

ANNA THORVALDSDOTTIR
Icelandic composer (b. 1977)
***Aeriality* (Estimated length: 13 minutes)**

Winner of the 2012 Nordic Council Music Prize, the 2015 New York Philharmonic's Kravis Emerging Composer Award, and Lincoln Center's 2018 Emerging Artist and Martin E. Segal Award, Anna Thorvaldsdóttir has earned praise from the *New York Times* for her "seemingly boundless textural imagination" and from former New York Philharmonic Music Director Alan Gilbert as "one of the most unique and expressive compositional voices on the scene today." Over the past five years, Thorvaldsdóttir's work has been performed by a number of internationally renowned orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, Berlin Philharmonic, BBC Symphony Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Ensemble Intercontemporain, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, among others. Thorvaldsdóttir's music illuminates her unique, distinctive soundscape, which reflects inspirations from the natural world and intangible abstract experiences of reality and existence.

"*Aeriality* is a work for a large instrumental force consisting of vast sound-textures combined and contrasted with various forms of lyrical material," Thorvaldsdóttir writes in her program note. "'Aeriality' refers to the state of gliding through the air with nothing or little to hold on to – as if flying – and the music both portrays the feeling of absolute freedom gained from the lack of attachment, and the feeling of unease generated by the same circumstances. The title draws its essence from various aspects of the meaning of the word 'aerial' and refers to the visual inspiration that such a view provides. 'Aeriality' is also a play on words, combining 'aerial' and 'reality' so as to suggest two different worlds: 'reality,' i.e., the ground, and 'aerial,' the sky, or the untouchable."

Thorvaldsdóttir places *Aeriality* "on the border [between] symphonic music and sound art ... The sense of individual instruments is somewhat blurred and the orchestra becomes a single moving body, albeit at times forming layers of streaming materials that flow between different instrumental groups." At the climax, "a massive sustained ocean of quartertones slowly accumulates and is then released into a brief lyrical field that almost immediately fades out ... only to remain a shadow."

JOHN ADAMS
American composer (b. 1947, Worcester, MA)
***Harmonielehre* (Estimated length: 40 minutes)**

"'Harmonielehre' is roughly translated as 'the book of harmony' or 'treatise on harmony,' John Adams wrote in his notes for its premiere. "It is the title of a huge study of tonal harmony, part textbook, part philosophical rumination, that Arnold Schoenberg published in 1911, just as he was embarking on a voyage into unknown waters, one in which he would more or less permanently renounce the laws of tonality."

At the time Adams was studying music at Harvard (1965-72), Schoenberg's 12-tone aesthetic held absolute sway over contemporary classical music. As a young composer, Adams struggled with his conflicting feelings about Schoenberg's overwhelming influence. "Despite my respect for and even intimidation by the persona of Schoenberg, I felt it only honest to acknowledge that I profoundly disliked the sound of twelve-tone music," Adams explained. "[Schoenberg's] aesthetic was ... one in which the composer was a god of sorts, to which the listener would come as if to a sacramental altar. It was with Schoenberg that the 'agony of modern music' had been born, and it was no secret that the audience for classical music during the twentieth century was rapidly shrinking, in no small part because of the aural ugliness of so much of the new work being written."

"*Harmonielehre* ... was a statement of belief in the power of tonality at a time when I was uncertain about its future," Adams observed some years later. "I needn't have worried, as the huge success of popular music and our growing awareness of other non-Western traditions were already making it clear that tonal harmony was in no danger of demise ... While writing the piece, I felt as if I were channeling the sensibilities of those composers I loved ...

"[*Harmonielehre*] is a large three-movement work for orchestra that marries the developmental techniques of Minimalism with the harmonic and expressive world of fin-de-siècle Romanticism ... The shades of Mahler, Sibelius, Debussy, and the young Schoenberg are everywhere ...

