

Quad City Symphony Orchestra  
**PROGRAM NOTES**  
Masterworks II: An American Tapestry

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*Though the symphony as a genre has its deepest roots in the instrumental music of German-speaking lands, composers from many nations have made vital contributions to the genre. However, in the United States, no single composer is the undisputed standard-bearer of a distinctly national symphonic tradition, and no single work has earned the title of the quintessential American symphony. On the first half of this weekend's program, Music Director Mark Russell Smith has compiled the work of four American composers into a speculative four-movement "symphony". Please hold your applause until the conclusion of the "fourth movement."*

**AARON COPLAND (1900-1990)**  
"Buckaroo Holiday" from *Rodeo*

**Instrumentation:** Piccolo, 2 Flutes (one doubling piccolo), 2 Oboes, English horn, 2 Clarinets, Bass Clarinet, 2 Bassoons, 4 Horns, 3 Trumpets, 3 Trombones, Tuba, Percussion, Harp, and Strings.



John Lomax, Sr. with "Uncle" Rich Brown.

**Premiere:** October 16, 1942, by Agnes de Mille and the Ballet Russe de Monte-Carlo, Metropolitan Opera House, New York City.

**QCSO Performance History:** "Buckaroo Holiday" was previously performed on Masterworks concerts in 1962 (Charles Gigante conducting) and 2015 (Mark Russell Smith conducting), and on Pops concerts in 2007 (Spring Pops, Paul Gambill guest conducting) and 2011 (Patriotic Pops, Mark Russell Smith conducting).

John Lomax's 1910 collection *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* begins with a neatly-handwritten preface praising Lomax for his "work emphatically worth doing and one which should appeal to the people of all our country, but particularly to the people of the west and southwest." The preface-writer marveled at the parallels between the "sympathy for the outlaw" in both American and British folk tunes (Jesse James, Robin Hood), and bemoaned that, "[u]nder modern conditions... the native ballad is speedily killed by competition with the music hall songs; the cowboys becoming ashamed to sing the crude homespun ballads." Thus, with the dying-out of a musical

repertoire, it was essential to “preserve permanently this unwritten ballad literature of the back country and the frontier.” To conclude his preface, the author signed off “With all good wishes / I am / Very truly yours, / Theodore Roosevelt.”

Aaron Copland, who was 10 years old when *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* was published, was the first American composer to recognize the potential of cowboy songs to provide a basis for American classical music. Though by no means a western native (having been born to immigrant Jewish parents in Brooklyn), Copland so successfully integrated “frontier ballads” into a number of his early works that audiences have come to consider his music synonymous with the big skies of the American West.

His first major musical success in this vein was the 1938 ballet *Billy the Kid*, and though Copland resisted a second go at the Western theme, choreographer Agnes de Mille successfully recruited him to provide music for her 1942 ballet *Rodeo*. In fashioning these works, Copland made generous use of the collections of John Lomax (as well as Lomax’s sons John, Jr. and Alan, both musicologists), fulfilling Teddy Roosevelt’s prediction that the preservation of frontier ballads would prove important to future American musical life.

### **Buckaroo Holiday Listening Guide**

♩ **MELODY.** Copland begins with extremely strong unison lines where most of the orchestra is playing the same bold, rhythmic scale. Though they begin by moving in the same direction (*parallel*

*motion*), listen for when the high instruments take the scale downward and the low instruments head upward (*contrary motion*).

♩ **INSTRUMENTATION.** Though a lot of composers have been resistant to using the piano in a symphony orchestra, Copland wrote unashamedly for piano, including in a kind of honky-tonk style which became one of his orchestral trademarks.

♩ **FORM.** As ballets often are, the movements of *Rodeo* are generally in *episodic form*; they move freely from one idea to another, usually tied to a change in the choreography. Listen for the frequent return of the opening scales, but otherwise enjoy the sharp contrasts, which were no doubt requested by Agnes de Mille herself.

