

Program notes by Eric Bromberger

### **Community Acoustics**

LJ WHITE

Born August 7, 1984, Springfield

*The following program note has been supplied by the composer.*

The phrase Community Acoustics is a name used by some scientists for the phenomenon of acoustic niche separation, in which sounds within an ecosystem organize themselves into distinct frequency layers and interlocking patterns, allowing for communication within species and overall ecosystem function. My composition of this title is inspired by field recordings from the natural world that display acoustic niche separation, including many compiled by David Dunn in his book *Why Do Whales and Children Sing?: A Guide to Listening in Nature*, which discusses the phenomenon and the ill effects wrought when it is disrupted. The piece is also informed by my experience at the Banff Arts Centre in the summer of 2017, where, along with Steven Schick, the International Contemporary Ensemble, and other musicians from around the world, I hiked and meditated in the Canadian Rockies, was surrounded by the work of sonic meditation composer Pauline Oliveros, and allowed the pristine natural surroundings and collective spirit of deep listening to seep into my creative process. Additionally, the piece pertains to the pastorally-affected expansiveness and spirituality of Anton Bruckner's music and is influenced by the message of the film *Naqoyqatsi*, whose score by Philip Glass evolved into his second Cello Concerto; the film ties humans' sense of place and capacity for effective communication to our ancient relationship with our natural surroundings, which has steadily eroded in the modern era. The piece combines harmonic and linear musical events with material reminiscent of natural sounds, creating a sort of sound ecosystem out of the orchestra, in which the audience gets to participate at the end.

With the composition of *Community Acoustics*, I sought to challenge the typical hierarchy of the orchestral concert experience, and to create, in its place, a communal order in which everyone listens and contributes. The instrumentalists have the power, in many cases, to decide when to begin and cease playing. Their musical contributions are egalitarian; rather than melody and accompaniment, all players create sounds that are of relatively equal importance to

the greater soundscape. The conductor exerts less control over the content and timing of the music than usual, allowing players to have agency, and the audience, rather than listening passively, actively adds to the sonic environment of the room. This piece facilitates a collective act of occupying sonic space, one that can perhaps serve as a model for how we all might choose to exist in the world, in touch with our own needs, those of others, the environment, and the greater good.

## **Cello Concerto No. 2 “Naqoyqatsi”**

PHILIP GLASS

Born January 31, 1937, Baltimore

Over a twenty-year span film director Godfrey Reggio created what has come to be known as the “Qatsi Trilogy”: *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982), *Powaqqatsi* (1988), and *Naqoyqatsi* (2002). *Koyaanisqatsi* was subtitled “Life out of Balance,” and that description might apply to all three films, which dramatize the intrusion of technology into modern life through rapidly intercut images of violence and the abuse of nature, set in contrast to images of natural peace and beauty. There is no spoken language in the three films, only a cascade of troubling images accompanied by the music of Philip Glass. The final film, *Naqoyqatsi*, was subtitled “Life as War,” and it emphasizes scenes of violence and military activity. For that film, Glass composed an eleven-section score that included a prominent part for solo cello that was written specifically for Yo-Yo Ma, who performed it as part of the film score. As a film, *Naqoyqatsi* did not have the impact of the classic *Koyaanisqatsi*, but Glass remained interested in the music he had composed for it.

An opportunity to re-visit that music came ten years later. During the 2011-12 season, Glass served as Creative Director of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, and—working with a generous commission from that orchestra—he reworked the music he had composed for *Naqoyqatsi* into his *Cello Concerto No. 2*. This involved dropping four sections of the film score and reshaping the remaining music to give a more prominent, virtuosic role to the solo cello. Matt Haimovitz was soloist and Dennis Russell Davies the conductor at the premiere in Cincinnati on March 30, 2012, and a recording of that performance has been released.

