

Interview with Composer Diego Sánchez Haase

ICONI Magazine is proud to present an interview conducted by **Dr. Edward Green**, professor at the Manhattan School of Music, with **Maestro Diego Sánchez Haase**, the most distinguished musician yet produced by the nation of Paraguay. First and foremost a composer, with works in many different genres, Haase is likewise a major orchestral conductor, and a powerful advocate for the music of Bach. This interview includes discussion of his operas *Pancha y Elisa* (2018) and *Ñomongeta* (2019) — each rooted in the history and culture of Paraguay: the latter opera being the first ever to have its libretto in Guaraní — the language of its indigenous population. (It is one of the two official languages of Paraguay; the other being Spanish.) In this interview is also substantial discussion of Haase’s study of Bach with Helmut Rilling, and of two operas Maestro Haase is currently creating, including one based on the Bible’s “Song of Songs.”

Журнал ИКОНИ представляет интервью **доктора Эдварда Грина**, профессора Мнхэттэнской школы музыки, с одним из выдающихся музыкантов Парагвая **маэстро Диего Санчесом Хаасе**. В первую очередь, Диего Санчес Хаасе — композитор, работающий в разных жанрах. Хаасе также является главным дирижёром оркестра и влиятельным пропагандистом и исследователем музыки Иоганна Себастьяна Баха. Интервью включает обсуждение опер Хаасе «Панча и Элиза» (2018) и «Номонгета» (2019), уходящих корнями в историю и культуру Парагвая. «Номонгета» — первая в истории опера, либретто которой написано на языке коренного



*Photo 1. Diego Sánchez Haase,
photo by Lourdes Franco Galli*

населения страны — гуарани, одного из двух официальных языков Парагвая (второй — испанский). В интервью речь идёт об исследовании музыки Баха Диего Санчесом Хаасе и Хельмутом Риллингом и о двух операх, которые маэстро Хаасе в настоящее время создаёт. Одна из них основана на библейской «Песне песней».

Edward Green: *I am glad to see that while you are very well-known in your native country, Paraguay, more of your music — including major works, such as operas and concerti — has recently been performed elsewhere: both*

in the Americas and in Europe. Can you tell us about some of these international events?

Diego Sánchez Haase: Yes. For instance, just to speak of 2019, my opera *Ñomongeta* was performed in Rome (where it premiered), as well as in Brussels, Paris, and later, of course, Asunción, the capital of Paraguay. The opera, incidentally, is in Guaraní — the language of the original inhabitants of my country: a language which is still very much alive, especially in the countryside. Many people don't know this, but Paraguay has two official languages: Guaraní and Spanish.

Also in Italy my composition "689" — *Ambigrama for a Musical Lottery* was performed twice. The piece is for an unspecified melodic instrument, and thus it allows for various readings. There was a performance in Mexico of *Omaggio a Puccini*, which is scored for chamber ensemble; in Spain, of *Camino al Akati* for solo piano; and in Chile the premiere of my *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra*.

"Camino al Akati" for solo piano.

Chiara D'Odorico, pianist:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j4v74S60rgs>

For 2020 there are plans for premieres of two new operas, one on May 23 in Italy, another at the end of October in Mexico. I could say more — and there were other performances of other pieces. But you get the idea. I am very grateful.

Edward Green: *Yes, of course! So my next question builds on what you said about yourself and opera — a field, clearly, in which you are active and plan to stay active. Your first two operas were Pancha y Elisa and Ñomongeta. They are both — in terms of their stories — based on Paraguayan themes. Yet they are remarkably different. Did you conceive them as a pair?*

Diego Sánchez Haase: No, actually. They were two completely different projects, but they were — interestingly enough — conceived almost at the same time, so I can see why you wondered about them being "fraternal twins." No — separate pregnancies!

