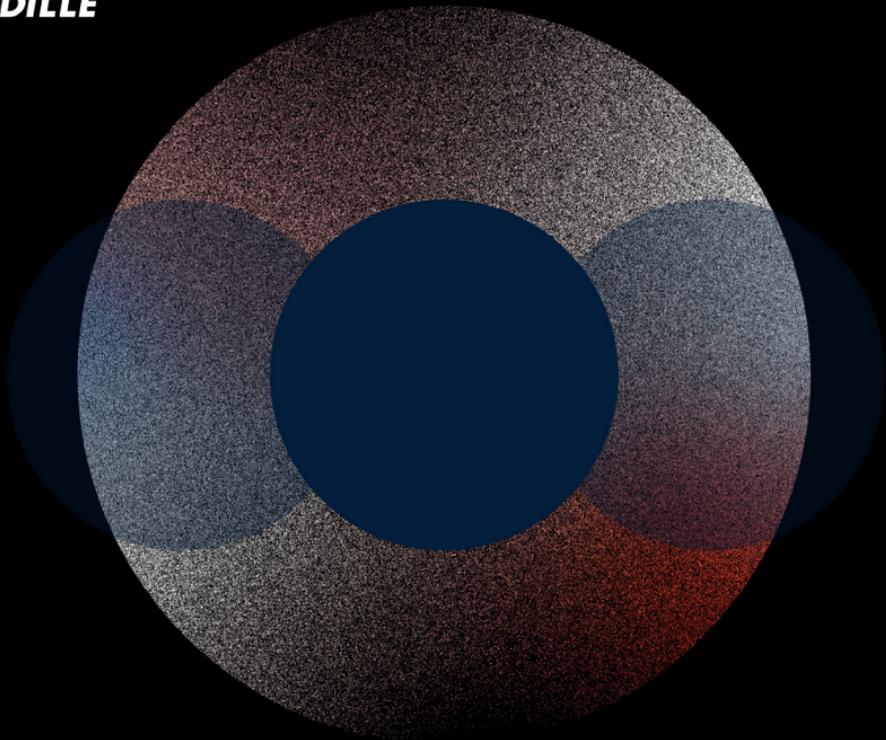


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VISIONS

JAMES M. STEPHENSON

SYMPHONY NO. 3

LAKE FOREST
SYMPHONY

VLADIMIR
KULENOVIC

VISIONS

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

JAMES M. STEPHENSON

SYMPHONY NO. 3, "VISIONS" (39:57)

- 1 I. Moderato agitato (9:52)
- 2 II. Adagio cantabile (8:33)
- 3 III. Vivo scherzando (12:17)
- 4 IV. Andante sonore – Allegro (9:00)

Commissioned by the University
of Miami Frost School of Music

LAKE FOREST
SYMPHONY

VLADIMIR KULENOVIC
CONDUCTOR

Note by

James M. Stephenson

In summer 2017, while in residence at the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, I got the opportunity to know Thom Sleeper, who was then the conductor of the University of Miami Frost School of Music Symphony Orchestra. I had always known and admired Thom as a composer, and this opportunity to spend some time together provided a chance to "talk shop" about composing, which was something I truly enjoyed. It wasn't long thereafter that I made a bold move and wrote to Thom, telling him that I felt I had a "major work" in me, and that I would love it if I could write it for him. Much to my delight, he put the wheels in motion and eventually had me engaged to write what would become my Third Symphony. One thing had changed in the intervening months however: that he would be retiring and that the job of conducting it would fall to Alexander Magalong as part of his (Alexander's) doctoral dissertation.

The subtitle of "Visions" actually came to me in a rather humorous way. About one-quarter way through composing the piece, I found myself constantly getting really tired during my workday. I was reminded to wear my glasses, however, and discovered that I suddenly had boundless energy, as I now wasn't straining to see the score, and the ideas really started flowing. That being said, the true reason for the subtitle lies in what I think about while composing, most especially while writing this monumental work.

When I was a young trumpeter, I would frequently get together with friends to play through our favorite musical excerpts; that is, those passages in the repertoire which had become staple yardsticks by which to measure our technical and musical growth.

At first these were very difficult, but over the years they would become fun and a great source of camaraderie. Later on in my professional life, I would sense the music that would get me and all of my colleagues excited about a concert. You could feel it on stage. One could also see it on a conductor's face and get a sense of what music would really energize an audience.

While writing this piece, all of these memories, these "visions," were what I kept in the forefront of my mind. This piece is composed entirely for the players on stage, the conductor, and the audience in the hall. I would literally close my eyes and imagine myself sitting there, in the performance space. I would then only write music that I could envision getting colleagues, patrons, conductors, and young versions of myself at the edge of their seats, eager to play and experience.

Formally, the work is rather classical in nature. This is on purpose. I wanted to see if I could explore and make valid comment on the four-movement symphony in its most usual form. The opening E-minor 7th (Em7) chord becomes crucial, both harmonically and structurally, as does the opening flute duet. These materials are constantly in the pages of the work, whether hidden or most obvious. The four movements are laid out accordingly, in B minor, E major, G major, and finally, D major, spelling out the notes in the opening chord, although not in order. The ideas in the symphony, always reworked and revisited, appear in many guises, ranging from soaring and heroic, to quirky and fugal, to lush and sentimental, to intimate and lonely, to grand and triumphant. I also really made an effort to ensure that everyone in the orchestra would get something to do.

