

# Aspects of an Elephant/ From the New World

**Carlos Kalmar**, *conductor*

KENJI BUNCH

Aspects of an Elephant  
(played without pauses)  
Introduction: Into Darkness  
    Var. I: The Elephant is a Whip  
    Var. II: The Elephant is a Spear  
    Var. III: The Elephant is a Silk Cloth  
    Var. IV: The Elephant is a Tree  
    Var. V: The Elephant is a Snake  
    Var. VI: The Elephant is a Throne  
The Argument  
Finale: The Creature Revealed

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

Symphony No. 9 in E Minor  
[old No. 5] "From the New World"  
*Adagio–Allegro molto*  
*Largo*  
*Molto vivace*  
*Allegro con fuoco*

Saturday, March 11, 2017, 7:30 pm  
Sunday, March 12, 2017, 7:30 pm  
Monday, March 13, 2017, 7:30 pm  
Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall

Saturday, February 4, 2017, 7:30 pm  
Sunday, February 5, 2017, 2 pm  
Monday, February 6, 2017, 7:30 pm  
Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall

KENJI BUNCH

## *Aspects of an Elephant*

### THE VITAL STATS

**COMPOSER:** Born July 27, 1973, Portland, OR.

**WORK COMPOSED:** Summer 2016–winter 2017, commissioned by and dedicated to the Oregon Symphony in honor of the orchestra's 120th season.

### WORLD PREMIERE.

**INSTRUMENTATION:** Piccolo (doubling alto flute), 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 2 trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, 5 aluminum mixing bowls, bass drum, chimes, crotales, cymbals, glockenspiel, gong, marimba, 5 rototoms, slapstick, stones, vibraphone, triangle, piano, harp, and strings.

**ESTIMATED DURATION:** 18 minutes

In his notes for *Aspects of an Elephant*, Bunch writes, “I drew inspiration from the timeless parable of the so-called Blind Men and the Elephant, of which various versions have appeared throughout Asia and Europe since the 13th century. I especially liked the version in Rumi’s epic collection of sacred Islamic texts, *The Masnavi*. In this retelling, the men are not blind, but in a dark room with an elephant they can’t see; each man holds a small candle, which casts a faint light. They touch the mysterious beast in order to describe it to each other; naturally, they each come up with a very distinct impression of the elephant. For example, the man touching the tusk declares, ‘The elephant is a spear!’ while the man feeling a leg is convinced the elephant is a large tree. A heated argument ensues; each man believes his concept of the elephant is correct, and can’t imagine any other version being remotely accurate. There are six musical variations representing the different descriptions of the elephant. In each variation I feature small groups of solo instruments.

“This conflict escalates almost to the point of violence until the men realize the combined light of their individual candles has now revealed the true nature of the elephant, and that they were all partially correct in their assessments.

“I find this story engaging for a number of reasons. Without going into detail, its relevance to today’s deeply divided political climate is fairly obvious. Musically, it also seems to lend itself particularly well to the many different colors of the orchestra—which I feel is a compelling metaphor for a collection of diverse elements uniting to achieve a larger beauty. In addition to the different instrument families, I also feature some exotic percussion instruments, including five nested aluminum mixing bowls pitched low to high, of the kind you have in your kitchen. It sounds kind of like an Indonesian gamelan.

“*Aspects* is, if not officially a ‘Concerto for Orchestra,’ certainly a celebration of the orchestra, and particularly the musicians of the Oregon Symphony, to whom this work is dedicated.”

Portland native composer/performer Kenji Bunch has been hailed by *The New York Times* as “A composer to watch.” Bunch’s music, which combines vernacular American influences with techniques from his classical training as a violist, blends wit, exuberance, lyricism, unpredictable stylistic infusions, and exquisite craftsmanship to create a new American musical vocabulary.

Bunch’s compositions have been performed by over 50 orchestras, and in premier venues on six continents. He is currently the artistic director of Fear No Music, one of Portland’s premier new music ensembles, and Bunch teaches both theory and composition at Portland State University and Reed College.

