

PROGRAM NOTES by ERIC BROMBERGER

Lineage

ZOSHA DI CASTRI

Born 1985, Canada

Our season devoted to exploring our heritage—musical and otherwise—begins with a work that perfectly symbolizes that exploration, Zosha di Castri’s *Lineage*. The Canadian composer received her bachelors degree from McGill University in Montreal, went to Paris for further study, and completed her DMA at Columbia, where she is currently the Francis Goelet Assistant Professor of Music. As a composer, she has used a number of techniques, including electronics, video, dance, and interactive collaborations, and she has also composed works in traditional forms. Her music has been performed by the San Francisco Symphony, Toronto Symphony, New World Symphony, Montreal Symphony, and the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra, and she has appeared on the chamber series of both the Chicago Symphony and Los Angeles Philharmonic. Her music shows a special interest in sound—in texture, timbre, and entirely new sonorities.

Lineage, composed in 2013, was jointly commissioned by the New World Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, and Boosey and Hawkes; Michael Tilson Thomas led the premiere in Miami on April 20, 2013. In an interview, di Castri said that she began *Lineage* as a tribute to her recently deceased grandmother, who was Italian, and in the process of composing the music she recognized that it was a way of “reflecting on what it meant to be a third-generation Canadian.” In a note on her publisher’s website, di Castri describes her intention in this music: “In *Lineage*, I was interested in exploring the idea of what is passed down. As a kid, I loved listening to my grandparents tell stories about ‘the-old-country’ or of life in the village or on the farm. These tales were at once so real through their repetition, and yet at the same time were so foreign and removed from my own personal experience. Thinking of this, I hoped to create a piece in which certain elements are kept constant while others are continually altered, adopted, or are added on, creating an ever-evolving narrative. In preparing for this piece, I also spent much time reflecting upon what it means to ‘return’—to keep coming back to something (or someone) that serves as a grounding force. I was interested in the idea of a landmark or point of origin, which remains steadfast, yet also evolves subtly over time. The constant nature of this rootedness is what allows us to orient ourselves; it serves as a bearing when navigating the many branches of uncharted possibility. It is also the measuring stick by which we gauge how far we’ve come

and how far we've yet to travel . . . the resulting music is a combination of change and consistency, a re-imagining of places and traditions I've known only second-hand, the sound of a fictitious culture one dreams up to keep the memories of another generation alive."

Concerto for Water Percussion and Orchestra

TAN DUN

Born August 18, 1957, Si Mao, Hunan, China

Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu, a figure universally revered for both his craftsmanship and his vision, died in 1996, and two years later Chinese composer Tan Dun wrote a piece in his memory. The *Concerto for Water Percussion and Orchestra* was inspired by the sounds Tan Dun heard while growing up in Hunan Province. Water percussion refers to those sounds that can be generated in part by water, but Tan Dun turned to this particular sonority for a larger reason—for him, water is a symbol of life: "We are all linked by water," he has said. "Life can never be without water. Water means tears. It also means the ocean." In a published interview, the composer has suggested that the *Concerto for Water Percussion and Orchestra* raises questions like "Where did we come from?" and "Where are we going?" In another interview, Tan Dun spoke at length about the many different meanings of water to him:

To me, my early life, living with water, having fun with water, and playing ritualistic music with water, has become very inspiring. Somehow now, I spend so much of my time to recompose this kind of memory...to recompose this kind of experience, with the new method. In Hunan, water was a daily thing with our life. Every day we washed everything with the river. All the old women, they always went to river for laundry, making a beautiful sound, very rhythmic. So I transpose those memories of beautiful laundry sounds, and swimming sounds, body popping sounds, water dancing sounds, water teasing sounds, water popping sound, into my orchestrations.

“Water percussion” includes a large array of instruments, and Tan Dun has noted that there are more than thirty ways to create sounds with water. In this concerto he calls for two large hemispherical and transparent water basins with lighting; one soda bottle; one waterphone; one pair of water tube drums; one medium water gong hung on a stand to be dipped in water; four water drums (four different sizes of wooden salad bowls, floating upside down on the water basin); one slinky phone; one long water tube with foam paddle; one water shaker; one sieve (strainer with handle); one set of agogo drums; and vibraphone. The composer asks that some of these sounds be amplified, and it should be noted that this careful attention to sound extends to the orchestra well as the percussion soloist: wind players are asked at points to detach their mouthpieces and play only through them, and the orchestra is also asked to hum in some passages.

The concerto takes the form of a prelude followed by the standard three movements, though Tan Dun abandons the traditional fast-slow-fast sequence of movements. Instead, here the tempo gradually increases across the span of this concerto, moving from a slow and mysterious beginning through a moderately-paced central movement to an animated (at times violent) conclusion.

The *Concerto for Water Percussion and Orchestra* was commissioned by the New York Philharmonic, and that orchestra gave the premiere on June 3, 1999, with its own percussionist Christopher Lamb as soloist. Conductor Kurt Masur liked the music so much that he took the *Concerto for Water Percussion and Orchestra* on the Philharmonic’s tour of Latin America and later included it in the set of recordings commemorating his tenure with that orchestra.

