Quad City Symphony Orchestra

PROGRAM NOTES

Masterworks II: Fit for a King

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DUKE ELLINGTON (1899-1974)
Three Black Kings

Instrumentation: Piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, four trumpets (all doubling flugelhorn), four trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, piano, electric guitar, and strings.

Premiere: April 29, 1976, Cathedral of St. John the Devine, New York City, Mercer Ellington conducting.

QCSO Performance History: This is the first full performance of *Three Black Kings* in QCSO history; the "Balthazar" movement was included on a 2008 Holiday Pops concert conducted by Mark Russell Smith.

Growing up in Washington, D.C. in the first quarter of the twentieth century, Edward Kennedy Ellington was reared in a music-loving home within the national capital's thriving, middle-class Black community. The boy had an elevated, noble demeanor, which earned him the neighborhood nickname Duke. Duke enjoyed a happy childhood, full of memories of sandlot baseball (with President Theodore Roosevelt occasionally riding by on horseback), both of his parents playing all varieties of music on the piano, and perhaps most importantly, a profound cultural education. Because schools in D.C. were then segregated by race, Ellington's schooling included a deep immersion in the history of Black people in the United States. These lessons nurtured in him a tremendous pride in his cultural heritage, and ultimately shaped his own place in Black history.

Ellington's love of African-American history manifested itself many times throughout his remarkable career. His most famous work on the topic premiered at Carnegie Hall in 1943: *Black, Brown and Beige* was a three-movement rhapsody on the history of Black America, beginning with the lives of the slaves in the antebellum South and progressing to the modern era. Decades later, he would reach even further back in history with *Three Black Kings*, a work which would turn out to be Ellington's last; he died on May 24, 1974, with only a few measures left to go.

Ellington's son Mercer, who first performed the work, claimed that his father was inspired to write the piece after visiting the Cathedral del Mar in Barcelona, Spain and seeing a depiction of the Nativity of Christ. In this Nativity scene as in many others, one of the three

Magi bringing gifts to the baby Jesus (traditionally named Balthazar) is depicted as Black. The other two kings depicted are Solomon of the Bible, and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose tragic assassination in 1968 had shaken the soul of the nation.

While we usually assume that a symphonic work is both composed and orchestrated by the same person, this is not always the case. Particularly in twentieth century, composers accustomed to working across the popular-classical divide sometimes outsourced the orchestration of their works. This is true of works like George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* (orchestrated by Ferde Grofé) and Leonard Bernstein's Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story* (orchestrated by Sid Ramin). This is also the case with *Three Black Kings*. Ellington's work was ultimately produced in two versions by two eminent orchestrators, both of whom had worked extensively with the composer: first Luther Henderson, and later Maurice Peress, whose version is performed by the QCSO this weekend.

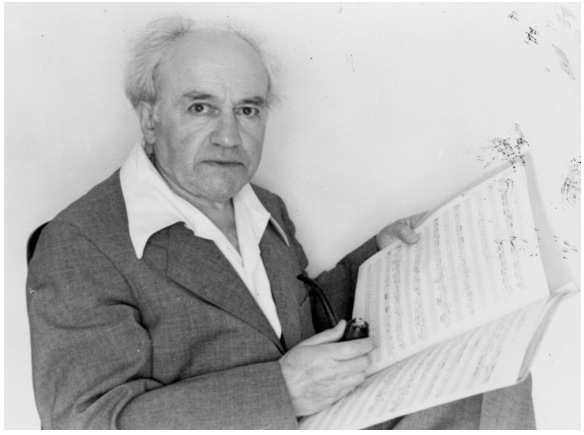
ERNEST BLOCH (1880-1959)
Schelomo: Hebraic Rhapsody

Instrumentation: Solo cello, three flutes (third doubling piccolo), two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, two harps, and strings.

Premiere: May 3, 1917, Carnegie Hall, New York City, Hans Kindler, cello, with Artur Bodanzky conducting.

QCSO Performance History: Tchaikovsky Competition-winning cellist Nathaniel Rosen played the QCSO premiere of *Schelomo* with James Dixon conducting on a Masterworks concert in December 1989, with a run-out performance the following Monday in Muscatine. Mark Russell Smith last conducted the work in March of 2009, with Joshua Roman as soloist.

