

Quad City Symphony Orchestra  
**PROGRAM NOTES**  
Masterworks III: Winter Wonders

By Jacob Bancks  
Associate Professor of Music  
Augustana College

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL  
(1685-1759), ed. Felix Schroeder  
Suite from *Alexander's Feast*

**Instrumentation:** Two solo violins, stings and continuo.

**Premiere:** February 19, 1736, Covent Garden Theatre, London.

**QCSO Premiere.**

Ask a musician, "Who is the patron saint of music?" and most will know the answer: St. Cecilia. Looking at both authoritative and legendary accounts of her life, this may be somewhat surprising: Cecilia was an early Roman martyr who died sometime in the early decades of the third century, and few direct connections to music show up in her biographies, whether historically trustworthy or not.

However, sometime after the year 1500, St. Cecilia came to be associated with music by virtue of music festivals, particularly in Italy and England, organized around her feast day of November 22. Thereafter iconography of the saint with various musical instruments became commonplace in Catholic churches, often showing her anachronistically playing keyboard instruments invented centuries after her death.

John Dryden, the first poet laureate of Great Britain, lived in the seventeenth century, long after the association between St.

Cecilia and music was established. He wrote two profound works for recitation on St. Cecilia's day, *A Song for St. Cecilia's Day* (1687), and *Alexander's Feast, or the Power of Music* (1697). Composer George Frideric Handel set both texts to music in the late 1730s. This suite is derived from music from the longer choral-orchestral work.



*Alexander's Feast*  
**Listening Guide**

**First movement: Allegro**

♩ **INSTRUMENTATION.** Like Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, this suite is in the form of a *concerto grosso*. Highly

popular during the eighteenth century, this instrumentation pitted a small group of soloists (“concertino”) against the entire ensemble (“ripieno”, which literally means “stuffing” or “padding”). In this work, the concertino is comprised of two violins.

♪ **TEXTURE.** The harpsichord and cello are playing a part known as the *basso continuo*. Very common in Baroque music, this part includes the bass line and improvised accompanying chords.

### **Second movement: Largo**

♪ **HARMONY.** The key relationship between the first and second movement is a move from a major key (C major) to its relative minor (A minor). This is a special kind of relationship, wherein the two keys use mostly the same pitches, but by rearranging them to center around a different note, their character changes completely. Anyone can try out this relationship by playing eight consecutive white keys on the piano starting on “C”, then doing the same thing but starting on “A”. You’ll find you’re playing the same notes, but the mood produced is very different!

♪ **MELODY.** Handel uses two kinds of melodies in this movement. One is an arpeggio-based melody, wherein the tune jumps between different pitches that together make up simple chords. These leaps move both up and down. To contrast, Handel composes a steadily-ascending contrasting melody that moves only by steps and small skips.

### **Third movement: Andante non presto**

♪ **RHYTHM.** This movement opens with what is called a “Lombard rhythm” or “Scotch snaps.” All of the instruments are playing figures that begin with a very

short, accented note, followed by a longer one.

♪ **TEXTURE.** Again, by way of contrast, the soloists play their parts in much more even rhythm, and for a longer period of time than in the first movement. Notice that the two soloists trade off identical melodic passages, almost as if to say, “Anything you can do, I can do better!” Also notice the return of the Scotch snaps in the solo parts that seems to invite the full ensemble to resume playing.

### **Fourth movement: Allegro**

♪ **TEXTURE.** The final movement begins with a “fugato”, or fugue-like passage. Notice how the melody introduced in the first violin enters, à la “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”, several measures later. This movement is not a fully-realized fugue, however (which would be appropriate for a less festive setting), hence the descriptor “fugato”.

♪ **RHYTHM.** Notice how each time the soloists enter, they “up the ante” when it comes to rhythm: about a third of the way through, they introduce rapid triplet rhythms, and then later even faster sixteenth notes.

JEROD IMPICHCHAACHAAHA’  
TATE (b. 1968)

“The Indian Spirit at Mesa Falls” from  
*Winter Moons*

**Instrumentation:** Flute (doubling piccolo), 2 bassoons, trumpet, 2 horns, tam-tam, piano, and strings.

**Premiere:** February 18, 1992, University of Wyoming.

**QCSO Premiere.**



Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate is a native of Oklahoma and is a member of the Chickasaw Nation of American Indians. His compositions, including the ballet suite *Winter Moons*, are centered on themes of Native American history and culture.

Tate writes the following about the suite as a whole:

Winter Moons is a ballet based upon American Indian legends from the Northern Plains and Rocky Mountains. It is in four movements and is performed with a live storyteller to guide the audience through the different legends.

