DVOŘÁK & SHOSTAKOVICH

March 16* & 18, 2023 ● 7:30 PM

***Thursday Classics presented by Quikcard**

Featuring:
Kensho Watanabe, conductor
Rafael Hoekman, cello

Please hold your applause until the end of each piece.

CARLOS SIMON
The Block (7')*

SHOSTAKOVICH
Cello Concerto No. 1 in E-flat major, Opus 107 (30')*

I - Allegretto
II - Moderato
III - Cadenza
IV - Allegro con moto

INTERMISSION (20 minutes)

DVOŘÁK
Symphony No. 8 in G Major, Op.88 (37')*

I - Allegro con brio
II - Adagio
III - Allegretto grazioso – Molto vivace
IV - Allegro ma non troppo

Program subject to change.

*indicates approximate performance duration

The Block
Carlos Simon
(b. Washington, D.C., 1986)

First performed: June 2018 in Santa Cruz, CA
This is the first time the ESO has presented music by Simon Block

Carlos Simon's music ranges from concert music for large and small ensembles to film scores with influences of jazz, gospel, and neo-romanticism. Simon is the Composer-in-Residence for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and was nominated for a 2023 GRAMMY award for his latest album, *Requiem for the Enslaved*.

Of his work *The Block*, Mr. Simon writes:
The Block is a short orchestral study based on the late visual art of Romare Bearden. Most of Bearden's work reflects African American culture in urban cities as well as the rural American south. Although Bearden was born in Charlotte, NC, he spent his most of his life in Harlem, New York. With its vibrant artistic community, this piece aims to highlight the rich energy and joyous sceneries that Harlem expressed as it was the hotbed for African American culture.

The Block is comprised of six paintings that highlight different buildings (church, barbershop, nightclub, etc.) in Harlem on one block. Bearden's paintings incorporate various mediums including watercolors, graphite, and metallic papers. In the same way, this musical piece explores various musical textures which highlight the vibrant scenery and energy that a block on Harlem or any urban city exhibits.

Cello Concerto No. 1
Dmitri Shostakovich
(b. St. Petersburg, 1906 / d. Moscow, 1975)

First performed: October 4, 1959 in Leningrad
Last ESO performance: March 2008

Mstislav Rostropovich was one of the greatest cellists of his age, so it's no wonder that not only did many composers want to write works for him, but he sought out gifted creators for new works as well. It was natural that the great Russian cellist would want the great Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich to write him a concerto. But Shostakovich's wife gave Rostropovich important advice. If you want him to write one for you, she said, whatever you do, don't say anything to him. Reverse psychology, one supposes. But it worked.

Still, Rostropovich did have to bide his time. So when Shostakovich made the unexpected announcement that his next work would be a cello concerto, there was much excitement. Rostropovich took his usual accompanist to Leningrad, and learned the concerto by heart in only four days. An unofficial first performance took place at the Composers' Union in late September; the public debut not long after. In the post-Stalin Soviet Union, it was a little easier to move around, and Shostakovich was permitted to travel even to the United States to see Rostropovich present the work with the Philadelphia Orchestra in November.

The work is in four movements, with the last three played with no pause between them. There are many Shostakovich hallmarks in the work – the use of a repeated four-note motif (which in

fact opens the work on the solo instrument) is reminiscent of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony's* four-note idea. Shostakovich also makes use of the motto theme he created as a cipher for his own name: D-S-C-H. There is a jauntiness to the rhythm and drive of the opening – the orchestra seems to comment from the sidelines for much of the goings-on. Near the halfway point, a lone French horn (the only brass instrument in the entire orchestra for this piece) presents its own version of the four-note idea, but the cello's rapid passage careens past it. Orchestra and cello find more common ground as the Recapitulation brings the cello's insistent four-note motif to the front once again, and a thump on the timpani closes it out.

