

COMPOSERS

Introducing - Aldo Rafael Forte

Martin Ellerby

Aldo Rafael Forte is Composer/Arranger with the United States Air Force Heritage of America Band, based at Langley AFB, and Adjunct Professor of Composition at Christopher Newport University in Newport News, both in Virginia.

Born in Havana, Cuba, Forte came to the United States as a young boy. His father, a mathematician and amateur classical guitarist and guitar maker introduced him to music. Forte has studied composition with Ross Lee Finney, William Presser and Robert Jager. He holds degrees from Tennessee Technological University and the University of Southern Mississippi.

Forte has composed in media ranging from chamber pieces to works for band and orchestra. He is the recipient of composition fellowships from the Cintas Foundation and the Alabama State Council on the Arts. Forte is a widely commissioned composer. His works have been performed and recorded by such diverse groups as the Southwest German Radio Orchestra, the Filharmonie Bohuslav Martinu Orchestra of the Czech Republic, the North Carolina Symphony Orchestra, and by various university, community and professional bands including University of Georgia, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, University of North Texas, Tacoma Concert Band and the USAF Heritage of America Band. His music appears regularly on programmes at music conventions and All State Band concerts. The 'Presidents Own' United States Marine Band recently showcased his Concerto for Soprano Saxophone in 19 performances during their Fall 2000 Tour.

Among Forte's most performed band works are *Van Gogh Portraits* and *The Riddle of the Sphinx*. His latest works include *Tableaux* - ballet for double quintet, *Olympus* - four mythological legends, *Symphony for the Millennium* and *Vestida de Luto* (Draped in Mourning Black). Forte was awarded 1st prize in the 2001 National Federation of Music Clubs American Music in the United States Armed Forces Composition Competition for his *Impressionist Prints*.

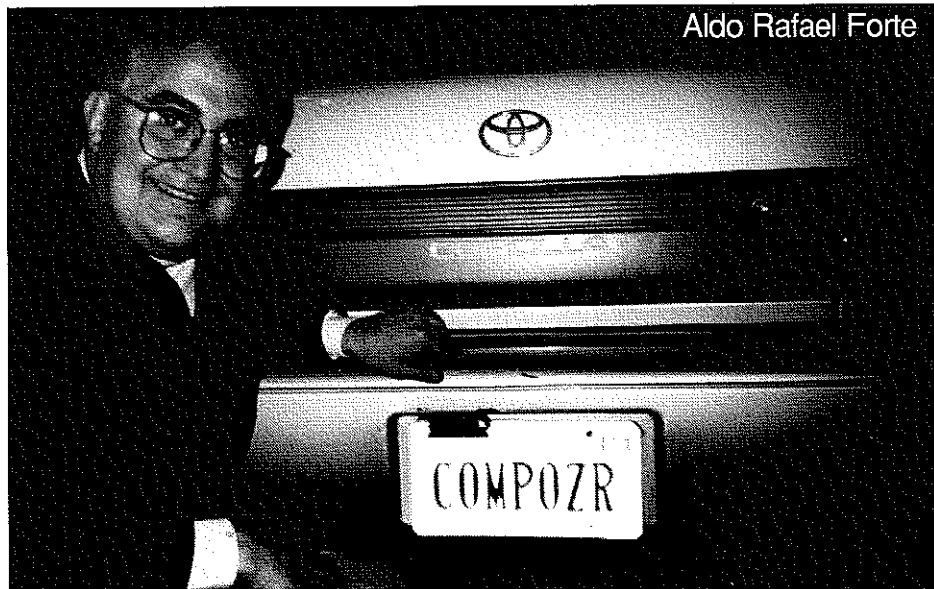
A member of ASCAP and recipient of several ASCAP special awards, his music is recorded on many labels and published by a diverse number of publishers. Forte is also in demand as a conductor and lecturer.

ME: When did you first get the 'call' to become a composer?

ARF: When I was about 12 years old. I found myself writing little compositions for myself to perform on trombone. Shortly after I found out that two of my cousins were learning trumpet and clarinet respectively. When we went to visit them in Florida I prepared some trio compositions for us to play and, in the process, I learned to transpose for B flat instruments!

ME: How old were you when you moved to the USA?

ARF: I was eight and a half when we moved from Cuba.