Pancha y Elisa was commissioned to honor the centenary of the great Paraguayan writer Augusto Roa Bastos, whose play *Pancha Garmendia and Elisa Lynch* serves as its basis. The play and the opera deal with a very sensitive historical theme for Paraguayans. The principal characters are Marshal Francisco Solano López, who was President of Paraguay during the War of the Triple Alliance — that is, the war against Paraguay by the combined efforts of Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay); his wife, Elisa Lynch — who was Irish; and a love of López's youth, Pancha Garmendia. The war was 1864–1870. It is very important in the history of South America; all schoolchildren know of it. Yet it seems very, very few people outside of my continent ever heard of it.

Edward Green: *I must admit, that was true for me before I visited Paraguay two years ago.*

Diego Sánchez Haase: Well, in the middle of the opera are scenes set during that war: a war which was a holocaust for the Paraguayan people. I don't use the word "holocaust" lightly: 80 % of the male population of Paraguay disappeared. It was the greatest tragedy in our history, and trying to do musical, operatic justice to its meaning was a great challenge. Although the musical language of the opera is modern, the concept is traditional, in terms of its dramatic structure and also the fundamental musical elements I use. There are the three main characters I mentioned, various secondary characters, and also use of choral ensemble. All this is "traditional" in operatic terms. And there is ballet, and — of course — orchestra.

Trailer for the opera "Pancha y Elisa":

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8jtk_fUzZ0

Ñomongeta follows a completely different concept, and is much more contemporary and experimental in its approach. It has only one singer and no orchestra at all. The scenic element is created entirely by means of varying lights and video projections. There is only the most minimal use of costume — which, in fact, the singer himself changes

in the middle of the action. Meanwhile, the greatest innovations, I think, are these: First, the singer accompanies himself — and uses only indigenous instruments. Not violin, French horn, or oboe in sight!

Second, the opera — as I mentioned before — is entirely in Guaraní. In fact, *Ñomongeta* is the first ever Guaraní-language opera. That, to me, is important. It has to do with a crucial ethical matter in the world today: the matter of how, in our highly technical contemporary world, to honor indigenous people: their cultures, languages, ways of life. The opera is all about this, and in the process also touches upon other very current problems: such as the declining state of the environment, pollution of our natural resources, deforestation of forests, depredation of wildlife. This is all given voice in *Ñomongeta*.

Trailer for the opera “Ñomongeta”:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=musQvkrm2_I

Edward Green: *Can you tell us more about the two operas planned for 2020?*

Diego Sánchez Haase: Sure. And I suppose at this point I ought to say that unlike *Pancha and Elisa* — which was a full-evening opera, these two will be shorter. The opera, which is set to premiere on May 23, was commissioned by the *Puccini Chamber Opera Festival of Lucca* — which, as you may know, is the birthplace of Puccini. It’s a challenge! I was asked to write an opera on an “erotic” theme. Of course, I want to avoid the grotesque. Still, I think what I chose to do will surprise people!

Why? Because the libretto will be based on the great Biblical *Song of Songs* — which, before it got its various theological interpretation, was simply the most popular of all ancient Hebrew love-poems! When most people think of “erotic” literature, I imagine this text is not the first thing that comes to their minds.

Edward Green: *I think you’re certainly right about that. Yes, it will surprise people. And — I hope — do them good. It’s interesting, isn’t it, that that book — and the Book of*

Esther — have no mention of God in them whatsoever, yet both are beloved parts of the Bible.

Diego Sánchez Haase: Yes, very interesting! Well, this commission was (and is) quite a challenge, too — not only because of what we just discussed — the need to find the right text, but also because the commission requires me to score it for only a single singer: in this case a countertenor who will play two characters. The accompanying ensemble is small: eight instrumentalists plus live electronics. I’m eager to plunge into the writing of it.

The second opera will premiere in Mexico at the end of October. I’ve been asked to score it for tenor and live electronics. I am still looking for the theme that will be the basis of the libretto.