♩ **INSTRUMENTATION.** Listen for the fantastic low bassoon solo, perhaps imitating the moo of a cow (this is centered on a low “C”, nearly the lowest note on the bassoon).

♩ **MELODY.** The statement of the classic song “If He’d Be a Buckaroo” is unmissable in its first entrance on the trombone. Copland takes this tune through a dizzying array of transformations and re-orchestrations.

♩ **INSTRUMENTATION.** Listen for when Copland evokes the snapping whip of a cowboy by combining the snare drum and the slapstick together.

JUDITH SHATIN (b. 1949)

*Piping the Earth*

**Instrumentation:** 3 Flutes (one doubling piccolo), 3 Oboes (one doubling English horn), 3 Clarinets, 3 Bassoons, 4 Horns, 3 Trumpets, 2 Trombones, Tuba, Timpani, 3 Percussion, Harp, and Strings.

**Premiere:** November 2, 1990, The Women's Philharmonic, JoAnn Falletta, conductor. Festival of New American Music, California State University at Sacramento.

**QCSO Premiere.**

A longtime faculty member at the University of Virginia, Judith Shatin is an accomplished composer of both acoustic and electronic music. In an interview, Shatin provided some observations about music in general that can help guide a new listener of her music. "I believe that all music is narrative," she said. "We are, by nature, pattern seekers, and we interpret patterns and our experience of the through narrative," and this is the same



process regardless of whether we are describing to ourselves a story about the elements of music theory or some other story. For that reason, Shatin "never accepted the standard notion that music is either abstract or programmatic," i.e., that it either tells an external story or it doesn't. "The program may be abstract... But as soon as those relationships are reified [i.e., made real] in music and we try to make sense of them, we turn to narrative."

Providing some insight into the narrative she had in mind while composing *Piping the Earth*, Shatin writes:

The title *Piping the Earth* derives from the ancient Chinese text *Chuang Tzu*. The term refers to the multiplicity of sounds created by the wind as it moves through different spaces. Yet the nature of the air remains the same. My one-movement work analogously flows from a constant harmonic background but the effect as it moves through given sound spaces changes markedly. The title also suggests harmonic pipes or poles, and the piece develops around three such fundamental structures.

*Piping the Earth*  
Listening Guide

♫ **HARMONY.** The piece begins with a very strong, long-held E. This is called a *pedal tone* because it imitates a held note on the pedals of the organ.

♫ **TEXTURE.** Notice how the various members of the string sections all join the opening moment at different times. Rather than provide specific rhythms, Shatin provides a little snippet for each

section and instructs the players to “stagger entries”.

♪ **NOTATION.** In a similar vein, Shatin’s score contains many specific and friendly instructions for the players. For example, watch the harpist – the player has been given a single low note and has been instructed to “Repeat occasionally, beginning sparsely, Forest murmurs.”

♪ **ORCHESTRATION.** The piece’s main first section has many “chattery” figures that jump around the orchestra. When you hear a little figure, try to follow its path as it moves from instrument to instrument.

♪ **RHYTHM.** Most of Shatin’s piece has a detectable pulse; when listening to sections where you don’t feel a strong beat, just enjoy the colorful “mess” until the pulse returns.

♪ **FORM.** Shatin signals an end to the first large section by boiling her grand and chameleon-like orchestration down to a single held note on the solo horn.

♪ **INSTRUMENTATION.** Immediately after this horn “solo”, listen for the flute. The slow arpeggio played by the flute may sound somewhat out of tune, as Shatin asks for *harmonics* on these notes. This is a method of playing that relies less on change of fingering and more on the natural changes that occur when the player alters the *embouchure* or mouth shape.

♪ **TIMBRE.** At various points in the second half of the piece, Shatin utilizes *timbral trills* in the woodwinds. These sound like normal trills, but the color of the sound also changes along with the pitch.

♪ **INSTRUMENTATION.** The latter passages of the work include a passage for *temple blocks*, which are similar to

wood blocks except that they are generally made of plastic and are carefully constructed as a set of five (or seven) with evenly-spaced pitches.