Petrushka

IGOR STRAVINSKY

Born June 17, 1882, Oranienbaum

Died April 6, 1971, New York City

Petrushka, Stravinsky’s ballet about three puppets at a Russian Shrovetide carnival, actually began life as a sort of piano concerto. In the summer of 1910, shortly after the successful premiere of *The Firebird*, Stravinsky started work on a ballet about a pagan ritual sacrifice in ancient Russia. But he set the manuscript to *The Rite of Spring* aside when he was consumed by a new idea: “I had in my mind a distinct picture of a puppet, suddenly endowed with life, exasperating the patience of the orchestra with diabolical cascades of arpeggi. The

orchestra in turn retaliates with menacing trumpet-blasts. The outcome is a terrific noise which reaches its climax and ends in the sorrowful and querulous collapse of the poor puppet.”

When impresario Serge Diaghilev visited Stravinsky that summer in Switzerland to see how the pagan-sacrifice ballet was progressing, he was at first horrified to learn that Stravinsky was doing nothing with it. But when Stravinsky played some of his new music, Diaghilev was charmed and saw possibilities for a ballet. With Alexander Benois, they created a story-line around the Russian puppet theater, specifically the tale of *Petrushka*, “the immortal and unhappy hero of every fair in all countries.” Stravinsky composed the score to what was now a ballet between August 1910 and May 1911, and *Petrushka* was first performed in Paris on June 13, 1911, with Nijinsky in the title role.

From the moment of that premiere, *Petrushka* has remained one of Stravinsky’s most popular scores, and the source of its success is no mystery: *Petrushka* combines an appealing tale of three puppets, authentic Russian folk tunes and street songs, and brilliant writing for orchestra. The music is remarkable for Stravinsky’s sudden development beyond the Rimsky-inspired *Firebird*, particularly in matters of rhythm and orchestral sound. One of those most impressed by *Petrushka* was Claude Debussy, who spoke with wonder of this music’s “sonorous magic.”

A brief summary of the music and action, which divides into four tableaux separated by drum rolls:

First Tableau: The Shrovetide Fair To swirling music, the curtain comes up to reveal a carnival scene in 1830 St. Petersburg. The crowd mills about, full of organ grinders, dancers, and drunkards. An aged magician appears and—like a snake charmer—spins a spell with a flute solo. He brings up the curtain in his small booth to reveal three puppets: *Petrushka*, the moor, and the ballerina. At a delicate touch of his wand, all three spring to life and dance before the astonished crowd to the powerful *Russian Dance*. A drum roll leads to the

Second Tableau: Petrushka’s Room This opens with *Petrushka* being kicked into his room and locked up. The pathetic puppet tries desperately to escape and despairs when he cannot. Stravinsky depicts his anguish with two clarinets, one in C major and the other in F-sharp major: their bitonal clash has become famous as the “*Petrushka* sound.” The trapped puppet rails furiously but is distracted by the appearance of the ballerina, who enters to a tinkly little tune. *Petrushka* is drawn to her, but she scorns him and leaves.

Third Tableau: The Moor’s Room Brutal chords take us into the moor’s opulent room.

The ballerina enters and dances for the moor to the accompaniment of cornet and snare drum. He is charmed, and the two waltz together. Suddenly Petrushka enters (his coming is heralded by variations on his pathetic clarinet tune), and he and the moor fight over the ballerina. At the end, the moor chases him out.

Fourth Tableau: The Shrovetide Fair (Toward Evening) At the scene of the opening tableau, a festive crowd swirls past. There are a number of ballet set-pieces here: the *Dance of the Nurse-Maids*, *The Peasant and the Bear* (depicted respectively by squealing clarinet and stumbling tuba), *Dance of the Gypsy Women*, *Dance of the Coachmen and Grooms* (who stamp powerfully), and *Masqueraders*. At the very end, poor Petrushka rushes into the square, pursued by the moor, who kills him with a slash of his scimitar. As a horrified crowd gathers, the magician appears and reassures all that it is make-believe by holding up Petrushka's body to show it dripping sawdust. As he drags the slashed body away, the ghost of Petrushka appears above the rooftops, railing defiantly at the terrified magician, who flees. Petrushka's defiance is depicted musically by the triplet figure associated with him throughout. The strings' quiet pizzicato strokes, taken from both the C major and F-sharp major scale, bring the ballet to an end that is—dramatically and harmonically—ambiguous.

TWO NOTES ON THE VERSION PERFORMED AT THIS CONCERT

Stravinsky published *Petrushka* in 1912, and the music quickly became a popular concert work. In 1947 Stravinsky published a revision of the score that reduced the size of the orchestra, rebarred many passages, and gave greater prominence to the piano, the instrument that had been the music's original inspiration. Many people, however, continue to prefer Stravinsky's original 1911 version, and at these concerts present the music in that version.

Over the years, Stravinsky came to prefer *Petrushka* as a concert piece rather than a ballet score, but he found that the original ambiguous ending, however effective it might be in the ballet, was not entirely satisfactory when the music was performed in the concert hall. To remedy this, he eliminated the final scene and composed a nine-bar concert ending. That ending, which begins after the *Masqueraders*, brings the music to a very dark and a very emphatic close.