

## Notes on the Program by DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

### *Chasing Light ... (2008)* Joseph Schwantner (born in 1943)

Joseph Schwantner, one of today's most frequently performed American composers, was born in Chicago on March 22, 1943. While in high school, he learned to play tuba and guitar, studied music theory and history, and composed several pieces for the student jazz ensemble, one of which, *Offbeat*, won the National Band Camp Award in 1959. Two years later, he enrolled as a composition student at the American Conservatory in Chicago, where he studied with Bernard Dieter. After graduating from the Conservatory in 1964, Schwantner undertook postgraduate work at Northwestern University, receiving his master's and doctoral degrees from that institution in 1966 and 1968. Following brief tenures teaching at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington and Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, he joined the faculty of the Eastman School of Music in 1970; from 1999 to 2002, he served as Professor of Composition at Yale. Among his many honors and awards are the first Charles Ives Scholarship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Pulitzer Prize (1979, for *Aftertones of Infinity*), First Prize in the Kennedy Center Friedheim Competition, a Guggenheim Fellowship, election to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and an honorary doctorate from Baldwin-Wallace University. Schwantner received the 2012 Grammy Award for "Best Classical Instrumental Solo Performance" for the Naxos recording of his Percussion Concerto, commissioned by the New York Philharmonic in honor of its 150th anniversary. Joseph Schwantner has been the subject of a documentary produced by WGBH, Boston, which was broadcast nationally on public television.

Joseph Schwantner composed *Chasing Light ...* in 2008 as part of the Ford Made in America partnership program of the League of American Orchestras and Meet The Composer. He wrote of it, "One of the special pleasures of living in rural New Hampshire is experiencing the often brilliant and intense early morning sunrises, reminding one of Thoreau's words, 'Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me' (*Walden*). *Chasing Light...* draws its spirit, energy and inspiration from the celebration of vibrant colors and light that penetrate the morning mist as it wafts through the trees in the high New England hills. Like a delicate dance, those images intersected with a brief original poem that helped fire my musical imagination.

#### *Chasing Light ...*

Beneath the sickle moon,  
sunrise ignites daybreak's veil

Calliope's rainbowed song  
cradles heaven's arc

piercing shadowy pines,  
a kaleidoscope blooms

morning's embrace  
confronts the dawn

“Each movement’s subtitle is associated with a pair of lines from the poem. *Sunrise Ignites Daybreak’s Veil (Con forza, feroce con bravura)* opens with an introduction containing three forceful and diverse ideas presented by full orchestra: (1) a low rhythmic and percussive pedal point followed by (2) a three-note triplet figure in the brass overlaid by (3) a rapid swirling cascade of arch-like upper woodwind phrases cast in a stretto-like texture [i.e., close imitative entries]. These primary elements form the melodic, harmonic and rhythmic materials developed in the work.

“*Calliope’s Rainbow Song (Lontano [distantly])*. The rapid, arched woodwind phrases in the introduction to the first movement occur in a variety of divergent contexts throughout the work. Cast in an arch-like palindrome form, this movement begins softly, first with solo clarinet followed by a repeated piano sonority that forms the structure of a theme played by solo flute. Gradually, this theme builds to an exuberant midpoint, followed by sections that appear in reverse order, finally ending quietly and gently with solo clarinet and an ethereal violin harmonic that carries over to the third movement.

“*A Kaleidoscope Blooms (Lacrimoso [tearfully])*, a slow, expressive and elegiac movement for oboe, opens with a low, dark repeated pedal note played by piano, contrabass and gong. Sudden rapid woodwind gestures contrast and frame a succession of gradually ascending oboe phrases that accumulate ever-greater urgency as the music approaches its maximum intensity at the end.

