

Christopher Rouse



Concerto Per Corde

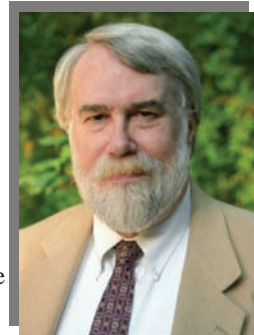
Passion Wheels

Ku-Ka-Ilimoku

Ogoun Badagrís

The Concordia Orchestra
Marin Alsop, conductor

Christopher Rouse is one of America's most prominent composers of orchestral music. He has created a body of work perhaps unequalled in its emotional intensity. The *New York Times* has called it "some of the most anguished, most memorable music around." Stephen Wigler of the *Baltimore Sun* has written: "When the music history of the late 20th century is written, I suspect the explosive and passionate music of Rouse will loom large." Amongst his many awards are: winner of the 1993 Pulitzer Prize in Music for his **Trombone Concerto**, a Grammy Award for his guitar concerto **Concert de Gaudí**, as



well as election to the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Letters, Born in Baltimore in 1949, Rouse developed an early interest in both classical and popular music. He graduated from Oberlin Conservatory and Cornell University, numbering among his principal teachers George Crumb and Karel Husa. He taught composition at the Eastman School of Music for two decades and currently teaches composition at The Juilliard School. His music has been played by nearly every major orchestra in the U.S., and numerous ensembles overseas, including the Berlin Philharmonic, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Sydney and Melbourne Symphonies, and the Austrian Radio Orchestra. In 2009 he was named Composer of the Year by *Musical America*. Recent highlights include the world premieres of the *Requiem* (2007) by the Los Angeles Master Chorale, Concerto for Orchestra by the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music (2008), the Oboe Concerto by the Minnesota Orchestra (2009), and *Odna Zhizn* by the New York Philharmonic (2010). Rouse's Symphony No.3 received its premiere in May 2011 by the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra. He has most recently been named The Marie-Josée Kravis Composer-in-Residence at the New York Philharmonic, and will begin his two-year tenure in the 2012-13 season.

Post-Modernism has already become a much-maligned description of the epoch in which we live. So often confused with self obsessed, slackerly cynicism, true Post-Modernism embraces the best of our own time and that of other cultures and eras. In the finest sense of the word, Christopher Rouse is a leading Post-Modernist composer. His music successfully melds elements of popular and serious musical thought into works of great expressive power and originality. As this recording illustrates, Rouse's musical ideas meld divergent cultures and stylistic periods into original and powerful new creations.

A wildly inventive orchestrator, Christopher Rouse has been notably creative in his writing for percussion. Many of the most poignant statements in his orchestral and ensemble pieces are expressed through percussion. He has written a number of popular, highly-acclaimed works for percussion ensemble, including **Bonham** (in homage to the late John Bonham of Led Zeppelin fame), and the present **Ku-Ka-Ilimoku** and **Ogoun Badagris**. **Ku-Ka-Ilimoku** was completed in 1978 on commission from the Syracuse Symphony Percussion Ensemble. The composer has written:

In Hawaiian mythology, Ku is perhaps the most fundamental and important of gods, occupying a place similar to that of Zeus in Greek mythology or Odin in Norse legend. Ku is manifested in several forms: as Ku-Ka-Ilimoku he represents the god of war. Thus, this work for percussion ensemble is best viewed as a savage, propulsive war dance.

Traditional Hawaiian music has endured a sad legacy of being discounted and undervalued. Hawaiian chants are often based on as few as two pitches, and Hawaiian percussion emphasizes short, repetitive patterns. Underlying this surface simplicity is a wealth of subtle rhythmic inflection and variation. Rouse incorporates this diversity to great effect, creating a tightly knit, exhilarating work. Although indigenous instruments are not employed, the

timbre of their voices is evoked. The dynamic power of the Western instruments adds an intense level of ferocity to the proceedings.

Largely based on his String Quartet No.2 (1988), Christopher Rouse's **Concerto per Corde (1990)** is much more than a transcription of the earlier work. A significant amount of re-writing went into the Concerto, especially in the second and third movements. The Concerto retains much of the Quartet's Russian flavor, particularly its bow to composer Dmitri Shostakovich. In emulation of J.S. Bach, Shostakovich created a musical acronym of the first initials and the last two letters of his name from the German alphabetic letters for musical pitches; specifically, the pitches D-E-flat-C-B (D-S-C-H in German). As with Bach's B-A-C-H (B-flat-A-C-B) motive, the D-S-C-H motive has entered the musical lexicon as a musical reference to its namesake. **Concerto per Corde** is permeated with this motive. In fact, the motive serves as a primary structural element throughout.

