

Christopher Theofanidis

CONCERTO FOR VIOLIN AND ORCHESTRA

CONCERTO FOR VIOLA AND CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

CHEE-YUN, VIOLIN | RICHARD O'NEILL, VIOLA
ALBANY SYMPHONY | DAVID ALÁN MILLER, CONDUCTOR

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The Composer

Christopher Theofanidis' music has been performed by many of the world's leading performing arts organizations, from the London Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, and New York Philharmonic to the San Francisco Opera, the Houston Grand Opera, and the American Ballet Theatre. He is a two time Grammy nominee, and his work, *Rainbow Body*, is one of the most performed works of the new era, having been performed by over 150 orchestras worldwide. Mr. Theofanidis is currently on the faculties of Yale University and the Aspen Music Festival, and directs a workshop for the Albany Symphony's American Music Festival each summer.

The Music

CONCERTO FOR VIOLIN AND ORCHESTRA

(originally written for Sarah Chang and the Pittsburgh Symphony, Andriss Nelsons, conductor)

It has been my great pleasure to work with tremendous performing artists over the years, of which I count Sarah Chang and Chee-Yun among the greatest. Sarah has a long-standing relationship with many orchestras and festivals from her childhood, and her playing today with those groups reflects that history. A particularly important and frequent partner over the years has been the Pittsburgh Symphony. Bob Moir, the former senior artistic administrator for that incredible orchestra, put Sarah and me together for this piece, and it was truly a collaborative effort. We corresponded frequently over the period I was writing the work, with calls from Dubai, from Paris, from Philadelphia, and a host of other cities, along with several in person meetings — “let’s make this passage more idiomatic, let’s push the envelope more in this passage”— it all made for a really wonderful experience and has left its imprint on the music.

Fast forward ten years. Although I have known Chee-Yun since the early 90’s, only in the past few years have we been working together artistically, and she has been my primary inspiration in writing for the violin of late, with an unusual combination of fire and lyricism in her playing. I altered the violin concerto in 2017 significantly, and she is in no small part responsible for many of those changes. I could not have written the piece without either of these two remarkable artistic voices and feel very grateful to them both.

The first movement of the concerto grows out of a strongly Romantic sensibility, one where the soloist is struggling against her environment. The music is dramatic, based around a six-note melody (which is heard in full for the first time after the early solo cadenza), and its contour is threaded in one form or another throughout the entire movement, also appearing in a more compressed way as a fast rhythmic

motif of six repeated notes. The opening minute prior to the first cadenza is a large orchestral crescendo, which for me had the feeling of a growing nightmarish vision, with the cadenza ‘waking up the piece’ from that tormented state. The second movement was composed after the birth of my daughter, Isabella, and the primary melody was written to her as an infant. The final movement is very short and fast, with a number of virtuosic twists and turns.

CONCERTO FOR VIOLA AND CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

(originally written for Kim Kashkashian and the Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra, Isaiah Jackson, conductor)

The concept and inspiration for this concerto came largely from Kim Kashkashian, who early on sent me a collection of anonymous Navajo poems that were wildly different in character but had in common a supernatural sense of nature and an extremely evocative, if often terse, vocabulary. I fixated on certain lines from these poems, and in an almost meditative sense, the music has come from them.

The other aspect of this concerto which I feel is personally linked to Kim is that it is written as a response to her incredible intensity and focus as a performing artist — her music making is an amplification of her spiritual being, and I tried to capture something of that in the tailored writing.

Each of the four movements is quite serious in sentiment. The first, *Black Dancer, Black Thunder*, is based on a three-note figure first heard in the soloist’s part. Its character is incisive and foreboding. The textures here are often Spartan but volatile- fire and earth. The movement is highly developmental and the transformations to the material spin out large sections in the structure.

The second movement, *In the Questioning*, contrasts a melancholic tune in the soloist’s part with a static background in the orchestra, representing a voice that questions, but receives no answer from the universe. This material alternates in blocks with passages of orchestral music that are lyrical, but with the soloist providing fleeting ‘commentary’ over them. These two larger blocks grow to

increasing desperation in the ‘question’ being posed, culminating in a dramatic accompanied cadenza toward the end of the movement.

This viola concerto was written during the period of 9/11. I started the piece before and finished it afterward, and I was profoundly influenced by being in midtown Manhattan that day. This inevitably came out in the music, but in no place more directly than in the third movement, *The Center of the Sky*. There was a memorial service held in Yankee Stadium after 9/11, and in that ceremony, a Sikh singer sung a melody which moved me deeply. It had the qualities of positive and negative in it in perfect balance, and that melody is the basis of the material for the third movement of my concerto, though that equilibrium in the line is always being challenged in some way from below. Around the edges of both of these melodies is a great deal of chromaticism, heard primarily in bass lines, and which ultimately propels the music forward into the fourth movement, *Lightning, with Life, in Four Colors Comes Down*. This movement is based on the chromatic underpinnings of the third with new melodic materials.

I am so delighted to have worked with Richard O’Neill on this recording — he is a consummate artist of the highest caliber, and I will always treasure the time we spent working together on the piece.

A very special thanks to David Alan Miller, who is a saint and true believer in the field of new work, and without whom, many worthy pieces and recordings would never have happened.

