SPIRITUALS & SYMPHONIES

André Raphel
Guest Conductor

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2023 | 3:00 PM

CENTURY II CONCERT HALL

ADOLPHUS HAILSTORK

Born April 17, 1941 in Rochester, New York

Three Spirituals for Orchestra (8')

1. Every-time I feel the Spirit (3')
2. Kum Ba Yah (3')
3. Oh Freedom (3')

This is the first performance by the Wichita Symphony.

Adolphus Hailstork received his doctorate in music composition from Michigan State University. Previous studies were at Howard University, the Manhattan School of Music, and the American Institute at Fontainebleau, where he studied with Nadia Boulanger. He paused his studies during two years of service in the U.S. Army in Germany. Following graduation with his doctorate in 1971, Hailstork began his academic career at Youngstown State University, followed by twenty-three years at Norfolk State University in Virginia. In 2000, he moved across town to Old Dominion University, where he was an Eminent Scholar.

Hailstork attributes his success as a musician to his music education in public schools. Emphasizing the significance of this background and regretting the present state of education in schools today, Hailstork comments, "It's a shame that so many Music programs have been cut out of public education. I'm glad that it was available for me when I came along, because that's where I really got my start! I went in the public school system, singing in the public school choirs and playing in the public school orchestras. That's where it all began for me, along with my excellent exposure in an Episcopal Cathedral. Those two things had a big impact! This is one person whose whole life started with public school Music!"[1]

Hailstork lists an extensive catalog of original compositions, including works for solo instruments, chamber ensembles, choral, opera, and symphony. His opera, *Joshua's Boots,* was co-commissioned by the Opera Theater of St. Louis and the Kansas City Lyric Opera and premiered in 1999. The Wichita Symphony performed Hailstork's Sonata da Chiesa for string orchestra at Symphony 360 in July 2022.

Major American orchestras like Boston, Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Philadelphia have performed Hailstork's many orchestral works under conductors such as James de Priest, Kurt Masur, Lorin Maazel, and Daniel Barenboim.

Much of Hailstork's music is accessible to listeners, who can access the many recordings of his music on YouTube, Spotify, and CDs. Commenting on his compositional style, Hailstork stated, "It's always lyrical, tonal, narrative, dramatic, and propulsive. I just wanted to add to the repertoire. I didn't switch over to the school of thought that came into being in the Sixties of reinventing music. Because a lot of it just didn't sing for me."[2]

Hailstork composed **Three Spirituals for Orchestra** in 2005 for the re-opening of the Crispus Attucks Theater in Norfolk, VA. The spirituals are familiar to gospel choirs. Each movement is short, lasting less than three minutes. The first, *Every Time I Feel the Spirit,* is an energetic and ebullient work with jazzy syncopations. The music begins with fragments of the tune until a crescendo leads into the spiritual played by the trumpets. Bassoon and horn solos of the tune alternate with the return of the chorus played by the full orchestra.

1. Cited in an entry on Adolphus Hailstork on the AfriClassical.com website.
2. ibid

Three Spirituals for Orchestra (8')
continued

The second movement draws upon the familiar folksong *Kum Ba Yah*. Believed to have its roots in the Southeastern United States Gullah tradition, *Kum Ba Yah* was popular during the folk music revivals of the mid-20th century when it was sung by singers like Joan Baez, Odetta, Pete Seeger, and thousands of children around summer campfires. Hailstork treats the song in a simple fashion, giving the tune to an English horn solo accompanied by tranquil and lushly harmonized strings. The solo passes off to the clarinet, which freely embellishes the melody before the English horn returns to end the song.

The third spiritual, *Oh Freedom,* one of the great songs of the Civil Rights era, playfully begins by fragmenting the tune in a pointillistic fashion, tossing it back and forth between instruments. Finally, the brass choir lets it rip with a terrific solo for the tuba.