Again, a most sincere thank you to Thom Sleeper for allowing me to explore this vision, in almost the grandest of forms. To date, this is my largest work, and I am excited to share it with the world.

I couldn't have done this recording without the support of my friends and colleagues in the Lake Forest Symphony, including Music Director Vladimir Kulenovic. The orchestra played a lot of my music over my ten years as Composer-in-Residence, and it is gratifying to have our collaborations culminate with such a large-scale work on record. I am also grateful to the team at Cedille Records, whose focused energies toward music in Chicago have resulted in numerous landmark and lauded recordings. I can't give enough thanks to tireless producer Jim Ginsburg, sound engineers Bill Maylone and Mary Mazurek, and the entire Cedille family for their constant professional and friendly working relationship throughout the artistic process.

JAMES M. STEPHENSON

Leading American orchestras, instrumentalists, and wind ensembles around the world have performed the music of Chicago based composer James M. Stephenson, both to critical acclaim and the delight of audiences. *The Boston Herald* raved about “straightforward, unabashedly beautiful sounds,” suggesting “Stephenson deserves to be heard again and again!” A formal sense of melody and tonality characterize his works, each embedded in a contemporary soundscape. These qualities, coupled with the composer’s keen ability to write to each occasion, have led to a steady stream of commissions and ongoing projects.

James M. Stephenson came late to his full-time composing career, having first earned a degree from the New England Conservatory in trumpet performance, and then going on to perform for 17 seasons in the Naples Philharmonic in Florida. The composer is largely self-taught and presents a musical voice that is truly individual. Colleagues and friends encouraged his earliest efforts and enthusiasm followed from all directions. As his catalog grew, so did his reputation. That catalog now boasts concertos and sonatas

for nearly every instrument, earning him the moniker “The Concerto King” from Chicago Symphony clarinetist John Yeh.

Stephenson recently enjoyed the world premiere of his Bass Trombone Concerto with soloist Charles Vernon and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra conducted by Riccardo Muti. In 2021, the San Francisco Ballet premiered his new ballet score to Dani Rowe’s *Wooden Dimes* and “The President’s Own” US Marine Band premiered his *Fanfare for Democracy* at President Biden’s inauguration. An orchestral version was subsequently co-commissioned by 51 orchestras: one in each state plus Washington, D.C.

The vast majority of Stephenson’s compositions have come through commissions by and for major symphony principal players, in Chicago, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Minnesota, Washington DC, St. Louis, Oregon, Milwaukee, and Dallas, among others. A major break came from the Minnesota Commissioning Club, which led to two works (violin concertos) receiving premieres in 2012 – by Jennifer Frautschi with the Minnesota



Orchestra under Osmo Vänskä and by Alex Kerr with the Rhode Island Philharmonic under Larry Rachleff. Other international soloists for whom Stephenson has composed include saxophonist Branford Marsalis and trumpeter Rex Richardson, whose concerto has been performed on five continents. With such prolific output, Stephenson’s music is well represented on recordings. Nearly all of his solo brass works (over 50) have been professionally recorded, and in total, his extensive catalog for all instruments can be heard on over 30 CDs.

James Stephenson is also a highly sought-after arranger and conductor, rounding out his constantly busy schedule. His arrangements have been performed/recorded/broadcast by virtually every major orchestra in the country, including the Boston Pops, Cincinnati Pops, New York Pops, and more. On the podium, Stephenson has led orchestras in Chattanooga, Bozeman, Charleston, Ft. Myers, Modesto, and Wyoming, in addition to numerous concert bands. With the Lake Forest Symphony, near his Illinois home, he not only conducted but also served as Composer-in-Residence.

composerjim.com

VLADIMIR KULENOVIC

Designated "Chicagoan of the Year in Classical Music" (2015) by distinguished Chicago Tribune critic John von Rhein, Vladimir Kulenovic served for six years as Music Director of the Lake Forest Symphony. A recent winner of the Sir Georg Solti Conducting Award, one of the most prestigious conducting honors in the United States, he has taken his place as one of the finest and most imaginative conductors of his generation. Having concluded four seasons as Associate Conductor of the Utah Symphony / Utah Opera, Mr. Kulenovic has also served as assistant conductor with Lyric Opera of Chicago, Principal Conductor of the Kyoto International Festival in Japan, and Resident Conductor of the Belgrade Philharmonic in his native Serbia.

Mr. Kulenovic's U.S. guest conducting engagements include the symphonies of Alabama, Chicago, Columbus, Grand Rapids, Houston, Illinois, Indianapolis, Jacksonville, Knoxville, San Francisco, South Bend, Stamford, Utah, and Winston-Salem, in addition to the philharmonic orchestras of Naples (FL) and Oklahoma City, the Florida Orchestra, and the Louisville Orchestra.

