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SYMPHONY IN SCULPTURE

- World Premiere: first performances at these concerts on September 29 & 30, 2012.

(Duration c. 25 minutes)

The composer, in describing his new work, writes:

“This work is commissioned by the Des Moines Symphony to commemorate its 75th Season in 2012-2013. *Symphony In Sculpture* is dedicated to John and Mary Pappajohn.

It has been my privilege to compose this work for the Des Moines Symphony and Music Director Joseph Giunta to launch the symphony’s 75th Anniversary Season. My aspiration in ‘collaborating’ with the sculptures has been to portray them through sound, perhaps adding a further dimension to these intriguing works. *Symphony In Sculpture* is dedicated to John and Mary Pappajohn for their vision and deep understanding of the power of art to change a culture and community in a positive way.

I. MOONRISE. East. January and MOONRISE. East. August (Ugo Rondinone)

Marked ‘Night Ritual,’ the work begins as a slow, pre-dawn fanfare and procession with low and mysterious piano, harp and string chords pitched in D Minor.

This leads into a mixed meter and lightly textured dance-like section—in an attempt to reflect the different moods of the two sculptures. When the opening procession returns, this time it is larger in scope. Since sculptor Ugo Rondinone is Swiss, I’ve scattered the ring of

cowbells throughout the movement, evoking the sound of herds in the Swiss Alps and paying tribute to Mahler.

II. Spider (Louise Bourgeois)

The thematic materials of this movement derive from LGBTQ (B Minor seventh and G Major seventh chords have prominent roles) since the sculptor Louise Bourgeois was an advocate for same-sex marriage and gay rights in her work—creating several works late in her life to promote equality. Scored for strings only, this movement is in perpetual motion to symbolize spiders’ fabulous spinning and Louise Bourgeois’ active protest against inequality.

III. Back of a Snowman (White) and Back of a Snowman (Black) (Gary Hume)

With the sounds of sleigh bells, glockenspiel, trumpet, harp, celesta and strings, this playful movement honors the joy of making snow people.

IV. Ancient Forest (Deborah Butterfield)

When I met with John and Mary Pappajohn this past April in Des Moines, Mr. Pappajohn mentioned that he had suggested to sculptor Deborah Butterfield that she might name her large horse sculpture—which the Pappajohns commissioned specifically for the new Sculpture Park—Bucephalus, the name of Alexander the Great’s horse. With a nod to the Pappajohns’ Greek heritage, I’ve begun this movement as a massive march, imagining the sound of Alexander the Great’s army on the move.

I wanted the movement to reflect not only the power of Greek horses, but the Native American ponies of the Plains as well. What follows is a folk-infused dance of celebration to close the movement. Both Respighi’s *Pines of Rome* and Theodorakis’ film score for *Zorba the Greek* were models for this movement.

V. Post-Balzac (Judith Shea)

'Is it nothingness or does a spirit reside? Music will certainly live inside...'

There is a sense of loss in the hollow space where a person should be inside Judith Shea's sculpture. Yet, there is also an evocation of comfort, even though the robe is cast in bronze and not soft fabric. To portray this, I have scored this movement in the exact instrumentation of Elgar's *Nimrod*, one of the most famous and beautiful adagios ever composed.

VI. T8 (Mark di Suvero)

This sculpture screams steel, so it is in the music. Scored for brass and percussion only, there is much rhythmic reference to the number eight and many chords are repeated eight times. Even the 3/8 meter suggests the sound of a car starting as percussionists play only car parts and two small glass Coke bottles. I chose an American populist feel and industrial sound for this movement because at night, the sculpture T8 and the red neon lights of American Dream Machine, across the street, seem to play off each other—the steel of T8 and steel in cars are both a part of the American Dream. (On my visit in April, I stopped in American Dream Machine looking for car parts, and they graciously supplied me with parts for the symphony.)

VII. White Ghost (Yoshitomo Nara)

Part girl, part dog, *White Ghost* is a silent centurion of the sculpture park, with eyes shut in meditation, head humbly bowed and arms open. I felt the movement called for serene music all in the 'white' key (as she is) of C. To evoke Japanese garden music, *White Ghost* is scored for solo flute, strings and percussion—gongs, bells, bowed cymbal, singing bowl and bamboo wind chimes. As *White Ghost* seems to have morphed into her current form, the music, too, morphs throughout the movement.

VIII. Thinker on a Rock (Barry Flanagan)

A brief, bright and clear fanfare for the contemplative mind—human and otherwise.

IX. Nomade (Jaume Plensa)

Sculptor Jaume Plensa's sculptures share a deep respect for all cultures and reference the beautiful universality of the world in their inclusiveness, approachability and playfulness. To reflect this, and the notion implied in the title of the sculpture that we are all nomadic, this movement begins with the sound of a shruti box drone, one of many transportable instruments employed here. (Similar to a harmonium, this small wooden instrument with a system of bellows frequently accompanies other instruments in Indian classical music. In this performance I have included an electronic shruti box for its cross-cultural purposes. "Shruti" means "hearing, revelation" in Sanskrit.)

Percussion instruments such as hand drums, finger cymbals, seed rattle and tambourine propel the movement forward and underscore the mixed meter melody centered in F Sharp and based on a synthetic scale. Celebration and dance abound, but they are interrupted by a searching, bittersweet melody that remains unresolved and rotates between A Major and G Major seventh chords. The earlier dance theme returns briefly, then the work closes with the full orchestra expanding on the searching theme.

While researching and composing this work I made several visits to the Pappajohn Sculpture Park. More than once, I have been asked to take photos of couples and families inside and in front of *Nomade*. Part shelter and part sculpture, there is something quite universal about this piece that draws people to it, emphasizing that we exist together on a beautiful planet. To me, the aura around *Nomade* is love, welcoming everyone in its space—no words needed, just like music."