AMY BEACH (1867-1944)

Lento con molto espressione, from  
*Gaelic Symphony*, Op. 32

**Instrumentation:** Piccolo, 2 Flutes, 2 Oboes, English horn, 2 Clarinets, Bass clarinet, 2 Bassoons, 4 Horns, 2 Trumpets, 3 Trombones, Tuba, Timpani, Percussion, and Strings.

**Premiere:** October 30, 1896, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Boston, MA.

**QCSO Premiere.**

In 1895, Antonin Dvorak mused in *Harper’s Monthly* on the question of where an American composer might look for inspiration. “It is a proper question to ask, what songs, then, belong to the American and appeal more strongly to him than any others? What melody could stop him on the street if he

were in a strange land and make the home feeling well up within him, no matter how hardened he might be or how wretchedly the tune were played?" Dvorak's answer to this question (demonstrated in his own Ninth Symphony, "From the New World") was the spirituals and "plantation songs" of Black southerners, which, he said, "are distinguished by unusual and subtle harmonies, the like of which I have found in no other songs but those of old Scotland and Ireland."

As this opinion was published, Boston composer Amy Marcy Cheney Beach was composing her *Gaelic* Symphony, and though she admired Dvorak, she did not share his opinion that spirituals constituted the best source to inspire American composers. A native of New Hampshire, Beach instead preferred to look for inspiration in what Dvorak called the songs "of old Scotland and Ireland." Fresh off the success of her choral-orchestral Mass with the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston, Beach crafted her contribution to the Romantic symphony tradition using a wide variety of Celtic folk songs. The *Gaelic* was the first symphony composed by an American woman to be performed and published, and it received enormous popular and critical acclaim. A major revival of interest in Beach's music has led to a tremendous number of performances of the *Gaelic* symphony in recent years.

### *Gaelic Symphony, Third Movement* Listening Guide

♩ **RHYTHM.** After the movement's introduction, the concertmaster begins a solo, which is marked "quasi recitativo". *Recitativo* is a vocal style where the free rhythm of a sung text overrides the

regular pulse. Like many vocal recitatives, this one is accompanied by pizzicato.

♩ **TEXTURE.** The violin is joined by a cello solo, which more in-time and melodic than the violin recitative. The two continue in *counterpoint*, both equal in prominence but contrasting in rhythm.

♩ **RHYTHM.** Like many great romantic symphonies, the slow movement of Beach's *Gaelic* has steady, slow forward motion in tempo with constantly-changing rhythmic divisions. This can make passages feel faster or slower, even if the tempo is not changing.

♩ **HARMONY.** When the violin solo returns, Beach has moved from the opening key of E minor to its *parallel key*, E major. The home note is the same, but the *mode* has changed.

♩ **INSTRUMENTATION.** You'll know we're back in E minor when you hear a doleful bass clarinet solo, a rare feature. This is joined by reprise of the opening cello and violin solos.

## JOHN ADAMS (b. 1947)

### *A Short Ride in a Fast Machine*

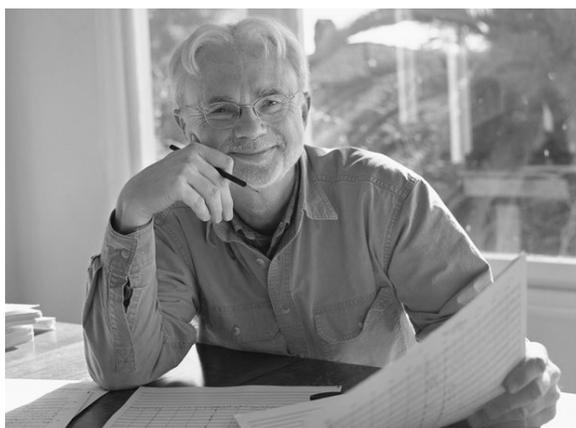
**Instrumentation:** 2 Piccolos, 2 Flutes, 2 Oboes, English horn, 2 Clarinets, 3 Bassoons, Contrabassoon, 4 Horns, 4 Trumpets, 3 Trombones, Tuba, Timpani, 3 Percussion, Synthesizer, and Strings.

