

The Art of Performing the Spanish Paso Doble

Dr. Abel Saldivar Ramirez

Throughout my entire professional career, the Paso Doble, or pasodoble, has truly been a mystery to me. Over the past 20 years, our profession has experienced a steady decline in the performance of Paso Dobles. I can, however, appreciate why music educators often resist adding Paso Dobles to their list of traditional concert program selections. Based upon recent and completely unscientific polls that I have taken, it has become increasingly evident to me that the absence of significant resources (historical and performance practice treatises) is part of the reason why fewer performances of these musical treasures are heard. Although tracing the origins of the Paso Doble (as they are perceived in the modern concert band setting) is nearly impossible, this exercise is an attempt to at the very least provide the music educator with definitive points of reference from which informed decisions can be reached.

The presentation that will be given during the TBA Clinic/Convention is entitled: The Art of Performing Spanish Paso Dobles. In the interest of preserving time, let us assume that we are all in agreement in terms of how

one defines “artistic.” With the much appreciated assistance of the Stevens High School Wind Ensemble, Robert Rubio, Director of Bands and John Dominguez, Assistant Director of Bands, the following performance practice items will be addressed.

I. Historical References:

(In our quest to identify specific points of reference from which informed musical decisions can be reached, the following items should be considered by the conductor. Although the origins of the popular dance-style of Paso Dobles can be traced to motets of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as well as Zarzuelas, more practical references will be addressed)

Paso Doble (literal Spanish translation: double-step) is a typical “march-like” musical and dance style performed by a couple. The Paso Doble is one of many Spanish folk dances that are associated with various aspects of Spanish culture. It is this style of

music that has become a signature item during bullfights. As the audience enters the arena and locates their seats, the band will often play a spirited Paso Doble at

a faster tempo than the one’s to follow. The event then begins with a single trumpeter blowing a fanfare while the large gate at one end of the arena is opened. One or two bailiffs (alguaciles) ride across the ring to the president and tip their hats. The official thereby returns the gesture

and waives a white handkerchief granting permission for the “corrida” to officially begin. This gesture is acknowledged by a loud trumpet call. After the “alguaciles” return to the gate, the “corrida” band performs a dramatic Paso Doble, which is played at a tempo that reflects and controls the grand nature of the opening “paseo.” In most Spanish bullfights, there are three matadors and six bulls-two for each matador. The “paseo” is led by three matadors with all of their teams following closely behind. (More details regarding

**“The Art of Performing the Spanish Paso Doble”
Monday, July 28
4:00-5:00 p.m.
CC Room: 217
Clinician: Dr. Abel Saldivar Ramirez
Accompanied by the John Paul Stevens High School Wind Ensemble**

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the nature of the Spanish bullfight and the music performed during these events will be included in the clinic handout)

II. Style:

Because not all Paso Dobles were written for bullfights (or in honor of famous bullfighter's), there are diverse stylistic issues that should be considered. Some ideas that will be addressed throughout the presentation include:

1. Definitive attacks that are not too abrupt and “eloquent” releases.
2. Hierarchy of musical lines.
3. Length of notes (especially in bass lines), as well as notes followed by RESTS.
4. Ensemble Color: Low Reeds (especially during the trio)
5. VIBRATO!!

III. Articulation:

With the assistance of the Stevens High School Wind Ensemble, issues regarding articulation (especially brass articulation) will be examined. The Stevens High School Wind Ensemble will perform excerpts taken from well-known Paso Dobles to help make more clear the importance of teaching appropriate articulation.

IV. Tempo:

Throughout the history of music, the issue of tempo (and all that it implies) has been one of the most pressing interpretive concerns for the performer. While discrepancies in performance are often the result of misconceptions, several issues will be addressed in attempt to identify specific points of reference from which the conductor can draw while making decisions about appropriate tempi. For example, some items that a conductor should consider include:

1. Composer: Who wrote the music? What was the composer's INTENT!!? Birth place? When was the music written? Who published the music? When was it published?
2. How does choice of tempi affect phrasing? Expressivity? Style?
3. Tempo rubato

This presentation is by no means an attempt to reveal the “truth” or the “correct way” to approach Paso Dobles; rather, it is intended to help the music educator identify points of reference that will allow for informed decision-making. I have discovered throughout this investigation that for every answer there exists a multitude of new questions. The beauty of music is not in the discovery of a single solution. It is in the risk-taking and experimental nature of the art form itself that motivates us to continue along in our musical adventures.

Associate Professor, Co-founder and Conductor-in-Residence of the International Honor's Wind Symphony, Dr. Abel Ramirez was recently appointed Acting Director of Bands for the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, School of Music beginning in the fall of 2008. Ramirez holds the Doctor of Musical Arts Degree in Wind Conducting from UCLA. During his tenure as the Director of Wind Bands at California State University, Los Angeles, Ramirez served as the Head of the Conducting Division and Chair of the Instrumental Area. Ramirez also served on 6 departmental and university committee's each year. Throughout his appointment as a Teaching Assistant at UCLA from 2000-2004, Ramirez served as the principle graduate conductor for the UCLA Wind Ensemble and Symphonic Band, both of which he rehearsed and conducted during numerous concert performances. In 2003, Ramirez was appointed Interim-Director of Bands at California State University, Los Angeles. Prior to accepting an invitation to begin graduate study at UCLA, Ramirez enjoyed a successful career as a Texas 5A high school band director.