Concerto per Corde is written in three connected movements. The first movement, Adagio; doloroso, is built around a passacaglia-like ostinato based upon the first two pitches of the motive (D-E-flat), answered by the last two motivic notes (C-B). The successive first entrances of the instruments each begin with a note of the motive (D in the low strings, E-flat in the violas, C in the second violins, B in the first violins). The emotional character of this first movement is mournful and expectant. The ensuing Allegro molto is filled with nervous agitation and fury. In it one can hear echoes of Bela Bartok and Bernard Herrmann. It is a virtuosic tour-de-force, demanding intense concentration and energy from the performers. A momentary silence leads us into the closing Largo; lamentoso, which begins in cold desolation. Essentially a theme and variations on the last two pitches of the motive (C-B), the music builds to an impassioned climax. Along the way the first violins present a

searching melody that begins with the D-S-C-H motive stated in retrograde. The music's anguished tension is released in a *trasfigurato* of great tonal warmth, leading to a somewhat unsettled conclusion rooted in the final pitch of the motive.

Rotae Passionis ("Passion Wheels"), a commission from the Boston Musica Viva, was completed and first performed in 1983. It is scored for seven players: flute (doubling piccolo and alto flute), clarinet (doubling E-flat and bass clarinets), percussion, piano, violin, viola and cello. The work is a veritable compendium of extended playing techniques, requiring the utmost in virtuosity from the performers. Additionally, the wind players and pianist play various percussion instruments. For purposes of this recording a second percussionist was employed to fulfill these added roles. Of **Rotae Passionis** Christopher Rouse explicates:

I have always been fascinated by the artwork of Northern Renaissance painters, particularly when dealing with the Crucifixion. Artists such as Bosch and Grunewald took a much more human (sometimes even horrific) approach to the subject than did the great Italian Renaissance painters, who on some occasions made the Crucifixion seem almost more of a joyous event than a cause for grief and anguish. It was this human view of the Passion story as detailed by German and Flemish artists - the Via Dolorosa and Crucifixion of Christ the man rather than Christ the Son of God - which I hoped to elaborate upon in my piece.

The word *rotae* is used because the materials are stated and developed (as well as repeated) in a circular fashion. **Rotae Passionis** divides itself into three large sections. The first, Circular Lament - The Agony in the Garden, is scored for clarinet (a sort of *vox Christi*) and percussion and details the final moments

of freedom for Christ in the Garden of Gethemene in an Expressionistic manner: It is followed by Part II - the actual passion wheels themselves - in an almost cinematic interpretation built around the Fourteen Stations of the Cross: Jesus is condemned to death; Jesus receives the Cross; He falls; He meets His mother; Saint Simon of Cyrene carries the Cross; Saint Veronica wipes His face; He falls again; The Women of Jerusalem weep for Him; He falls a third time; He is stripped of His clothes; He is nailed to the Cross; He dies; His body is taken down from the Cross; His body is laid in the tomb.

The effect for which I was striving was of the listener being strapped to a pew in a church and being forced to watch a slide presentation of each Station flashing by, with each change of slide symbolized by an immense wooden hammer blow. The final part, Parallel Wheel - Christ Asleep, has almost the character of a lullaby, and it ends the work in a contemplative, quiet tone. Thus, the score may be said to represent a three day period (Thursday night, Friday morning and afternoon, Saturday) without a Resurrection.

Rotae Passionis is indeed reminiscent of a North-European Renaissance triptych. The disquiet of the first part (or panel, to take the metaphor further), the extraordinary drama of the extended middle, and the serene stasis of Part III combine to form a compelling, at times appalling, Passion narrative.

Rotae Passionis is dedicated to the memory of Carl Orff, who died while Rouse was in the early stages of work on the piece. Rouse's "wheel" concept was inspired by the "Wheel of Fate" imagery in Orff's *Carmina Burana*, and *Rotae Passionis*' opening bass drum motive is a paraphrase of the beginning of Orff's opera *Prometheus*.