The title of the ballet is derived from the idea that American Indian stories are best told during the full moons of the wintertime. Winter Moons was commissioned by and is dedicated to my mother, Dr. Patricia Tate.

About this particular movement, Tate writes:

A few miles west of Yellowstone National Park, the North Fork of the Snake River plunges over wide escarpments into two cascades – Upper and Lower Mesa Falls.

Many years ago, a young man was courting a beautiful girl at the falls. Becoming

bold, he waded out into the deeper water. He lost his footing and the swift stream swept him in. The girl went into the deep water after him and was also carried away by the rushing river. Ever since, Indians who come to the falls watch for the girl's spirit in the mist of the falls. At times she appears to them dressed in white with her long hair floating in the wind. In a sweet voice, she calls: "Do not long for me, for I am happy here, guarding these falls and watching over you. I must stay here to warn my people of the dangerous water below."

### *The Indian Spirit at Mesa Falls* Listening Guide

♫ **INSTRUMENTATION.** The piece opens with a number of piccolo solos, which are doubled in various octaves by various solo string instruments. Notice how the sound of the piccolo changes depending on which string instrument is playing with it.

♫ **MELODY.** This piece is full of *diatonic* melodies. In short, diatonic means a tune is made up of notes from the basic seven-note scale. These are often major or minor, but they often move into other *modes* which sound similar to major and minor but have slightly different vibes.

♫ **ORCHESTRATION.** Pay careful attention to how Tate uses the double bass very judiciously. The entire opening passage has no double bass; notice how despite the low and full texture, something seems to be missing in terms of depth. Then, when the bass enters, notice the profound sonic transformation.

♫ **TEXTURE.** Many of Tate's textures are comprised of *ostinato* figures. Taken from the Italian word for "obstinate",

these are figures that repeat many times and end up forming a kind of musical “wallpaper” behind which the main melodic action occurs.

♩ **RHYTHM.** Late in the piece, the strings all start pulsing eighth notes together. Though they play different notes, and those notes change at different times, all strings are playing the same rhythm constantly. This is called *rhythmic unison*.

♩ **HARMONY.** Notice how the last four chords of the piece are progressively less *dissonant*. Though we know that we have certain emotional experiences attached to whether a chord is dissonant or not, there’s also a technical and physical reason why a chord is consonant or dissonant: the notes in a consonant chord are very related to each other in their *overtones* (quiet notes sounding above the pitch we hear most prominently), whereas the notes of dissonant chords are less-closely-related.

withdrawn for three years, as being not substantial enough for its eleven minutes duration. Late in 1982 a certain mellowness set in, perhaps occasioned by the piece’s healthy resistance to attempts at revision, and subsequently *Snow Country* has reentered the small catalogue of pieces for oboe and strings, where it has started to find its proper place. It has proven popular with performers, as a distant relative of the *Swan of Tuonela*, demonstrating that composers cannot always tell which of their pieces will “go” and which will stay. *Snow Country*’s white terrain actually conceals earth colors, engendered by tonal tensions between B minor, its home ‘key,’ and C minor, the neighbor key, which challenges its hegemony. A middle section in F major seems distant from both homes. The oboe is sometimes primary, sometimes a voice in the texture, submerged only to reemerge as a final lonely voice, braced against a longer winter.”

## JOHN HARBISON (b. 1938)

### *Snow Country*

**Instrumentation:** Oboe and strings.

**QCSO Premiere.**

John Harbison writes:

*Snow Country* was composed in January 1979, during an unusually dark Wisconsin winter. It was commissioned by the New England arts patron and scientist Dr. Maurice Pechet in honor of the birthday of his friend Sir Derek Barton. It was composed for the oboist Peggy Pearson, who gave the first performance of both versions of the piece, with string orchestra and with string quintet. The piece was



## Snow Country Listening Guide

♩ **TIMBRE.** After a slow introduction, Harbison builds an amazing texture with glassy tremolo strings, sharp chords below, and the elegant, long-lined oboe above. Throughout the piece, notice how he stacks up the different instruments with foreground, middle-ground, and background colors.

♩ **INSTRUMENTATION.** Strings can play for a very long time without needing to rest; the oboe, on the other hand, needs frequent breaks. Harbison carefully affords the oboe these opportunities to rest, which also has the effect of allowing the distinctive sound of the oboe to impress us anew with each entrance.

♩ **HARMONY.** In his notes above, Harbison describes the piece in terms of battles between different keys. Oddly enough, while Harbison was writing this piece in the late 1970s, writing for tonality of any kind was unfashionable among academic composers. So, though his music will sound familiar to concert listeners, it was actually composed somewhat counterculturally.

that also featured celebrity violinist Joseph Szigeti), and in 1991 with James Dixon conducting.