**Premiere:** 1986, Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

**QCSO Performance History:** This is the third performance of *A Short Ride in a Fast Machine* by the QCSO. The piece premiered on Spring Pops in 1990 (James Dixon conducting), and was featured on Masterworks concerts in 1997 (Donald Schleicher conducting).

The musical style known as *minimalism* originated in the corners of *avant garde*

American music in the 1960s and 70s. Minimalist composers like Steve Reich and Philip Glass sought out a musical vocabulary that contrasted from the modernism then dominant in academic music circles. Minimalist style was repetitive to the point of hypnosis, straightforward in its harmonies, and aesthetically crafted for art galleries and small music venues. Though it found many fans among lovers of the visual arts and has had a wide impact on film music, the works that most fully represent this style have been greeted with relative coolness if not outrightly rejected by classical audiences.



But since the 1980s, a number of composers influenced by Glass and Reich have sought to import the aesthetics of minimalism – vibrant and repetitive rhythmic figures, harmonies based commonly-heard scales, etc. – into concert works that appeal more to the mainstream classical audience. The most successful of these “post-minimalists” are Michael Torke and especially John Adams, whose works have received far more performances by American orchestras and opera houses than either Glass or Reich.

When commissioned to write *A Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, Adams was fresh off the unique experience of riding in a friend’s Italian sports car. The music is meant to

represent a combination of thrill and terror, or, as Adams put it, “You know how it is when someone asks you to ride in a terrific sports car, and then you wish you hadn’t?”

### *A Short Ride in a Fast Machine* Listening Guide

♪ **INSTRUMENTATION.** Different folks notice all kinds of things about *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*. But everybody notices the wood block.

♪ **ORCHESTRATION.** In keeping with his practice in other works, Adams makes use of synthesizer as part of the orchestra.

♪ **RHYTHM.** Like all music in this style, Adams’s piece includes a very clear pulse throughout. However, the *meter* (organization of pulse into regular patterns) varies wildly and often different sections of the orchestra “disagree” as to which pulses are most important.

♪ **ORCHESTRATION.** You might wonder how the clarinets can keep playing their part so constantly without passing out. Adams makes use of a “dovetailing” orchestration technique whereby the clarinets have rests distributed at different times and are therefore able to stagger their breathing. The same effect is used by Wagner in *Ride of the Valkyries* to portray constant motion without suffocating the woodwinds.

### SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873-1943)

#### Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 18

**Instrumentation:** Solo Piano, 2 Flutes, 2 Oboes, 2 Clarinets, 2 Bassoons, 4 Horns, 2 Trumpets, 3 Trombones, Tuba, Timpani, Percussion, and Strings.

**Premiere:** November 9, 1901, with the composer as soloist, Alexander Siloti conducting. Moscow Philharmonic Society, Moscow.

**QCSO Performance History:** This is the eighth time Tri-City/Quad City Symphony audiences have heard Rachmaninoff's second concerto on Masterworks concerts. Previous performances were in 1946 (William Kapell/Oscar Anderson), 1964 (Byron Janis/Charles Giggante), 1975 (Byron Janis again/James Dixon), 1982 (Robin McCabe/James Dixon again), 1992 (Seung-Un Ha/James Dixon a final time) and 2007 (Thomas Sauer/Michael Buttermann). The most recent performance was in 2014 with Andre Watts and Mark Russell Smith.

"Is such music needed by anybody?"

This was the question posed by the aged Russian writer Leo Tolstoy, when he first heard the music of young composer Sergei Rachmaninoff in January of 1900. Rachmaninoff idolized Tolstoy, and the literary giant's negative response poured salt into an already open wound. The 1897 premiere of Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 1 had been a tremendous fiasco, eliciting disapproval of both audience and learned listeners. "Forgive me," said Rimsky-Korsakov to Rachmaninoff, "but I do not find this music at all agreeable."

