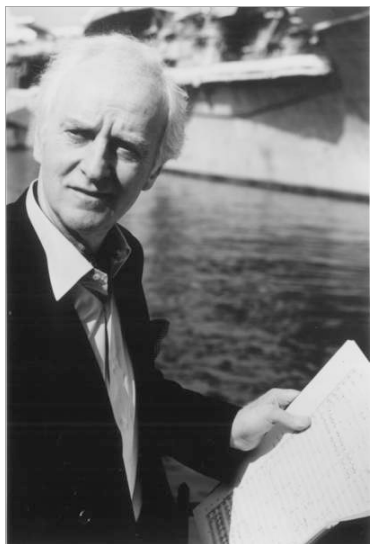


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Duffy's 'Mark Twain' out on CD

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John Duffy

CAMDEN — On Dec. 10, 2010, trailblazing American composer and Midcoast resident John Duffy released his newest CD, "We Want Mark Twain." The compact disc includes his recent composition, "Mark Twain," as well as several commissioned pieces, released here for the first time together.

"We Want Mark Twain" was commissioned by the Eastman School of Music, Rochester, N.Y. It originally was composed in 2005 and revised in 2009. Scored for narrator and string quartet, the work is based on the writings of Mark Twain, someone with whom Duffy feels an inspirational kinship. In composing "Twain," a narrated and musical journey, he wanted the musicians to be part of the drama — to call out, yell out, sing out, stomp their feet, join in with the narrator, so the drama is felt viscerally.

The narrator for "Twain" is Isaiah Sheffer, founding artistic director of Symphony Space and director and host of its acclaimed National Public Radio series "Selected Shorts." The work premiered at Symphony Space in New York City in March 2005, hosted by Sheffer. It premiered in Maine at the Strand Theatre in Rockland in 2008 with Bay Chamber Concerts and again was narrated by Isaiah Sheffer.

Also featured on the disc is Duffy's beautiful and heart-wrenching Saxophone Concerto in memory of Stan Getz, commissioned by Duke University in 1964. Duffy composed this concerto at the height of the civil rights struggle. At that time, while living in his hometown of New York City, he picked up a newspaper and read the headline "Four Little Girls Killed by Bomb" about a bombing in a Birmingham, Ala., Baptist church. Heartbroken and horrified, Duffy composed the second movement of the concerto in memory of those children. Featured performers on Saxophone Concerto include the Cassatt String Quartet; Glenn Morrissette on tenor saxophone; and Tomoya Aomori, double bass.

Duffy's "Seven Portraits for Orchestra" are from concert, film and theater music composed during the past 50 years. Commissioned by the Sierra Club and Channel Thirteen in New York City, these short pieces bear the names of people he admires and places and ideas that spark his imagination. "Mountains Majesty" is an inspirational song about the sweep and the beauty of America. "Jerusalem" was composed for Duffy's teacher, Solomon Rosowsky, an early pioneer in Palestine, who jumped with joy when he talked of Jerusalem. "Istanbul," written for a Turkish friend and fellow composer, describes summer afternoons, sipping white wine and eating Turkish apricots.

In his short piece "Muhammad Ali," the music evokes The Great One doing his trademark "rope-a-dope;" the music, which changes meter often, is Duffy's version of Ali's fast footwork. In "Picasso," Duffy is inspired by an ancient Moorish/Celtic scale on which he created the melody. The solo trumpet is the toreador and the music evokes Picasso's powerful drawings of crowds at a bullfight. In the piece titled "Einstein," the super-scientist with an eye for the ladies is depicted, according to Duffy, as "dancing way out there in space, with a warm lady in his arms." The music pulses with an exuberant waltz beat.

The final piece on the disc is "Lady Liberty," which holds a special meaning for Duffy. His Irish-immigrant parents first saw this majestic woman when their ship steamed into New York Harbor. Duffy reminds his listeners that liberty does not come easy. The music, with its rich, brass harmonies, reflects the hopes and promises of new life. Duffy is a real American patriot and his music reflects and amplifies his love for his country and its diverse people.

Featured performers on "We Want Mark Twain" include the Cassatt String Quartet and classical singer Signe Mortensen. Acclaimed as one of America's outstanding ensembles, the Manhattan-based Cassatt String Quartet performs throughout North America, Europe and the Far East. Equally adept at classical masterpieces and contemporary music, the Cassatt collaborates with a remarkable array of artists and composers. The quartet is named after the American impressionist painter Mary Cassatt.

Classical singer Mortensen has sung with opera companies throughout the country including the New Composer Institute at the Virginia Arts Festival, where she works closely with Duffy. The first of the Seven Portraits, "Mountains Majesty," is performed by the Utah Symphony Orchestra with noted conductor Joseph Silverstein. The remaining musical pieces are by the Royal Symphony Orchestra with conductor Richard Williams.

Duffy, a major figure in American music, has composed more than 300 works for symphony orchestra, opera, theater, television and film. He and his work have received many awards in recognition of his excellent contributions to music including two Emmys and an ASCAP award for special recognition in film and television music. He currently lives and works in Camden. For more information on Duffy and his music, visit JohnDuffy.com.

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