

program notes

BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

Rise (2018)

WORLD PREMIERE

ZHOU TIAN ■ BORN IN 1981

Chinese-American composer Zhou Tian (JOH TEE-en; Zhou is his surname) was born in 1981 in the city of Hangzhou, China, 100 miles southwest of Shanghai, and did his undergraduate work in composition and piano at the Shanghai Conservatory. In 2001 Zhou came to the United States to attend the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where he studied composition with Richard Danielpour and Jennifer Higdon and piano with Meng-Chieh Liu. Zhou subsequently earned a master's degree at the Juilliard School as a student of Christopher Rouse and a doctorate at the University of Southern California, where he studied composition with Stephen Hartke and Donald Crockett and piano with Antoinette Perry. Zhou taught at Colgate University from 2011 until 2016, when he was appointed Associate Professor of Composition at the Michigan State University College of Music. Zhou's distinctions include a 2018 Grammy Award nomination for Best Contemporary Classical Composition for his *Concerto for Orchestra*, First Prize in the Washington International Competition for Composers, First Prize in the Kathryn Thomas International Composition Competition, Julius Hemphill International Composers Award, Presser Foundation Music Award, three ASCAP/Morton Gould Awards, an Excellence Award in the 16th Musical Composition Award by the Ministry of Culture of

China (given only every five years), and composition fellowships from the Aspen, Tanglewood and Fontainebleau music festivals; he has also served as Composer-in-Residence for the Green Bay Symphony and the Chicago chamber series Music in the Loft.

Zhou wrote that *Rise*, commissioned by the Allentown Symphony, Spokane Symphony and Erie Philharmonic on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the United States' involvement in World War I with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, "is a five-minute work inspired by diaries of American soldiers during World War I. During a visit to the Library of Congress, I was drawn to the personal and unmediated experiences and emotions the soldiers themselves wrote of on the battleground. Whether it's a brief note about the weather, a long entry about losing a comrade, or a touching moment when a letter from home arrives ('letters from home are like the heavens breaking through depressing clouds' — First Lieutenant Quincy Ayres), the soldiers' stories moved me deeply. *Rise* attempts to convey the emotions of simple servicemen — their fears, frustrations, love and awe — through the intimacy and power of the symphony orchestra. It is a musical postcard from America's coming-of-age war, 100 years later."

Lincoln Portrait (1942)

AARON COPLAND ■ 1900-1990

Soon after the United States entered World War II, conductor André Kostela-

netz asked three prominent American composers to write works that would convey “the magnificent spirit of our country.” Following Kostelanetz’s request, Virgil Thomson composed the *Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia Waltzes*, Jerome Kern wrote the *Portrait for Orchestra of Mark Twain*, and Aaron Copland created the *Lincoln Portrait*. “The letters and speeches of Lincoln supplied the text,” he wrote. “I avoided the temptation to use only well-known passages, permitting myself the luxury of quoting only once from a world-famous speech. The order and arrangement of the selections are my own. The first sketches were made in February and the portrait finished on April 16, 1942. The orchestration was completed a few weeks later. I worked with musical materials of my own, with the exception of two songs of the period: the famous *Camptown Races* and a ballad that was first published in 1840 under the title of *The Pesky Serpent*, but is better known today as *Springfield Mountain*. The tunes are used freely in the manner of the cowboy songs in my *Billy the Kid*.”

“The composition is roughly divided into three main sections. In the opening section, I wanted to suggest something of the mysterious sense of fatality that surrounds Lincoln’s personality. Also, near the end of that section, something of his greatness and simplicity of spirit. [*Springfield Mountain* is the thematic basis of this portion.] The quick middle section briefly sketches in the background of the times during which he lived. [Fragments of Stephen Foster’s *Camptown Races* figure prominently in this passage.] This merges into the concluding section, where my sole purpose was to draw a simple but impressive frame around the words of Lincoln.”

Adagio for Strings (1936)

SAMUEL BARBER ■ 1910-1981

In 1936, Artur Rodzinski gave the American premiere of Samuel Barber’s *Symphony in One Movement* in Cleveland and played it the following year at the Salzburg Festival, making it the first American work to be heard at that prestigious event. The chief conductor of the Salzburg Festival at that time was Arturo Toscanini, who was to begin his tenure with the NBC Symphony later that year. Toscanini asked Rodzinski if he could suggest an American composer whose work he might program during the coming season, and Rodzinski advised that his Italian colleague investigate the music of the 27-year-old Barber. By October, Barber had completed and submitted to Toscanini the *Essay No. 1 for Orchestra* and an arrangement for string orchestra of the slow movement from the *Quartet* (Op. 11, in B minor) he had written in Rome in 1936 — the *Adagio for Strings*. Toscanini accepted the pieces for performance, and broadcast them on November 5, 1938 with the NBC Symphony. The *Adagio*, with its plaintive melody, rich modalism, austere texture and introspective mood, was an instant success and remains among Samuel Barber’s greatest legacies.

Symphony No. 5, Op. 100 (1944)

SERGEI PROKOFIEV ■ 1891-1953

“In the Fifth Symphony I wanted to sing the praises of the free and happy man — his strength, his generosity and the purity of his soul.” The “man” Prokofiev invoked in that description of the motivation behind this great Symphony could well have been the composer himself. The work was written in the summer of 1944, one of the happiest times he

knew. His home life following marriage to his second wife four years earlier was contented and fulfilling; he was the most famous and often-performed of all Soviet composers; and Russia was winning the war. In fact, the success of the premiere of this work was buoyed by the announcement immediately before the concert that the Russian army had just scored a resounding victory on the River Vistula. The composer's mind was reflected in the fluency and emotional depth of his music.

The opening movement is a large sonata form that begins without introduction. The wide-ranging main theme is presented by flute and bassoon; flute and oboe sing the lyrical second subject. The development gives prominence in its first portion to the opening theme and a skittish motive heard at the end of the exposition; it later focuses on the second theme. The recapitulation is heralded by the brass choir. The scherzo is one of those pieces Prokofiev would have classified as "motoric": an incessant two-note rhythmic motive drives the music through its entire first section. The central section is framed by a bold, strutting phrase. The brooding third movement is in a large three-part design. The outer sections are supported by the rhythmic tread of the low instruments used to underpin a plaintive melody initiated by the clarinets. A sweeping theme begun by the tuba serves as the basis for the middle section. The finale opens with a short introduction comprising two gestures based on the first movement's main theme: a short woodwind phrase and a chorale for cellos. The main body of the movement is a sonata-rondo structure propelled by an insistent rhythmic motive.

ALLENTOWN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

NOVEMBER 10 AND 11, 2018
8:00 P.M., SYMPHONY HALL

P R O G R A M

DIANE M. WITTRY MUSIC DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR

The Star-Spangled Banner

John Stafford Smith/
Francis Scott Key

Special Guest Conductor: The Honorable Pat Browne

America, the Beautiful

Samuel Augustus Ward/
Katherine Lee Bates

Soloist and Arranger: Daniel Rodriguez, The Singing Policeman

Rise

ZHOU TIAN

WORLD PREMIERE

Commissioned by the Allentown Symphony Orchestra
in Observance of the 100th Anniversary of Armistice Day

Lincoln Portrait for Speaker and Orchestra
Speaker: Daniel Roebuck

Aaron Copland

Adagio for Strings

SAMUEL BARBER

God Bless America

IRVING BERLIN

Soloist and Arranger: Daniel Rodriguez, The Singing Policeman

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Symphony No. 5, Op. 100

SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Andante
Allegro marcato
Adagio
Allegro giocoso