"The first part is a seventeen-minute inverted arch form ... pounding e minor chords at the beginning and end of the movement are the musical counterparts of a dream image I'd had shortly before starting the piece. In the dream, I'd watched a gigantic supertanker take off from the surface of San Francisco Bay and thrust itself into the sky like a Saturn rocket." The second movement, "The Anfortas Wound," was inspired by Adams' interest in Carl Jung's writings about Medieval mythology, particularly the character of Anfortas, a king whose wounds could never be healed. "Anfortas symbolized a ... sickness of the soul that curses it with a feeling of impotence and depression," Adams explained. "... a long, elegiac trumpet solo floats over a delicately shifting screen of minor triads that pass like spectral shapes from one family of instruments to the other."

"Meister Eckhardt and Quackie" begins with a simple berceuse (cradlesong) that is as airy, serene and blissful as "The Anfortas Wound" is earthbound, shadowy and bleak," Adams continued. "The Zappaesque title refers to a dream I'd had shortly after the birth of our daughter, Emily, who was briefly dubbed "Quackie" during her infancy. In the dream, she rides perched on the shoulder of the Medieval mystic, Meister Eckhardt, as they hover among the heavenly bodies like figures painted on the high ceilings of old cathedrals. The tender berceuse gradually picks up speed and mass ... and culminates in a tidal wave of brass and percussion."

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

German composer (1770–1827)

Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 61 (Estimated length: 42 minutes)

Ludwig van Beethoven's only violin concerto shattered conventional notions of what a Romantic solo concerto could or should be. Instead of using the concerto as a vehicle to show off the

soloist's technique, Beethoven placed the music front and center, while also giving the soloist plenty of opportunities to display musical skills.

21-year-old Franz Clement, music director and concertmaster of the Theater an der Wien, commissioned the Violin Concerto in 1806. After the premiere, Clement suggested revisions to the solo part, which Beethoven incorporated into his revised score.

Even masterworks can be diminished by a mediocre performance. According to published accounts, Beethoven finished the concerto just two days before the premiere, which meant Clement had to sight-read the opening performance. Although it was beautiful, and staggeringly difficult, the lack of adequate rehearsal, among other factors, left the Violin Concerto with a bad reputation, which took 30 years to dissipate. 38 years after its premiere, 12-year-old violin virtuoso Joseph Joachim presented the concerto at his debut with the London Philharmonic in 1844. Joachim pored over the score, memorized the entire piece, and composed his own cadenzas in preparation. The hard work paid off; one reviewer noted, “[Joachim] is perhaps the finest violin player, not only of his age, but of his siècle [century]. He performed Beethoven's solitary concerto, which we have heard all the great performers of the last twenty years attempt, and invariably fail in ... its performance was an eloquent vindication of the master-spirit who imagined it.”

Unlike Beethoven's concertos for piano, which feature thick, dense chords and difficult scalar passages, the violin solo is graceful and lyrical. This warm expressiveness matched Clement's style of playing, which Beethoven said exemplified “an extremely delightful tenderness and purity.”

The concerto begins with five repeating notes in the timpani, an unconventional opening for any piece of music written in 1806. This simple knocking is repeated, like a gentle but persistent heartbeat, throughout the movement, and becomes a recurring motif. In another distinctive break from tradition, the soloist does not enter for a full three minutes, and then begins a *cappella* (unaccompanied), before reiterating the first theme in a high register.

The Larghetto's main melody is stately, intimate, and tranquil, and becomes an orchestral backdrop over which the solo violin traces graceful arabesques in ethereally high registers. The soloist takes center stage in this movement, playing extended cadenzas and other passages with minimal accompaniment.

The final Rondo-Allegro flows seamlessly from the Larghetto; the soloist launches immediately into a rocking melody that suggests a boat bobbing at anchor. Typical rondo format features a primary theme (A), which is interspersed with contrasting sections (B, C, D, etc.) Each of these contrasting sections departs from the (A) theme, sometimes in mood, sometimes by shifting from major to minor, or by changing keys entirely.