music to create daring compositions that defy category.

Besides his Grammy Award-nominated chamber music recordings, Golijov has won wide acclaim for his eclectic collaborations with other artists, ranging from Zakir Hussein, a leading Indian tabla player, to Mexican rock groups.

Golijov said he hopes his foray into Brazilian music finds expression in a future theatrical piece or opera. He said the Vilcek prize lifted his spirits after the death last month of British filmmaker **Anthony Minghella**. The two were collaborating on a work for New York's Metropolitan Opera.

Minghella died of complications stemming from surgery to treat tonsil cancer. A winner of the 1996 Academy Award for Best Director on ``The English Patient," he was 54.

``I felt complete shock," Golijov said. ``I wake up in the morning, and I still don't believe that he's gone."

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Last Updated: April 3, 2008 00:01 EDT