Fresh off the enormous operatic success of *Don Giovanni*, Mozart devoted the summer of 1788 to writing what would become his final three symphonies, Nos. 39, 40, and 41. The composer was only 32 years old at the time; no one who knew him would have assumed that these would become “late” works, his final contribution to the symphonic genre in which he had already shown such extraordinary mastery.

German poet and critic E.T.A. Hoffman (1776-1822), was a great admirer of Mozart’s and one of the early commentators to ascribe to him spiritual greatness. Of symphony No. 39, he wrote that “Mozart leads us into the heart of the spirit realm. Fear takes us in its grasp, but without torturing us, so that it is more an intimation of the infinite. Love and melancholy call to us with lovely spirit voices; night comes on with a bright purple luster, and with inexpressible longing we follow those figures which, waving us familiarly into their train, soar through the clouds in eternal dances of the spheres.”

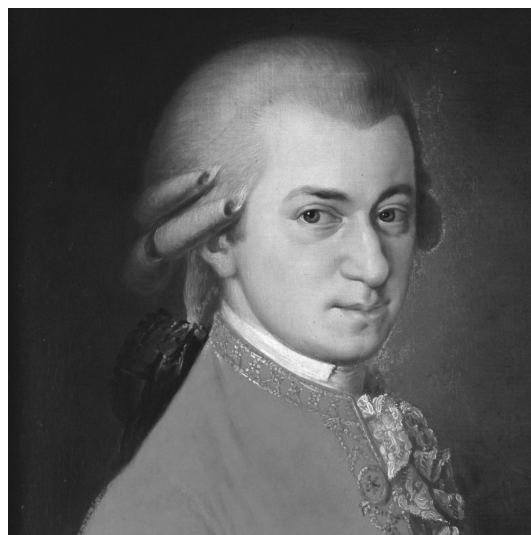
## WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)

Symphony No. 39 in E-flat major, K.  
543

**Instrumentation:** flute, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings.

**Premiere:** Unknown; perhaps at a 1792 memorial concert in Hamburg.

**QCSO Performance History:** Mozart’s 39th Symphony has been performed only twice in Tri-City/Quad City Symphony history, in 1942 with Oscar Anderson conducting (in a concert



## Mozart Symphony No. 39 Listening Guide

### First movement: Adagio – Allegro

♩ **FORM.** Symphonies almost always start with a fast movement, but the question is always whether it has a slow introduction or not. Mozart's grand slow opening in this symphony hints at an occasion of great importance. However, as is often the case, the mood of a symphony's slow introduction is in sharp contrast to the faster main body of the movement. Listen for the change of character that comes with the change of tempo.

♩ **TEXTURE.** Although the introduction is slow, you'll notice rather rapid descending scales every few bars in the strings. These are always downward and seem to add even more gravity to the texture. Before the introduction comes to a close, Mozart reverses their direction, having the scales ascend instead. Notice how this switch from descending to ascending changes the overall mood.

♩ **MELODY.** The descending fast scales of the slow introduction return during the main body of the movement, to very different effect.

### Second movement: Andante con moto

♩ **RHYTHM.** A prominent "dotted rhythm" pervades the opening of the slow movement, a reverse of the "Scotch snaps" referred to in the Handel piece above. At this slow tempo and in the relatively sunny key of A-flat major, the dotted rhythms seem to hint at graceful and cautious formality.

♩ **RHYTHM.** Mozart writes a secondary theme in the more fateful key of F minor, and he includes some faster dotted rhythms in contrast to the opening tune.

These dotted rhythms have the opposite effect, making the mood more urgent and deliberate.

### Third movement: Minuet and Trio

♩ **FORM.** As always, notice the ABA form of the minuet and trio. The minuet (A) comes first, always of a certain character, and the trio (B) follows, always contrasting in character. Composers are always careful to make it obviously when the minuet (A) returns.

♩ **TEXTURE.** The trio includes passages of *imitative counterpoint*. This is the same kind of device that Handel used in *Alexander's Feast*, whereby different instruments echo each other with different versions of the same melody.

### Fourth movement: Finale (Allegro)

♩ **ORCHESTRATION.** After the movement's boisterous opening, listen for the tune leaping freely between the strings and woodwinds. This kind of on-your-toes excitement was a favorite device of Mozart's when writing orchestral music.

♩ **RHYTHM.** Just after the movement's mid-point, notice a big gaping silence. This is almost like Mozart had to take a breath and regroup; once the silence breaks, the music seems irritated, like it has something to hash out.

♩ **FORM.** In contrast to the symphony's extended opening, the work ends in a perhaps surprisingly abrupt ending.