

RICHARD DANIELPOUR

Born 28 January 1956 in New York City.

Darkness in the Ancient Valley for Soprano and Orchestra (2011)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Nashville, 17 November 2011; Schermerhorn Symphony Center; Nashville Symphony; Giancarlo Guerrero, conductor; Hila Plitmann, soloist

THESE PERFORMANCES MARK THE PSO PREMIERE

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 29 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, three flutes, alto flute, two oboes, English horn, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, piccolo trumpet, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, piano, celesta, and strings.

Richard Danielpour, one of America's most gifted composers, was born in New York City on January 28, 1956. He completed his undergraduate education at the New England Conservatory in Boston (Bachelor of Music, 1980) and received his Master of Music (1982) and Doctor of Musical Arts (1986) degrees from the Juilliard School, where his principal teachers were Vincent Persichetti and Peter Mennin; he also studied composition with John Heiss and conducting with Benjamin Zander and Jacques Monod. Danielpour trained as a pianist with Lorin Hollander, Veronica Jochum, Theodore Lettvin and Gabriel Chodos, and appeared as soloist in the premiere of his First Piano Concerto with the Caracas Philharmonic in 1981. From 1984 to 1988, he taught at the College of New Rochelle and Marymount Manhattan College; he is currently on the faculties of the Manhattan School of Music (since 1993) and the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia (since 1997). At the invitation of Leonard Bernstein, Danielpour served as guest composer at both the 1989 Festival of the Academy of Santa Cecilia in Rome and the 1989 Schleswig-Holstein Festival in West Germany. He has subsequently fulfilled residencies with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, Pacific Symphony Orchestra, Nashville Symphony, Van Cliburn Foundation, Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, Marlboro Music Festival, Saratoga Music Festival and Berklee College of Music in Boston; in 2002, he held the Alberto Vilar Fellowship and Residency at the Berlin Academy in Germany. Among Danielpour's other distinctions are grants and fellowships from the Guggenheim, Rockefeller, Barlow, Vollmer, Astral and Djerassi foundations, the Bearns Prize of Columbia University, the Charles Ives Fellowship, a Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, an ASCAP Award, residencies at the MacDowell Colony, Yaddo and the American Academy in Rome, a Jerome Foundation Award, and a Rockefeller Foundation grant for a residency in Bellagio, Italy.

Among the many organizations that have commissioned works from Richard Danielpour are the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (*Pastime*, inspired by the lives of baseball stars Josh Gibson, Jackie Robinson and Hank Aaron; *A Woman's Life*, with texts by Maya Angelou; and *Darkness in the Ancient Valley*), New Jersey Symphony (*Celestial Nights*, written for the opening of Prudential Hall in Newark in 1997, and *Apparitions*), New York Philharmonic (*Toward the Splendid City* and *Through the Ancient Valley*), Philadelphia Orchestra (Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, "A Fool's Paradise"), National Symphony (*Voices of Remembrance*), San Francisco Symphony (*Song of Remembrance*, Symphony No. 2 and Cello Concerto No. 1, for Yo-Yo Ma), New York Chamber Symphony (*Metamorphosis*), Baltimore Symphony Orchestra (*The Awakened Heart* and *Rocking the Cradle*), Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center (Piano Quintet and *Sonnets to Orpheus Book I*), Absolut Vodka (Piano Concerto No. 2) and Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival (*Sonnets to Orpheus Book II*). He has also written music for Jessye Norman, John Aler, Emanuel Ax, Dawn Upshaw, Kurt Ollman, Christopher O'Riley, William Sharp, the Emerson and Muir quartets, and the Saturday Brass Quintet. In May 2005, Detroit's Michigan Opera Theatre premiered Danielpour's *Margaret Garner*, starring Denyce Graves in the title role, with a libretto by Nobel and Pulitzer Prize-winner Toni Morrison based on the same true story of a fugitive Kentucky slave who killed her infant daughter and then tried to kill herself when faced with the prospect of returning to slavery that Morrison recounted in her 1987 novel *Beloved*. *Margaret Garner* has received subsequent productions in Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Charlotte and New York.

Richard Danielpour wrote, "*Darkness in the Ancient Valley* is a symphony in five movements, commissioned by the Pittsburgh and Nashville Symphonies. The fifth movement, which includes a soprano voice, was written for Hila Plitmann. The text comes from an English translation of a Rūmī poem (Divan 1559), and involves a woman who refuses to retaliate against her husband, or lover, in spite of his abusive and cruel behavior. The voice of this woman is for me a metaphor for the voice of the people of Iran who have endured much under the present regime, but who nonetheless refuse to retaliate with violence.

"This thirty-minute work was inspired by recent events in Iran, in particular the way its people, especially the women, have been brutalized. This is of particular interest to me because my parents were born in Iran and my family lineage on both sides goes back for well over twenty generations. Born in the United States, I spent a year in Iran (1963–1964), and although I was just a child, I remember much about that year. In addition to learning Farsi, that time laid the bedrock of my understanding about the world that deepened as I matured.

"Sadly, the experience in Iran was for various reasons an unpleasant one, and I had fallen in love with Western music and culture, so as I grew into adulthood I kept my Persian heritage at a distance. In recent years, however, I have become engrossed in this ancestral legacy and deeply interested in the way the people of Iran and the whole of the Middle East are pleading to be heard in the face of oppressive regimes.

"The work is in its way a kind of secular liturgy (Lamentation – Desecration – Benediction – Profanation – Consecration), with much of the music drawing on sources stemming from Persian folk melodies and Sufi rhythms. I remember my mother listening to Persian records when I was little. I appropriated my memory of that music when I wrote *Darkness*. It's not an accurate, note-perfect representation of the music I heard, but I think it's more interesting because it is more personal. While this is clearly the music of a 21st-century American composer, it is the music of an American composer with a Middle Eastern memory."

Finale: Consecration

Text by Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī (13th century).

English translation by Rafiq Abdullah from *Words of Paradise*, with permission from Frances Lincoln Publishers, Ltd., London

Again with burning lips I swore
An oath in last night's heart,
I confess with a sigh again I swore
An oath on your ruby blood.
I swore that I would fix
My longing gaze on your chaste smile.
I swore that I would not flinch
Even if you struck me with a blade,
My faith in you is green and strong,
It would rise again unscathed. I suffer,
My heart is torn from your breast
Which none can cure but you.
You may willfully cast me into fire
But I am an ingot glowing for you.
I swear I am dust, dry powder
Rising from your path, as hapless atom,
A circling would held by your gravity
I turn and turn in your wake.