Glass had written his *First Cello Concerto* in 2001 for cellist Julian Lloyd Webber, who premiered it in Beijing of that year (the La Jolla Symphony gave the American premiere in 2007 with Wendy Sutter as soloist). The *First Cello Concerto* was in the three-movement form of the traditional concerto, but Glass abandoned that form in his *Second Cello Concerto*, which is a much more dramatic and varied piece, as befits the subject of the movie that inspired it. Though it consists of seven sections, the *Second Cello Concerto* is actually in five movements that encompass two brief interludes; these interludes, titled *New World* and *Old World*, are scored for solo cello and minimal accompaniment. Glass calls for a large orchestra—one that includes piano, harp, and five percussionists—and he creates an extremely difficult part for the solo cellist, who must master the score’s rhythmic complexities and its (often) very high writing while still projecting the dramatic sweep of this music across its forty-minute span. The stylistic features we associate with Glass’ music—pulsing rhythms, rapidly changing meters, clean textures, and shifting colors—are very much a part of this score. Though the movements have evocative titles, listeners should not attempt to associate them with images from the movie—this is not music that “tells” a story—but should approach the *Second Cello Concerto* as a purely musical experience. Glass provides no movement markings in Italian, choosing instead only to preface each movement with a metronome indication, and most of the movements are performed without pauses between them.

A brief overview of the seven sections: the opening *Naqoyqatsi* establishes the foreboding tone of much of this concerto; characteristically, the cello’s initial entrance is on a sequence of arpeggios that constantly switch between 4/8, 5/8, and 12/8. *Massman* opens with a long orchestral introduction that sets rhythmic pulses of 8, 6, and 4 against each other before the solo cello makes its entrance. *New World* is the first of the two solo interludes: here the cello’s long soliloquy is accompanied only by very quiet cymbals and tam-tam. The powerful *Intensive Time* is introduced by a long and striking trumpet solo, with the cello taking up this theme on its entrance. The second interlude, *Old World*, is set extremely high in the register of the cello, which is joined here only by the most minimal of harp accompaniment. The full orchestra returns for *Point Blank*, another dynamic movement, this one featuring a beautiful part for the soloist. The concluding *Epilogue* opens with a long cello rumination set in 7/4, though the meter settles into 4/4 at the entrance of the orchestra. Themes heard earlier are revisited in this

movement, which ends not with the angry gesture that might be expected, given this music's original inspiration, but with a gradual fade into unsettling silence.

### **Symphony No. 3 in D Minor**

ANTON BRUCKNER

Born September 4, 1824, Ansfelden

Died October 11, 1896, Vienna

Success came very slowly for Anton Bruckner. When he began work in 1872 on what would officially be his *Third Symphony*, he was already 38 years old. The following summer, when he had much of the *Third Symphony* in manuscript, Bruckner was invited to meet his idol Wagner in Bayreuth. There, overwhelmed in the presence of the master, the terrified Bruckner showed Wagner the manuscript, which—in this draft—contained a number of quotations from *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Walküre*. Wagner was impressed, particularly by the striking trumpet theme at the very beginning of the symphony, and offered fulsome praise to the overwhelmed Bruckner, who asked for—and received—permission to dedicate the symphony to Wagner. Bruckner completed the symphony and revised it extensively over the next several years, in the process eliminating the Wagner quotations. But the *Third Symphony* was for some years nicknamed the “Wagner Symphony,” and that is unfortunate because—for all Bruckner's veneration of the older master—there is no Wagnerian influence on this music.

The first performance of the much-revised *Third Symphony* on December 16, 1877, was a disaster. The regular-scheduled conductor had died suddenly, and Bruckner—an inept conductor—was pressed into service. The Vienna Philharmonic hated the piece and made that clear, and the performance was accompanied by catcalls and whistling from the audience, which departed in such numbers that at the end only a handful of Bruckner's admirers were left to try to console the despairing conductor. Bruckner, always painfully vulnerable to criticism (he had several nervous breakdowns as a result of stress), was close to tears and cried out in despair: “No one wants anything of mine!” He did not have to wait long to have his fears confirmed. Eduard Hanslick's review described the *Third Symphony* as “A vision of how Beethoven's Ninth befriends Wagner's *Walküre* and finds itself under her horse's hooves.”

But there were consolations. A music publisher was one of those who had remained to the end, and to the composer's pleased surprise he offered to publish the symphony. Another of

those who remained was one of Bruckner's students at the Conservatory, a seventeen-year-old named Gustav Mahler. The teenaged Mahler helped make the piano arrangement of the symphony, which was also published.

