

MSM SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Leonard Slatkin (HonDMA '13), Conductor Distinguished Visiting Artist in Conducting and Orchestral Studies



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THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2023 | 7:30 PM NEIDORFF-KARPATI HALL

MSM SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Leonard Slatkin (HonDMA '13), Conductor

Distinguished Visiting Artist in Conducting and Orchestral Studies

PROGRAM

DUKE ELLINGTON

(1899 - 1974)

Three Black Kings

King of the Magi King Solomon

Martin Luther King

MASON BATES

(b. 1977)

The B-Sides

ALAN HOVHANESS

(1911-2000)

Symphony No. 2, Op. 132 ("Mysterious Mountain")

Andante con moto

Double fugue (Moderato maestoso, allegro vivo)

Andante espressivo

GEORGE GERSHWIN

(1898-1937)

An American in Paris

MSM SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Leonard Slatkin (HonDMA '13), Conductor

VIOLIN 1
William Lee.

concertmaster Hsinchu County, Taiwan

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Daegu, South Korea

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* ELLINGTON Three Black Kings
BATES The B-Sides

† HOVHANESS Symphony No. 2, Op. 132 ("Mysterious Mountain")

‡ GERSHWIN An American in Paris

PROGRAM NOTES

Three Black Kings Duke Ellington

One of the most celebrated figures in the history of big-band jazz, Duke Ellington is renowned both as a composer and as a performer. Dubbed "Duke" by a boyhood friend on account of his regal bearing, Ellington entered the jazz world as a pianist, influenced greatly by ragtime. A native of Washington, DC, he began making a name for himself in New York in the 1920s with his four-piece band, the Washingtonians, which was soon enlarged to a 10-piece orchestra. Though he rose to the top of the jazz world, it took the overwhelming success of his *Mood Indigo* in 1930 to make his name a household word.

Between 1932 and 1942 Ellington produced his most creative big-band sonorities through unusual timbral effects, tonal experiments, and innovative voicings. Dubbed the "Ellington effect" by composer, arranger, and pianist Billy Strayhorn, who joined his band in 1939, this hallmark sound depended largely on the individual traits of each band member, but it was Ellington's genius that made a blend like no other. His enlargement of the band in the 1940s coincided with his writing a series of works of enormously ambitious scope, beginning with *Black, Brown, and Beige*, which he called a "tone parallel," intended to depict the history of Black people in America through their music. In addition to his myriad short jazz-band pieces and larger instrumental suites, Ellington wrote stage works, film scores, and sacred music, becoming one of history's most prolific composers, with some 2,000 works to his name.

Ellington left *Three Black Kings* unfinished at the time of his death in 1974. He often left the final details until the day of the premiere, owing partly to superstition and partly to the spontaneity of the jazz world. His son Mercer Ellington, also an accomplished bandleader and composer, completed the work, which arranger and composer Luther Henderson arranged for jazz band and orchestra in time for Mercer to conduct it for a tribute concert to his father in 1976. Alvin Ailey then choreographed the work for his company's 1976–77 season, and finally conductor Maurice Peress, who had worked closely with Ellington, orchestrated it for symphony orchestra.

Three Black Kings continues Ellington's exploration of Black history by making ties across centuries. According to his son Mercer,

He intended it as a eulogy for Martin Luther King and he decided to go back into myth and history to include other black kings. Primitivity,

the opening movement, represents the black king of the Magi. King Solomon is next, with the song of jazz and perfume and dancing girls and all that, then the dirge for Dr. King. The piece owes its inspiration to a stained glass window of the three Kings Ellington saw in the Cathedral del Mar in Barcelona.

Referencing King Balthazar, the first movement features lively, percussive patterns that occasionally erupt into grandiose melodies. The middle movement features a more intimate, sometimes sultry opening, a prominent trumpet solo, a spirited bossa nova, and a swing beat with tenor saxophone solo before returning to the sultry opening. Ellington pays tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in gospel style with tenor saxophone taking center stage and the whole orchestra rising with it to a central climax.

The B-Sides Mason Bates

American composer and disc jockey Mason Bates studied piano and composition growing up in Richmond, Virginia, where he received his first commission as a high school student. He earned bachelor's and master's degrees in the Columbia-Juilliard program in English literature and composition, studying with John Corigliano ('63), David Del Tredici, and Samuel Adler, and he earned his doctorate at the University of California–Berkeley as a student of Edmund Campion at the Center for New Music and Audio Technologies. Bates's curatorial approach to all different kinds of music, his love of words, and what he calls "the magical intersection between music and technology" are central to his compositions.

