

**MICHAEL IPPOLITO**

*composer, pianist, teacher*  
(Tampa, Florida, 1985)

**TRIPTYCH**

*Composed in 2017.*

*World Premiere.*

*Commissioned by The Florida Orchestra.*

*Duration: ca 24 minutes*

*Scoring: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, celesta, piano and strings*

*Overview*

Michael Ippolito made a precocious start as both composer and performer. He was soloist in his own Piano Concerto with the Tampa Bay Youth Orchestra when he was fifteen; three years later The Florida Orchestra premiered his *Waltz* at the University of South Florida's Composer Showcase. Ippolito undertook his professional training at the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, where he studied composition with Joel Hoffman and Michael Fiday and improvisation with Alan Bern, and at Juilliard, where his principal teacher was Pulitzer-, Oscar-, Grawemeyer- and Grammy Award-winning composer John Corigliano. In 2014, he joined the faculty of Texas State University in San Marcos, where he is now Assistant Professor of Composition. His compositions have been inspired by an apparently omnivorous range of influences — Ansel Adams photographs, Croatian folk songs, poems by Carl Sandburg and Siegfried Sassoon, Japanese haiku about mushrooms, old-time radio shows, paintings and sculptures by the Spanish surrealist Joan Miró, descriptions of the Medieval celebration of “drunkenness and bawdy humor, social inversion, ceremonial parody and licensed foolishness” known as *The Feast of Fools* — and been performed and commissioned by several of the country's leading orchestras, chamber ensembles and soloists. Among Ippolito's distinctions are a Charles Ives Scholarship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Palmer Dixon Prize from the Juilliard School, multiple ASCAP Plus Awards and Frederick Fennell Prize.

*What To Listen For*

Michael Ippolito wrote “*Triptych* was composed for the 50th anniversary season of The Florida Orchestra. I saw this piece as an opportunity to celebrate my hometown orchestra as well as reflect on the environment where I grew up. In thinking about how to approach this composition, I found three passages of literature that spoke to Florida's sense of place.

“The first movement, *Cypress Cathedral*, was inspired by a section of Henry David Thoreau's 1851 lecture, *Walking*: ‘When I would recreate myself, I seek the darkest wood, the thickest and most impenetrable and to the citizen, most dismal, swamp. I enter a swamp as a sacred place, a *sanctum sanctorum*.’ This image of a swamp as sanctuary or sacred place resonated with me for a variety of reasons, and it seemed especially fitting since I always thought being surrounded by cypress trees felt like being in a Gothic cathedral, with swooping columns and vaulted ceilings. This movement has a mysterious atmosphere, with gently rising and falling lines, florid melodies

for the winds, and an outburst that evokes a giant organ chord.

“The second movement, *On the Curl'd Clouds*, is based on a passage from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: ‘All hail, great master! Grave sir, hail! I come/To answer thy best pleasure: be't to fly,/To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride/On the curl'd clouds, to thy strong bidding task/Ariel and all his quality.’ Ariel speaks these words to Prospero after creating the titular storm of the play. This movement is based on the image of Ariel, a trickster sprite, conjuring up a massive storm; it begins as a light wisp of a scherzo and gradually builds into a cataclysmic explosion. The entire movement is constructed as a sort of spiral in which familiar music returns more compressed and more intense each time, each rotation of the spiral shorter than the last.

“The last movement, *Barque of Phosphor*, takes its title from the first line of Wallace Stevens' poem *Fabliau of Florida*. This poem combines imagery that could come straight out of a postcard beach scene with whimsical and profound images, like the ‘barque of phosphor’ — the moon re-imagined as a luminescent ship sailing into the night sky. My music loosely follows the contemplative mood and imagery of the poem, beginning with a strange, high melody representing the moon. While in Stevens' poem the moon is rising, I imagined that the viewer might in fact be sinking. The melody returns several times throughout the movement, each time accompanied by lower harmonies as the perspective sinks lower. After an expansive development, the piece comes to an end, submerged and swallowed up by the never-ending surf.”