Edward Green: *Do you write your own libretti?*

Diego Sánchez Haase: No. I work with writers who have a lot of professional experience in dramaturgy. Naturally, we have in-depth discussions about the libretti, trying together to achieve good dramatic-musical effects. But I prefer to leave the ultimate writing of the text to more expert hands than my own. The librettists I have worked with are Alcibiades González Delvalle for *Pancha and Elisa*, derived from the play of Augusto Roa Bastos; Modesto Escobar Aquino, one of the most important Guaraní poets of Paraguay, who wrote the *Ñomongeta* libretto in conjunction with Pedro Parédez Argüello, who wrote that opera’s epilogue. Mr. Argüello is likewise the librettist who will adapt the *Song of Songs*.

Edward Green: *Switching subjects: it fascinates me that along with your creative work as a composer, you are a passionate advocate of the music of J.S. Bach. In fact, you gave the Paraguayan premieres of several of his greatest masterpieces. Can you tell us what you love most about Bach; also, how your study of his music has influenced your own work as a composer?*

Diego Sánchez Haase: Well, I consider myself an apostle of J.S. Bach! To “spread the



*Photo 2. Conducting the Bach Collegium de Asunción,
photo by Alejandro Held*

word,” so-to-speak, about him. To that end, I founded the *Bach Society of Paraguay*. That was years ago, and it's been arduous work — but we love it: disseminating Bach's music in Paraguay and throughout the region. I'm happy to say, our society was invited to perform in the Bach Fest Leipzig in 2020! What a thrill that will be.

As to what I like in Bach, all I can say is I like it all: all the aspects of Bach's musical work. I like his aesthetic and dramatic concepts; his management of architectonic structure; and, of course, his supreme mastery of counterpoint and harmony. Melody and rhythm, too! And I can't leave out my awe at his ideas about sound color; timbre. They are simply wonderful. Just to give a single example: the way he interweaves the oboe with the violins, nesting it within the string sonority, to produce a unique color. One obvious example to cite would be the chorale “Jesus bleibet meine Freude”, from Cantata BWV 147 — in which the oboes blend with the line of the first violins. To

my ear, Bach is the first great orchestrator in history.

But there is something above all these things I have to point to. And it is something inexplicable, really; something, in all honesty, I hardly find in the work even of other great composers. Namely his ability to maintain high spirituality in all his music, whether the overt “subject” of the music is sacred or profane. His music always transports me to a very high spiritual dimension. I think it does that for anyone who listens with open ears and an open heart. And that is true whatever one's personal faith or particular religious denomination might be.

Edward Green: *I know what you are talking about! And it's moving, isn't it, that the German novelist Johannes Ruber wrote that novel about a Pope declaring Bach — who was a Protestant, after all — a Saint for the Catholic Church.*

Diego Sánchez Haase: I don't know the novel, but it certainly sounds like one I want to read. What's the title?



Photo 3. Conducting the Orquesta Sinfónica del Congreso Nacional del Paraguay, photo by Lourdes Franco Galli

Edward Green: *Bach and the Heavenly Choir.*

Diego Sánchez Haase: Thanks! And while we're discussing Bach's spiritual power, I would think that even atheists, listening to Bach, would find themselves inwardly transported into a dimension of emotion far from the "everyday." A deeper dimension; a higher one; a more permanent one. For lack of a better word: Heaven.

And since you ask me about the impact of Bach on my own music, first and foremost I'll say this: I make much use of counterpoint — in the traditional sense of the word; something which many contemporary composers shy away from. I also try to follow Bach's lead in the territory of musical integrity: that is, I do try to achieve what he *always* achieves — true and organic balance of all the aspects of music. So, honoring Bach, I try not to let harmony, or melody, or counterpoint, or rhythm, or timbre — or whatever — dominate a composition to the detriment of the many other aspects I've just mentioned.