“*Morning’s Embrace Confronts the Dawn (Lontano ... leggiero [lightly].)* The rapid and aggressive woodwind phrases in the first movement now emerge in delicate and shimmering string textures. These earlier elements prepare for a stately but urgent chorale theme that builds forcefully to the palindromic music of the third movement, the introductory materials of the first, and a final climactic conclusion. □ □”

## **Concerto for Violin, Cello, Piano and Orchestra in C major, Op. 56, “Triple Concerto” (1803-1804)** **Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**

“Everyone likes flattery; and when you come to Royalty you should lay it on with a trowel,” counseled the 19th-century British statesman Benjamin Disraeli. He would have gotten no argument from Beethoven. When Rudolph, Archduke of Austria and titled scion of the Habsburg line, turned up among Beethoven’s Viennese pupils, the young composer realized he had tapped the highest echelon of European society. Beethoven gave instruction in both piano and composition to Rudolph, who had a genuine if limited talent for music. Concerning flattery, the most important manner in which 19th-century composers could praise royalty was by dedicating one of their compositions to a noble personage. Beethoven wrote the Triple Concerto for Rudolph, who eventually became Archbishop Cardinal of Austria and remained a life-long friend and patron of the composer, and dedicated to him such important works as the Fourth and Fifth Piano Concertos, “Lebewohl” and “Hammerklavier” Sonatas, Op. 96 Violin Sonata, “Archduke” Trio, *Missa Solemnis* and *Grosse Fuge*.

The “Triple” Concerto’s first movement is a modified sonata design with a lengthy exposition and recapitulation necessitated by the many thematic repetitions. After a hushed and halting opening in the strings, the full orchestra takes up the main thematic material of the movement. The soloists enter, led, as usual throughout this Concerto, by the cello with the main theme. The second theme begins, again in the cello, with a snappy triad. Much of the remainder of the movement is given over to repetitions and figuration rather than to true motivic development. A sudden quickening of the tempo charges the

concluding measures of the movement with flashing energy. The second movement is a peaceful song for the solo strings with elaborate embroidery for the piano. The finale is a strutting *Rondo alla Polacca* in the style of the Polish polonaise.

### **Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, Op. 97, “Rhenish” (1850)** **Robert Schumann (1810-1856)**

When Robert Schumann arrived in Düsseldorf on September 2, 1850 to assume his new duties as conductor of the local orchestra and choral society, one of the things he was most anticipating in his new position was the chance to live in the heart of the Rhineland, on the legendary river itself, a region for which he had harbored great fondness throughout his life. During the three months following his move to Düsseldorf, he wrote two important works — the Cello Concerto and the “Rhenish” Symphony. The inspiration for the Symphony came from his visit to Cologne on September 29, 1850. The city and its great cathedral, still unfinished centuries after its inception, made such a powerful impression on him that he determined to write a work which, he said, “mirrors here and there something of Rhenish life.” Though he provided only the fourth of the Symphony’s five movements with a programmatic title, the second and last movements reflect the spirit and style of peasant dances, while the first shows the confidence and joy Schumann felt in his new surroundings and the third the deep contentment he found in living close to the Rhine. The fourth movement was originally titled, “In the character of an accompaniment to a solemn ceremony,” though Schumann later deleted the heading, saying that “the general impression of a work of art is more effective [than a specific extra-musical reference].” This great movement, which stands at the pinnacle of Schumann’s symphonic achievement, grew from the ritual that the composer observed at the Cologne Cathedral on November 12, 1850, when Archbishop Johannes von Geissel was elevated to the rank of Cardinal. So overwhelmed was Schumann with the magnificent service in that great church that he produced what the noted British musicologist Sir Donald Tovey later dubbed “one of the finest pieces of ecclesiastical polyphony since Bach.”

The opening movement of Schumann’s “Rhenish” Symphony launches without introduction into its main theme. This striding melody precedes a vigorous scalar motive and a lyrical second theme, all of which are combined with considerable craft in one of Schumann’s most elaborate developmental sections. The second movement resembles a slow *Ländler*, the peasant dance that was the forerunner of the waltz. The brief third movement is a songful interlude similar in spirit to the many mood paintings that abound in Schumann’s works for solo piano. The penultimate movement is the composer’s depiction of the majestic ceremony in Cologne Cathedral. The finale exudes the aura of a folk festival, as though Schumann had left the misty Gothic interior of the Cathedral to find a sun-lit square filled with carnival revelers immediately outside. At the climax of the movement, the Cathedral music again resounds in the winds and brass before the work closes with an energetic coda alluding to the theme of the first movement.