

Montgomery Philharmonic 2017 - 18 Our 12th Season : Old Friends ... New Friends

Concert 4, Sunday, March 18, 2018: Old Friends ... New Friends

Brahms | Hovhaness | Bernstein

About Alan Hovhaness

Alan Hovhaness ranks among the most intrepid of musical explorers in 20th century classical music. He was a widely recorded and lauded American composer in the 1950s and 1960s, and the recipient of numerous awards. A bit ahead of his time aesthetically, he has, since the 1990s, enjoyed something of a revival on CD and radio, as audiences have “caught up” with him. Yet there is little scholarly commentary on Hovhaness despite the wealth of radical individuality in some phases of his six decades of creativity. This is somewhat surprising given that during the 1940s and 1950s he was firmly entrenched within that maverick group of American composers (including Henry Cowell, John Cage, and Lou Harrison) who spearheaded one of the great shifts in 20th century American music, namely that of looking to non-Western cultures for creative renewal in art music. In addition, Hovhaness spearheaded quasi-aleatoric textural music as early as the 1940s, a technique which became known as “ad libitum” in the 1960s.

The composer’s huge output of more than 500-odd works was unusually diverse, prompting lively debate and opinion over the perceived merits of certain musical phases over others. Like other 20th century restless creators, such as Villa Lobos and Henry Cowell to name but two, Hovhaness did not set out to write a polished masterpiece with every work. But as Leonard Bernstein remarked in 1960, “Some of Hovhaness’s music is very, very good.” Indeed, Hovhaness’s best works stand shoulder to shoulder with those of America’s most lauded composers, and many are more original, if lesser known. But Hovhaness was an outsider by temperament and choice, his artistic credo somewhat impermeable to musical fashion and his aesthetic intent more often in sympathy with the Orient than Occident.

Investigation of Hovhaness’s best music reveals a unique and thoroughly convincing assimilation of highly disparate traditions coming to the fore and receding over the course of his career, including Renaissance polyphony, South Indian classical music, Japanese Gagaku music, and Korean Ah-ak music. Of course, many 20th century composers flirted with such exotica, but in Hovhaness they find perhaps the most seamless alchemy of all because it was more than mere flirtation. It was a musical engagement on an aesthetic as well as technical level.

- **Born:** March 8, 1911, Somerville, Massachusetts
- **Died:** June 21, 2000, Seattle, Washington
- **Nationality:** Armenian American
- **Compositions:** 67 symphonies with many non-traditional instrument combinations, 39 concerti, 6 works for choir, soloist, and orchestra, 33 works for band, brass choir, or woodwinds, over 130 chamber works, over 80 works for solo piano, over 140 works for voice including over 35 works for choir and many works for voice and varying instruments
- **Father:** Haroutioun Hovhaness Chakmakjian (1806–72), an American Chemistry Professor at Tufts University
- **Mother:** Madeline, née Scott (d. 1930)
- **Children:** a daughter, Jean Nandi

Symphony No. 66 – Opus 428 (1992) – Alan Hovhaness (1911–2000)

Hovhaness’ *Symphony No. 66* was the penultimate symphony that he wrote. He was commissioned to write the work by the Seattle Youth Symphony in 1992 and its premiere was given with Ruben Gurevich by the Seattle Youth Symphony at the Seattle Opera House on May 10, 1992. Hovhaness and his sixth wife, Hinako, lived in Seattle and could view the volcano of Glacier Peak.

The entire work unfolds as a three-movement hymn-like piece, thus its subtitle—*Hymn to Glacier Peak*. The work has Asian mysticism through its use of modes and irregular rhythms and a fugue section that pays homage to Bach. The melodies are gorgeous and at times conjure up the breathtaking views of Glacier Peak in its various seasons. The finale of the piece is opulent in its orchestration and chord structure.

The work was adored by some critics, while others felt the writing was too simplistic. Some critics commented that it paled in comparison to other works by Hovhaness. A review of the premiere said that the symphony has a “radically conservative style.” It is felt though, that the critics missed the point. Hovhaness was writing for a youth orchestra. It is amazing that the work speaks to professional orchestras as it is programmed and recorded.

Instrumentation – 3 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, 3 percussion, harp, violin 1, violin 2, viola, cello, double bass

Artifacts –

[Official website](#)

[A list of compositions by Hovhaness](#)

[Image of Hovhaness as a young man](#)

[Image of Hovhaness later in life](#)



Hovhaness: Mysterious Mountains Gerard Schwarz & Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra

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1. Hovhaness, A.: Symphony No. 2, "Mysterious Mountain" / Prayer Of St. Gregory / And God Created Great Whales (Seattle Symphony)
2. American Mystic - Music of Alan Hovhaness - Centennial Collection

YouTube.com Links –

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._66_\(Hovhaness\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._66_(Hovhaness))

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQ3Wm5HiTrE>