Martin Ellerby first met Aldo Forte at the Mid-West Conference in December of 2000. Forte's band, the USAF Heritage of America Band, had recently recorded his *Paris Sketches* and so they had an immediate conversational link. Before visiting the 2001 Mid-West Conference Ellerby took some time to visit both composer and band, in Virginia, as they were recording more of his music. Later when they met up again in Chicago he recorded the responses to a series of questions.

ME: Why did you opt for a service life?

ARF: It offered me the opportunity to have a professional ensemble to write for, day in, day out. Prior to entering the US Air Force Band Program I had been a middle and high school band director for 3 years and had worked as a trombonist with several nightclub bands.

ME: Prior to joining the Air Force had you written much that has survived?

ARF: There are some things I have written since joining the Air Force that

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have not survived! I consider most of the works I wrote before then to be the early works of a novice composer. I joined the USAF just before I turned 27 and did not really become devoted to composition until about four years before that. I had written a couple of works that had received some mileage; a tone poem for band on *The Fall of the House of Usher* by Poe and a *Sinfonietta for String Orchestra* which was premiered by the Alabama Symphony - oh, and also a little trifle for wind quintet.

ME: How did the Air Force post change/benefit your career?

ARF: Greatly in many ways. First it taught me to write 'on demand'. I find deadlines a great inspiration. Secondly, being surrounded by professional musicians all the time has given me the opportunity to constantly experiment and hear the results very quickly. Before then I often had to wait some time to hear my works after I had completed them. The Heritage of America Band is an awesome ensemble to write for!

ME: What are your feelings about music publishing?

ARF: It is vitally important for a composer - this is how the music gets around! A good publisher will market a composer, get the 'name' moving. This hopefully leads to more performances, possibly guest conducting and commissions for new works.

ME: What are your thoughts regarding music recording?

ARF: It can achieve the same results as publishing can, providing that the recordings are well performed and of high quality. I also enjoy a variety of interpretations of my music. I do not want all conductors to be clones of each other; that is I welcome individual approaches. The other thing is that recordings have an archival importance as markers in your own career, though there is no substitute for a live performance.

ME: What is your favourite piece for concert band by an American composer and why?

ARF: There is much exciting music being written here. Stephen Melillo composes music that is very emotionally charged. His *Ahab* for narrator and band is full of gripping drama and the music totally complements the spoken word. Also his *David* is a wonderful work. I also like the music of David Gillingham, in particular *Galactic Empires* and *Concerto for Percussion and Band*. He has a great command of the development of ideas and his craftsmanship is top notch. Another of my favorites is *Blue Shades* by Frank Tichelli with its infusion of jazz elements. Alongside his command of the band he also has a great sense of colour.

ME: What is the favourite piece of your own?

ARF: This is difficult. I am a chameleon composer in that I write different kinds of works as circumstances dictate. I also evolve from one composition to the next, but if I had to give an answer I can say that I was very pleased with the colors and contrasts in my recent *Impressionist Prints* - six masters in two galleries and also *Tableaux* - ballet for double quintet, specially in my efforts to make it sound bigger than it really is!

ME: How positive do you feel about the future of concert band music?

ARF: Very. The literature for this medium continues to develop along many exciting lines. There are new colors being discovered all the time. It is also the medium in which the most audience-friendly music is being written these days. So much of

the literature communicates well with the public as well as with the players.

ME: What works have you recently completed?

ARF: A Christmas piece for narrator and band recently recorded by the USAF Heritage of America Band, *Tensegrity* for the Georgia Tech Band which is a tribute to engineering principles and *Vestida de Luto* (Draped in Mourning Black) for the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Wind Ensemble under Jack Stamp.

ME: What are you currently working on?

ARF: A three movement work for a school band in Virginia in memory of a wonderful hornist, Maria Diaz, who died at the age of 19 in an auto accident. However, it is a joyous work cast in a Spanish style that is a musical celebration of her life and heritage. I am also working on a concerto for tuba and band.

ME: What do you hope to achieve in the future?

ARF: To continue to grow as a composer through new projects that steer me in new directions allowing me to experiment with form and technique.

Further information about Aldo Forte and his music is available on the following websites:

Cnu.edu/music/faculty

trn-music.com (click on composers and articles)

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