As the first composer-in-residence with the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Bates became well known for his ongoing series KC Jukebox, which presents innovative immersive productions. He is also on the faculty of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, but he is just as well known in the Bay Area for his working clubs as DJ Masonic. His show Mercury Soul, which originated in San Francisco has packed houses nationwide.

Conductors such as tonight's maestro Leonard Slatkin (HonDMA '13), Riccardo Muti, Michael Tilson Thomas, and Marin Alsop have championed his music in large part *because* of its unique approach to combining symphonic music with contemporary culture. Bates's most-performed work, *Philharmonia Fantastique: The Making of the Orchestra*, is an animated film collaboration with multi-Oscarwinning Gary Rydstrom of Lucasfilm and Jim Capobianco of Aerial Contrivance that "explores the connection between creativity and technology with the help

of a magical Sprite, who flies through instruments as they are played." The Grammy-winning soundtrack was recorded by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra conducted by Edwin Outwater.

Bates's recent highlights include his opera *The (R) evolution of Steve Jobs*, premiered so successfully by the Santa Fe Opera in 2017 that an additional performance had to be added and the soundtrack won a 2019 Grammy. Further performances by co-commissioners Seattle and San Francisco Operas and the Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music are ongoing. Other highlights this season include his *Nomad Concerto* for violinist Gil Shaham, co-commissioned by the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Nashville and San Diego Symphonies.

Bates composed *The B-Sides* for Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony, who premiered it on May 20, 2009. The composer colorfully describes its genesis and content:

It was between Tchaikovsky and Brahms that Michael Tilson Thomas, surprisingly mellow in his dressing room during one intermission, broached the idea of a new work. Fresh off the podium after the concerto, and apparently undistracted by the looming symphony in the second half, he suggested a collection of five pieces focusing on texture and sonority—perhaps like Schoenberg's Five Pieces for Orchestra. Since my music had largely gone in the other direction—large works that bathed the listener in immersive experiences—the idea intrigued me. I had often imagined a suite of concise, off-kilter symphonic pieces that would incorporate the grooves and theatrics of electronica in a highly focused manner. So, like the forgotten bands from the flipside of an old piece of vinyl, *The B-Sides* offers brief landings on a variety of peculiar planets, unified by a focus on fluorescent orchestral sonorities and the morphing rhythms of electronica.

The first stop is the dusky, circuit-board landscape of Broom of the System. To the ticking of a future clock, our broom—brought to life by sandpaper blocks and, at one point, an actual broom—quietly and anonymously keeps everything running, like a chimney-sweep in a huge machine. The title is from a short-story collection by David Foster Wallace, though one could place the fairy-like broom in Borges's *Anthology of Fantastic Zoology*.

The ensuing Aerosol Melody (Hanalei) blooms on the Northshore of Kauai, where a gentle, bending melody evaporates at cadence points. Djembe and springy pizzicati populate the strange fauna of this purely

acoustic movement, inspired by several trips with the Fleishhacker family. The lazy string glissandi ultimately put the movement, beachside, to sleep.

Gemini in the Solar Wind is a re-imagination of the first American spacewalk, using actual communication samples from the 1965 Gemini IV voyage provided by NASA. In this retelling, clips of words, phrases, and static from the original are rearranged to show Ed White, seduced by the vastness and mystery of space, deliriously unhooking from the spacecraft to drift away blissfully.

His [White's] final vision of the coast of Northern California drops us down close to home. The initial grit of Temescal Noir, like the Oakland neighborhood of the title, eventually shows its subtle charm in hazy, jazztinged hues. Unbothered by electronics, this movement receives some industrious help in the rhythm department by a typewriter and oil drum. At its end, the broom returns in a cameo, again altering the tempo, and this propels us into Warehouse Medicine. An homage to techno's birthplace—the empty warehouses of Detroit—the final stop on *The B-Sides* gives no quarter. Huge brass swells and out-of-tune pizzicati emulate some of the visceral sonorities of techno, and on this pounding note *The B-Sides* hows out.

—Mason Bates

Symphony No. 2, Op. 132 ("Mysterious Mountain") Alan Hovhaness

Alan Hovhaness ranks with Duke Ellington and Darius Milhaud as one of twentieth-century America's most prolific composers. His more than 400 works include at least 60 symphonies, a number of operas and ballets, much chamber music, and hundreds of vocal and choral compositions. These are the works he considered worth preserving, but he had written many more—in the early 1940s he destroyed over 1,000 of his earlier works!

Hovhaness received his education at Tufts University in Boston and at the New England Conservatory, where he studied composition with Frederick Converse. In the summer of 1942 he furthered his studies with Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů at Tanglewood in Massachusetts. Hovhaness became fascinated by the ancient worlds of Armenia, Greece, Egypt, and India, opened up for him by Greek mystic painter Hermon DiGiovanno in 1943.

