

## CONDUCTOR'S NOTE

As I was conceiving our 2018-19 season, “Lineage,” an experience from many years ago came to mind. During a lull in the conversation at a Seder, someone made the quirky suggestion that we go around the table and just say the birth names of our grandmothers aloud. At first it seemed like a lighted hearted party game, but as we began to remember one after another of those gorgeous Jewish names from the turn of the century—Zadie and Pearl, along with Safta or Nonna—the table grew quiet. There were plenty of non-Jewish guests also so there was a Bonnie and an Elna and Josefina as well. These names were our legacy and our recitation of them our oral history and lineage. We all began to wonder how we were extending their legacies. What part of those gorgeous and evocative names and memories still lived within us? And the corollary thought: how could we create today a beautiful past that those who come after us will one day want to celebrate?

Planning this season, I began to wonder what the musical version of that moment was. Was there a lineage (taking the name of Zosh di Castri's luminous piece built on her memories of her Italian grandparents) that could connect Stravinsky to di Castri to Tan Dun? In the concerts that follow, how could continue the celebration of our pasts, linking Handel and his glorious *Messiah* to the young Chinese composer Qing Qing Wang? Lj White to Anton Bruckner? By what properties of our minds does the Bernstein *Symphony #3*, the *Kaddish*, evoke both memory and mourning while, on the same concert, the Beethoven *Symphony #8* evokes memory and joy? And what do we make of the end of World War I, now just one hundred years ago, and its connection to our current geopolitical state? Our final concert of the year takes that theme to heart. In each case, we offer an answer in the form of musical texture, harmonic sense, orchestration or narrative impulse.

We start our season, appropriately, with a provocative work by the young Canadian composer Zosha di Castri. At first her piece feels modern, maybe even gritty. Micro-tonally inflected “chorale” melodies seem to rob the music of a tonal center, and as a textural counterpoint, nearly continuous string glissandi feel gauzy, veiled, and impermanent. Soon a listener notes that the modern surface of the piece is not the point. We are invited to hear through the textures and grasp the partly hidden melodies and rhythms at the core of the music. Imagine the composer as a young person in Alberta, listening through the noise of contemporary life to claim the memories of her Italian grandparents. We gather from her piece that sometimes the most important music, the most telling memories, are not the ones closest to the surface, but deeper ones to be excavated like gold nuggets from a sieve-full of gravel.

For a listener in search of memory, Tan Dun's evocative *Water Concerto* is the perfect place to start. In *Water Concerto*, we get memory through three tributaries. Firstly and foremost there is the water itself. It's our earliest aural memory, heard in the aqueous environment of the womb. Water is one of our first sounds—and as one who loves the sea, I hope it will also be one of the last sounds I hear. Then there are the ringing metallic sounds of gongs and bells—tied to ancient religious and spiritual rituals—against which a cacophony of voice-like sound effects played by the orchestra creates a halo of imaginary language.

Water. Ritual. Language. The memory trifecta!

Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, like his other famous ballets of the time, *Firebird* and *Le Sacre du Printemps*, is a rich repository of lineage. These pieces, along with *Les Noces*, which was gestating at the time, allowed Stravinsky to metabolize the Russian and Ukrainian memories of his youth and created a platform for the future. Music History texts write of Stravinsky's mercurial exploration of the musical forms of memory—from his embrace of 18<sup>th</sup> century ideals in the aptly named “neo-classical” phase to his late adoption of 12-tone technique, itself by that time a memory of earlier practices. Stravinsky was obsessed with lineage.

Sometime over the course of the last century, memory became a skill to be deployed. We are impressed with a soloist who plays from memory. Or, to the contrary, when we forget we feel less competent. But that's a modern perspective. For millennia, memory, both personal and communal, was not primarily a skill, but a central quality in a moral person. Early philosophers grouped memory with ethics, not neuroscience.

I still like to think of it that way. A critical component to living an ethical life is how we remember, how we create lineage. It answers important questions: Who are we? To what echoes of our history do we resonate and how do we memorialize them? And, most importantly, what do we need to do today so that, in the future, we will be remembered by someone who will recognize herself in her memories of us; who will examine her lineage through our lives and be grateful?

Steven Schick