

# 8.2 HOPE PROGRAM NOTES

## ***Megalopolis* (2013)**

**TJ Cole** (b. 1993)

[West Coast Premiere]

**megalopolis** \me-gə-'lä-pə-ləs\

noun

A region containing several large cities in close proximity creating one giant urban complex.

An example of a Megalopolis would be the chain of cities starting from Washington D.C., stretching through Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York City, and ending in Boston.

My first year living in Philadelphia was my first year living in any sort of city. I grew up in the suburbs of Atlanta, and went to school for a few years in the northern Michigan woods. *Megalopolis* was written during my first year in Philadelphia, so the piece is very reflective of my first reactions to the crazy urban life and all of the sounds it could produce. At first, city life can be very exciting. But for me, it quickly became very crowded, loud, overwhelming, and even a little scary. Across the street from where I lived in Philly, there was a church with a little courtyard. Every day, the church bells would ring on the hour to mark the time. Sometimes at night, I would go out into the courtyard to find some peace within all of the chaos. But the quiet in a city can only last for a moment. —TJ Cole

*Megalopolis* premiered on April 6, 2013 at Gould Rehearsal Hall at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, PA, with the Curtis Symphony Orchestra.

Not recorded

## ***Concerto 4-3* (2007)**

**Jennifer Higdon** (b. 1962)

*Concerto 4-3* is a three-movement concerto, featuring two violins and a bass, which uses the language of Classical music, with dashes of bluegrass technique.

The work is divided into three movements, with the option to perform a cadenza between the first and second movements. The movement titles refer to rivers that run through the Smoky Mountains (where growing up, I heard quite a bit of bluegrass): *The Shallows*, *Little River*, and *Roaring Smokies*. I wanted to reference the Smokies, because East Tennessee was the first place that I really experienced bluegrass (or as they call it there, Mountain Music).

The first movement, *The Shallows*, incorporates unique extended techniques (a manner of playing beyond the normal way of playing these instruments) that mimic everything from

squeaking mice to electric guitars. These sounds resemble parts of the mountain rivers that move in shallow areas, where small rocks and pebbles make for a rapid ride that moves a rafter quickly from one side of the river to the other.

The second movement, *Little River*, is slow-moving and lyrical, very much in hymn-like fashion. This movement reflects the beauty of Little River as it flows through Townsend and Walland, Tennessee. At times there is real serenity and a majestic look to the water, with no movement obvious on the pure, glassy surface.

The third movement, *Roaring Smokies*, is a rapid-fire virtuosic movement that shifts and moves very much like a raging river (those wild mountain waters that pour out of the mountains). It is fun to swim in those cold waters, but your attention must always be alert, as danger lurks...the water goes where it wants and will take you with it.

While *Concerto 4-3* is written in the Classical vein, there are certain bluegrass techniques incorporated into the fabric of the piece: emphasis on offbeats, open strings, and slides. But the language is definitely tonal, 21st Century and American-sounding in style. —Jennifer Higdon

*Concerto 4-3* was commissioned by *The Philadelphia Orchestra*, *the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra*, and *the Wheeling Symphony Orchestra*. It was premiered on January 10, 2008, at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts in Philadelphia, PA with *Time for Three* and the Philadelphia Orchestra, conducted by Christoph Eschenbach.

Recommended recording:

Fort Worth Symphony conducted by Miguel Harth-Bedoya

FWSO Live 844667029154

## ***Speranza* (2012/13)**

**Mark-Anthony Turnage** (b. 1960)

[West Coast Premiere]

*Speranza* is scored for a large orchestra including three flutes (third doubling piccolo and alto flute), two oboes and English horn, two clarinets and two bass clarinets (third doubling E-flat clarinet), soprano saxophone (doubling duduk ad lib.), two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets (first doubling D trumpet), three trombones, tuba, four percussion (I. vibraphone, almglocken; II. sala bell, tubular bells, sizzle cymbal, gongs, five-octave marimba, glockenspiel; III. tabla, four tom-toms, lion's roar, almglocken [shared with percussion I]; IV. djembe, large bass drum, Japanese temple bells), cymbalom, harp, piano/celesta, and strings. The piece is about forty-two minutes long.

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*Speranza* means hope in Italian; the titles of the four movements of Mark-Anthony Turnage's symphonic work also mean hope: *Amal* in Arabic; *Hoffen* in German; *Dochas* in Gaelic, *Tikvah* in Hebrew. For its first performances, *Speranza* had five movements; the composer has since revised the piece and removed the original fourth movement, *L'Espoir*. Although mostly deliberate and thoughtful in mood, the resulting four-movement structure, with its scherzo-like third movement, has very much the shape and scope of a traditional symphony.

Mark-Anthony Turnage the composer is himself hardly traditional, notwithstanding the fact that his music has been performed by many of the world's major orchestras and opera companies. He did, though, grow up with classical music, and studied at the Royal College of Music under Oliver Knussen. In 1983 he was a Fellow of the Boston Symphony Orchestra's Tanglewood Music Center, where he worked with the eminent German composer Hans Werner Henze and the American Gunther Schuller. In spite of the short time Turnage had with them, both Henze and Schuller turned out to be well-suited as models for Turnage's career: Henze was a veteran and estimable opera composer, and Turnage would go on to become one of the more successful English composers of opera of our time. Schuller, a musical polymath, had played French horn in ensembles under Miles Davis, one of Turnage's idols, and had pioneered the melding of jazz and modern classical music in the late 1950s with the genre he'd dubbed "Third Stream." Schuller had also instigated the first jazz studies programs at a conservatory when he became president of the New England Conservatory in the 1960s.