It is difficult to overstate the profound impact that Jewish composers have had in the development of classical music, from the French grand operas of Giacomo Meyerbeer to the minimalist epiphanies of Steve Reich. And with each facing unique societal situations and dilemmas vis-à-vis the predominating musical culture, Jewish musicians have often fashioned unique and personal ways of integrating or reconciling their faith and heritage in music. At one extreme, Felix Mendelssohn converted to Protestantism and wrote a symphony in praise of Luther's Reformation; at the other, Arnold Schoenberg abandoned and then returned to the Jewish faith, a reversion inextricably tied to his exile from his native Austria in 1933. Accordingly, Mendelssohn included few if any expressly Jewish influences in his music, whereas Schoenberg's works written after his reconversion include profound metaphysical explorations of Jewish philosophy (as in the opera *Moses und Aron*) and disturbing depictions of the Holocaust (as in the vocal-orchestral work *A Survivor from Warsaw*).



But perhaps no composer integrated Jewish themes as thoroughly into his works as the Swiss-American composer Ernest Bloch. "It is the Jewish soul that interests me," he wrote in 1954, "the complex glowing agitated soul that I feel vibrating throughout the Bible; the freshness and naivete of the patriarchs; the violence which is evident in the prophetical books; the Jew's savage love of justice; the despair of the preacher in Jerusalem; the sorrow and immensity of the Book of Job; the sensuality of the Song of Songs. All this is in us, all this is in me, and it is the better part of me. It is all that I endeavor to hear in myself and to transcribe in my music."

The cello concerto *Schelomo* is perhaps Bloch's most well-known work on Jewish themes, in which the solo cello part depicts the voice of King Solomon in the Book of Ecclesiastes. The piece originates from a pivotal moment in Bloch's life; he completed it in 1916, just before his first emigration to the United States to teach at Mannes College of Music in New York. After helping to found the famed Cleveland Institute of Music, he would return to Switzerland in the 1930s, but ultimately settled for good in Northern California and Oregon during the Second World War, serving on the faculty of the University of California-Berkeley.

MICHAEL DAUGHERTY (b. 1954)
Dead Elvis

Instrumentation: Solo bassoon, e-flat clarinet, trumpet, bass trombone, violin, double bass, and percussion.

Premiere: 1993, Grand Tetons Festival, Charles Ullery, bassoon, Boston Musica Viva, Richard Pittman conducting.

QCSO Premiere.

Composer Michael Daugherty obtained what in the 1970s was the ultimate in a modernist musical training. As a young man he studied with perhaps the most notorious serialist of the time, Charles Wuorinen. He then worked at Pierre Boulez's Parisian mecca of electronic music, IRCAM, and then returned to the United States for doctoral studies at Yale University.

Each of these teachers, mentors, and institutions is widely associated with what has been facetiously labelled by musicologist Richard Taruskin as "the academic *avant-garde*." The label is intentionally contradictory: on one hand this movement was "avant-garde" (innovative, groundbreaking, and unconcerned with popular success), but were also "academic" (elitist, methodically technical, and tied to legacy institutions and government funding). Their artistic predecessor was Arnold Schoenberg, who saw popular music as the antithesis of artistic success. "If it is art, it is not for all, and if it is for all, it is not art."

But at some point during the 1980s, Daugherty seems to have adopted a different credo, this time in the spirit of Andy Warhol, who once said, "Art is what you can get away with." Perhaps inspired by the popular music which filled his Cedar Rapids, Iowa home while growing up, or perhaps in response to encouragement from Leonard Bernstein at the Tanglewood Festival, Daugherty pivoted to a pop-art style which has since launched him to international

fame. He first gained notoriety with his *Metropolis Symphony* (1988) based on the comic-book character of Superman; later works include *Desi* (1991) exploring the persona of Desi Arnaz, and *Jackie O* (1997) about, yes, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. These works, full of familiar harmonies and pop-inspired rhythmic vitality, stand in stark contrast to the austere aesthetics associated with the high modernism of Daugherty's education.