Edward Green: *Speaking of diversity, and the need for integrity and balance, it's fair, I think, to say that you are the most diverse, and most deeply accomplished musician in Paraguay: what with your many achievements as conductor, composer, harpsichordist, pianist, and scholar. Can you tell the readers of Iconi what musical positions you currently hold in your native country?*

Diego Sánchez Haase: Thank you very much for saying that about me. Yes, I've been immensely fortunate. I was trained rigorously in several fields of musical activity, and 2020 in fact marks the 30th year of my professional career. As for my current positions, they are these: I am Music Director of the *Symphony Orchestra of the National Parliament of Paraguay* (since 2012); also director of the *Bicentennial House of Music of Paraguay*; director of the *Paraguayan Institute of Musicology*; president and artistic director of the *Bach Society of Paraguay* — and a member of the *Advisory Council of the Cultural Center of the Republic "El Cabildo."*



Playing the harpsichord:
Agustín Barrios Mangoré:
“La catedral”, transcription for harpsichord
by Diego Sánchez Haase:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cHKemTlaY68>

Earlier, I was Music Director of the *Symphony Orchestra of the Universidad del Norte* (2001–2012), and likewise of the *Orquesta Filarmónica Guaireña* (1992–2002). I was a member of the *Advisory Council of the Municipal Theater of Asunción*, and was a teacher in several conservatories in Paraguay. I was also the founder and artistic director of the *Asunción Baroque Music Festival* (2004–2011) and the *Asunción Contemporary Music Festival* (2006–2011).

Edward Green: *So much! I hope, on occasion, you even found time to get a full three hours of sleep a night?*

Diego Sánchez Haase: Yes — sometimes! And, to be honest, not nearly often enough! So, you’re right: sometimes I look back on all this and I do wonder how I ever managed it. Still, I can’t say I regret any of it. I learned so much in each position, and I still do. Actually, while all this work does keep me a bit sleep-deprived, I also think — in a deeper sense — it also keeps me young!

Edward Green: *Good. May you live to be 100! OK — now, going back a bit: I know you studied for several years in Europe, including with the great Bach conductor Helmuth Rilling. Can you tell us something about your experiences there? And also, specifically, studying with him?*

Diego Sánchez Haase: When I finished my basic musical training in Paraguay, I was fortunate to receive scholarships to do further study abroad. It was a time which coincided with the fall of the Paraguayan dictator General Stroessner; as a result there was much international help given then to help Paraguay recover from his quasi-Fascist regime. To recover economically, culturally, politically. One could even say spiritually. I was a beneficiary of that.

Here’s more precisely how it happened. In 1991, in Brazil, I met Maestro Albert Juliá

from Stuttgart, Germany when I took an orchestral conducting course with him while he was here in South America. The maestro then invited me to continue my studies in Germany. So I applied for an UNESCO scholarship. I am so happy it was granted me!

In Stuttgart, with the maestro, I studied many foundational aspects of the technique of orchestral conducting. (He, himself, had trained under Celibidache). I also studied piano with him, since he is not only a wonderful conductor but also an excellent pianist.

Stuttgart also gave me the opportunity to hear many concerts conducted by Helmuth Rilling. I can’t resist the rhyme: these Rilling concerts were thrilling. And at the end of one of them, Maestro Juliá introduced me to him. Maestro Rilling then invited me to apply to the Internationale Bachakademie Stuttgart, to take courses with him there, and naturally I applied. And I’m so grateful I was accepted. I had the privilege of studying with Maestro Rilling at the highpoint of his career. What good luck!

Through Helmuth Rilling I discovered the wonderful world of Bach’s cantatas, which for me had been unknown territory. The slightest handful had been performed in Paraguay over the centuries — and I’m not even sure any of them had ever been performed in its entirety.

With the particular charisma that characterizes him, Maestro Rilling knew how to wake up in me — as well as all the other young people from around the world who were taking his courses alongside me at the “Akademie” — a huge passion for Bach’s music. From that moment on, I promised myself to become a Bach apostle in South America. Upon returning to my country, I founded the Bach Society of Paraguay. And I sought out opportunities to continue to study with Rilling: in later Stuttgart courses, but also when he taught in Santiago de Compostela in Spain.

