

LEONARD SALZEDO

CANTO DE LA SIBILA

Opus 135

Oboe d'amore (Bassoon or Bass Oboe) and String Quartet



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AI EN 003

Leonard Salzedo

(1921-2000)

Leonard Salzedo, the most Spanish of British composers, was born in London in 1921. He began the violin at the age of six and started to compose when he was twelve.

He was awarded the Cobbett Prize (1942) after only two years as a student at the Royal College of Music (London) for his first string quartet: he would eventually compose ten. Again, during his studies, he was commissioned to write the score for a ballet, *The Fugitive* (1944), which was performed more than four hundred times by Ballet Rambert.

The most renowned of Salzedo's seventeen ballet scores, *The Witch Boy*, received its première in Amsterdam (1956). Since then, ballet companies around the world have given in excess of three thousand performances in more than thirty-three countries. *The Witch Boy* has featured on television in many of these including Germany, Japan and New Zealand.

From 1947 - 1950 Leonard Salzedo was a member of the London Philharmonic Orchestra. He then moved to the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (until 1966). Its illustrious conductor, Sir Thomas Beecham, gave the premières of two of Salzedo's compositions at the Royal Festival Hall. As well as playing violin in the orchestra, Leonard Salzedo became his assistant conductor. In 1964 he joined the London Soloists Ensemble and composed *Concerto Fervido* especially for it.

In 1967, Salzedo abandoned the violin to become Musical Director of Ballet Rambert (now the Rambert Dance Company), a post he held until 1972. The same year, he moved to Scottish Ballet as their Principal Conductor (-1974). He was later to become Music Director of London City Ballet (1982 -1986).

Thereafter, until his death in May 2000, Leonard Salzedo devoted himself almost entirely to prolific composition. Although performing continuously for many years, he composed more than 160 works including two symphonies.

The opening six bar fanfare of his *Divertimento for Three Trumpets and Three Trombones* (1959) was used by the BBC as the theme music for all Open University educational programmes broadcast on radio and television (1970s -1990s). He composed eighteen film scores including Hammer's *The Revenge of Frankenstein* (1959).

Leonard Salzedo was a wine connoisseur and member of the *Confrérie des Chevaliers du Sacavin*, a Loire-based wine brotherhood with a London Chapter. For many years he was their *Chef des Beaux Arts* and wrote fanfares, which were performed at dinners and inductions.

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I wrote this work for Jennifer Paull during the summer of 1996. The *Canto*, a liturgical drama dating back to the X century, was very eminent in the Middle Ages.

Originally, the *Canto de la Sibila* (Sibylline Verse) was set in Latin, but, from the XIII century, in either Castilian or Catalan. Until the XV century it was sung by a single voice. However, from that time onwards, it was written in four vocal parts. The usual date for this observance was Christmas Night. Whilst the choir sang the words of the Sibyl (oracle), an elaborate ceremony was enacted.

Initially, a group of six would emerge in highly-embroidered, oriental, feminine costumes. Behind these figures (representing the Sibyl) there followed a further four. Of these, two were dressed with albs (long white vestments representing purity) adorned with wide stoles to symbolise angels' wings. In their hands they carried daggers brandished aloft. Clad in choir robes, the remaining pair held burning torches. The four formed a smaller procession close to the *presbytery* (the priest's residence). During this time the original six sang the *canto*. When it was completed, the smaller group's members flourished their daggers on high. Meanwhile, the choir responded with a refrain that was repeated several times.

In this piece I have represented the atmosphere of this ancient ceremony paraphrasing one of the old plainsong melodies. Written for Jennifer Paull to perform on oboe d'amore, at her suggestion I conceived this work as my only composition equally intended for solo bassoon - although the bassoon is an alternative instrument for my *Iberian Improvisations*. In the same way, *Canto de la Sibila* is well suited to the rich timbre of the bass oboe; an instrument I employed in my *Bailables* suite of dances for oboe consort.

Leonard Salzedo
1997