

# CABRILLO FESTIVAL *Program Notes: Power & Devotion*

## **The Death of Oscar (2012)**

**James MacMillan** (b. 1959)

[United States Premiere]

The conductor Stéphane Denève led a co-commission for *The Death of Oscar*, a miniature tone poem drawing upon the legend of the bardic poet Ossian and the death of his son Oscar. In addition to musical collaborations while Stéphane Denève was Music Director of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, MacMillan and Denève both shared the experience of sitting for portrait busts created by the Scottish sculptor Alexander Stoddardt. MacMillan became aware of Stoddardt's project to create a monumental sculpture of the death of Oscar, to be carved from a Scottish granite hillside in the Western Highlands, and this inspired the current score for Denève to conduct.

In the legends of Ossian, his son Oscar challenged the High King Cairbre to single combat and, though victorious, died of his wounds and was mourned by his father and lover. These tales collected by James Macpherson in the 18th century have long been the subject of hot debate about their authenticity. What is not in doubt is the massive influence they had on perceptions of Scottish and Celtic culture, particularly overseas—admired by political figures such as Napoleon and Thomas Jefferson, and inspiring Romantic artists from Mendelssohn in *Fingal's Cave* to Goethe in *Werther*.

MacMillan's score opens slowly and darkly, building a mood of mythical lamentation with horns sounding the threnody above low strings, tolling drums and harp. The central fast section is militaristic—perhaps recalling Oscar's final battle—trumpet fanfares derived from the opening theme and increasingly jagged elaborations. The closing section sees a return to the slow tempo with the English horn presenting the unadorned, sorrowful melody above simple string accompaniment.

—Note provided in part by Boosey & Hawkes

*The Death of Oscar* commission was led by Stéphane Denève in collaboration with the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Seattle Symphony, and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. It was premiered at the Liederhalle Beethovensaal Stuttgart on July 11, 2013, by the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Stéphane Denève.

Not recorded

## **Oboe Concerto (2004)**

**Christopher Rouse** (b. 1949)

Katherine Needleman, oboe  
[West Coast Premiere]

Since 1985 I have composed more than ten concerti, and I have noticed that they seem to fall into one of two categories: "somber" (e.g., trombone, violoncello) and "genial" (guitar, clarinet). My oboe concerto is of the latter variety. (I used to employ the term "recreational" to refer to works of this type until I realized that it would be wrong to create the impression that composing them was a form of recreation. It isn't; it's hard work!)

Unlike some of my other concerti, there is no overt program to this piece. It aims of course to explore the capabilities of the oboe, of which the first in everyone's mind is its capacity to play long, lyrical lines. However, to compose a score that would only concern itself with this aspect of the oboe would be to deny the instrument's more virtuosic attributes, and so there are plenty of moments when the soloist is asked to play music requiring substantial agility. Notwithstanding the fast—sometimes extremely fast—music that abounds in the work, I feel that there is an overall feeling of coloristic romanticism in the concerto, especially in the central slow movement.

It is cast in the more-or-less traditional three movement mold (fast – slow – fast) with brief and rather static slow sections at the beginning and end providing a frame for the piece. Much of the musical material in the concerto is derived from the five-note chord played by the strings at the very opening. As the music progresses, this chord undergoes a variety of metamorphoses, being used to generate both melodic and further harmonic content.

—Christopher Rouse

*The Oboe Concerto* was commissioned by the Minnesota Orchestra. It was premiered at Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis on February 5, 2009, by the Minnesota Orchestra with oboist Basil Reeve, conducted by Osmo Vänskä.

*Recommended Recording:* Christopher Rouse, R. Strauss. New York Philharmonic with oboist Liang Wang, conducted by Alan Gilbert. The Philharmonic—Symphony Society of New York, Inc.

## **Thunderstuck (2014)**

**Christopher Rouse** (b. 1949)

[West Coast Premiere]

*Thunderstuck* reflects my continuing love of the popular music of my younger years. Rock music has had an influence on several of my works, but none more so than this one. Near the end there is an obvious reference to Jay Ferguson's 1978 hit "Thunder Island," and this helps give the piece its title. This is a work meant to be engaging and fun—sometimes I feel that a little more "fun" at classical music concerts would be all to the good. The score is dedicated to Alan Gilbert and the New York Philharmonic

—Christopher Rouse

*Thunderstuck* was commissioned and premiered by the New York Philharmonic and their Music Director Alan Gilbert. It was premiered at Avery Fisher Hall in New York City on October 9, 2014.

Not recorded

## **RIFT: a symphonic ballet (2016)**

**Anna Clyne** (b. 1980)

Kitty McNamee, choreographer  
[World Premiere | Festival Commission]

In creating RIFT, myself and choreographer Kitty McNamee have used music and dance as a voice to reflect upon the chaos and destruction that is so prevalent in the world today.

Whilst RIFT is presented in one large brushstroke, we have, in our imaginations, divided the journey into three acts.

Act 1 – dust

A song of reflection - a meditation on the sadness, which, throughout this act, escalates into a chaotic mass of sound that snaps into Act 2.

Act 2 - water

Covered in the dust of destruction from Act 1 we now move into a more ethereal world of rituals. A snaking duet emerges from the

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ruptures that sever Act 1 and introduce Act 2, which is then interrupted by a wild outburst of energy. From here, we move into a more serene ritual - bathed in water, softly washing away the dust and debris.

Act 3 - space

From this cleansing we are then propelled back in time to a period of more refined and orderly beauty - a sacred and harmonious space. From here we are then propelled into the future where, through our journey, we find ourselves in a more optimistic sonic and visual world.

We would like to express our deepest thanks to Marin Alsop and the staff and musicians at the Cabrillo Festival for offering such a wonderful opportunity to create this work.

—Anna Clyne & Kitty McNamee

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