In 2001, on his recommendation, I received a full scholarship to the Oregon Bach Festival in the United States. That was

the final “official” course I took with him, but we always remained in touch. The last time I met him was in 2011 in Milano; we had lunch together and talked ... about Bach! And I am happy to say that in the recent years several young musicians from the Bach Society of Paraguay were admitted to the Jugend Bach Ensemble in Stuttgart, so his work vis-à-vis Paraguay continued!

I keep the finest and deepest and most grateful memories of the maestro. He set me on the wonderful path of Bach’s music!

Edward Green: *Rilling was a scholar and a true interpretive musical artist. And I know you care very much for scholarship. In particular: am I right in thinking you’ve published three books on music? Or are there more? What were the subjects of these books, and are you planning on writing another?*

Diego Sánchez Haase: Yes, three that I authored myself. Music research is indeed a field I love, although I have never had enough time to work in it as much as I would like. In 2002, *Music in Paraguay: History and Analysis* was published by El Lector, located in Asunción. It is an extended essay on Paraguayan musical history, and is now a text widely used in our schools. I have planned an updated new edition for the year 2022, which will be, of course, the 20th anniversary of the first edition. How time flies!

http://www.portalguarani.com/1107-diego_sanchez_haase/10446_la_musica_en_el_paraguay_breve_compendio_de_su_historia_por_diego_sanchez_haase.html

My second book came out in 2004 — in the context of the first year of the Baroque Music Festival of Asunción. It is entitled *The Music of J.S. Bach in Paraguayan Music Education*, and was published by the Universidad del Norte. The book is meant as support material for students in the field of Music Education. It contains a detailed analysis of Bach’s *Inventions and Sinfonias*, as well as stylistic considerations on such topics as ornamentation, articulation, and Baroque Era improvisational techniques.

My third book is entitled: *Carlos Lara Bareiro: Apostle of Music and Dignity*, and

is a study of the life and work of the great Paraguayan orchestral conductor and composer Carlos Lara Bareiro (1914–1987). It was published in 2014, on the occasion of his centenary, in conjunction with the Cultural Center of the Republic “El Cabildo”.

Also, I collaborated on books with other authors, including — for example — *Tribute to José Asunción Flores and Paraguay: A Vision of Two Centuries*. And naturally there have been many interviews over the years with magazines and newspapers in Paraguay and abroad. For example, in 2018 the newspaper *Última Hora*, of Asunción, published an extensive article of mine on the 60th anniversary of a major event in Paraguayan musical history: the concert in Asunción of Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic.

Edward Green: *I know that you are very much interested in fostering the work of other contemporary composers; being a “champion” for them. Among these is Girolamo Deraco of Italy. You’ve premiered many of his works. Can you tell us about your various collaborations with him, and what you find so particularly engaging about him as a composer?*

Diego Sánchez Haase: Yes, indeed: I am very interested in spreading the music of living composers, and I founded the Asunción Contemporary Music Festival in order to have yet another path to do so. I do my best to introduce at least one piece of music by a living composer into each program of my orchestra — festival or no festival. Thus, we have programmed the music of Paraguayan living composers such as Daniel and Nancy Luzko, José and Héctor Ramírez, Gabriel Graziani (to name just a few), as well as foreign composers such as Dimitri Cervo (Brazil), Eduardo Caballero (Mexico), Francisco Varela (Argentina), Valeria Valle (Chile), and many more. You, too, of course!

Edward Green: *Yes, and thank you for that. Twice now: my Symphony in C and also my orchestral suite Music for Shakespeare.*

Diego Sánchez Haase: And hopefully we can do more! Meanwhile, you are right to draw particular attention to Girolamo



Deraco of Italy. Ever since we met in June, 2017 in Lucca (his hometown), we've maintained a very fruitful collaboration. In this short period of time, I have conducted three world premieres of his operas, one in Italy and two in Paraguay, and he did the stage management of my opera *Ñomongeta*, and has commissioned other works by me.

