

More About PAISANO SUITE

As most parents are unwilling to admit that any of their children are favored over others, most composers—myself included—are reluctant to name a favorite among their many compositions. It is difficult, but I think if this one is not my very favorite, it is certainly among the top two or three...partly because of the music itself, and partly because of the story behind it.

“Paisano” is the name of a ranch, located in the Texas Hill Country west of Austin, once the private retreat of Texas folklorist and writer J. Frank Dobie. Now owned by the University of Texas, the ranch has for many years been used as a residence for recipients of the prized Dobie Paisano Fellowship, awarded twice annually to promising Texas writers. (quoted from the preface to the score)

In the summer of 1982, I had two lucky breaks come my way. First, I received a commission from Austin Ballet Theatre to compose the score for a new ballet. They had produced an earlier ballet of mine the year before and were eager for another one. The second break was that, as the spouse of a Dobie Fellowship winning writer, I got to live at the ranch for 6 months, during which time I completed the entire score. It was a magical location to work in, and I will never forget the experience.

Since the Dobie Fellowship is not open to composers, and winners of it are not likely to come to the ranch with a composer-spouse in tow, this is quite probably the only musical score ever to be composed there.

The music was originally scored for a small pit orchestra, and it was only in 2012 that I shortened and re-orchestrated it to create this suite for full orchestra. Since the original title is a term used specifically for dance music, and the new version of the work is meant to be a concert suite rather than a ballet, I also re-titled it after the Paisano Ranch, where it was originally composed and which served as its inspiration.

The entire nearly twenty-minute suite is actually based on a fairly modest amount of musical material and the eight short movements are thematically all very closely related. The overall framework is highly unified in that way.