

## Masterworks 4 – April 12, 2018

### Symphony No. 2, “Island of Innocence”

Kevin Puts  
b. 1972

Kevin Puts composed his Symphony No. 2 in 2001-02, inspired by the events of 9/11. A review of the Symphony describes it as programmatic, but Puts gives a subtler interpretation of his own work, suggesting a more atmospheric understanding.

Puts writes: “My second symphony, while by no means a memorial, makes reference to this sudden paradigmatic shift. During the first eight minutes of the work, a slow orchestral build describes the unsuspecting climate pre- 9/11, a naïve world aptly described by my mother as a metaphorical island. After a brief passage for solo violin, an upheaval of sorts effectively obliterates this opening sentiment and initiates another gradual crescendo which makes use of the same material as the opening, cast this time in darker and more ambiguous harmonic colors. Once the entire orchestra reaches the climax of the work, the solo violin returns in a more extended passage than before and subdues the turbulent orchestra. This leads to a reflective epilogue in which a clock-like pulse creates a mood of expectancy and uncertainty, interlaced with hope.”

It is a remarkable musical insight coming so hard on the heels of the cataclysmic event. It reflects the buildup and shock, while concluding with an air of calm, belied by 15 years of subsequent history. Audience perception has certainly distanced itself, hearing and relating to it in a different way from that of the composer’s original conception – rather with a sense of irony, continued tension and despair.

So far, Puts has composed four symphonies eight concertos and two operas. In 2012, he won the Pulitzer Prize for his first opera, *Silent Night*. He currently teaches composition at the Peabody Institute of The Johns Hopkins University and is Director of the Minnesota Orchestra Composer’s Institute. He is an accomplished pianist, who frequently performs his own works, as well as other contemporary music and works in the standard repertoire. A native of St. Louis, Missouri, he received his BA from the Eastman School of Music, his MA from Yale University, and returned for his DMA to Eastman.

### Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125

Ludwig van Beethoven  
1770-1827

As slovenly as Beethoven was in his personal life, he stored and maintained his musical ideas in sketchbooks, continually jotting down ideas that might come in handy later on. Perusing these sketchbooks today, we gain insight into both his creative process and method of working. While Beethoven did not have the quick and ready inspiration of a Schubert or a Mendelssohn, two characteristics contributed to his greatness: he had the tenacity to work and rework his material many times, often over many years; and he knew when he got it right.

Ideas for the Ninth Symphony first appeared in Beethoven’s sketchbook in 1817-18, initially as material for a pair of symphonies, one of which was to have a choral finale with a text from Greek mythology. He did not begin sustained work on the symphony until 1822, finally

finishing it in February 1824.

During this period, Beethoven was embroiled in turmoil in his personal life. When his brother Johann, who had married a woman against the composer's advice, became ill, his wife Therese shamelessly carried on with her lover. Beethoven's on-again-off-again friendship with Anton Schindler, who eventually became his private secretary and first biographer, was currently off. It should be noted, however, that for all Beethoven's irascibility and mood swings, he was often a shrewd judge of character and he did not trust Schindler, who in the end made off with the composer's sketchbooks and conversation books, selling some and forging others.

Professionally, Beethoven was both clearly over his head in commitments and also beset by debts. He was putting the finishing touches for publication of the *Missa Solemnis* while trying to manipulate a secret bidding war for it among three publishers, each of whom were expecting the work. He used a bait-and-switch maneuver involving a Mass in D (that was never written), as an excuse to each publisher for not delivering the *Missa Solemnis*. He had also undertaken several other commissions, some of which remained incomplete or never started.

One unfulfilled commission spurred the completion of the Ninth Symphony. Always an admirer of the British, Beethoven had sent inquiries to the Philharmonic Society of London and had received a positive reply with the promise of £50 for a new symphony. He would have liked to visit London, perhaps to experience the accolades showered on his former mentor, Franz Joseph Haydn, but the visit never materialized and the commission never fulfilled. It was, nevertheless, an incentive to finish the Symphony. The score was completed in February 1824, and Beethoven, disgusted with the musical taste of the Viennese, was planning to premiere the work in Berlin. But it had been ten years since he had given a public concert of his work in Vienna, and his friends and admirers signed a petition begging him not to disappoint his public any longer. Although he eventually gave in, it took three months of haggling with the Imperial "Pooh-Bahs" and reluctant singers to finally schedule the concert for May 7 at the *Kärntnertortheater*. Artistically the Symphony was a wild success but – because of the huge forces required and the large copying costs – a financial near-disaster.

Starting from the mysterious descending open intervals of the first movement, the symphony must have amazed its first hearers. Out of them gradually emerges the powerful first theme into classical sonata form. The contrasting second theme, like many of the composer's melodies, is made up of several distinct motives that he later develops separately. The movement ends in a long dramatic coda with an ominous ostinato in the cellos and basses.

The second movement is a massive scherzo that opens *Molto vivace* with hammer-blow descending octaves, an oblique reference to the descending intervals in the first movement. This motive is immediately picked up by the violins as the first bar of a fugue – an unusual but not unheard of structure for a scherzo. A driving ostinato rhythmic motif underlies the scherzo section, with the timpani periodically banging out the signature octaves and motivic rhythm. A playful trio brings respite, but the insistent scherzo returns with a short coda and a final hint at the trio.

The slow third movement is a free variation form comprised of the simultaneous transformation of two themes; its gentle intensity is in marked contrast to the powerful,

driving music that preceded and will follow it. If anyone ever doubted that Beethoven was a Romantic, this movement will dispel the doubt, especially with the heartfelt second theme.