I really like Deraco's music, which is very versatile stylistically, and has impressive creativity. He is an original mind; an original artist. And he always has "ideas." Engaging new ideas. I believe that our collaboration, to which Eduardo Caballero, from Mexico often joins as a third composer, is a valuable way not only of joining our countries and integrating our cultures, but also — I do hope — of inspiring the younger generation of composers to create music with fresh and deep ideas. In particular, I think, our "Trio" is presenting a new and solid notion of how the future of opera might unfold.

Two of Girolamo's most fascinating recent operas, both of which I had the joy to conduct at their premieres, were *Oceano* and *Universo*, each based on the phenomenon of migration. *Oceano* recounts Italian migration to South America at the end of the 19th century, and *Universo* speaks of a future migration of humanity into space.

"*Oceano*," docu-opera by Girolamo Deraco:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRxXdyfzv10>

It was also very interesting to premiere his opera *Dr. Streben*, in which one of the main characters is a robot.

Edward Green: *A robot? It sings?*

Diego Sánchez Haase: Well, no. In the opera, the robot just speaks. But it was a very interesting experience to conduct because all of the robot movements, as well the timing of its "spoken interventions" were depended on my conductor's baton. So I was, as they say, "multi-tasking." Likewise, I have conducted Girolamo's "Taci" last year — another daring work. It has the record of being the shortest opera in history: it lasts only eight seconds!

Edward Green: *When I was in Paraguay in 2018 giving a series of Fulbright-sponsored*

lectures on the Aesthetic Realism approach to music, based on the work of the great poet and philosopher Eli Siegel, you told me you found his philosophic principles deeply inspiring and insightful.

Diego Sánchez Haase: Yes, I certainly did!

Edward Green: *Can you say more?*

Diego Sánchez Haase: Sure. I was very profoundly impressed by how Aesthetic Realism relates Art and Life. Eli Siegel's principle, "All beauty is a making one of opposites, and the making one of opposites is what we are going after in ourselves," made tremendous sense to me. Likewise, his statement: "The world, art, and self explain each other: each is the aesthetic oneness of opposites." That is magnificent. What a concept!

Truly, I am grateful — and I know the hundreds of people who attended your lectures were also grateful — to see in detail, through musical analysis, how these principles of Aesthetic Realism illuminate not only masterpieces by Stravinsky, Ellington, and others, but are so valuable as a means of having our own daily lives be more beautiful. I want to continue to learn more about this profound philosophy, and at some point I hope I'm actually in a position to study it directly in New York City, where I know the Aesthetic Realism Foundation is located.

Edward Green: *I certainly hope you can come to New York! Yes, the education at the Foundation is — to use the word you chose — magnificent.*

Diego Sánchez Haase: And I want to reiterate: your lectures and master classes aroused enormous curiosity and great enthusiasm in Paraguay — especially among the younger music students who witnessed them. Some, as you know, drove hours to attend, when word got out what was happening! I hope that in the future we can get you back to our country to continue this grand education.

Edward Green: *Thank you. I'd love it. And now, to continue, let me ask you more about your work as a composer. Are there new instrumental works — chamber or symphonic — you are in the midst of working on?*



Diego Sánchez Haase: I am finishing up a piano and oboe sonata commissioned by Chilean oboist José Luíz Urquieta. I need to finalize the last movement. Also, the excellent Paraguayan clarinetist José Cabrera asked me for a clarinet and piano “reduction” version of my concerto. So I am working on this, too. In addition, since 2020 — as I mentioned — is my 30th year as a professional musician, I would like to celebrate by giving myself a Concerto for Piano and Orchestra. It’s actually a debt I have had for a long time.

If my intense activities as a Music Director of the National Parliament Symphony Orchestra permits me the time to accomplish it — because, after all, I have to plan, rehearse, and conduct more than 60 concerts a year here and abroad — I’ll certainly write that concerto! Write it this “anniversary” year, and premiere it, as well. God willing.

