

Quad City Symphony Orchestra  
**PROGRAM NOTES**  
Masterworks II: Midsummer Night's Dream

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DAVID DIAMOND (1915-2005)  
Music for Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*  
V. The Death of Romeo and Juliet

**Instrumentation:** Two flutes (second doubling piccolo), two oboes (second doubling English horn), two clarinets (second doubling bass clarinet), two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, trombone, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings.

**Premiere:** October 20, 1947, Little Orchestra Society, conducted by Thomas Scherman, New York City.

**QCSO Premiere.**

American composer David Diamond's 90 years spanned arguably the most consequential years in American music. At his birth in 1915, the Gershwin brothers hadn't yet collaborated, Louis Armstrong hadn't yet begun performing on riverboats, and Copland had just made up his mind to pursue composition. When Diamond died in 2005, Marin Alsop was the first woman leading a major American symphony orchestra, Lang Lang was in the first years of his career, and Justin Timberlake and Janet Jackson were fresh



off the "wardrobe malfunction" of Super Bowl XXXVIII.

As you might expect, a composer who saw so much change and upheaval in society and musical culture might hold an opinion or two. And indeed, Diamond was well-known for his incisive if jaundiced view on the direction of American music during his long career. Speaking with interviewer Bruce Duffie in 1990, Diamond held forth on many topics, including young composers ("They do nothing but go from city to city and peddle their scores. I'm too old for that; at seventy-five you can't do that. I'm glad that I can just get my teaching done..."), minimalism ("I can't sit through more than three minutes of Philip Glass because I begin getting hives..."), and

the current crop of Hollywood acting talent ("It's so ghastly, and you can't remember one actress or one actor from another..."). "Is composing fun?" asked Duffie. "No. It's agony," replied Diamond.

Diamond's principled, opinionated, and thorny temperament was indeed a life-long trait. Having written an orchestral suite based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in 1947, he was approached by a New York director about repurposing the

suite as incidental music for a new Broadway production of the play. Diamond was amenable to collaboration, but stood by his artistic principles. Quoted in liner notes to a Naxos recording, Diamond recounted that “when I got to rehearsal, they started talking about chopping up the long, sustained movements I had written, and I said, ‘Nothing doing.’ If it’s agreeable to you, I’d prefer to write a whole new score.”

The movement on this weekend’s concerts is the concluding movement of the 1947 suite, depicting the tragic end of Western literature’s most famous star-crossed lovers.

### *The Death of Romeo and Juliet* Listening Guide

♩ **ORCHESTRATION:** The strings form the core of Diamond’s opening sound, with subtle entrances doubling them in the winds. At the end of the first melodic section, the winds break away with shorter figures, like an outpouring of grief.

♩ **INSTRUMENTATION:** The timpani plays very little in this movement. Aside from the large full-orchestra moments, Diamond gives it one dark and subtle “heartbeat” moment halfway through the movement.

♩ **FORM:** The somber opening unison melody in the cellos and basses returns at the end of the work.

### REENA ESMAIL (b. 1983) “Testament” from *Vishwas*

**Instrumentation:** Two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, two trombones, timpani, tabla, percussion, piano, and strings.

**Premiere:** May 14, 2014, by the Albany Symphony’s sinfonietta, Dogs of Desire, Troy, NY.  
**QCSO Premiere.**

### RE | Member

**Instrumentation:** Three flutes, three oboes, three clarinets, three bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, and strings.

**Premiere:** September 2021, Seattle Symphony, oboist Mary Lynch VanderKolk, Thomas Dausgaard, conductor.

**QCSO Premiere.**

On her composition “Testament” from *Vishwas*, composer Reena Esmail writes:

*The word vishwas expresses the concept of fervent belief, or faith, in Hindi. Meera Bai, a celebrated saint-poet from 15th century India, is the quintessential embodiment of vishwas. Though she is forced into a traditional marriage to unite two kingdoms, she believes she is married to the Lord Krishna, a Hindu deity, and the events of her life are shaped around her fervent devotion to this intangible but omnipresent figure.*

*Testament is the final movement of a three part work for bharatanatyam (Indian classical) dancer and orchestra. In Meera’s stubbornness, she stages a hunger strike outside the temple of her Lord Krishna, refusing to eat until the doors are opened. One night, after days of*

fasting, she is extremely weak and lays down to rest. A storm brews, and the high winds begin to swing the lamp outside the temple's wooden door, causing the door to catch fire. As the storm builds, the door burns, eventually causing the entrance to the temple to reopen. This piece incorporates one of Meera's own bhajans (devotional songs), in Raag Malhar, the raag that beckons rain. Krishna has used the forces of nature to show himself, and to honor Meera's faithfulness to him. Even as the flames surround her, Meera walks calmly into the temple to honor her Lord.

Vishwas makes use of traditional Hindustani raags, which are woven through the fabric of the composition. It is fitting that all the information we currently have about Meera Bai and her struggles for self-expression are from her own songs.