For a long time Beethoven had been unsure about what to do for the Finale. Material for a purely instrumental one ended up in 1825 as part of the string quartet Op. 132. Once he fixed on a choral finale, he had difficulties settling on its two main components: the melody and the text. The sketchbooks reveal that he had a surprisingly difficult time developing what ultimately became such a simple straightforward tune. In its first manifestation it appeared in a song, “*Gegenliebe*” (WoO 118) from 1794 and, in a closer version to the melody he ultimately settled on, as a main theme of the *Choral Fantasia*, Op. 80, of 1808.

It was not until November 1823, only three months before he finished the symphony, that Beethoven decided to use Friedrich Schiller’s “*An die Freude*” (Ode to Joy). He had been toying with the idea of setting the Ode since 1793, when he considered it for a song. Again, in 1812, he incorporated part of it into a choral overture, a project he abandoned. Now, he took the opportunity to combine his desire and set the poem into the new choral symphony.

The long introduction to the Finale begins with a surprise, a recitative for the cellos and basses that, between recitative passages, recaps in order the first themes from the three preceding movements and anticipates a snatch of the chorale theme. But these recurrences serve as deliberate “false starts.”

After the introduction by the full orchestra, Beethoven uses his own words for the repeat of the recitative, now sung by the baritone, to introduce Schiller’s poem. In structure, the body of the Finale is a set of variations, one for each stanza of the poem plus a substantial coda. As poems go it’s a bit over the top, and Schiller himself did not care for it. Beethoven’s music, coupled with judicious rearrangement and strategic deletions in the text, transformed it into a cultural icon. At the climax of the movement, Beethoven abandons the variations for a lengthy dramatic coda in which the soloists and chorus restate the text of the poem and freely develop the musical material. However constrained in form the variations may have been, Beethoven handles the coda as an operatic finale, recalling the heady celebration that concluded his opera *Fidelio*.

### **TEXT (adapted from Schiller)**

*O Freunde, nicht diese Töne!  
Sondern Laßt uns angenehmere anstimmen,  
Und freudenvollere*

O friends, not these sounds!  
Rather let us strike up more pleasant  
And more joyful ones.

*Freude, schöner Götterfunken  
Tochter aus Elysium,  
Wir betreten feuertrunken,  
Himmlische, dein Heiligtum!*

Joy, thou glorious spark of the gods,  
Daughter of Elysium,  
We approach fire-drunk,  
Heavenly One, your shrine.

*Deine Zauber binden wieder  
Was die Mode streng geteilt;  
Alle Menschen werden Brüder,  
Wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt.*

Your magic reunites  
That which custom strictly parts;  
All men become brothers,  
Where your gentle wing alights.

*Wem der große Wurf gelungen,  
Eines Freundes Freund zu sein;  
Wer ein holdes Weib errungen,  
Mische seinen Jubel ein!*

*Ja, wer auch nur eine Seele  
Sein nennt auf dem Erdenrund!  
Und wer's nie gekonnt, der stehle  
Weinend sich aus diesem Bund!*

*Freude trinken alle Wesen  
An den Brüsten der Natur;  
Alle Guten, alle Bösen  
Folgen ihrer Rosenspur.*

*Küsse gab sie uns und Reben,  
Einen Freund, geprüft im Tod;  
Wollust ward dem Wurm gegeben,  
Und der Cherub steht vor Gott.*

*Froh, wie seine Sonnen fliegen  
Durch des Himmels prächt'gen Plan,  
Laufet, Brüder, eure Bahn,  
Freudig, wie ein Held zum Siegen.*

*Freude, schöner Götterfunken  
Tochter aus Elysium,  
Wir betreten feuertrunken,  
Himmlische, dein Heiligtum!*

*Deine Zauber binden wieder  
Was die Mode streng geteilt;  
Alle Menschen werden Brüder,  
Wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt*

*Seid umschlungen, Millionen!  
Diesen Küß der ganzen Welt!  
Brüder - über'm Sternenzelt  
Muss ein lieber Vater wohnen*

*Ihr stürzt nieder, Millionen?  
Ahnest du den Schöpfer, Welt?  
Such' ihn über'm Sternenzelt!  
Über Sternen muss er wohnen.*

*Seid umschlungen, Millionen!*

Whoever succeeds in the great attempt  
To be a friend of a friend,  
Whoever has won a loving woman,  
Let him add his jubilation!

Yes, whoever calls even one soul  
His own on the earth's globe!  
And who never has, let him steal,  
Weeping, away from this group.

All creatures drink joy  
At nature's breast;  
All the good, all the evil  
Follow in her roses' trail.

Kisses gave she us, and wine,  
A friend, faithful unto death;  
Even the worm was granted pleasure,  
And the cherub stands before God.

Glad, as his suns fly  
Through the Heavens' glorious plan,  
Run, brothers, your course,  
Joyous, like a hero to victory.

Joy, thou glorious spark of the gods,  
Daughter of Elysium,  
We approach fire-drunk,  
Heavenly One, your shrine.

Your magic reunites  
That which custom strictly parts;  
All men become brothers,  
Where your gentle wing alights.

Be embraced, you millions!  
This kiss for the whole world!  
Brothers, beyond the star-canopy  
Must a loving Father dwell.

Do you bow down, you millions?  
Do you sense the Creator, world?  
Seek Him beyond the star-canopy!  
Beyond the stars must He dwell.

Be embraced, ye millions!

*Diesen Küß der ganzen Welt!*

*Freude, schöner Götterfunken  
Tochter aus Elysium,  
Wir betreten feuertrunken,  
Himmlische, dein Heiligtum!*

*Ihr stürzt nieder, Millionen?  
Ahnest du den Schöpfer, Welt?  
Such' ihn über'm Sternenzelt!  
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