Years later, Rachmaninoff explained how formative the experience of failure had been. "There are serious illnesses and deadly blows from fate that entirely change a man's character. This was the effect of my own symphony on myself. When the indescribable torture of this performance had at last come to an end, I was a different man." By the time he met Tolstoy in January of 1900, he was deep in the throes of writer's block, wondering with the elderly author

whether he was capable of writing music worth listening to.

But that same month, at the suggestion of friends, Rachmaninoff began to see psychotherapist (and amateur violist!) Nikolai Dahl. Dahl was a pioneer in the field of hypnotherapy and, over several months, provided care to the anguished composer. The treatment worked, and from June 1900 to April 1901 Rachmaninoff worked happily at his second piano concerto. Enormously grateful for his treatment, he dedicated the concerto to Dahl.

Rachmaninoff would, of course, go on to an enormously successful career as a composer, conductor, and pianist. But the self-doubt which Dahl so effectively treated never fully left the composer. In a 1935 interview, Rachmaninoff confided, "Today, when the greater part of my life is over, I am constantly troubled by the misgiving that, in venturing into too many fields, I may have failed to make the best use of my life. In the old Russian phrase, I have 'hunted three hares.' Can I be sure that I have killed one of them?"



## Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto No. 2 Listening Guide

### First movement: Moderato

♩ **HARMONY.** Like Shatin, Rachmaninoff begins with a *pedal tone*, but here just in the piano. This is a low “C” which is the *tonic* (home note) of the concerto, hammered ever more insistently by the soloist.

♩ **MELODY.** A master of piano textures, Rachmaninoff often gives melodies to the orchestra and allows the piano to decorate. This is the case when the orchestra enters for the first time: the strings are all in a unison melody, with the rest of the orchestra providing support in the form of quiet chords.

♩ **FORM.** Like most first concerto movements, this concerto has a *first theme* (the labored string unison) and a contrasting *second theme*, which is a touching and pretty theme played by the piano alone, with occasional doublings in the woodwind instruments. When this tune returns toward the end of the movement, it appears where, frankly, it “should have been”, in the solo horn.

♩ **RHYTHM.** Rachmaninoff brings the movement to a quick end with a driving rhythmic figure, first almost whispered, but rising quickly to a forceful close.

### Second movement: Adagio sostenuto

♩ **HARMONY.** Listen for the transformation between the close of the first movement and the opening of the second. Not only are the tempo, and orchestration different, the slow movement also begins in E major, very far removed from the home key of C minor.

♩ **RHYTHM.** Rachmaninoff plays interesting rhythmic “tricks” on us in this

movement’s poignant opening. When the flute solo enters, it seems to be almost out of sync with the solo piano’s flowing arpeggios. However, it’s the flute that actually lands squarely in the meter and the piano whose patterns are off the beat. It takes a clarinet solo, of course, to bring the piano in line.

♩ **TEXTURE.** The movement closes with a moment of remarkable layering in the orchestration: as the piano continues its silky arpeggios, the strings sustain long notes below it and the woodwinds play light, short staccato notes.

### Third movement: Allegro scherzando

♩ **HARMONY.** Like in Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, the last movement of this concerto begins in C major, the *parallel key* to the concerto’s main key of C minor. Unlike Beethoven, however, for whom C major triumphed over C minor, Rachmaninoff returns almost immediately back to the minor key.

♩ **MELODY.** The viola first plays a melody that functions as something of a “10 o’clock number” – a tune that shows up late in a Broadway show to revive the audience before the finale. This unforgettable tune becomes a prominent feature throughout the rest of the movement.

♩ **TEXTURE.** Late in the movement, the opening theme is the subject of a *fugato* or fugue-like section. This is where different sections of the orchestra begin the melody at different times (*Frere Jacques* style), and somehow it all works.

♩ **FORM.** Though he included no cadenza in the fast first movement, the virtuoso Rachmaninoff could not resist allowing the soloist a second opportunity for some true bravado, so the last movement includes an impressive cadenza.