The *Third* is the earliest of Bruckner's symphonies to have held a place in the repertory. It is compact (about an hour in length), tuneful, and modestly scored (pairs of woodwinds, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings). Much of its characteristic sound springs from Bruckner's love of brass instruments, which have a tremendous part in this symphony. Against their bright, dramatic sound, he sets a rich, almost cushioned string sonority.

Swirling strings establish the D-minor tonality at the very beginning, and over this rings out the trumpet tune that impressed Wagner so much—this shape will dominate the symphony's outer movements. Other ideas follow: a massive falling gesture stamped out by the entire orchestra and a sweetly-singing idea introduced by the second violins. This is a long movement (nearly twenty minutes), and its development is structured around the opening trumpet tune (which reappears in many forms, including inversion) and Bruckner's imaginative combination of his various ideas. The movement drives to a powerful close as the opening trumpet tune is hammered out by massed brass.

The *Adagio* is heartfelt, reverent music—at several points the string cadences almost seem to say “Amen.” Again, the development of these lyric materials displays Bruckner's considerable gift for counterpoint, and the music eventually builds to a ringing climax before trailing off to conclude quietly. The *Scherzo*, which Bruckner marks “Rather fast,” features terrific writing for brass. The movement opens with almost tentative string figures (the marking is *pianissimo*), but these drive the music forward and the brass quickly erupt over them. The trio section dances happily on a bucolic tune for violas that has a ländler-like swing; this too grows to a huge climax before the return of the opening section, which is absolutely literal (as it is in every Bruckner symphony).

Rushing strings propel the music forward at the beginning of the *Finale*, and the brass quickly stamp out the movement's main idea, which is a cousin to the main theme of the first movement. This subsides, but the strings continue their rush, hurrying right up to the movement's second subject, which Bruckner marks “Slower.” This second group deserves

attention for several reasons. It is based on the simultaneous presentation of two completely different kinds of music: the strings have what might be described as a polka tune, almost perky in its innocence. But beneath this the brass very quietly intone a noble chorale, and the symphony continues along this strange yoking-together of what seem irreconcilable opposites. Except that for Bruckner, they were not opposites. The composer was once walking with a friend and passed between a dance hall and a cathedral where the funeral of an architect was taking place. Bruckner turned to his friend and said: “Listen! In that house there is dancing, and over there the master lies in his coffin—that’s life. It’s what I wanted to show in my *Third Symphony*. The polka represents the fun and joy of the world and the chorale represents the sadness and pain.”

This is another extended movement, and as it continues the trumpet theme that opened the first movement begins to cut through its complex textures. Gradually at first, then more and more forcefully, and finally—transformed into D major—it is shouted out in triumph as the symphony powers its way to a thunderous close.

A NOTE ON TEXTS: Bruckner’s symphonies existed in different forms even during his lifetime. Desperate for success, the composer allowed himself to be pushed into revisions by those who wanted to make his work more “popular.” This effort continued even after his death, when new editions were prepared by well-intentioned but ill-advised enthusiasts. The result has been chaos, and modern editors have had to try to cut through the various revisions to determine what Bruckner himself wanted (time has shown that Bruckner was a shrewder judge of his music than all his well-meaning friends and their ideas about popularity).

The case with the *Third Symphony* is particularly confusing, and one critic has counted nine separate versions of this symphony. There are in fact three main versions, and all have been recorded. The first is Bruckner’s original manuscript of 1872-74, with the explicit quotations from Wagner—this version lasts nearly 90 minutes and is almost never heard. Even before the first performance, Bruckner completely revised the symphony—this second version is the one that was performed at the disastrous premiere in 1877. The third version comes from late in Bruckner’s life. With his student Franz Schalk, Bruckner returned to the symphony one more time in 1890, shortening it and making it more concise. Both the second and third versions have their proponents today, some conductors preferring the longer second version,

others the more concise 1890 version. At these concerts, the final version—the Schalk edition—is performed, but even this is heard in a version revised by Bruckner’s disciple Joseph von Wöss in 1924.