Worldwide, Mr. Kulenovic has appeared with the Orchestre Nationale d'île de France, Basque National Orchestra of Spain, Beethoven-Orchester Bonn, Bilkent Symphony, Deutsche Kammerakademie Neuss, Leipziger Symphonie Orchester, Malaysia Philharmonic, Minas Gerais Philharmonic, National Arts Centre Orchestra, Orquesta Filarmónica de Jalisco, Orchestra Sinfonica de España, Orchestra Classica de Santa Cecilia, Romanian State Philharmonic, Slovenia Philharmonic, Taipei Symphony, Württembergische Philharmonie, Zagreb Philharmonic, Macedonian Philharmonic, and the Macedonian National Opera. Festival appearances include Aspen, Cabrillo, Kuhmo, Round Top, Salzburg Mozarteum, and Verbier.

In 2012, Mr. Kulenovic was awarded the Mendelssohn-Bartholdy Fellowship and the position of conducting assistant with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, where he worked closely with his longtime mentor, Maestro Kurt Masur. He has also served as cover conductor with the Boston Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Baltimore Symphony, Baltimore Opera, and Florentine Opera.



He has assisted many illustrious conductors including Bernard Haitink, Zubin Mehta, Sir Andrew Davis, Alan Gilbert, and Marin Alsop, among others. Vladimir Kulenovic holds graduate diplomas in conducting from both The Juilliard School and the Peabody Institute and was one of six top U.S. emerging conductors chosen by the League of American Orchestras for the 2013 Bruno Walter National Conducting Preview.

vladimirkulenovic.com



LAKE FOREST SYMPHONY

The Lake Forest Symphony performed in Lake County, Illinois, north of Chicago, for over 60 years. Founded as a chamber orchestra of volunteer musicians in 1957 by Robert Kalter and William English, the orchestra continued to grow, becoming fully professional in 1988. The orchestra went on to receive numerous awards from the League of American Orchestras and Illinois Council of Orchestras, including 2019 "Orchestra of the Year."

Praised for the incredible talent of its over 60 musicians, the Symphony performed throughout Lake County and northern Illinois, including at the College of Lake County's James Lumber Center, Lake Forest Academy's Cressey Center for the Arts, the Genesee Theatre, and the Lake Forest Gorton Center.

Under the executive direction of Susan Lape and then Timothy Corpus, the Symphony recorded three albums with Cedille Records and a broadcast documentary with 98.7 WFMT, Chicago's classical music station, titled "The Search," chronicling the orchestra's search for a new music director.

After an extensive conductor search in 2014, the Symphony welcomed its seventh Music Director, Vladimir Kulenovic, who went on to be designated "Chicagoan of the Year in Classical Music" by the *Chicago Tribune*, and "Conductor of the Year" from the Illinois Council of Orchestras.

The Lake Forest Symphony's popular, genre-blending "Salon Series" presented sold-out chamber music shows for two years and continues under different auspices today at the Gorton Community Center.

VIOLIN 1
Netanel Draiblate, concertmaster
David Katz, associate concertmaster
Thomas Yang, assistant concertmaster
Paul Zafer
Clara Lindner
Sylvia de la Cerna
Elaine Fohrman
Carl Johnston
Sally Stephenson*
Steven Winkler*

VIOLIN 2
Paul Vanderwerf, principal
Rachel Fisher, assistant principal
Charles Bontrager
Pamela Lutter
Carol Setapen
Lisabeth McQuaid
John Ling
Mark Agnor*

VIOLA
Daniel Golden, principal
Nicholas Mowry, assistant principal
Sally Didrickson
Christine Due
Kjell Sleipness
Mark Djordjevic
Scott Dowd

CELLO
Steven Houser, principal
Andrew Snow, assistant principal
Mark Anderson
Elizabeth Anderson
Mark Lekas
Richard Yeo
Vicki Mayne*
David Bednarek*

BASS
John Floeter, principal
Alan Steiner
Julian Romane
John Tuck
Tim Shaffer*

FLUTE
Lyon Liefer, principal
Irene Claude
Janice MacDonald, piccolo

OBOE
Ricardo Castandea, principal
Erica Anderson*
Deborah Stevenson, english horn

CLARINET
Kathryne Pirtle, principal
Dileep Gangolli
David Tuttle, bass clarinet

SAXOPHONE
Patrick Posey, principal (soprano)*
Jessica Maxfield (alto)*
Russell Kerns (tenor)*

BASSOON
Andrei Muravev, principal
Collin Anderson
Peter Brusen, contrabassoon

HORN
Michael Buckwalter, principal
Jeremiah Frederick
Anna Mayne*
Emma Sepmeier

TRUMPET
David Inmon, principal
Charles Roberts*
John Burson*

TROMBONE
Rachel Castellanos, principal
Audrey Morrison
David Becker*

TUBA
Sean Whitaker

TIMPANI
Simon Gomez*

PERCUSSION
Deborah Katz-Knowles, principal
Tina Laughlin*
Sean Kopp*
Michael Folker*

HARP
Tija Danilovics

*Indicates artists not on LFS regular roster

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Bill Maylone and Mary Mazurek

MIXING & MASTERING **Bill Maylone**

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