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## ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

### Symphony No. 9 in E Minor, “From the New World”

#### THE VITAL STATS

**COMPOSER:** Born September 8, 1841, Nelahozeves, near Kralupy in Bohemia (now the Czech Republic); died May 1, 1904, Prague.

**WORK COMPOSED:** 1892–1893 in New York City.

**WORLD PREMIERE:** Anton Seidl led the New York Philharmonic on December 16, 1893, at Carnegie Hall.

**MOST RECENT OREGON SYMPHONY PERFORMANCE:** November 21, 2011; Carlos Kalmar, conductor.

**INSTRUMENTATION:** 2 flutes (one doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, triangle, and strings.

**ESTIMATED DURATION:** 40 minutes

Antonín Dvořák began work on his Ninth Symphony in December 1892, shortly after his arrival in America, and completed it in May 1893. He had come to the United States at the invitation of Jeanette Thurber, president of the National Conservatory of Music, who had asked Dvořák to head the National Conservatory of Music in New York City. Although Dvořák was initially reluctant to leave Vysoká, his country home, not to mention his friends and his country, the \$15,000 salary Mrs. Thurber offered him was too tempting to pass up (Dvořák’s six children were all under 13 at the time; providing for his family was the main reason he accepted Thurber’s offer). For her part, Thurber hoped Dvořák’s international reputation would shine much-needed luster on her school.

During his three-year sojourn in New York, Dvořák spent his off hours exploring the city, watching trains and large ships arrive and depart, feeding pigeons in Central Park and meeting all kinds of people. He also accompanied Mrs. Thurber around town, taking in, among other outings, a performance of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show. She was keenly interested in creating a uniquely “American” musical sound and style, and hoped that Dvořák would oblige her. She suggested that Dvořák “write a symphony embodying his experiences and feelings in America.” Late in 1892, Dvořák wrote to a friend back home,

“The Americans expect great things of me. I am to show them the way into the Promised Land, the realm of a new, independent art, in short a national style of music! ... This will certainly be a great and lofty task, and I hope that with God’s help I shall succeed in it. I have plenty of encouragement to do so.” Dvořák’s ultimate response to Thurber’s request was no mere parlor piece or small chamber work, but a symphony as expansive and energetic as America itself. From the moment of its premiere, the New World Symphony became Dvořák’s most popular work and one of the most performed symphonies by any composer.

Although Dvořák was exposed to a great deal of American folk music, including Native American melodies and Negro spirituals, he did not quote any of them verbatim while writing the Ninth Symphony. Dvořák explained, “The influence of America can be readily felt by anyone with ‘a nose.’” That is, hints of the uniquely American flavor of this music are discernable throughout. Dvořák makes use of the syncopated rhythms, repeated patterns, and particular scales common to much of America’s indigenous music. However, the Ninth Symphony is not a patchwork of previously existing materials, and Dvořák used no direct quotes in any part of the work, including the famous Largo, which was later given the title *Goin’ Home*, with accompanying text, by one of Dvořák’s composition students in New York. All the significant melodies in the Ninth Symphony are Dvořák’s own. “I have simply written original themes embodying the peculiarities of Indian music, and using these themes as subjects, have developed them with all the resources of modern rhythms, harmony, counterpoint and orchestral color,” Dvořák explained. As for the title,

“From the New World,” Dvořák intended it as an aural picture postcard to be mailed back to friends and family in Europe and meant simply “Impressions and Greetings from the New World.”

At the premiere, the audience applauded every movement with great enthusiasm, especially the *Largo*, which they cheered without pause until Dvořák rose from his seat and took a bow. A critic writing for *The New York Evening Post* spoke for most when he wrote, “Anyone who heard it could not deny that it is the greatest symphonic work ever composed in this country ... A masterwork has been added to the symphonic literature.”

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#### Recommended Recordings

##### Beethoven–Piano Concerto No. 4

Yefim Bronfman, piano  
David Zinman–Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich  
Arte Nova 640100

##### Dvorak–Symphony No. 9

István Kertész–London Symphony  
Orchestra  
Decca 000692002 OR

Christoph von Dohnányi–Cleveland  
Orchestra  
2-Decca 452182