Edward Green: *I’m sure He’s listening. And may He grant your prayer! And since you mentioned conducting abroad, I know you’ve conducted not only in South and Central America, but also in the United States, the Caribbean, and Europe. Are there any interesting observations about these experiences you’d like to share with the readers of Iconi? — especially where you found a different musical approach among the musicians in these different locations.*

Diego Sánchez Haase: Yes: in general, each orchestra does have its own sound identity, and I am sure that national traditions (and sound ideals) have a great deal to do with that. Still, I must say I am very concerned about the lack of stylistic knowledge with which most orchestras — in whatever country — play music prior to the Romantic Era. We still need to convey, in a far more effective way, the need of musicians to stay true to accurate criteria of historical interpretation. I think the Europeans — thank God — have already taken steps in this direction. May other parts of the world follow their lead!

So, a situation I’ve met several times is this: being asked to conduct (as a guest) an orchestra whose tradition is to play Mozart

or Haydn — yet with a romantic sound! It is hard, in a mere two or three rehearsals (all a guest generally gets) to change deeply rooted things, and achieve a stylistically correct interpretation. Therefore, I do not believe that conductors ought to spend their careers primarily as guest conductors. I think that the only way for a conductor to express a true sound ideal — not to mention the flexibility to be true to the various sound ideals of the different epochs of music history — is to work in a sustained way, over many years, with his own orchestra.

This year, for example, in honor of the big Beethoven anniversary (250th of his birth) I will conduct, for the fourth time, the complete cycle of his nine symphonies. It will be the second time I’ll be doing the cycle with my current orchestra, which, I am grateful to say, is made up of musicians who have been working with me for a long time, and know my musical criteria.

But, of course, no matter how often you perform them, the Beethoven symphonies always remain fresh; always remain exciting challenges.

Edward Green: *Since Iconi is a Russian-based journal, would you tell us who your favorite Russian composers are? And, if you like, your favorite works by them — and perhaps why?*

Diego Sánchez Haase: I really like the music of many Russian composers, including (of course) Tchaikovsky! I have conducted his symphonies, ballets and concerti many times. Also I care very much for Rimsky-Korsakov, Rachmaninov, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, and remain fascinated by Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*. I do think it’s my favorite work of the Russian repertoire, and one of the greatest musical compositions in all of human history. It broke all the rules — but did so beautifully, and in the process opened up a new path for music. Stravinsky really was a liberator!

Edward Green: *Do you have a particular spiritual or philosophic viewpoint as to music which is a foundation for your work as a composer?*



Diego Sánchez Haase: Not specifically. At least that I am conscious of — that is, that I can find words for. I do try to find in the music that I write the clearest and most direct language to express my ideas, my feelings and my spirit. The language of sound, that is. Not words. I want to communicate through my music, and communication simply works better when a person — whether in words or music — is as clear and direct as he can be. To be honest, I do think I express myself far better with music than with words.

I have to say, I'm grateful to music for giving me a medium through which I can express my spirituality and my faith. Music is my way of offering daily prayer — and I thank God for the privilege of studying it, cultivating it, enjoying it, and being in a position, I do hope, of bringing joy to those who listen to it.

Edward Green: *Speaking of joy, and of privilege, I know you are a proud father! Have you given thought to writing music specifically for children — as Schumann and others did? In fact, have you already done so?*

Diego Sánchez Haase: I haven't yet written music, just so, to be played by children. But my daughter Constanza did inspire in me a piece I titled *Constanza and the Elves*, for Paraguayan harp and ensemble. When it was premiered, I not only conducted, I also played the Paraguayan harp part myself. It was at the World Harp Festival in Asunción. (The ensemble was from my orchestra.)

I also wrote a piece for children's choir and orchestra, entitled *The Train*, which premiered in Newton, Kansas in 2006, on the occasion of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Mid-Kansas Symphony, of which I was then Music Director.

