

Spotlight



JEFF ROFFMAN

Orchestral Maneuvers

COMPOSER CHRISTOPHER THEOFANIDIS HAS A GIFT of lyricism and emotional affect that can strike a listener...in a profoundly moving way,” says Robert Spano.

Washington audiences can test the noted conductor’s assertion on Friday, March 31, when he leads a performance of Theofanidis’ *Creation/Creator* at the Kennedy Center. A theatrical and multimedia oratorio, featuring soloists and the full 180-piece choir and orchestra, it’s been commissioned by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra as part of the first ever “Shift: A Festival of American Orchestras.”

The festival highlights classical music organizations striving to go beyond the classics and the status quo. The Atlanta Symphony, for example, has achieved this in large part through its cultivation of the Atlanta School of Composers. After becoming the organization’s music director in 2001, Spano, who is gay, started commissioning works by a handful of contemporary composers, including Theofanidis. “At a certain point we realized, even though they’re distinct from each other and unique unto themselves, they share common [traits],” Spano says. “They

work with tunes, and they’re tonal, and they’re influenced by popular or world music, or both.”

Shift, which runs from March 27 to April 1, also spotlights Colorado’s Boulder Philharmonic, the North Carolina Symphony, and Brooklyn’s self-described “orchestral collective” the Knights. Each orchestra will perform a thematic program of its choosing in the Concert Hall. Even more innovative are the recitals presented by the orchestras that go far beyond the traditional — from a vocal recital, featuring piano accompaniment by Spano, at the National Gallery of Art’s West Garden Court, to a concert by singer-songwriter and Knights member Christina Courtin at the Hamilton, to indie-rock singers accompanied by a North Carolina chamber ensemble in the Smithsonian’s Kogod Courtyard.

The Boulder Philharmonic, meanwhile, ventures the farthest afield with its “Nature and Music” programming, including “Guided Musical Hikes” of bird-watching in Rock Creek Park and “Pop-Up Chamber Concerts” in the Tidal Basin, surrounded by cherry trees. —Doug Rule

Shift, A Festival of American Orchestras runs March 27 through April 1. For a full schedule of events, including a free Library of Congress symposium, and to purchase tickets, call 202-785-9727 or visit kennedy-center.org/festivals/shift/.