ANDY AKIHO

BENEATH LIGHTED COFFERS
CONCERTO FOR STEEL PANS & ORCHESTRA

DAVID DANZMAYR
OREGON SYMPHONY

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ANDY AKIHO BENEATH LIGHTED COFFERS

Beneath Lighted Coffers, commissioned by the National Symphony Orchestra, was written for one of Andy Akiho's music idols, the Trinidadian steel pan virtuoso Liam Teague. Its five movements were inspired by the Pantheon in Rome, a structure Andy came to know intimately after being awarded the 2014 Luciano Berio Rome Prize in Composition by the American Academy. Akiho spent most of 2015 living in Rome, where he visited the Pantheon almost daily. "I've never been in such awe of an architectural feat," he enthused. "The energy this building has, there's nothing like it."

Akiho included the following notes in the score for *Beneath Lighted Coffers*:

I. PORTICO

"Inspired by the Pantheon's portico, the entryway that one sees walking up a once narrow path to the building. The portico is inviting and unassuming, and the grandeur of the dome cannot be seen from afar, creating a somewhat unexpected experience in the rotunda. What captivates me most about the Greek-inspired entrance are the enormous, monolithic, Corinthian granite columns that were shipped from Egypt."

II. TWENTY-EIGHT

"The architecture mirrors the 140 trapezoidal coffers, or sunken panels, geometrically arranged in five concentric circles of twenty-eight in the Pantheon's concrete dome. The coffers create an optical illusion that draws the observer towards the dome's center, and they look different depending on the light of day streaming in through the oculus. Because the

coffers are sunken voids within the concrete, they are also a critical part of the architectural structure of the large domed ceiling; they evoke history, time, lightness, and possibility. Musically, I derived the melodic material of this movement from a 28-note palindromic scale that spans the entire range of the orchestra, and the structure of the movement is built in five groups of 140 beats, often sub-divided into five groups of 28."

III. OCULUS

"The many different skies that appear through the oculus continually change the way the Pantheon is experienced. They inspired this central movement, whose music comes from a more personal and intuitive place, mimicking the unpredictable clouds and light variances above and through the exposed sky in the oculus. The oculus also acts as an architectural keystone, although it is a purely empty space that has held the entire unreinforced concrete dome together for nearly two thousand years. Like the oculus, this middle movement is central to the structure of the entire composition."

IV. CORELLI

"The brief fourth movement drew inspiration from the Pantheon's marbled floor patterns and the music of the Italian Baroque composer and violinist Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713), who is buried in the Pantheon. I have always been a fan of Corelli's chamber music, and I pay homage to him by alluding to the 'Grave' movement from his Concerto Grosso No. 3. The original lays out a melodic line of 45 notes for the violin, which I associated with the 45 circles of the Pantheon's patterned marbled floor, imagining rain falling from the oculus above, shifting these notes and timbres around before disappearing in the drainage system beneath the floor."

V. PERMANENCE

"Writers and historians often use adjectives like 'permanence' and 'progeny' to describe the Pantheon because it is the best-preserved and most influential building from ancient Rome: it has miraculously endured numerous years, storms, fires, wars, governments, barbarians, and popes. The Pantheon brings together the past and the future, and I am very grateful to have had an opportunity to experience the history of the building and its architectural greatness while writing this piece in the present day."

CONCERTO FOR STEEL PANS & ORCHESTRA

Akiho's Concerto for Steel Pans & Orchestra is an early work, originally written for and performed by the composer and the Yale Philharmonia in 2011. The round metallic shimmer of the steel pans weaves in and out of the orchestra's fuller textures, creating an inviting and unfamiliar sonic palette. Akiho's use of low-range instruments – bass clarinet, contrabassoon, trombone, and tuba in particular – provides a strong contrasting anchor to the rippling treble range of the pans. The music is, by turns, violently energetic, authoritative, reflective, and dreamy.

