



JONATHAN LESHNOFF
SYMPHONY NO.4 "HEICHALOS"
(featuring the VIOLINS of HOPE)
GUITAR CONCERTO ♦ STARBURST

JASON VIEAUX, GUITAR
NASHVILLE SYMPHONY
GIANCARLO GUERRERO

Symphony No. 4 “Heichalos” ♦ Guitar Concerto ♦ Starburst

Distinguished by *The New York Times* as “a leader of contemporary American lyricism,” composer Jonathan Leshnoff is renowned for his music’s striking harmonies, structural complexity and powerful themes. Leshnoff’s works have been performed by more than 60 orchestras worldwide, including commissions from Carnegie Hall, the Atlanta, Baltimore, Dallas, Kansas City, and Nashville Symphony orchestras, the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, and the IRIS and Philadelphia orchestras. He is a professor of music at Towson University, Maryland.

“My essential aesthetic has always been that I have to communicate and take people on a journey,” Leshnoff says. “Where listeners decide to go, what they do with the music they hear, is of course going to be based on their own lives and what is inside them.”

Leshnoff believes that the symphony and concerto have endured “because they are time-tested forms that have shown they work. But I believe in pouring fresh wine into these old flasks, to shed new light so there’s something fresh: in harmony and expression and also in the architectural form.”

Jewish spirituality has provided an inexhaustible source of inspiration for the composer, who was commissioned to write his *Symphony No. 4* for the Violins of Hope. This extraordinary collection of stringed instruments, which were played by Jewish musicians during the

Holocaust, have been painstakingly restored by Israeli luthiers Amnon and Avshi Weinstein.

“The root of Judaism is the teaching and philosophy of monotheism and Jewish ethics,” the composer says. “This is what has kept the Jewish people together through all the millennia of persecutions. I see the Violins of Hope as the physical embodiment of this Jewish survival. And I see my symphony as a representation of the spiritual/ethical embodiment of this Jewish survival.”

The *Symphony No. 4*’s subtitle, “Heichalos” provides the key to this spiritual dimension, which in turn shapes the work’s formal design. This Hebrew word refers literally to “rooms” and also to an ancient Jewish mystical text, *Heichalos Rabbasai*. “Written approximately 2,000 years ago, it is one of a few texts that explicitly describes the way to attain a mystical encounter with the higher worlds,” Leshnoff explains. “Through the means outlined in the text, the initiate meditates himself into ‘rooms,’ where he advances, room by room, to a communion with the Divine. The Rabbis who were qualified to teach and attempt this type of meditation have long ago ceased to walk the face of this Earth.”

The composer describes his *Symphony No. 4* as “a musical depiction of the initiate’s travels through these rooms.” The music proceeds in two parts of



JONATHAN
LESHNOFF

SYMPHONY NO.4
“HEICHALOS”
(featuring the
VIOLINS of HOPE)

GUITAR CONCERTO
STARBURST

8.559809

roughly equal lengths. These should not be thought of as “movements” in the usual sense, because the two parts have such distinctive characters, though they are connected by the arresting theme stated majestically at the outset.

Part I refers to the opening, and a later chapter of the *Heichalos* text: “When one enters the [first] room, he knows everything that will happen in the terrestrial world ... when he is on a higher level, he sees each person’s secret deeds ... when he is on yet a higher level, he is separated from mankind; anyone who tries to harm him is rebuked by a Heavenly tribunal ... and when he approaches the seventh room, the angelic *Chayos* glare at him each with their 512 eyes, each stare like a flash of lightning.”

The overall character of the music here, says Leshnoff, is of a darker hue than anything he had hitherto written. The composer deploys thick orchestration. “This does not have the lightness and nuanced touch of my other works.”

In contrast, Leshnoff characterizes *Part II* as “a love song between humanity and God. There’s a lot more nuance and detail, which is heard in the string writing, with the added sonorities of harp and soft percussion. The audience should feel as if suddenly they have been pushed from one extreme to the other.” Leshnoff’s score appends brief quotes from Chapter 28 of the *Heichalos* text, which glorifies various qualities of “the One who lives forever.”