Three Spiritual for Orchestra is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, an English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, and strings. The percussion section consists of timpani, snare drum, bass drum, suspended cymbal, and crash cymbals.

Listen to Three Spirituals before coming to the concert with this recording on YouTube performed by JoAnn Falletta and the Virginia Symphony:
https://youtu.be/0xF7Z-N8mzk?si=xKCEj7gRQAXXqm00

Compare Hailstork's rendition of Every Time I Feel the Spirit with this recording by Nat King Cole:
https://youtu.be/oLp587Bgk0M?si=sBKMYuHy5sGMY7rZ

Here's a 1963 performance of Kum Ba Yah by Pete Seeger:
https://youtu.be/mSUmzMi-vwQ?si=OpwpJvNn7MSGaber

Listen to Oh Freedom sung here by the Golden Gospel Singers:
https://youtu.be/veiJLhXdwn8?si=KPhOUIQd_bnT-7tB

ROY HARRIS

Born February 12, 1898 in Chandler, Lincoln County, Oklahoma
Died October 1, 1979 in Santa Monica, California

Third Symphony in One Movement (18')

This is the first performance by the Wichita Symphony.

Conductors, critics, and historians once called Roy Harris' Third Symphony "the Great American Symphony." Following the symphony's premiere by Serge Koussevitzy and the Boston Symphony on February 24, 1939, that conductor and orchestra performed the work several times during subsequent seasons. By 1945, orchestras across America had performed the symphony some fifty times, making it the most performed symphony by an American composer at the time. After the premiere, a young music critic studying at Harvard wrote, "[Harris' Symphony is] mature in every sense, beautifully proportioned, eloquent, restrained, and affecting." The critic who submitted his review to *Modern Music* was Leonard Bernstein. He championed the work throughout his career and recorded it twice.

Of course, Harris was not the only American composer attempting to write "The Great American Symphony." Between the 1920s and early 1950s, composers wrote dozens of symphonies, any number of which might be regarded as "great" in hindsight. During an era when composers were establishing what it meant to be an American symphonist, composers like Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, Howard Hanson, Walter Piston, Florence Price, William Grant Still, Randall Thompson, and others were churning out symphonies by the dozen. Harris himself composed thirteen numbered symphonies. Florence Price's music has recently enjoyed a belated discovery. Copland's Third Symphony is a standard repertoire work, and Hanson's Second receives an occasional performance. For many others, their music faded from concert stages as more "modern" styles dominated in the years following World War II.

Once considered one of America's leading composers and a chief rival to Aaron Copland in the efforts to define an American symphonic style, Roy Harris' career was amplified by what we now call "branding." Born on Abraham Lincoln's birthday, February 12, 1898, in a log cabin on the plains in Chandler, Oklahoma, a small community that happened to be in Lincoln County, Harris later promoted his all-American background, earning him the label of "a musical pioneer of the Middle West." The family moved to the San Gabriel Valley near Los Angeles in 1903. They ran a small farm here, and Roy grew up doing hardscrabble work and odd jobs.

After serving in the army during World War One, Harris returned to California to enroll at the University of California at Berkeley. While he had studied piano with his mother as a child and took up clarinet in high school, becoming proficient in both, he was largely self-taught as a composer. During the early 1920s, he took composition lessons from the English composer Arthur Bliss, who was in Santa Barbara, and with Arthur Farwell. Moving to New York, Harris encountered Aaron Copland, who urged him to study in Paris with Nadia Boulanger, whose studio attracted dozens of ambitious American composers.

Harris, whose stubborn streak didn't accept everything Boulanger had to offer, remained in her studio for three years, eventually returning to the States. As a composer, Harris gained some early performances. His Symphony 1933, performed by Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony, was the first commercially recorded symphony by an American composer. In 1936, Harris married the Canadian pianist Beula Duffy (1912-1995).

