

Foreshadowing the Season: The Quad City Symphony Premieres Michael Torke's "Oracle"

Written by Frederick Morden

Tuesday, 17 September 2013 12:43

- [Buy Cheap DAZ Carrara 8 Pro MAC](#)
- [Buy OEM Corel Paint it](#)
- [Buy Lynda.com - Create Your First Online Store with Drupal Commerce \(en\)](#)
- [Download ABest Video to AppleTV 3GP SWF Converter](#)
- [Buy Cheap GFI MailArchiver 6.0](#)
- [Buy Adobe Flex Builder Professional 3 \(en\)](#)
- [Buy OEM Adobe Prelude CC \(Full LifeTime License\)](#)
- [Download Adobe ColdFusion 9 Enterprise edition MAC \(64-bit\)](#)
- [Download Corel Motion Studio 3D](#)
- [Discount - Nero 7 Vision Xtra](#)
- [Discount - Outlook 2010 All-in-One For Dummies](#)



In February, the Quad City Symphony contacted a representative of Michael Torke with the hope of commissioning a short season-opening piece from the well-known American composer. It was a long shot – a request with a turnaround time of a few months instead of the typical year or two between commissioning and the orchestra's first rehearsal with the completed music.

But Torke was looking for a summer project, a short work to add to his library of titles. "I love those drop-everything-now projects," Torke said in a phone interview in July. "The Quad City thing seemed perfect." With the logistics in place, what remained was finding an appropriate artistic concept and completing the piece before rehearsals in September.

Foreshadowing the Season: The Quad City Symphony Premieres Michael Torke's "Oracle"

Written by Frederick Morden

Tuesday, 17 September 2013 12:43

Oracle was composed in a burst of creative energy from mid-June to mid-July. "I think this is going to be one of the best pieces I've ever written," Torke predicted the day after the five-minute composition was completed. "I am so jazzed up about it. It starts off with this kind of 'Pines of Rome' thing, with one variation of the melody warm and juicy, and another noble."

He said the short duration of the commission allowed him to "obsess over the orchestration, help the audience focus on what I'm doing with the music, where every detail is clearly heard." Torke described the result as "very thematic, based on melodic intervals" as opposed to a 12-tone row, or static tones with varying rhythms. Fundamentally, he wanted the music "grounded in American sounds, [similar to] the pandiatonicism" found in the music of Aaron Copland.

When asked about the title, Torke said, "Titles are something I agonize over. They can help a piece live or die." As a springboard to naming the work, Torke imagined "the audience just settling into their seats and the conductor walks out ... the opening piece of the concert and the season." Inspired by the Oracle of Delphi, the ancient Greek priestess known for her prophecies, Torke realized his mission was musically foreshadowing both the concert and the season.

Torke also said color informs the title. He experiences music as a synesthete, someone who, in his case, "involuntarily sees colors" when he hears music. In *Oracle*, Torke said he "sees an off-white, creamy color ... travertine" that recalls marble – another link to ancient Greece, but also to the rock's use in concert halls across the country. The composer originally considered using "Travertine" as the title but rejected the idea because "it didn't really tell you the emotions involved in the music."

While Torke's music will debut in the Quad Cities with the world premiere of *Oracle* on October 5 in the Adler Theatre and October 6 in Augustana College's Centennial Hall, it is also becoming more familiar to orchestras and audiences around the world.

Archipelago

was commissioned for the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing, China, his opera

Pop'pea

for the Theatre du Chatelet in Paris, and

An American Abroad

for the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. His American premieres include

Four Seasons

with the New York Philharmonic and

Javelin

Foreshadowing the Season: The Quad City Symphony Premieres Michael Torke's "Oracle"

Written by Frederick Morden

Tuesday, 17 September 2013 12:43

for the 1996 Olympics, and he collaborated for five years with the New York City Ballet.

His album *Tahiti* won Best Instrumental Album in the 11th Independent Music Awards, and the boxed set of Torke's music (released on his own label) was named one of the top classical albums of 2003 by the *New York Times*, which wrote that he is "a master orchestrator whose shimmering timbral palette makes him the Ravel of his generation." Summarizing his recorded musical output, the American Record Guide wrote, "Torke is our Copland; the rare composer who combines staggering technical chops, a rigorous and uncompromising approach to the working-out of material, and the guts to shape that material into music with broad appeal and without irony."

The *Los Angeles Times* said that "Torke practically defined post-minimalism, a music in which eclectic young composers utilize the repetitive structures of a previous generation [specifically the minimalism of composers such as Philip Glass] to incorporate musical techniques from both the classical tradition and the contemporary pop world." Torke is comfortable with the post-minimalist label, and his work exemplifies the movement's fidelity to the central role of pitch, its wide-ranging emotional effect, and its ability to absorb a cross-cultural mixture of styles, from Balinese gamelan to African polyrhythm to American pop, jazz, and rock.

"While some think of my music as atmospheric, and certainly the minimalistic aspects suggests this, I nevertheless think of my music as more a derivation of a Bach-like approach," Torke explained. Similar to Bach's use of a fixed melody in his fugues, Torke challenges the audience to "follow what I'm doing pitch- and counterpoint-wise all the way through," he said.

And, like Bach, it is the intellectual construction – "the elegance of the math" – that Torke believes gives his music durability for orchestras and audiences. If you "manage to get both, that emotional excitement whetted with an interior elegance of the math, you have something that will last beyond," he said.

"People think you either have highly intellectual music that is hard to listen to, or you have really frothy music that doesn't have any backbone. I say no, that's not true," he added, citing Mozart as the best example of the "frothiest, most fun music ever with great math behind it. The point I'm making with my own music is that they can both coexist in contemporary music as well."

Foreshadowing the Season: The Quad City Symphony Premieres Michael Torke's "Oracle"

Written by Frederick Morden

Tuesday, 17 September 2013 12:43

For more information on the Quad City Symphony Orchestra, visit QCSymphony.com . For more information on Michael Torke, visit MichaelTorke.com

.

Frederick Morden is a retired orchestra-music director, conductor, composer, arranger, educator, and writer who has served on the executive board of the Conductors Guild. He can be reached at f.morden@mchsi.com .