

PROGRAM NOTES

Quincy Symphony Orchestra
April 19, 2026 Quincy, Illinois
Triumph of the Spirit

Thrill Seeker

Stephanie Berg (b. 1986)

Thrill Seeker is a one movement, mostly tonal, high intensity piece featuring stark contrasts and drastic color changes. The piece begins with fast, pesante chord clusters in the strings for a forceful and energetic timbre that is punctuated by interjections by the brass and percussion. A contrasting melodic middle section features the solo French horn mimicked sweetly by the flute. This builds into a full orchestral celebratory outpouring before returning to the opening material. Following a final full orchestral climax, the high strings close out the piece in their uppermost register for a bright and triumphant conclusion.

~Stephanie Berg 2026

Chichester Psalms

Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990)

Leonard Bernstein, known to millions for his *West Side Story* and *Candide*, is not in any way limited to compositions of this genre. The *Chichester Psalms* prove conclusively his ability to compose sacred works of unquestioned merit. Written for the summer music festival at the Cathedral of Chichester in Sussex, England, in 1965, the Psalms were the first work by Bernstein since the completion of his *Kaddish Symphony* of 1963, also a work for chorus and orchestra, and also in Hebrew.

The opening chorale, from Psalm 108, is a majestic introit which one finds again at the end of the first movement and at the start and end of the second movement. It leads directly into a joyful dancelike setting of Psalm 100, in a fast and constant 7/4 meter. The second movement begins with a lyric, almost naïve solo based on Psalm 23 by a boy alto, followed at length by a sudden interruption from the men's choir, "Why do the nations rage?" from Psalm 2. As the violence moves into the distance but continues softly, Psalm 23 returns to quiet the menace of Psalm 2.

The third movement is introduced by a long orchestral meditation. The peacefully flowing melodies which follow prepare for a warm and comforting ending with a single unison Amen quietly bringing the Psalms to a close.

~ Dr. Lavern Wagner 2010

Symphony No. 5

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Human suffering was widespread in the 1930s. The same depression that plagued the United States helped the rise of fascism in Western Europe, of communism in its ugliest form in the (idealistically created) Soviet Union, of colonialism persisting in some of Asia and much of Africa, and of political pressures troubling much of Latin America.

In the Soviet Union, young Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich was successful, creating modernistic works of international stature. His Fourth Symphony, rather acerbic and certainly dissonant, was composed after the opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* which was received badly by the political elite. Whether bowing to political pressure, or trying to overcome it, Shostakovich withdrew the premiere of his Fourth Symphony, then composed a Fifth Symphony. The statement attributed to him in the newspaper *Vechernyaya Moskva* (1937) says the work "is a Soviet artist's creative response to justified criticism." This Symphony has been the object of speculation concerning the possibility of an artist "caving" to political pressure. However, the intrinsic merit of the work transcends any serious acceptance of such a judgment on any basis. It succeeds as a work of art.

The Fifth Symphony consists of the classical traditional four movements in the usual formal and tempo arrangement: fast-scherzo-slow-fast (finale). Shostakovich was writing in the symphonic tradition nearly 200 years old in 1930. So any conservative demands of the politicians fed into Shostakovich's symphonic impulse. The initial success was highlighted by the fact that people reportedly wept during the Largo movement. Steeped in the feeling of mourning, the music seemed to echo the *pankhida* the Russian Orthodox requiem.

So too, in the Fifth Symphony, he used a normal-sized orchestra. His insistence on a firm structure for the movements allowed for each movement to proceed within easily discerned sections. The harmonic material is less dissonant and the themes are often broad and lyric. It has been said that this symphony bears the best qualities of his music, meditation, humor and grandeur blended in perfect proportion.

~ Dr. Paul Borg 2016