She changed her name to Johana at Harris' behest to honor J.S. Bach and for the presumable marketing possibilities. Roy and Johana became leading music promoters in the States, organizing and performing concerts, adjudicating competitions, creating music festivals, and in 1959, founding the International String Congress to promote string instrument learning.

Harris led a peripatetic career, taking him to numerous college and university campuses as a teacher before ending up back in Los Angeles at UCLA and California State University at Los Angeles. He composed over two hundred works throughout his career, but none ever quite reached the stature of the Third Symphony. His interests in folk songs and American subjects appear in works like "When Johnny Comes Marching Home – An American Overture" (1934), a "Folksong Symphony" (Symphony #4) (1939, rev. 1942) for chorus and orchestra, a ballet, "What So Proudly We Hail" (1942), written in response to Copland's ballet successes, a cantata "Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight" (1953), and "Epilogue to Profiles in Courage – JFK" (1964).

Harris' obituary in the New York Times, October 4, 1979, sums up a perspective of Roy Harris: "Mr. Harris's admirers came to identify his music with the mythic simplicity and honesty of heartland America. And, in fact, there is a plainspoken ruggedness in the best of his scores that supports the notion." The article also cited Aaron Copland's critique of Harris' music as having "real sweep and breadth, with power and emotional depth such as only a generously built country could produce. It is American in rhythm, especially in the fast parts, with a jerky, nervous quality that is peculiarly our own. It is crude and unabashed at times, with occasional blobs and yawps of sound that [Walt] Whitman would have approved of."

Listening to the Symphony gives a sense of organic structure that builds upon what comes before. The music is sometimes reminiscent of the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius, one of the most famous and popular composers during the decades before WWII. While the Symphony is in a single uninterrupted movement, Harris provides an outline delineating sections. These will be identifiable by changing orchestral textures. The instrumental families of woodwinds, brass, percussion, and strings act as blocks of sound, often set against each other before reaching a homophonous resolution at the conclusion.

The music begins with a freely spun melody in the cellos. The cellos split into a divided section (divisi) where the outside player on the stand usually plays the top melodic line, and the inside player plays the lower line. A similarly divided viola section joins the cellos. The lower range of these strings creates a dark and foreboding texture. You might think of dark prairie skies during this section.

This opening section moves seamlessly into the second section, which Harris describes as lyrical. The orchestral texture becomes richer and thicker as woodwinds, horns, and violins join in. The low brass adds dark accented chords of punctuation. The rhythm is straightforward, principally written in steady quarter notes. Note how the different instrumental lines overlap to create forward motion.

Murmuring arpeggiated chords of eighth notes in the strings demark the third section. Woodwind solos in a conversational fashion or birdcall-like fashion ride above the rippling accompaniment. The mood is pastoral, almost like a breeze through prairie grass. Trumpet chords and cymbal crashes announce that the horns, trumpets, and, eventually, trombones will take over from the winds.

The active and flowing passage gives way abruptly to a hoedown-like motive. Harris calls this the "Fugue" section, characterized by overlapping lines and the development of short motives. The sound emphasizes the brass instruments, and the timpani makes its first appearance prominently. Melodically and rhythmically, this section sounds the most "American" of the Symphony. The "jerkiness" of the rhythm induced by syncopation and accented tones, the many layers of sound, and the rapid-fire brevity of overlapping musical ideas create a web of texture that seems to pull the music like taffy.

After so much rhythmic and motivic activity, we reach a new section. The strings in union reprise the violin's theme from the stately opening. Also in unison, the woodwinds follow a few beats later in a canonic fashion with the same melody. Meanwhile, the brass and percussion continue interjecting with rhythmic motives from the previous section. There is less sense of traditional recapitulation and more of an organic arrival at a new place in our journey. Harris describes the music as "dramatic and tragic." Because we have these blocks of unified sound, there is an unyielding, granite-like presence.

