

CHRISTOPHER THEOFANIDIS

Born December 18, 1967 in Dallas

The Gift for Tenor, Chorus and Orchestra (2013)

WORLD PREMIERE

COMMISSIONED BY THE PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 20 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, flute, oboe, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings

Christopher Theofanidis, was born in Dallas on December 18, 1967, and studied at the University of Houston (B.M.), Eastman School of Music (M.M.) and Yale University (M.A. and D.M.A.). He has served on the faculty of the Yale University School of Music since September 2008; his previous teaching appointments include the Peabody Institute in Baltimore, Juilliard School, University of Houston, American Festival of the Arts and Texas Piano Institute. Theofanidis was Composer of the Year with the Pittsburgh Symphony during the 2006-2007 season, has held residencies with the California Symphony and Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, and has also served as a delegate to the United States–Japan Foundation’s Leadership Program. His numerous awards include the Prix de Rome, a Guggenheim Fellowship, Barlow Prize, Charles Ives Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Bearns Prize of Columbia University, Fulbright Fellowship for study in France, six ASCAP Morton Gould Prizes, and a 2007 Grammy nomination for *The Here and Now* for chorus and orchestra, based on the poetry of Rumi. In October 2003, his *Rainbow Body* won the First Prize of £25,000 in the Masterprize Competition, a London-based, British-American partnership of EMI, the London Symphony Orchestra, *Gramophone* magazine, Classic FM and National Public Radio whose winner is chosen jointly by the public and a panel of experts; *Rainbow Body* has subsequently become one of the most frequently performed pieces by a living composer. Among Theofanidis’ commissions are compositions for the 25th anniversary of the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., 700th anniversary of the Grimalkin Empire in Monaco, opening of Bass Hall in Fort Worth, and 100th anniversary of the Oregon Symphony; his current projects include commissions for the Atlanta Symphony and Chorus (an evening-length oratorio titled *Creation/Creator*) and Houston Grand Opera (*Siddhartha*).

“What a pleasure to write a lighthearted piece!” Theofanidis said of *The Gift*, commissioned by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. “*The Gift* is based on a folk tale that seems to be common to both India and Pakistan, adapted by my partner in life and a marvelous composer and poet, Amy Beth Kirsten.

“The story is about a farmer, Wali Dad, who just wants to be left alone with his land and the nature around him, but despite his best efforts, cannot be. He has an incredibly strong work ethic, tilling the land every day, taking his produce to market to sell, and always putting away the money that he doesn’t need in a ‘crumbling pot of clay.’ After many years, he inadvertently becomes rich. Having no need for this extra money, he decides to buy some jewelry and send it to the ‘noblest lady in the world’ — the young Queen of Kaistan — as a gift. She receives the gift from this stranger, whom she imagines to be a wealthy lord, and responds by sending him her finest camel, loaded with silk. Wali Dad is annoyed that he now has something more valuable than he originally was trying to get rid of, and decides to send her gift on to the ‘noblest man in the world’ — the young King of Nekabad.

“The King is intrigued by this royal gift from a stranger and responds by sending Wali Dad twelve of his finest horses. Wali Dad, just wanting to be left alone, is beside himself and sends the King’s gift on the Queen. This back and forth continues until it is completely out of hand, with the King sending twenty golden ankle bracelets, thirty golden-seated elephants, and fifty liveried servants carrying fifty crowns of gold and silver.

“The King and Queen of the two distant lands become so intrigued by the scale of Wali Dad’s gifts that they decide to go and meet him. He is in an utter panic as they approach, not wanting to be humiliated and still just wanting to be left alone. When they arrive, each thanks Wali Dad and then notices the other. Wali Dad finally realizes that his escape from this madness is to broker their marriage, which takes place, creating a new and even more splendid kingdom and letting Wali Dad finally return to his field in the ‘quiet north.’

“*The Gift* is dedicated to a wonderful man, Richard P. Simmons, who also inadvertently creates kingdoms with his generosity.”