As a professor himself, Hovhanness taught at the New England Conservatory and at the University of Hawaii. Three Guggenheim fellowships allowed him to concentrate on his own compositions, and Fulbright and Rockefeller fellowships enabled him to study music in India, Japan, and Korea. He was very active in promoting the folk music of Armenia, part of his own heritage, and his music often shows an intriguing combination of Western elements and Armenian, Asian, and Indian borrowings.

The illustrious conductor Leopold Stokowski, best known for his long tenures with the Philadelphia Orchestra and NBC Symphony Orchestra, asked Hovhaness to compose a new work for his debut as the Houston Symphony's new music director in 1955. Stokowski had given the US premiere of Hovhaness's First Symphony in 1942 with the NBC Symphony, which was broadcast over the radio, and had continued to champion his music. At first Hovhaness provided a fanfare called *To a Mysterious Mountain*, but he composed his three-movement Symphony No. 2 instead when Stokowski asked for something more substantial.

Years later Hovhaness told composer Charles Amirkhanian that Stokowski had asked him if the work had an opus number since "people like opus numbers," and on finding it had none, suggested "132" if that would allow enough room for earlier works. Hovhaness agreed saying, "Sure, that's okay. I'll start making a catalogue." Next, as Hovhaness tells it, Stokowski said, "'I like your titles, give it a title.' And so I gave it the title *Mysterious Mountain*. Which I felt was mysterious enough."

Whether or not it was the title that helped propel the work, *Mysterious Mountain* established Hovhaness's reputation. The Houston Symphony's premiere in 1955, broadcast by NBC radio, was well received, leading to further performances and the benchmark 1958 recording by Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony. The Symphony's success, however, came to irk Hovhaness much in the way the popularity of *Bolero* irritated Ravel or the appeal of the 1812 *Overture* annoyed Tchaikovsky. Said Hovhaness, "As to my *Mysterious Mountain* my feelings are mixed—I am happy it is popular but I have written much better music." Ironically, Hovhaness was never paid for his best known work.

Hovhaness's talent for melody is on full display in this work, in which he relies throughout on modal scales and evocative orchestration. The first movement, predominantly in the Phrygian mode, opens with a solemn hymn followed by a profusion of melodic lines colored by celesta and harp shimmers. Whether or not the title was somewhat haphazardly applied, the qualities of mystery and contemplation of an immense mountain are apt.

The second movement shows Hovhaness's "academic" side in a skillfully constructed double fugue. The first subject, built on a pentatonic (five-note) scale, unfolds much like Renaissance vocal polyphony. Bristling with energy, the second fugue stems from his First String Quartet (1936), and the combination of the two results in a grandiose climax.

Mysterious contemplation returns in the third movement, which again begins in hymnlike fashion. Hovhaness also incorporates a chantlike melody, and again, colorful orchestration provides an air of mystery. The hymn returns, growing into a majestic concluding edifice.

An American in Paris George Gershwin

In January 1928 Gershwin began composing An American in Paris even without a commission. As America's most famous composer he could be assured that someone would want to perform the piece, especially following the success of two orchestral works that had ingeniously fused jazz and classical elements—Rhapsody in Blue (1924) and the Concerto in F (1925). In March 1928, with two hits running on Broadway, Funny Face and Rosalie, Gershwin decided he could take a "vacation" and he set sail for Europe, where he and several family members spent much of their sojourn in Paris.

Contrary to popular lore, Gershwin did not go to Paris to compose An American in Paris, but he had brought with him two sketches he had begun, one for solo piano and the other for two pianos. Amid parties, sightseeing, and meetings with important composers and society figures, Gershwin did find time to work on the piece—and to purchase the taxi horns that famously sound in the opening and closing sections.

After returning to the States in June, Gershwin was busy writing and rehearsing the show *Treasure Girl*. He told conductor Walter Damrosch—who was anxious to present *An American in Paris*—that he had completed the solo piano version, had a day or two to go on the two-piano version, and would then begin the orchestration. Damrosch scheduled the Carnegie Hall premiere for December 13, and while *Treasure Girl* was floundering at the Alvin Theater, Gershwin finished orchestrating *An American in Paris* on November 28. The premiere

was enthusiastically applauded by the audience, though, as with Gershwin's previous innovative orchestral works, the critics gave mixed reviews. The tone poem, as he labeled it, has since become one of the beloved staples of the orchestral repertoire.

Gershwin was always somewhat ashamed of his lack of classical training, in regard to both formal procedures and orchestration. *An American in Paris* was only the second large-scale work that he had fully orchestrated, the first being the Concerto in F. His wonderful range of colors and "exotic" textures, including passages involving solo violin, string quartet, taxi horns, saxophones, and xylophone, show that his self-education had been highly successful.