### **SERGEI RACHMANINOFF**

*Composer, Pianist, Conductor*

(Oneg (near Novgorod), Russia, 1873 — Beverly Hills, California, 1943)

### **RHAPSODY ON A THEME OF PAGANINI FOR PIANO AND ORCHESTRA, OP. 43**

*Composed: 1934*

*Premiered: November 7, 1934 in Baltimore, conducted by Leopold Stokowski with the composer as soloist*

*Duration: ca. 22 minutes*

*Scoring: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings*

#### *Overview*

The legend of Nicolò Paganini has haunted musicians for nearly two centuries. Gaunt, his emaciated figure cloaked in priestly black, Paganini performed feats of wizardry on the violin that were simply unimagined until he burst upon the European concert scene in 1805. Not only were his virtuoso pyrotechnics unsurpassed, but his performance of simple melodies was of such purity and sweetness that it moved his audiences to tears. So far was he beyond the competition that he seemed almost, well, superhuman. Perhaps, the rumor spread, he had special powers, powers not of this earth. Perhaps, Faust-like, he had exchanged his soul for the mastery of his art. The legend (propagated and fostered, it is now known, by Paganini himself) had begun.

Paganini, like most virtuoso instrumentalists of the 19th century, composed much of his own music. Notable among his *oeuvre* are the breathtaking *Caprices* for Unaccompanied Violin, works so difficult that even today they are accessible only to the most highly accomplished performers. The last of the *Caprices*, No. 24 in A minor, served as the basis for compositions by Schumann, Liszt and Brahms, and was also the inspiration for Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*. Rachmaninoff's work is a series of variations on this theme, which is characterized as much by its recurrent rhythm (five short notes followed by a longer one) as by its melody. Taking his cue from the Paganini legend, Rachmaninoff combined another melody with that of the demonic violinist — the *Dies Irae* (“*Day of Wrath*”) from the Requiem Mass for the Dead. This ancient chant tune had long been connected not only with the Roman Catholic Church service, but also with musical works containing some diabolical element. Berlioz associated it with the witches' sabbath in his *Symphonie Fantastique*, Liszt used it in his *Totentanz* (“*Dance of Death*”), Saint-Saëns in his *Danse macabre*, and Rachmaninoff himself in his earlier *Isle of the Dead*.

In devising a scenario for a 1937 ballet based on the *Paganini Rhapsody*, Rachmaninoff wrote to the choreographer Mikhail Fokine describing the program he had in mind for the work: “Why not resurrect the legend about Paganini, who, for the perfection of his art and for a woman, sold his soul to an evil spirit? All the variations which have the theme of *Dies Irae* [Nos. 7, 10, 24] represent the evil spirit. The variations from No. 11 to No. 18 are love episodes. Paganini himself appears in the ‘theme’ (his first appearance) and again, for the last time, in variation No. 23. The evil spirit appears for the first time in variation No. 7. Variations Nos. 8, 9 and 10 are the development of the evil spirit. Variation No. 11 is the turning point into the domain of love. Variation No. 12 — the Menuet — portrays the first appearance of the woman. Variation No. 13 is the first conversation between the woman and Paganini. Variation No. 19 — Paganini's triumph.”

#### *What To Listen For*

The *Rhapsody*, a brilliant showpiece for virtuoso pianist, is a set of 24 variations. The work begins with a brief, eight-measure introduction followed, before the theme itself is heard, by the first variation, a skeletal outline of the melody reminiscent of the pizzicato opening of the variation-finale of Beethoven's “Eroica” Symphony. The theme, 24 measures in length, is stated by the unison violins. The following variations fall into three groups, corresponding to the fast–slow–fast sequence of the traditional three-movement concerto. The most familiar section of the *Rhapsody*, and one of the great melodies in the orchestral literature, is the climax of the middle section. This variation, No. 18, actually an inversion of Paganini's theme, has a broad sweep and nobility of sentiment unsurpassed anywhere in Rachmaninoff's works.