It is here that the Violins of Hope come into the foreground: the strings alone play extended, slow, quasi-Mahlerian lines, and following a massive climax for full orchestra later in the movement, they again take center stage at the end.

At the beginning of *Part II*, the composer has written the question “Who do you love?” into the score. At the end, he adds: “Where are they now?” Leshnoff explains that he has been exploring how to make “the transitions from music to enter into spiritual realms.” Thus, the start of *Part II* is a measure of notated rest with this first question held as long as the conductor is inclined: “I want the musicians to meditate on that phrase and to start thinking about who they love. Then, at the end, what has happened to them – are they dead or alive, part of your life?”

The *Guitar Concerto* was spawned from Leshnoff’s relationship with the Baltimore Symphony under Marin Alsop. Yet for all his experience as a concerto composer (he has written twelve so far), he recalls being surprised when he was commissioned to write one for guitar. “I never could have predicted I’d take on that challenge. I don’t play the guitar myself, and it’s notoriously difficult to write for the instrument unless you play it.”

Leshnoff immersed himself in studying the literature. A key reason why there are relatively few concertos for the instrument, he suggests, has to do with the peculiarities of guitar tuning and the guitar’s



**JONATHAN
LESHNOFF**

SYMPHONY NO.4
“HEICHALOS”
(featuring the
VIOLINS of HOPE)

GUITAR CONCERTO
STARBURST

8.559809

inherently soft acoustical nature. “Every instrument has a few blackout zones where it won’t be heard with an orchestra playing alongside it, but with the guitar you have to be incredibly careful across the whole range.”

The *Guitar Concerto* opens with an ascent and a gradual descent that recurs later in the first movement, as well as at the end of the second and third movements, providing a sense of coherence throughout the work. Leshnoff describes the opening movement as the most overtly “formal” in terms of the concerto model. “I let the orchestra reflect and be subordinate, almost in the sense of listening to what the guitar is doing and mirroring this back – like a reflecting pool.”

Leshnoff indicates that there is also a level of spiritual reflection in the *Guitar Concerto*. This is evident above all in the second of its three movements, which relies on a metaphorical connection between the music and the Jewish concept of *hod*, or humility. In Jewish thought, *hod* describes the awareness of one’s smallness in the universe and an appreciation of others. The Hebrew letter “*vav*” (ו) is associated with *hod* – hence the subtitle of the movement, in which the orchestra is reduced to violins, harp, and percussion.

“In a deeper sense, a state of humility means I’m taking my essence and I’m quashing it, subjugating it to the fact that I acknowledge others. Humility suggests there is something greater than one’s personal perspective. In

terms of the music in the second movement, a guitar is a very soft and gentle instrument. The only way to allow it to speak is to have the orchestra minimize itself so that the guitar’s natural essence bubbles up to the top.”

The finale counterbalances this intensely beautiful, meditative music with a dramatically contrasting attitude imbued with a Spanish flavor, playing off one of the guitar’s many cultural associations. “As I was composing it,” Leshnoff says, “I listened to the music and followed wherever it was taking me. It’s meant to suggest a spirit of fun and dance.”

Starburst, the brief work that closes this recording, immediately gave Jonathan Leshnoff’s career a meteoric boost after its premiere in 2010 and continues to be performed by scores of orchestras as an energetic concert-opener. He remarks that a compact piece is more challenging to write than longer-form compositions, which give a composer “more time to develop, to amplify and present contrasts.” A related challenge, he says, was to write a piece “with energy and excitement while exploring new corners and avenues,” which he successfully set out to do in *Starburst*.

