



AMERICAN CLASSICS



AARON JAY KERNIS

Color Wheel

Symphony No. 4 'Chromelodeon'

Nashville Symphony • Giancarlo Guerrero



Aaron Jay Kernis (b. 1960)

Color Wheel • Symphony No. 4 'Chromelodeon'

The two works on this recording share much in common: from the virtuosic, percussion-rich approach to orchestral writing to the fundamental use of variation as a unifying and essential creative compositional approach. Though written more than 15 years apart, the two works are like related family members – one brash and exuberant, the other more serious and pensive in intent, though no less bold in manner.

Color Wheel (2001)

Color Wheel was composed especially for The Philadelphia Orchestra's opening concerts in Verizon Hall at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts in 2001, and in celebration of the orchestra's centennial. It was premiered at the grand opening of that hall with former music director Wolfgang Sawallisch.

The honor of being asked to compose the first music played by The Philadelphia Orchestra in my hometown in the newest of concert halls led me to conceive of a "miniature" concerto for orchestra which treats it as a large and dynamic body of sound and color. The work features the virtuosity of the orchestra's larger sections (winds, strings, brass, percussion) and to a great extent focuses on distinct groups of instruments separately and in combination rather than on individual soloists.

There were many experiences that helped to inspire the process of writing this piece. Long before starting it I met with architect Rafael Viñoly and acoustician Russell Johnson to learn about the development of the new hall. Shortly before that I'd completed an ambient sound score for the new Rose Center for Earth and Space at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and was fascinated by the challenge of writing for a specific acoustical environment. Initially I'd intended that *Color Wheel* would explore specific spatial characteristics of this new hall. As I spent a good deal of time re-familiarizing myself with that splendid orchestra, I vividly remembered many life-changing afternoons and evenings in my early

teens hearing the orchestra at the Academy of Music. I eventually decided to concentrate on exploring the unique qualities of the orchestra itself, employing a wide array of contrasts in dynamics and sounds to embolden the ear to discover this new space in what I hoped would be a vivid new musical experience.

Two visual elements have influenced *Color Wheel*. Color wheels are tools used by artists and designers that teach color relationships by organizing colors in a circle so you can visualize how they relate to each other. Most color wheels show primary colors and myriads of related hues. I feel that this piece concentrates on the bolder contrasts of basic primary colors. (I sometimes see colors when I compose, and the qualities of certain chords do elicit specific sensations in me – for example, I see the A major that ends this work as bright yellow.) I've also been fascinated with Sufi whirling dervishes and their ecstatic spinning. This work may have some ecstatic moments, but it is full of tension, continuous energy and drive.

Harmonically, *Color Wheel* explores a wide gamut of colors, from huge overtone-derived chords, strongly contrasting levels of consonance and dissonance, and occasional touches of jazz harmony and syncopation.

The work opens with a brief, bold, chorale-like introduction which introduces many of the piece's basic musical elements that will be varied later on. These opening harmonies and vital four- and eight-note motifs in the horns and trumpets reappear later in many guises. The boldness of the opening chords is contrasted with the soft, liquid harmonies and rising lines in the strings. *Color Wheel* then changes character suddenly, beginning again with a contrasting lighter tone as a *scherzo* in the winds. From then on the work unfolds as a series of variations on the extremely malleable opening ideas. In fact, the work is a series of inventions on those initial harmonies and motifs.

After reaching a climactic point in its spinning, a variation of the slower music returns, passing rising melodic lines between sections of the strings. The faster music returns gradually in a series of more compressed

variations and re-examinations of elements from before. The work builds to a whirling high point and closes with a return of the opening chorale idea in its grandest harmonic context and most fully realized melodic shape.

Color Wheel is dedicated with love to my wife, Evelyn Luest.

Symphony No. 4 'Chromelodeon' (2018)

Writing symphonies can seem anachronistic in 2018, but to me (as Mahler says) they contain the entire world. It is the totality of the musical worlds of Mahler, Sibelius, and Haydn (plus Messiaen) that speak most urgently to me. In each of my four symphonies I've pushed past boundaries of what I've explored in my work up to that point.

"Chromelodeon" seems like a nonsensical word. The only instances of its use that I've found come as the name of a microtonal instrument (36 tones per octave) invented by the great American eccentric composer/hobo Harry Partch, and of a cult progressive rock band in the late 60s. But for me it has a particular meaning: "Chroma-," relating to the chromatic scale of notes, or intensity of/or produced with color; "Melodi-," melody, a succession of tones that produce a distinct phrase or idea; and "-eon," one who performs. In other words, chromatic, colorful, melodic music performed by an orchestra. This new symphony is created out of musical elements, not images or stories, though I would not be surprised if the influence of living in the chaos of the world today – at a "molecular" emotive level – didn't play a part in its creation.

The first movement, *Out of Silence*, is the most continuously chromatic, characterized by shifting 6–9 note chords first heard in bells, and later, strings, followed by a pensive tune first heard in the viola. It unfolds from an uneasy yet frequently contemplative sound world that grows in drama and intensity, and through many variations in texture. Before beginning the movement I read Thich Nhat Hanh's *Silence* and thought again (after many years) about John Cage's essential book of essays also of that name. I've only begun on a journey suggested by those readings, and very possibly the experience of writing this symphony is part of that.