Constanza, as I think you know, plays the violin and is also learning the piano, apart from singing — which she does very well. I hope that when her younger sister, Aurora, grows up, they can make music together. Maybe then I will write duets for them. Or a trio with soprano, so that my wife Lourdes, who is an excellent soprano and sings in the

choir of the Bach Society of Paraguay, can also sing with them. Hopefully, yes!

Edward Green: *A technical question: are there any particular aspects of the art of musical composition which, over the years, you've found it most engaging to explore? Rhythmic, harmonic, etc.?*

Diego Sánchez Haase: I really like counterpoint. Some consider it as an element of “ancient” music, already antedated. But I disagree! For me it is fundamental. Also, considering that my artistic roots come from the folk music of Paraguay (my first instrument was the Paraguayan harp), I am very interested in continuing to explore our folk music. I try to be deep about it, and to include some of that music's technical elements in all my concert music. Bartók, as you know, felt something like that in relation to the folk music of his native Hungary. I have enormous respect for that. And I remember when you spoke in your Fulbright lectures about Duke Ellington, you spoke about how proud Ellington was of his African-American heritage — musically and otherwise.

Edward Green: *Yes.*

Diego Sánchez Haase: Well, I'm proud of my national heritage. The Spanish aspect, and my own family's German aspect. But very much I am also proud of the indigenous aspect of my wonderful country. Therefore, several of my works are inspired by Guaraní mythology; or by the landscape of Paraguay; or even by the cuisine of my country! I think I went deepest in my opera *Ñomongeta*, which has very different rhythmic and tonal patterns than the music of our classical European heritage.

Edward Green: *Along with Bach, what other classical composers have deeply inspired you? And, in particular, what 20th century composers?*

Diego Sánchez Haase: Certainly Beethoven and Brahms. I greatly appreciate Beethoven's boldness; his fearless transgression of “academic” norms in behalf of finding his own sincere musical voice. I also am in awe of Brahmsian intellectuality — which is simultaneously so warm-hearted and melody.



That combination — intellect and warmth — is a beautiful one, don't you think?

Edward Green: *I absolutely do, and I couldn't agree with you more about that — how those opposites are one in Brahms.*

Diego Sánchez Haase: Yes. And I also admire Debussy, Schönberg and Stravinsky — all of whom opened up new roads. In opera, Monteverdi, Puccini and Wagner inspire me the most. In fact, I think *Pancha and Elisa*, in its own way, reflects many Wagnerian concepts. And of later 20th-century masters, I certainly would mention Ligeti, Nono, and Berio among the Europeans, and among Latin-Americans Revueletas, Ginastera and Villa-Lobos.

Edward Green: *Finally: is there any "massive" project — any very large-scale work — you hope, sometime in your career, to compose? In particular, I'm wondering about ballet, since I know you've conducted a good deal of ballet in Paraguay, and perhaps elsewhere. Is there a full-length dance work perhaps coming from you in the future?*

Diego Sánchez Haase: I have indeed conducted much ballet. It's a very important

experience for any orchestral conductor. However, I'm not — at least at this point — inspired to do actual composition for ballet. Independent composition, that is: a "stand-alone" dance piece. But, after all, I do see dance as important. In *Pancha and Elisa* there is a ballet scene that's a full 18 minutes long. I must say, I'm proud of it. It's really two scenes in one, and the music reflects that. Also, it's the part of the opera that has the most "advanced" tonal and rhythmic language of the entire work.

A large-scale project I am considering would be the composition of a big symphonic-choral work: one which would far exceed the dimensions of my *Symphony No. 1*, which premiered in Asunción on the occasion of the bicentennial celebration of Paraguay's Independence. That was 2011. But, of course, before I can write this second symphony, I need to find the right text!

Edward Green: *Godspeed in that! I certainly hope you find that text. And speaking of texts and words, thank you for this lively interview.*

Diego Sánchez Haas: You're very welcome.

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