Formally, Gershwin used several techniques that had served him well in the past: immediately restating his memorable tunes before introducing contrasting material, and bringing back a recurring main theme in grandiose style toward the composition's end. *An American in Paris* is ingeniously laid out in three main connected sections, each defined by the introduction of one or more new themes, followed by a recapitulatory coda that draws on all three sections. Though Gershwin claimed that he did not attempt to portray specific scenes, he clearly had a scenario in mind: "My purpose here is to portray the impressions of an American visitor in Paris as he strolls about the city, listens to various street noises, and absorbs the French atmosphere."

In the first section Gershwin presents the cheerful bustle of the city, various "walking" themes, and several pauses for taking in sights—all ideas that he develops locally but many of which reappear in the following section. The lively second section begins with a bright new theme bursting on the scene following a quiet, chromatically inflected descent in the flutes. In a calm transition Gershwin's hero meets a girl, enters a café, and engages in conversation—this last involving solo violin and English horn.

In the third section, which Gershwin described as "a rich 'blues' with a strong undercurrent," the famous main theme portrays the American, who after a few drinks "has suddenly succumbed to a spasm of homesickness;" the blues theme returns toward the end in his grandiose climax. Of the ensuing coda, the composer said,

The spirit of the music returns to the vivacity and bubbling exuberance of the opening part with its impressions of Paris. Apparently the homesick American, having left the café and reached the open air, has downed his spell of blues and once again is an alert spectator of Parisian life.

Annotator Deems Taylor provided a more detailed narrative for the premiere, which was subsequently included as the preface to the printed score, but as he and Gershwin disagreed over the interpretation of certain passages, it seems best to follow the composer's advice that the individual listener should "read into the music such episodes as his imagination pictures for him."

 $-Program\ notes\ @Jane\ Vial\ Jaffe$

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Leonard Slatkin (HonDMA '13), Conductor

Internationally acclaimed conductor Leonard Slatkin is Music Director Laureate of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO), Directeur Musical Honoraire of the Orchestre National de Lyon (ONL), Conductor Laureate of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra (SLSO), and Principal Guest Conductor of the Orquesta Filarmónica de Gran Canaria (OFGC). He maintains a rigorous schedule of guest conducting throughout the world and is active as a composer, author, and educator.

Slatkin has received six Grammy awards and 35 nominations. His latest recordings are Jeff Beal's *The Paper Lined Shack* on Supertrain Records and *Slatkin Conducts Slatkin*, a compilation of pieces written by generations of his musical family, including three of his own compositions, on Naxos Records. Naxos has also recently remastered and reissued audiophile editions of his recordings of Gershwin's and Rachmaninov's orchestral works (with the SLSO) for Vox. Other recent Naxos releases include works by Saint-Saëns, Ravel, and Berlioz (with the ONL) and music by Copland, Rachmaninov, Borzova, McTee, and John Williams (with the DSO). In addition, he has recorded the complete Brahms, Beethoven, and Tchaikovsky symphonies with the DSO (available online as digital downloads).

The 2023–24 season includes engagements with the Oregon Symphony, Orquesta de València, Orquesta Sinfónica de Radio Televisión Española, Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra (Ireland), ONL, SLSO, Manhattan School of Music Symphony Orchestra, Carnegie Mellon University Philharmonic, Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, George Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra, OFGC, Prague Symphony Orchestra, and Bilbao Orkestra Sinfonikoa.

A recipient of the prestigious National Medal of Arts, Slatkin also holds the rank of Chevalier in the French Legion of Honor. He has received the Prix Charbonnier from the Federation of Alliances Françaises, Austria's Decoration of Honor in Silver, the League of American Orchestras' Gold Baton Award, and the 2013 ASCAP Deems Taylor Special Recognition Award for his debut book, Conducting Business. His second book, Leading Tones: Reflections on Music, Musicians, and the Music Industry (2017), was published by Amadeus Press, followed by Classical Crossroads: The Path Forward for Music in the 21st Century

(2021). Two volumes of essays that supplement the score-study process, in a new series entitled *Scores to Settle*, are scheduled for release by Rowman & Littlefield in 2024. He is also working on several new compositions.

Slatkin has conducted virtually all the leading orchestras in the world. As Music Director, he has held posts in New Orleans; St. Louis; Washington, D.C.; London (with the BBC Symphony Orchestra); Detroit; and Lyon, France. He has also served as Principal Guest Conductor in Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and Cleveland.

For more information, visit leonardslatkin.com.

Leonard Slatkin is a member of Manhattan School of Music's Board of Trustees and Artistic Advisory Council, and holds the position of Distinguished Visiting Artist in Conducting and Orchestral Studies.

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