Chromaticism and consonance coexist side by side (or even simultaneously) more clearly in the other movements. After a dense, hectoring chorale opening, the second, *Thorn Rose I Weep Freedom (after Handel)* exposes a melody vaguely influenced by Handel with an antique-sounding string quartet which is soon opposed by shifting, chromatic chord clouds, and leads onward to ten or so mostly short variations. The longest and most languid variation is for strings alone, and leads to a varied return of the opening chorale and final variation of the tune which is destroyed by wave-like outbursts. Finally, to close the movement, part of the original Handel tune appears, distorted and broken. (The title of this movement comes from the central words in the text of two versions of the famous and deeply touching aria *Laschia ch'io pianga* from the operas *Armida* and *Rinaldo*.)

Armida (1707)

Leave the thorn, take the rose;
you go searching for your pain.

Rinaldo (1705)

Let me weep over my cruel fate,
And that I long for freedom!

The final, and shortest movement, *Fanfare Chromelodia*, makes the coexistence of opposing forces even clearer, placing ringing brass exhortations, repetitive little "musical machines," and wide-ranging disjunct melodies appear side by side, with a final slow chorale placed below fast runs and nearly ecstatic melodic figures that end boldly and unexpectedly in a ringing open fifth.

Symphony No. 4 'Chromelodeon' (2018) was commissioned by the New England Conservatory of Music, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of its founding, for its orchestra, Hugh Wolff, director; the Nashville Symphony, Giancarlo Guerrero, music director; and the Bellingham Festival of Music, Michael Palmer, artistic director, with the support of Anacrusis Productions Ltd.

Aaron Jay Kernis

Nashville Symphony



One of Tennessee's largest and longest-running nonprofit performing arts organizations, the Nashville Symphony has been an integral part of the Music City sound since 1946. Led by music director Giancarlo Guerrero and president and CEO Alan D. Valentine, the 83-member ensemble performs more than 160 concerts annually, with a focus on contemporary American orchestral music through collaborations with composers including Jennifer Higdon, Terry Riley, Aaron Jay Kernis, Michael Daugherty, John Harbison, Jonathan Leshnoff, and the late Christopher Rouse. The orchestra is equally renowned for its commissioning and recording projects with Nashville-based artists including bassist Edgar Meyer, banjoist Béla Fleck, singer-songwriter Ben Folds, electric bassist Victor Wooten, and composer Kip Winger. The Nashville Symphony is one of the most active recording orchestras in the US, with more than 30 releases. Together, these recordings have earned a total of 25 GRAMMY Award nominations and 13 GRAMMY Awards, including two for Best Orchestral Performance. Schermerhorn Symphony Center is home to the Nashville Symphony and widely regarded as one of the finest concert halls in the US.

nashvillesymphony.org

Giancarlo Guerrero



Six-time GRAMMY Award-winning conductor Giancarlo Guerrero is music director of the Nashville Symphony and the NFM Wrocław Philharmonic in Poland, as well as principal guest conductor of the Gulbenkian Orchestra in Lisbon, Portugal. He has championed contemporary American music through numerous commissions, recordings and performances with the Nashville Symphony, presenting eleven world premieres of works by Jonathan Leshnoff, Michael Daugherty, Terry Riley, and others. As part of this commitment, he helped guide the creation of Nashville Symphony's Composer Lab & Workshop initiative. In North America, Guerrero has appeared with the orchestras of Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Toronto, and the National Symphony Orchestra. He has developed a strong international profile working with the Frankfurt Radio Symphony, Brussels Philharmonic, Deutsche Radio Philharmonie, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra. An advocate for music education, he works with the Curtis Institute of Music, Colburn School, the National Youth Orchestra (NYO2) in New York, and the Nashville Symphony's Accelerando program, which provides intensive music education to promising young students from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

giancarlo-guerrero.com

Aaron Jay Kernis



Pulitzer, GRAMMY, and Grawemeyer Award-winning composer Aaron Jay Kernis is one of America's most performed and honored composers. He has been commissioned by the world's pre-eminent performing organizations and artists, from the New York Philharmonic to the Symphonies of San Francisco, Dallas, Detroit, Toronto, and Melbourne; the Walt Disney Company to the Rose Center for Earth and Space at New York's American Museum of Natural History; and soloists Renée Fleming, James Ehnes, Joshua Bell, Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, and Sharon Isbin. Kernis was the recipient of Northwestern University's Nemmers Prize, and is a member of the American Classical Music Hall of Fame and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He is the workshop director of the Nashville Symphony's Composer Lab & Workshop; was new music adviser to the Minnesota Orchestra, with which he co-founded and directed its Composer Institute for 15 years; and serves on Yale's composition faculty. Kernis has conducted in cities including Rome, Washington, and Portland. Leta Miller's biography of Kernis and his work was published in 2014 by the University of Illinois Press. His music can be heard on the Nonesuch, Naxos, Signum, Koch, Argo, and Onyx record labels, among others.

www.aaronjaykernis.com

Aaron Jay
KERNIS
(b. 1960)

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| 1 | Color Wheel (2001) | 22:30 |
| | Symphony No. 4 | |
| | 'Chromelodeon' (2018) | 29:36 |
| 2 | I. Out of Silence | 11:20 |
| 3 | II. Thorn Rose Weep Freedom
(after Handel) | 12:17 |
| 4 | III. Fanfare Chromelodia | 5:50 |

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

Nashville Symphony
Giancarlo Guerrero

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AMERICAN CLASSICS

Pulitzer Prize recipient and GRAMMY award-winner Aaron Jay Kernis is one of America's most performed composers. Both works on this album exemplify his creative approach to orchestral composition, sharing elements in common, such as virtuoso percussion writing and the use of variation form. *Color Wheel* is an exuberant miniature concerto for orchestra with a wide array of contrasts, while *Symphony No. 4 'Chromelodeon'* explores the coexistence of opposing musical forces to powerful, pensive, and touching effect.

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Playing
Time:
52:13