We reach a coda. The timpani pounds out a repeated pedal tone. The blocks of winds, brass, and strings unite in the overlaying chorale textures of the opening. This conclusion is not joyful or triumphant. Life's hardships from the Great Depression of the 30s and a world on the brink of a cataclysm inform a historical perspective. There really isn't another American Symphony quite like Harris' Third. Its rugged individualism makes it stand out in the repertoire. Is it still the "Great American Symphony?" That's a subjective determination. However, like other works of its day that may be in jeopardy of being lost, it deserves our reconsideration and occasional performance.

Harris scored his Third Symphony for a large orchestra that includes a wind section with two flutes, a third doubling on piccolo, two oboes, an English horn, two clarinets, a bass clarinet, and two bassoons. The brass section uses four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, and two tubas. The percussion battery utilizes timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, xylophone, and vibraphone. There are the usual strings.

It's not a long symphony in duration, only about eighteen minutes. A listen or two before attending the concert will familiarize you with the different sections and textures. Remember, no recording is the same as hearing a live performance in the concert hall! Enjoy this recording on YouTube by Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic. See you at the concert!

https://youtu.be/I6mnG3VaD1c?si=quyHLdPELfOiVtUt

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

Born April 1, 1873 in Novogorod, Russia
Died March 28, 1943 in Beverly Hills, California

Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27

1. Largo - Allegretto moderato
2. Allegro molto
3. Adagio
4. Allegro vivace

Last performed by the Wichita Symphony on February 17 and 18, 1996 with Zuohuang Chen conducting.

This Wichita Symphony performance coincides with a Rachmaninoff anniversary year, where we mark the 150th year of his birth and the 80th year of his death. It is only partly coincidence that we've programmed two of his most popular works – the Second Symphony, heard at this concert, and later in February, the even more familiar Second Piano Concerto. Even with time elapsed, Rachmaninoff remains an audience favorite and one of the most popular composers from the first half of the 20th Century.

Rachmaninoff composed three symphonies. The First Symphony (1897) had a disastrous premiere, triggering a four-year period of deep depression for Rachmaninoff that was relieved only by therapy. While the First Symphony had its share of structural weaknesses, it probably suffered more from a poorly prepared premiere and an inebriated conductor on the podium. Cesar Cui described the First Symphony as a work worthy of a First Prize from a Conservatory in Hell. Rimsky-Korsakov was more apologetic, finding the work simply disagreeable. Even Rachmaninoff confessed that the orchestration was "abominable" and that the "music didn't amount to much." Better preparation and a cleaned-up published edition have led to more successful performances. Still, the First does not compare with the Second Symphony or the Third. Eventually, Rachmaninoff overcame his writer's block with the Second Piano Concerto and other beloved works.

The Second Symphony was composed in 1906 and 1907 during a three-year sabbatical to escape political unrest in Russia, during which the composer and his family lived in Dresden. It was a productive period in which Rachmaninoff composed his *Isle of the Dead,* the First Piano Sonata, the Third Piano Concerto, and several songs in addition to the Symphony.

The Second Symphony premiered on February 15, 1909, in Moscow and was an immediate success and received the Glinka Prize. The Symphony became Rachmaninoff's calling card during his first American tour. The Philadelphia Orchestra performed its American premiere on November 26, 1909, with Rachmaninoff conducting.

In America, critics and the public hailed Rachmaninoff as a composer, conductor, and pianist. Americans loved his music for its moderation, reaction against modernism, and "heart on the sleeve" emotionalism. The music was one of the last gasps of 19th-century romanticism and maintained a distinctly individual style. Rachmaninoff declared that "a composer's music should express "the sum total of a composer's experience." He lived by a creed in which music conveyed human emotions, and that melody was paramount. This emphasis on melody played an important role in Rachmaninoff's popularity. It helped to spur an entire generation of composers writing in the pop and Hollywood idioms who attempted to imitate the melodiousness and lushness of Rachmaninoff's style. The Second Symphony spawned its popular song when the opening theme of the third movement became the basis for the 1976 Top-Forty hit "Never Gonna Fall in Love Again" by Eric Carmen.

Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27
continued

Rachmaninoff's Second is a big, sprawling symphony that rewards listeners with repeated hearings. A criticism of Rachmaninoff's symphonies is that they tend to "run on." Eugene Ormandy, Music Director of the Philadelphia Orchestra, made cuts with Rachmaninoff's approval, tightening the performance and keeping the work to about forty-eight minutes. These Ormandy cuts became the basis for most interpretations of the Symphony in the latter half of the 20th Century. Maestro Raphel, who served as an Assistant Conductor at the Philadelphia Orchestra, uses the Ormandy version as the basis for his interpretation and restores several of the cuts. Recently, other conductors have utilized the complete, uncut score, extending the work's duration to about an hour.

Some writers have attempted to draw links between Rachmaninoff's Symphony and Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony and the Liszt B minor Piano Sonata. Unlike Tchaikovsky's brassy opening to the Fourth with its Fate motive that grabs the listener by the throat, Rachmaninoff's opening is moody and melancholic as might befit the tall, lanky, usually unsmiling man that we know from photographs. But like Tchaikovsky and Liszt, Rachmaninoff builds his symphony from the ideas presented in the opening. Occasionally, there are direct references to these opening bars, as in the brief flute phrase heard near the end of the third movement and again in the fourth movement over a reminiscence of the third movement's opening theme. Other times, Rachmaninoff transforms the opening wind and horn chords like in the march theme of the second movement.

Rachmaninoff's texture is busy and often thick. A lot is going on at various levels, and it becomes a challenge for the conductor to balance the primary melodic material against the intricate accompanying figures. These layers of texture often contribute to the shaping of a long-range arch, such as heard in the first movement's introduction and again in the development. Adding instrumental layers increases the tension as the melodic material rises. Dynamic levels increase to forte as, finally, the music crests at a climax before gradually dying away. These arches help create the work's expansiveness.

What listeners take away from hearing this work for the first or second time is its rich melody. The second theme of the second movement, the contrasting tunes between the opening of the third movement and the famous clarinet solo, and the trademark "big tune" of the finale are all memorable moments.

Several elements make Rachmaninoff's melodies characteristic of his style. First is how Rachmaninoff "spins out" his melodies, building upon short motivic cells that he repeats sequentially. Many of his themes derive their "tunefulness" from their step-like motion. There are few leaps in these melodies, and when there are, Rachmaninoff counters the jump up or down by immediate movement in the opposite direction, similar to the elementary rules of Renaissance counterpoint, and sometimes contributing to the feel of Russian Orthodox music. Finally, one hears a fluidity of motion in many of these melodies. The clarinet solo in the third movement is a classic example. Here, Rachmaninoff avoids a strong sense of downbeats by holding notes across the bar line. The effect suspends us in time while maintaining the forward motion of the melody.

The symphony displays many orchestral colors, befitting a composer influenced by Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov. Rachmaninoff orchestrates his Symphony with three flutes and piccolo, three oboes, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, glockenspiel, bass drum, cymbals, and strings.

For your listening pleasure…

Listen to the classic recording by Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra of the Second Symphony. With Ormandy's cuts, the recording runs forty-eight minutes:
https://youtu.be/tp9WmsLWh1g?si=S-P9MTzhHPyMw0Hr

In contrast, listen to this version with the late Yuri Temirkanov, who passed away on November 2, leading the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra. It runs for about fifty-seven minutes:
https://youtu.be/H-ywFXdeI_w?si=vFM3l694ODX6jbOw

Here's Eric Carmen's 1976 Top-Forty hit, "Never Gonna Fall in Love Again," based on the theme of the third movement of Rachmaninoff's Second Symphony:
https://youtu.be/POkE9eI23cU?si=qH8Hs6ZhxcW1AjOl