As is obvious from the title, the chamber work *Dead Elvis* is in the same vein as these other pop-culture influenced works. And while it can be easy to dismiss his topics and the accompanying stage antics as silly or absurd, like Warhol before him, Daugherty often implies that such works contain a deeper level of social commentary. "Elvis, for better or worse, is part of American culture, history and mythology. If you want to understand America and all its riddles, sooner or later you will have to deal with (Dead) Elvis."

JOHANN STRAUSS, JR. (1825-1899)
Emperor Waltz, Op. 437

Instrumentation: Piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings.

Premiere: October 21, 1889, Berlin.

QCSO Performance History: QCSO audiences have heard the *Emperor Waltz* twice before, in 1936 under Frank Laird Waller, and in 1979 in an all-Strauss Masterworks concert conducted by James Dixon.

The sometimes-friendly, sometimes-fraught relationship between Emperors Wilhelm II of Germany and Franz Joseph I of Austria was emblematic of the differences between their empires. In the waning days of the nineteenth century, Germany was unified in a single language and aggressively and ready to expand its borders. Austria-Hungary, on the other hand, was a sprawling and multicultural wilderness, with many competing factions and few means of building social cohesion. Fittingly, Franz Joseph I was generally cautious, stoic, and humble, whereas Wilhelm II was forceful, belligerent, and often personally offensive. For better or worse, these characteristics endeared Wilhelm II to German nationalists everywhere. When visiting Vienna in 1888 shortly after his accession to the Prussian throne, he was received with such great acclaim and adulation that some local authorities were concerned that the German emperor was eclipsing the Austrian in the minds of his own German-speaking subjects.

It was against this awkward backdrop that, In the following year, Franz Joseph I reciprocated the visit, and employed another kind of "king", Johann Strauss, Jr., to dignify the occasion with a new waltz. Rather than be forced to decide which of the two rulers deserved the dedication more, Strauss chose the title *Kaiser-Walzer* to diplomatically honor both, and ensuring the possibility of currying favor with either monarch. (Of course, being the "Waltz King" himself, the piece's title includes the composer as well.)

Ultimately, the differences in character between the two monarchs and kingdoms would shake the very foundations of Europe, with the heterogenous ungovernability of Austria-Hungary combining noxiously with Prussian aggression following the

assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Franz Joseph I's nephew, which marked the beginning of the Great War. Franz Joseph would die in 1916, and Wilhelm would abdicate the German throne at the war's end, escaping into exile in the Netherlands. Thus we can hear Strauss's *Kaiser-Walzer* as something of a dual farewell for two great European monarchies, both abolished in the ashes of World War I.

WILLIAM WALTON (1902-1983)
Henry V Suite

Instrumentation: Two flutes (both doubling piccolo), two oboes (second doubling English horn), two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings.
QCSO Premiere.

British actor Laurence Olivier was the son of Anglican clergyman Gerard Olivier, a distant father but a gifted preacher who identified in his son a rare dramatic talent from an early age. After his education, and with his father's encouragement, Laurence worked his way up in the British theatre world, eventually landing an invitation to join the Old Vic theatre company in Thames. It was here that he developed what would become his widely-lauded Shakespearean technique, a more human and natural approach in contrast to the fusty, sing-song style then in fashion.

Growing up around the same time, composer William Walton had a more unconventional career path, failing out of Oxford and then spending much of his young adulthood in close friendship with the flamboyant Sitwell siblings, Sacheverell, Osbert, and Edith. Walton's most notorious work as a composer from this era was the absurdist chamber suite *Façade*, in which Edith Sitwell's poems are barked through a megaphone alongside cheeky accompaniment. The premiere, in which the poet herself performed the declamation, was ridiculed by critics but provided both Sitwell and Walton with coveted notoriety.

So what brought Olivier and Walton, two gifted but very different contemporaries, together? Like so many British artists during the Second World War, both found themselves in the employ of the Ministry of Information in support of the war effort. In 1943, amid the waning days of the war, both artists began working on a film version *Henry V,* the first of three highly successful collaborations on film adaptations of Shakespeare plays. Despite the composer's skepticism that film music could function meaningfully in the concert hall, the work was eventually adapted into two concert suites for orchestra.

William Walton with his wife Susana and his longtime friend, the eccentric poet Edith Sitwell (seated).