Osvaldo Golijov, Gr’91, is all over the place. For one thing, his innovative music brings three continents’ worth of folk and pop elements to a buttoned-down classical tradition. For another, thanks to a heavy travel schedule overseeing premieres and recordings of his new works, he’s darn hard to pin down for an interview. We play phone and e-mail tag for weeks before I finally connect by phone to his Boston studio.

It seems that Golijov’s name (pronounced Golly-hov) and his music are everywhere. At the tender age of 45, his career has already taken off in the colossal way that most composers of classical music only dream about. His symphonic works are performed by major orchestras worldwide; his most recent opera was directed by the superstar Peter Sellars; he has recordings on eight different labels; he writes film scores for Francis Ford Coppola; he’s a MacArthur Fellow with a list of commissions longer than his arm. In perhaps the ultimate test of cross-over into the popular imagination, you can download his works from the iTunes Music Store. (As I type, I’ve got Golijov on the iPod.)

This winter, the Great Performers series at New York City’s Lincoln Center launches an all-Golijov festival, The Passion of Osvaldo Golijov, whose title is a nod to the composer’s groundbreaking setting of St. Mark’s passion. La Pasión Según San Marcos is written primarily in Spanish but uses multiple dialects. The work mingles contemporary classical idioms with flamenco riffs, hints of bossa nova and Nuevo Tango, and even capoeira dancing. The massive, 90-minute work, which is scored for orchestra, 60-voice choir, vocal soloists, berimbau, Afro-Latin dancers and percussionists, will be performed at the conclusion of the two-month festival.

Golijov was born in Argentina to Eastern European parents and counts among his early influences Jewish liturgical music (he sang in his synagogue chorus as a boy), J.S. Bach, Louis Armstrong, the Beatles, Astor Piazzolla, Miles Davis, Duke Ellington and Leonard Bernstein.

“At Penn, I was very lucky to study with George Crumb, one of the great American composers,” he says. “My music does not resemble his much, but he completely transformed me in his teaching. He is part of the essence of who I am as a composer.”

When Golijov arrived at Penn, fresh from studies in his native Argentina and Jerusalem, neither man could understand a word the other said. “He had a heavy West Virginian accent, and I spoke with my own accent. Still, I learned, if not always in a conscious way. I listened as he played Chopin in his office in between students. I absorbed everything I watched him do. This was the greatest thing that happened to me. It’s like an old Hasidic legend, where the student decides to learn by watching the rabbi tie his shoes.”

After Penn, it was off to a fellowship at Tanglewood, where Golijov sprang onto the international scene with his Grammy-nominated string quartet, Yiddishbbuk, a holocaust meditation that incorporates klezmer and other Yiddish styles. His more recent works, including the opera Ainadamar (Fountain of Tears) are increasingly filled with eclectic new-world influences. Ayre, a cycle of 11 songs, uses Sephardic, Arabic and Christian folk tunes in sometimes jarring juxtapositions of melody and text. All three compositions come together in the same place at the Lincoln Center festival.

—KAREN RILE