Esmail composed *RE|Member* to commemorate the uncertain times surrounding the Covid-19 Pandemic. The composer writes:

*This piece connects two meanings of the word 'remember'. Firstly, the sense that something is being brought back together. The orchestra is re-membering, co-alescing again after being apart. The pandemic will have been transformative: the orchestra is made up of individuals who had a wide variety of experiences in this time. And they are bringing those individual experiences back into the collective group. There might be people who*

*committed more deeply to their musical practice, people who were drawn into new artistic facets, people who had to leave their creative practice entirely, people who came to new realizations about their art, career, life. All these new perspectives, all these strands of thought and exploration are being brought back together.*

*And the second meaning of the word: that we don't want to forget the perspectives which each of these individuals gained during this time, simply because we are back in a familiar situation. I wanted this piece to honor the experience of coming back together, infused with the wisdom of the time apart.*

### *RE|Member* Listening Guide

♫ **TONE COLOR:** After the opening oboe solo and the piece's initial fanfare, the double bass section performs what are called "snap pizzicato" or "Bartok pizzicato" (after the composer who first utilized them). The players pull their strings very tight and then release them sharply enough to strike the fingerboard.



♪ **INSTRUMENTATION:** Many of the woodwind lines are doubled on the Marimba, which gives those figures a warmer yet more focused sound.

♪ **TEXTURE:** Esmail will often create very active, undulating background textures, then float long, soaring melodies in the foreground.

### Testament Listening Guide

♪ **MELODY:** Listen for the pitch bends in the opening oboe solo; this is a technique evoking Indian classical music.

♪ **RHYTHM:** Note Esmail's shifts in forward motion; she frequently juxtaposes passages featuring a clear percussive background with moments where a less-rhythmic melody seems to temporarily suspend the beat.

♪ **INSTRUMENTATION:** The tabla fills an important role in Hindustani classical music. Mastering the tabla is a long and arduous task, often undertaken under the guidance of a master teacher.

## FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847) Selections from *Ein Sommernachtstraum*

**Instrumentation:** Two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, strings, and chorus.

**Premiere:** 1843, Potsdam, Germany.

**QCSO Performance History:** This is the most complete performance of Mendelssohn's incidental music in QCSO history. The Overture has been performed the most frequently (1928/Ludwig Becker, 1950/Harry John Brown, 1968/James Dixon, 1977/James Dixon, and 1988/James Dixon again). Harry John Brown's 1950 performance also included the Nocturne and Scherzo. James Dixon's last performance of music from the work in 1992 included the Scherzo, Intermezzo, Nocturne, and Wedding March (perhaps he'd had enough of the Overture by then). In 2012, Mark Russell Smith led performances of the Scherzo and Wedding March.

In 1808, the German literary critic and translator August Wilhelm von Schlegel gave a landmark series of lectures in Vienna. Later published as *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, Schlegel's expansive talks cover a broad range of literary topics (subheadings include "Difference in Taste between the Ancients and Moderns", "Euripides—his Merits and Defects", and "Mischief resulting to the French Stage from too narrow Interpretation of the Rules of Unity"). And while Schlegel issued praise for many major dramatists dating back to antiquity, some of his boldest acclaim was reserved for William Shakespeare, who had died almost exactly 150 years before Schlegel's birth. The details of his admiration for Shakespeare shed light on the bridge between the Bard and the German Romantic imagination.

Schlegel praised *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which he said contained "a luxuriant vein of the boldest and most fantastical invention; the most extraordinary combination of the most dissimilar ingredients seems to have been brought about without effort by some ingenious and lucky accident, and the colours are of such clear transparency that we think the whole of the variegated fabric may be blown away with a breath." Focusing on Shakespeare's unique "fairy world", Schlegel described "twilight, moonshine, dew, and spring perfumes, are the element of these tender spirits; they assist nature in embroidering her carpet with green leaves, many-coloured flowers, and glittering insects; in the human world they do but make sport childishly and waywardly with their beneficent or noxious influences." This play, in particular, showed Shakespeare's ability to dispel the tragedy that he was, in other works, so masterful at sustaining. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the characters' "most violent rage dissolves in good-natured raillery; their passions, stripped of all earthly matter, are merely an ideal dream."

Schlegel was speaking from a position of authority, not only as an admirer of Shakespeare, but also as his chief translator into the German language. Beginning with (you guessed it!) *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1789, Schlegel produced seventeen German translations of Shakespeare's plays, editions which proved highly influential on the German-speaking public, literati, and artists. And among those thus bewitched by "twilight, moonshine, dew, and spring perfumes" was the nephew of Schlegel's sister-in-law Dorothea, none other than the composer Felix Mendelssohn.

Born in the year after Schlegel's Vienna lectures, Felix Mendelssohn first engaged *Ein Sommernachtstraum* at the age of 17, composing the work's "overture". As was common in his time, this project was not undertaken with a particular production of the play in mind, but was rather an instrumental composition inspired by the play intended for use at orchestral concerts. However, Mendelssohn revisited the play a decade and a half later, composing full incidental music (essentially a "film score" for a live-action play) at the request of Prussian King Frederick William IV. The production was staged in Potsdam in 1843, and portions of Mendelssohn's work have since become some of the most often-performed and recognizable pieces of classical music ever composed.