Turnage came to jazz and American soul music relatively late in his maturation as a musician, but the effect on his composing was seismic and immediate. His deft and provocative *Night Dances* (1981) was an explicit response to that newfound wellspring. The solo muted trumpet of the third movement is a deliberate nod to Miles Davis; its orchestral accompaniment taps into the voicings and harmonies of the great jazz orchestrator Gil Evans, collaborator on many of Davis's classic cool jazz recordings. Beyond allusion to jazz and soul, Turnage has been able to tap into the less tangible energy of *urbanness* in his music, which was utterly essential in his opera *Greek*, for example, a modern retelling of the Oedipus myth in London's East End. That piece, composed for the Munich Biennale as a direct result of his acquaintance with Henze, helped establish Turnage's international stature. Fundamentally a dramatic composer, Turnage has gone on to write several more operas, including *The Silver Tassie* (based on Sean O'Casey's play and first produced by English National Opera) and *Anna Nicole*. The latter, based on the tragic life of the tabloid heroine, was commissioned by the Royal Opera-Covent Garden, received its acclaimed premiere there in February 2011, and was produced by the New York City Opera and Brooklyn Academy of Music last month, in what appear to have been City Opera's final performances as a

company. *Anna Nicole* required the composer to tap into even further-flung American pop-music sources to create the proper environment for the Texas media diva.

The early opera *Greek's* basis in Sophocles, via the playwright Steven Berkoff, is one indication of the breadth of Turnage's interests outside of music. His saxophone concerto *Your Rockaby* was inspired by Samuel Beckett; his two-trumpet concerto *Dispelling the Fears* was triggered by paintings by Heather Betts; *Three Screaming Popes* and *Blood on the Floor* are both reactions to the work of the artist Francis Bacon, the latter work taking its title from a particularly austere Bacon painting. The eighty-minute *Blood on the Floor* was a watershed in Turnage's career, a large-scale, multi-style, multi-stimulus work that incorporates, for the first time in his music, improvising jazz musicians. It became a collaboration with ex-Weather Report guitarist John Scofield, saxophonist/clarinetist Martin Robertson, and drummer Peter Erskine, performing with the specialist new music group Ensemble Modern. Collaboration with Scofield and other jazz musicians in that piece and beyond led to a new strain in Turnage's approach to jazz and improvisation that inevitably had an effect on his music for traditional orchestras and ensembles in the form of expanded structures and freer use of instruments. He has had no shortage of opportunities in writing for orchestra, having, over the years, served in resident or associate composer positions with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, English National Opera, the BBC Symphony, and in recent years the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the London Philharmonic, and having been commissioned by the Berlin Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra (co-commissioner of *Speranza*), London Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and a host of others. His music is among the most often programmed of any living composer.

The dramatic impetus of Turnage's pieces, whether or not spurred by outside sources, often invokes an emotional narrative from the composer's own life; for example his trumpet concerto *From the Wreckage* emerges from darkness and gradually climbs to transcendence. In writing *Speranza*, his biggest purely orchestral work to date, the composer has said, "My first intentions were to write a big, dark, despairing work as I'd been through a tough time. The piece was to have been in memory of poets and writers who'd committed suicide, including Paul Celan, Primo Levi, and Sadegh Hedayat. But I soon realized this all seemed a bit gloomy and not exactly a fun evening in the concert hall, especially with a piece lasting forty-five minutes. So I started brightening things up and it soon became more upbeat, extrovert, and optimistic. Eventually the work turned completely round and became a positive piece about hope. I guess it was something of a personal transformation. Although *Speranza* shimmers a lot, I suspect the dark heart of the original idea still peeks through."

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*Speranza*'s movement titles go beyond language: subtle touches of Arabic music in the first movement, Jewish music in the finale, and other styles (blues and jazz) give the piece a warm, universal embrace. Use of the cimbalom, a concert hammer dulcimer typically used in Hungarian music but having a number of cousins in other regions; the duduk, a wind instrument associated with Armenia, and the soprano saxophone help expand the timbral palette of the orchestra beyond its usual colors.

*Speranza* opens with *Amal*, lushly orchestrated, rich and dense in its harmonies. The tremolo unison of the opening features the cimbalom's wiry, distinctive sound. The melodic motif that follows is fundamental to the movement, and its three-note chromatically falling tail will become an important independent idea. Countering this pair of gestures is a winding, spun-out lyrical tune high in the woodwinds. The exploration of these two types of material involves mosaic-like layering in the first case, and a shading toward the blues for the second, lyrical idea. The movement peaks in pounding drums before ending quietly much as it began. *Hoffen* begins with a threatening series of chords and pounding bass drum, which alternates with a melody in the plaintive voice of the duduk, whose idea is eventually taken up by winds. Following a passage of shimmering chorales that expands throughout the ensemble, melody returns, first in unison in several instruments, finally back to duduk alone.

*Dochas* is jazzy, funky, hyper, with sustained but syncopated melodic ideas propelled by jumping bass figures in the piano. Big tutti passages—the full orchestra—contrast with small-ensemble passages, like the improvising solo group in front of a big band, or a concertante group in a concerto grosso. The last movement, *Tikvah*, is slow and meditative, first an introduction of bell-like chords with a brief chorale of single violins, then a long, yearning melody in soprano saxophone, folksong-like. The middle part of the movement is a kind of ethereal chorale, culminating suddenly in a majestic orchestral bloom. A return of the chorale, with quiet interjections from the duduk, brings the piece to a contemplative close.

-Robert Kirzinger (c) Boston Symphony Orchestra. Used by permission.

*Speranza* was commissioned by the London Symphony Orchestra, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra. It was premiered on February 7, 2013, at the Barbican Centre in London by the London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Daniel Harding. The piece is dedicated to the composer's "younger kids" Milo and Amelie, "who are for me a real hope for the future."

*Recommended Recording:*

London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Daniel Harding.  
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