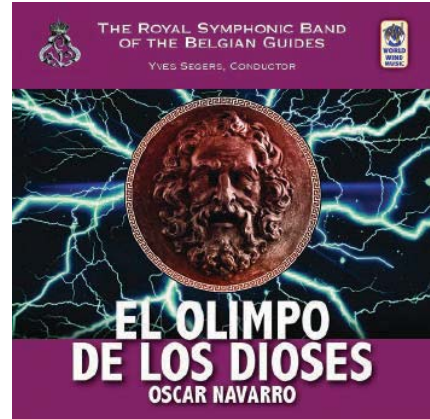


**El Olimpo de los Dioses** (The Royal Symphonic Band of the Belgian Guides, Yves Segers, conductor)  
World Wind Music, WWM 500.199



This recording consists of four compositions by the Spanish composer Oscar Navarro – *El Olimpo de los Dioses* (*The Gods' Olympus*), the *Second Concerto for Clarinet*, *The Fly*, and the pasodoble *Andrés Contrabandista*. Navarro studied clarinet at the Conservatorio Superior Oscar Espla in Alicante, composition and conducting at the Allegro International Music Academy in Valencia, and film scoring at the University of Southern California's Thornton School of Music.

The three-quarter-of-an-hour, ten-movement Symphonic Suite: *El Olimpo de los Dioses* is in the tradition of late Romantic program music and strongly influenced by Hollywood film music. The work was originally composed for symphony orchestra and is performed here in a very fine transcription by Andrés Alvarez and the composer. Each movement begins with a thunder clap announcing the god or goddess portrayed in the movement. The first movement, Hermes, captures very well energy and speed of the messenger god, while the second movement, Artemis, is a well written if not very original dance, depicting the goddess of the hunt frolicking in a picturesque countryside. The composer's program notes nicely sums up the third movement, Hades, the god of death, "who is described in the music by a demonic ostinato, which will drive our ear crazy until it rips our soul apart." The fourth movement, Poseidon, begins with a musical depiction of a calm sea, but when a horn call summons the god of the sea, the water becomes unruly with huge, powerful waves until he returns to its depths.

The fifth movement, Demeter, is a nice pastoral setting for the goddess of agriculture, and the sixth movement, Hephaestus, has the power and intensity of a smith's chant for the god of fire and forging. The seventh movement, Apollo, the god of music, introduces a theme that is later used for the processional of the gods at the conclusion of the suite. The eighth movement, Aphrodite, nicely portrays the sensuousness of the goddess of sexuality with extensive use of the harp, but the melodies are rather commonplace. The ninth movement, Ares and Athena, is a good if not very original piece of battaglia depicting the god and goddess of war, and the tenth movement, Zeus and Hera, is a grand march with shades of Respighi for the king and queen of the gods. The *Concerto No. 2 for Clarinet* was originally composed for clarinet and orchestra in the winter of 2011-2012. It is performed here in an excellent transcription by the composer. The composer's first-hand knowledge of the clarinet is clearly demonstrated in this concerto, which receives an excellent performance from clarinetist David Van Maele. The three-movement work, which is played without pause, opens with a dance combining flamenco style music and new age idioms. The minimalistic second movement exploits the expressive possibilities of the clarinet, and the soloist and the conductor must be complimented for a most convincing and moving performance of this movement at such a slow tempo. The closing Prestissimo dance movement receives a fantastic virtuoso performance from the soloist. The novelty piece, *The Fly* (2013), receives a very fine performance. As I wrote in the December 2016 issue of *WASBE World*, the work reflects the composer's extensive background in writing music film music and would make great music for a cartoon. The recording concludes with a spirited performance of the pasodoble *Andrès Contrabandista*, which includes some non-traditional idioms as well as typical pasodoble features. The work is dedicated to Andrès Planells, a member of the Comparsa de Contrabandistas de Villajoyosa in Alicante, a group that disguises themselves as smugglers for the annual Alicante Moors and Christian Festival, thus the unusual title.

Leon J. Bly