The second movement is the longest of the work. Strings intone a dark theme – the lone French horn is the first solo instrument heard in this movement – until the cello enters in its upper register, a beautiful, sad song that rises in passion against the strings' counterpoint. At the halfway point, the cello seems to want to begin a dance – its tune becomes more rhythmic while remaining elegiac – the woodwinds respond, and a gradual rise in intensity takes hold, building to a passionate climax for both orchestra and soloist. When it has faded, harmonics in the cello are answered by a celeste – music of mystery and delicacy – leaving the cello alone as the movement bridges to the third movement. This is a cadenza, but not one to showcase a bravura fireworks display. This one begins in the mood left behind by the slow movement, in the cello's bottom end. Moving to the middle register, the cello begins a new passage, one of more intense emotion and expression. The full range of the cello (which has the widest span from top note to bottom of any string instrument) is explored, and double stops and pizzicato passages are presented as integral parts of the cello's monologue.

As the six-minute solo passage nears its end, it serves as another bridge – this time to the final movement – increasing in energy, pace, and excitement. The orchestra jumps back in with three quick notes, and a mawkish parody of one of Stalin's favourite songs serves as a melodic source for the syncopated and almost frantic dance between cello and orchestra. Material from the opening movement's four-note motif makes a reappearance in different orchestral guise, the sense of sarcasm so prevalent in much of Shostakovich's music is readily apparent as the off-kilter music returns us full circle to the pervasive motif which has accompanied the entire concerto – restated in a brilliant climax and another timpani-led conclusion.

Symphony No. 8 in G Major, Op.88
Antonín Dvořák
(b. Nelahozeves, Bohemia, 1841 / d. Prague, 1904)

First performed: February 2, 1890 in Prague
Last ESO performance: Symphony Under the Sky 2018

It was Johannes Brahms that had introduced Antonín Dvořák to Brahms' publisher, Simrock. The young Bohemian composer had made Simrock a lot of money, thanks to works such as his *Slavonic Dances*, and his shorter piano pieces. Understandably, Dvořák not only wanted to write works in larger forms, he hoped and expected that the publisher that had gained so much from him might pay him a fair price for a new symphony.

Yet the haggling dragged on, to such a point that five years passed between the completion of Dvořák's *Seventh* and *Eighth Symphonies*. Eventually, Dvořák gave the new symphony to a British publishing house, Novello. This led some early on to coin *Symphony No. 8* the "English"

Symphony – which is actually absurd, as the work is probably the most Bohemian-influenced and Bohemian-sounding symphony he ever wrote.

Dvořák wrote much of the symphony at his country home at Vysoká, and we are in nature from the work's opening measures. The G Major work actually begins quietly and even a little darkly in G minor, until a bird call on the flute ushers in a bold and bright main subject in the work's home key. The opening, minor-key motive returns, serving as a transition following the exposition, and again, it is a birdsong in the flute that ushers in a host of new melodic ideas, all of which are painted in rich, pastoral shades. While the work eschews a formal sonata-allegro blueprint, the two principal themes are ever present, and unify the movement with clarity and grace.

The slow second movement begins almost unsurely, phrases beginning, then pausing. Another bird call, however, intrudes repeatedly, and seems to shake the doldrums. The strings take up the bird call with bolder strokes, and we are led to a picture of a Bohemian village, gently at first, then richly and with fanfare and ceremony. The mood becomes gentle again, then darkly dramatic. The quiet merrymaking also returns, and the net effect of the movement is that of a tone poem, embracing a day of peasant life.

The A-B-A-C third movement begins with a waltz-like theme, again with twittering birds accompanying it. It is contrasted by an equally amiable folksong-like theme first presented on oboe, then taken up by the strings, before the dance theme returns, clothed in slightly richer hues. An unexpectedly buoyant final section sets up the fourth movement.

The final movement is a patchwork of many musical ideas, led by a bold fanfare, and a variation on it. This variation is the main theme of the movement, which takes on broader and increasingly rousing guises. At times, the joy seems almost manic, and while the central section (ingeniously also based on the main theme) is tender and bucolic, it yields to the energy and verve that dominate this rich and rowdy finale.