Thomas May



**JONATHAN
LESHNOFF**

SYMPHONY NO.4
“HEICHALOS”
(featuring the
VIOLINS of HOPE)

GUITAR CONCERTO
STARBURST

8.559809

Jason Vieaux

Jason Vieaux has an extensive discography that includes the 2015 Best Classical Instrumental Solo GRAMMY® Award winner, *Play*. Performance highlights include the Caramoor Festival as artist-in-residence, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, the Teatro Colón, Buenos Aires, the Royal Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, New York's 92nd Street Y, and the Ravinia Festival. Frequent collaborators include the Escher String Quartet, harpist Yolanda Kondonassis, violinist Anne Akiko Meyers, and accordion/bandoneonist Julien Labro. He has appeared as a soloist with over 100 orchestras, and has fostered premieres by Jonathan Leshnoff, Avner Dorman, Jeff Beal, Dan Visconti, David Ludwig, Vivian Fung, and José Luis Merlin. Vieaux has received a Naumburg Foundation top prize, a Cleveland Institute of Music Distinguished Alumni Award, First Prize at the Guitar Foundation of America International Guitar Competition, and a Salon de Virtuosi Career Grant. Vieaux was the first classical musician featured on NPR's *Tiny Desk* series. He plays a 2013 Gernot Wagner guitar with Augustine strings.

jasonvieaux.com



Photo: Tyler Boye



**JONATHAN
LESHNOFF**

SYMPHONY NO.4
"HEICHALOS"
(featuring the
VIOLINS of HOPE)

GUITAR CONCERTO
STARBURST

8.559809

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 150 concerts annually, with a focus on contemporary American orchestral music through collaborations with composers including Jennifer Higdon, Terry Riley, Aaron Jay Kernis, Michael Daugherty, Christopher Rouse, John Harbison and Jonathan Leshnoff. 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 and electric bassist Victor Wooten. The Nashville Symphony is one of the most active recording orchestras in the US, with 30 releases. Together, these recordings have earned a total of 24 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



**JONATHAN
LESHNOFF**

SYMPHONY NO.4
"HEICHALOS"
(featuring the
VIOLINS of HOPE)

GUITAR CONCERTO
STARBURST

8.559809



Photo: Mark Mosrie

Giancarlo Guerrero

Six-time GRAMMY® Award-winning conductor Giancarlo Guerrero is music director of the Nashville Symphony and the Wrocław Philharmonic Orchestra in Poland, as well as principal guest conductor of the Gulbenkian Orchestra in Lisbon, Portugal. He has championed contemporary American music through commissions and recordings, presenting nine world premieres with the Nashville Symphony by composers including Michael Daugherty and Terry Riley. 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, the Brussels Philharmonic, the Deutsches Radio Philharmonie, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra. An advocate for music education, he works regularly with the Curtis Institute of Music, the Colburn School in Los Angeles and the National Youth Orchestra (NYO2) in New York.

giancarlo-guerrero.com



Photo: Tony Matula



**JONATHAN
LESHNOFF**

SYMPHONY NO.4
"HEICHALOS"
*(featuring the
VIOLINS of HOPE)*

GUITAR CONCERTO
STARBURST

8.559809



The Violins of Hope is a collection of restored instruments
played by Jewish musicians during the Holocaust.

For more information, please visit:
www.violinsofhopensh.com

This recording was funded in part through grants from the National Endowment
for the Arts and Metro Arts, and the Nashville Office of Arts & Culture.

Symphony No. 4 commissioned by the Nashville Symphony. Special thanks to
Judah Gudelsky and Eileen Willams for co-commissioning this work.

Guitar Concerto commissioned by the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra; co-commissioned by the Nashville
Symphony, the Reno Philharmonic and the Orquesta Sinfónica del Principado de Asturias.

Starburst commissioned by the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra; co-commissioned by the Kansas City
Symphony Orchestra and the Orquesta de Extremadura.



All rights in this sound recording, artwork, texts and translations
reserved. Unauthorised public performance, broadcasting and
copying of this release prohibited.

©&© 2019 Naxos Rights (Europe) Ltd