Ogoun Badagris dates from 1976, and was written for the Ithaca College Percussion Ensemble. In the forward to the published score Rouse states:

Ogoun Badagrís derives its inspiration from Haitian drumming patterns, particularly those of the Juba Dance. Hence, it seemed logical to tie in the work with various aspects of Voodoo ritual. Ogoun Badagrís is one of the most terrible and violent of all Voodoo loa (deities) and he can be appeased only by human blood sacrifice. This work may thus be interpreted as a dance of appeasement. The four conga drums often act as the focal point in the work and can be compared with the role of the four most basic drums in the Voodoo religion, the be-be, the seconde, the maman, and the asator. The metal plates and sleigh bells are to a certain extent parallels of the Haitian ogan. The work begins with a brief action de grace, a ceremonial call-to-action in which the high priest shakes a giant rattle known as the asson, here replaced by cabasa. Then the principal dance begins, a grouil: this is a highly erotic and even brutally sexual ceremonial dance, which in turn is succeeded by the Danse Vaudou at which demonic possession occurs. The word reler, which the performers must shriek at the conclusion of the work, is the Voodoo equivalent of the Judeo-Christian amen.

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Marin Alsop's success as Music Director of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra was recognized when, in 2009, her tenure was extended to 2015. Alsop takes up the post of Chief Conductor of the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra at the start of the 2012 season, where she will steer the orchestra in its artistic and creative programming, recording ventures and its education and

outreach activities. This mirrored her ongoing success in the United Kingdom where she was Principal Conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony from 2002-08 and is now Conductor Emeritus. Ms. Alsop also continues her association as Conductor Laureate of the Colorado Symphony following 12 years as Music Director, and since 1992 has been Music Director of California's acclaimed Cabrillo Festival which has won the coveted ASCAP award for Adventurous Programming of Contemporary Music every single year since her appointment. The first artist to win both Gramophone's "Artist of the Year" award and the Royal Philharmonic Society's Conductor's Award in the same season, Alsop was named to a MacArthur Fellowship (the first conductor to receive this prestigious American honor) and won the Classical Brit Award for Best Female Artist that year. She has also received the Royal Philharmonic Society's BBC Radio 3 Listeners Award and a European Women of Achievement Award, and in Autumn 2008 was inducted as a fellow to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Ms. Alsop is a regular guest conductor of the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra and Los Angeles Philharmonic. She is also one of the few conductors to appear every season with both the London Symphony and the London Philharmonic, and has conducted many other distinguished orchestras worldwide, including the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Zurich Tonhalle, Orchestre de Paris, Bavarian Radio Symphony and La Scala Milan.

Rotae Passionis: Flute-Susan Rotholz **Clarinet-**Allen Kay
Violin-Mary Rowell **Viola-**Ralph Farris **Cello-**Francis Rowell
Percussion-Tom Kolor, Patricia Niemi **Piano-**Phillip Bush

Ku-ka-Ilimoku & Ogoun Badaris: Jeffrey Milarsky, Tom Kolor, Patricia Niemi, Maya Gunji, Barry Centanni



Christopher Rouse

The Concordia Orchestra
Marin Alsop, conductor

PHCD 180



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- 1 Ku-Ka Ilimoku (1978)
- 2 - 4 Concerto Per Corde (1990)
- 5 - 7 Rotae Passionis (1983)
- 8 Ogoun Badagris (1976)

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PHCD 180



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|---|---|-------|---|--|------|
| 1 | Ku-Ka-Ilimoku (1978)
for Percussion Ensemble | 4:47 | | Rotae Passionis (1983)
("Passion Wheels") | |
| | Concerto Per Corde (1990) | | 5 | I. Circuitus Lamentationis - Dolor in Horto | 7:07 |
| 2 | I. Adagio; doloroso | 7:59 | 6 | II. Rotae Passionis | 5:04 |
| 3 | II. Allegro molto | 6:47 | | Jesus capitis condemnatur | |
| 4 | III. Largo; lamentoso | 10:49 | | Jesus crucem accipit | |
| | Produced under license | | | Sub cruce cadit Jesus | |
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| | © 2000 Koch International Classics | | | Adjuvat Jesum ad crucem potandam Simon Cyrenaeus | |
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| | Karen Chester | | | Jesus iterum cadit | |
| | Tom Lazarus Engineering tks 2-4 | | | Mulieres Jerusalem lamentantur Eum | |
| | All other tracks Ben Rizzi | | | Jesus tertium cadit | |
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| | File Under Rouse/Classical | | | De Cruce Jesus deponitur | |
| | | | | Corpus Jesu poniture in monumento | |
| | | | 7 | III. Rota Parallela - Christus in Somno | 8:21 |
| | | | 8 | Ogoun Badagris (1976) | 4:26 |
| | | | | for Percussion Ensemble | |