The *Rhapsody* was an immediate success at its 1934 premiere, and became one of the staples of Rachmaninoff's concert tours in this country and abroad during the last decade of his life. During those final years, he returned twice more in his compositions to the *Dies Irae* as a musical reminder of life's transience, employing it in his Third Symphony (1937) and the *Symphonic Dances* of 1941, his last work. The ancient melody had become for him a musical motto representing his brooding and fatalistic frame of mind. It seems therefore fitting that the

*Paganini Rhapsody* in which it figures so prominently was the last work he played in public with orchestra, only two months before his death.

## **ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK**

*Composer, Teacher*

(Nelahozeves, Bohemia, 1841 — Prague, 1904)

### **SYMPHONY NO. 9 IN E MINOR, OP. 95, “FROM THE NEW WORLD”**

*Composed: 1892-1893*

*Premiered: December 16, 1893 in New York, conducted by Anton Seidl*

*Duration: ca. 40 minutes*

*Scoring: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion and strings*

#### *Overview*

When Antonín Dvořák, aged 51, arrived in New York on September 27, 1892 to direct the new National Conservatory of Music, both he and the institution’s founder, Mrs. Jeanette Thurber, expected that he would help to foster an American school of composition. He was clear and specific in his assessment: “I am convinced that the future music of this country must be founded on what are called Negro melodies. They can be the foundation of a serious and original school of composition to be developed in the United States.... There is nothing in the whole range of composition that cannot find a thematic source here.” Dvořák’s knowledge of this music came from Henry Thacker Burleigh, an African-American song writer and student of his who sang the traditional melodies to the enthralled composer. Burleigh later recalled, “There is no doubt that Dr. Dvořák was very deeply impressed by the Negro spirituals from the old plantation. He just saturated himself in the spirit of those old tunes, and then invented his own themes.”

The “New World” Symphony was not only Dvořák’s way of pointing toward a truly American musical idiom but also a reflection of his feelings about his own country. “I should never have written the Symphony as I have,” he said, “if I hadn’t seen America,” but he added in a later letter that it was “genuine Bohemian music.” There is actually a reconciliation between these two seemingly contradictory statements, since the characteristics that Dvořák found in Burleigh’s indigenous American music — pentatonic (five-note) scales, modal minor keys with a lowered seventh degree, rhythmic syncopations, frequent returns to the central key note — are common to much folk music throughout the world, including that of his native Bohemia. Because his themes for the “New World” Symphony drew upon these cross-cultural qualities, to Americans, they sound American; to Czechs, they sound Czech.

#### *What To Listen For*

The “New World” Symphony is unified by the use of a motto theme that occurs in all four movements. This bold, striding phrase, with its arching contour, is played by the horns as the main theme of the sonata-form opening movement, having been foreshadowed (also by the horns) in the slow introduction. Two other themes are used in the first movement: a sad, dance-like melody for flute and oboe that exhibits folk characteristics, and a brighter tune, with a

striking resemblance to *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, for the solo flute.

Many years before coming to America, Dvořák had encountered Longfellow's epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha*, which he read in a Czech translation. The great tale remained in his mind, and he considered making an opera of it during his time in New York. That project came to nothing, but *Hiawatha* did have an influence on the "New World" Symphony: the second movement was inspired by the forest funeral of Minnehaha; the third, by the dance of the Indians at the feast. That the music of these movements has more in common with the old plantation songs than with the chants of native Americans is due to Dvořák's mistaken belief that African-American and Indian music were virtually identical.

The second movement is a three-part form (A–B–A), with a haunting English horn melody (later fitted with words by William Arms Fisher to become the folksong-spiritual *Goin' Home*) heard in the first and last sections. The recurring motto here is pronounced by the trombones just before the return of the main theme in the closing section. The third movement is a tempestuous scherzo with two gentle, intervening trios providing contrast. The motto theme, played by the horns, dominates the coda.

The finale employs a sturdy motive introduced by the horns and trumpets after a few introductory measures in the strings. In the Symphony's closing pages, the motto theme, *Goin' Home* and the scherzo melody are all gathered up and combined with the principal subject of the finale to produce a marvelous synthesis of the entire work — a look back across the sweeping vista of Dvořák's musical tribute to America.

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