Akiho writes, "The steel pan was the catalyst that led me to become a composer. I was first introduced to the instrument at the University of South Carolina ... after I finished my studies, I made four extensive visits to Trinidad to immerse myself in the culture of the music, and I returned several times to study and perform with two pan pioneers, Len 'Boogsie' Sharpe and Ray Holman. In 2003, I moved to the Caribbean community in Brooklyn, NY. While there, I studied and performed with

pan innovators Scipio Sargeant, Eddie Quarless, Clive Bradley, and Freddy Harris III. Their positive influences ultimately led me to the Manhattan School of Music in 2007, where I began to compose new art music that often integrated the steel pan in combination with traditional classical instruments.

“My goal with this piece ... is to create sonorous textures that explore the frontiers of the instrument. I often find that compositions incorporating the steel pan outside of the pure Calypso and Soca genres use the instrument as a novelty gimmick without realizing its full potential. I believe that the steel pan is an extremely versatile instrument capable of producing an extraordinarily unique timbre that creates a homogenous orchestral texture.”

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ANDY AKIHO

Andy Akiho is a “trailblazing” (*Los Angeles Times*) Pulitzer Prize finalist and seven-time GRAMMY®-nominated composer whose bold works unravel intricate and unexpected patterns while surpassing preconceived boundaries of classical music. Called “increasingly in-demand” by *The New York Times*, Akiho has earned international acclaim for his large-scale works that emphasize the natural theatricality of live performance. He is the only composer to be nominated for a GRAMMY® in the Best Contemporary Classical Composition category in 2022, 2023, and 2024.

As a pannist, Akiho has a deeply physical relationship with playing, which undoubtedly informs his compositions. His style is further shaped by his nontraditional path as a composer: having spent most of his 20s playing steel pan by ear in Trinidad and New York City, Akiho only began writing music at age 28. Still, these social and musical roots remain foundational. Akiho frequently composes into the late hours at coffee shops, nightclubs, and restaurants, taking breaks to get to know those around him. Similarly, Akiho develops relationships with his collaborators, as he writes for people, not instruments.

Akiho was born in 1979 in Columbia, SC, and is currently based in Portland, OR and New York City.

LEARN MORE AT ANDYAKIHO.COM.

DAVID DANZMAYR

As the Jean Vollum Music Director for the Oregon Symphony, David Danzmayr has established himself as a capable and visionary leader. He has a demonstrated commitment to innovation and to featuring works by composers from underrepresented populations.

Danzmayr is widely regarded as one of the most talented and exciting conductors to emerge from his generation. He received his musical training at the University Mozarteum in Salzburg where, after initially studying piano, he went on to study conducting in the class of Dennis Russell Davies. He has won prizes at some of the world’s most prestigious conducting and has quickly become a sought after guest conductor for orchestras around the globe.

In recent years Danzmayr has demonstrated his prowess as an interpreter of a wide array of repertoire. Danzmayr stands at the helm of the versatile and innovative ProMusica Chamber Orchestra in Columbus and has previously served as Chief Conductor of the Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra, Music Director of the Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra of Chicago, and as the Assistant Conductor of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra in Glasgow.

LEARN MORE AT DANZMAYR.EU.

THE OREGON SYMPHONY

The multi-GRAMMY Award-nominated Oregon Symphony, led by Jean Vollum Music Director David Danzmayr, serves hundreds of thousands of people annually through concerts, education initiatives, and community programs. With a 129-year legacy, it is the sixth oldest orchestra in the United States, and oldest in the Western United States. Its home venue is the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall in downtown Portland’s Cultural District.

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ORCHESTRA GUIDE

*Guest Musician

^Not heard on recording

**Principal on Beneath Lighted Coffers

°Principal on Concerto for Steel Pans & Orchestra

RECORDING

Beneath Lighted Coffers, recorded from live performances on April 29, 30 & May 1, 2023.

Concerto for Steel Pans & Orchestra, recorded from live performances on October 5, 6 & 7, 2024.

All recordings at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall in Portland, Oregon.

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