

# Sensemaya, Tuba Solo

*Transposition Inquisition No. 73*

Silvestre Revueltas (1899-1940)

arr. Martorano

## About the Composer:

*"Mexican composer and violinist. At the age of eight he began violin studies in Colima, and at 12 he entered the Juárez Institute, Durango. He studied further under Tello (composition) and Rocabruna (violin) in Mexico City (1913–16), at St Edward College, Austin, Texas (1916–18), and at the Chicago Musical College under Sametini (violin) and Borowski (composition, 1918–20). After a hiatus in Mexico he returned to Chicago in 1922 to complete a four-year violin course under Kochanski and Ševčík. He was again in the USA in 1926 and 1928, playing the violin in a theatre orchestra in San Antonio, Texas, and conducting an orchestra in Mobile, Alabama. Chávez recalled him to Mexico City to take the post of assistant conductor of the Mexico SO (1929–35).*

## About the Composition:

*"From a poem by the Afro-Cuban revolutionary Nicolás Guillén, Sensemaya (1938) evokes ancient Mayan civilization and the ritualistic sacrifice of a snake. Its foreboding recapitulation transmits the incessant underlying rhythm where both main themes are overlapped in a chaotic frenzy, ending conclusively with the inevitable death blow.*

*-Program Note by publisher*

*"Sensemaya was originally written for voice and small orchestra in 1937. Recorded for large orchestra without voice, it was premiered by the Orquesta Sinfónica de México, conducted by the composer, at the Teatro de Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City, on December 15, 1938. It remains his most recorded and performed score. The transcription by Frank Bencriscutto was premiered by the University of Minnesota Band, conducted by Bencriscutto, at the CBDNA conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan, on February 8, 1967.*

*This powerful composition is an extremely complex and primitive-sounding work. The challenging rhythms include much use of 7/8, 5/8, 9/8, 5/16 and 7/16 meters. Sensemaya, like many of the composer's other works, contains compact melodic ideas which are woven into a vibrant texture of dissonant counterpoint and free polyrhythms. Leonard Bernstein called it "the work of a sophisticated composer with a very advanced technique handling an idea of savage primitiveness." According to the sister of Revueltas, the piece was inspired by a poem about "killing a deadly snake with glossy eyes" by the Cuban poet Nicholas Guillén. The title " 'Sensemaya' has no interpretation and no sense. The poet used it solely as an idiomatic rhythm in his poem."*

*- Program Note from Program Notes for Band*

*"Revueltas wrote little explanation about his composition Sensemaya, and the meaning/relationship of the music to the poem has been the basis for much scholarly debate for the past eighty years. Revueltas heard Afro-Cuban poet Nicholas Guillén recite his poem Sensemaya in 1937 and was taken by the text and rhythm of the poem. The word sensemaya is a combination of *sensa* (Providence) and *Yemaya* (Afro-Cuban Goddess of the Seas and Mother of Earth), one of the goddesses of the Palo Monte Mayombe religion. The poem recites the story of the sacrifice of the snake, a sacred entity, symbolizing renewal, fertility and wisdom. Programmatic in nature, scholarly discussion centers on the idea if Revueltas musically depicted a literal translation through his music, or if it was a general blue-print for the composition. Regardless, Sensemaya is arguably one of the most significant compositions by a composer from Central or South America. Each rhythmic pattern is layered upon the previous, culminating in six patterns all operating simultaneously. One can hear the plunge of the knife in the final musical statement.*

*- Program Note from The Woodlands Concert Band concert program, 20 December 2018*



①

3

*p* sempre espr. e sostenuto *f*

Staff 1: Bass clef, 7/8 time signature. The piece begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and the instruction "sempre espr. e sostenuto". It features a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure. The music transitions to a forte (*f*) dynamic in the second measure.

②

3

*p* sempre espr. e sostenuto *f*

Staff 2: Bass clef, 7/8 time signature. Similar to staff 1, but in a different key signature (one flat). It features a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a dynamic shift from piano (*p*) to forte (*f*).

③

3

*p* sempre espr. e sostenuto *f*

Staff 3: Bass clef, 7/8 time signature. Similar to staff 1, but in a different key signature (two sharps). It features a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a dynamic shift from piano (*p*) to forte (*f*).

④

3

*p* sempre espr. e sostenuto *f*

Staff 4: Bass clef, 7/8 time signature. Similar to staff 1, but in a different key signature (two flats). It features a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a dynamic shift from piano (*p*) to forte (*f*).

⑤

3

*p* sempre espr. e sostenuto *f*

Staff 5: Bass clef, 7/8 time signature. Similar to staff 1, but in a different key signature (three sharps). It features a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a dynamic shift from piano (*p*) to forte (*f*).

⑥

3

*p* sempre espr. e sostenuto *f*

Staff 6: Bass clef, 7/8 time signature. Similar to staff 1, but in a different key signature (three flats). It features a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a dynamic shift from piano (*p*) to forte (*f*).

⑦

3

*p* sempre espr. e sostenuto *f*

Staff 7: Bass clef, 7/8 time signature. Similar to staff 1, but in a different key signature (one sharp). It features a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a dynamic shift from piano (*p*) to forte (*f*).

⑧

3

*p* sempre espr. e sostenuto *f*

Staff 8: Bass clef, 7/8 time signature. Similar to staff 1, but in a different key signature (no sharps or flats). It features a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a dynamic shift from piano (*p*) to forte (*f*).

9

*p* sempre espr. e sostenuto *f*

10

*p* sempre espr. e sostenuto *f*

11

*p* sempre espr. e sostenuto *f*

12

*p* sempre espr. e sostenuto *f*

13

*p* sempre espr. e sostenuto *f*

14

*p* sempre espr. e sostenuto *f*

15

*p* sempre espr. e sostenuto *f*

16

*p* sempre espr. e sostenuto *f*