—Christopher Theofanidis

The Performers



A winner of the Young Concert Artists International Auditions and a recipient of the Avery Fisher Career Grant, **Chee-Yun** has performed with many of the world’s foremost orchestras and conductors. She has appeared with the San Francisco, Toronto, Pittsburgh, Dallas, Atlanta, and National symphony orchestras, as well as with the Saint Paul and Los Angeles Chamber Orchestras. As a recitalist, Chee-Yun has performed in many major U.S. cities, including New York, Chicago, Washington, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Atlanta. In 2016, Chee-Yun performed as a guest artist for the Secretary General at the United Nations in celebration of Korea’s National Foundation Day and the 25th anniversary of South Korea joining the UN. In 1993, Chee-Yun performed at the White House for President Bill Clinton and guests at an event honoring recipients of the National Medal of the Arts. In addition to her active performance and recording schedule, Chee-Yun is a dedicated and enthusiastic educator. Her past faculty positions have included serving as the resident Starling Soloist and Adjunct Professor of Violin at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music and as Visiting Professor of Music (Violin) at the Indiana University School of Music. From 2007 to 2017, she served as Artist-in-Residence and Professor of Violin at Southern Methodist University in Dallas.



Newly appointed violist of the Takács Quartet, **Richard O'Neill** has distinguished himself as one of the great instrumentalists of his generation. An EMMY Award winner, two time GRAMMY nominee and Avery Fisher Career Grant recipient, he has appeared as soloist with the world's top orchestras including the London, Los Angeles, Seoul Philharmonics, the BBC, Hiroshima, Korean Symphonies, the Kremerata Baltica, Moscow, Vienna and Wurtemberg Chamber Orchestras, Alte

Musik Koln, and has worked with distinguished musicians and conductors including Andrew Davis, Vladimir Jurowski, Francois Xavier Roth and Yannick Nezet-Seguin. An Artist of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and Principal Violist of Camerata Pacifica, for thirteen seasons he served as Artistic Director of DITTO, his South Korean chamber music project, leading the ensemble on international tours to China and Japan and introducing tens of thousands to music. A Universal Music/Deutsche Grammophon recording artist, he has made 10 solo albums and many other chamber music recordings, earning multiple platinum discs. He has appeared on major TV networks in South Korea and enjoyed huge success with his 2004 KBS documentary 'Human Theater' which was viewed by more than 12 million people, and his 2013 series 'Hello?! Orchestra' which featured his work with a multicultural youth orchestra for MBC and led to an International Emmy in Arts Programming and a feature length film. He serves as Goodwill Ambassador for the Korean Red Cross, The Special Olympics, UNICEF and OXFAM and serves on the faculty of the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara.



Grammy®-winning conductor **David Alan Miller** has established a reputation as one of the leading American conductors of his generation. Music Director of the Albany Symphony since 1992, Mr. Miller has proven himself a creative and compelling orchestra builder. Through exploration of unusual repertoire, educational programming, community outreach and recording initiatives, he has reaffirmed the Albany Symphony's reputation as the nation's leading champion of American symphonic music and one of its most innovative orchestras.

A native of Los Angeles, Mr. Miller holds a bachelor's degree from the University of California, Berkeley and a master's degree in orchestral conducting from the Juilliard School. From 1988 until 1992, he was Associate Conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. From 1982 to 1988, he was Music Director of the New York Youth Symphony, earning considerable acclaim for his work with that ensemble.

The **Albany Symphony** fulfills its mission by performing, commissioning, and recording the work of established and emerging American composers while bringing a fresh perspective to time-honored classics. The Symphony is one of this region's most revered music and cultural organizations, having won numerous national awards for its adventurous programming of contemporary music and innovative educational efforts involving area schools. Founded in 1931, the Albany Symphony is the oldest and only professional symphony orchestra based in New York's Capital Region, serving a significant and diverse population within a 75-mile radius covering more than seven counties and parts of three states. Annual programming includes a nine-concert classical series with performances throughout the region, nineteen consecutive years of the American Music Festival, the new music ensemble Dogs of Desire, a three-concert family series, and holiday and pops concerts.

The Albany Symphony was founded in 1931 by conductor John Carabella, and achieved not-for-profit status in 1935. The Orchestra has evolved artistically under the leadership of music directors Carabella, Rudolf Thomas, Ole Windingstad, Edgar Curtis, Julius Hegyi, Geoffrey Simon, and David Alan Miller.



Acknowledgments

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Christopher Theofanidis

CHEE-YUN, VIOLIN | RICHARD O'NEILL, VIOLA | ALBANY SYMPHONY | DAVID ALAN MILLER, CONDUCTOR

Christopher Theofanidis (b. 1967)

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra (2008)

- | | | |
|---|------|---------|
| 1 | I. | [10:15] |
| 2 | II. | [6:58] |
| 3 | III. | [3:54] |
- Chee-Yun, violin

Concerto for Viola and Chamber Orchestra (2002)

- | | | |
|---|---|--------|
| 4 | Black Dancer, Black Thunder | [8:27] |
| 5 | In the Questioning | [7:45] |
| 6 | The Center of the Sky | [8:59] |
| 7 | Lightning, with Life, in Four Colors Comes Down | [5:55] |
- Richard O'Neill, viola
Albany Symphony | David Alan Miller, conductor

Total Time = 52:19



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