

”Every Matter Under Heaven” is a work of lush and colorful orchestration and invincible full-blooded pan-diatonicism adapting speeches from JFK, NASA, Truman, atomic scientists, military leaders, a.o., to illustrate the ancient Hebrew book of Ecclesiastes’ unapologetic manner of explaining virtually "a time for everything". The chosen subject matter helps us recognize that a successful life is usually demonstrated best by one's ability to balance the commonplace.

The scope of Lee Johnson’s new work is truly staggering: he aims and succeeds at nothing less than a discussion of *everything* in the universe, from the cosmology of the Big Bang down to family matters in the Midwest, and all that lies between.

Several musical devices reappear throughout the work, providing a sense of unity that complements the remarkable diversity of other elements. Perhaps the most important of these unifiers, both orchestrally and dramatically, is the solo violin. Mr. Johnson writes extremely well for this instrument; its lyric statements suggest the presence of an individual who comments on and reacts to events in an uncommonly sensitive manner. Perhaps the solo violin could be considered the soul of the work itself. Just before the end, it gets a long, unaccompanied cadenza that recapitulates themes and organizational motives from every preceding movement. Entitled „Circle,“ this cadenza reminds us that the universe of tasks and events in each of our lives will recur time and again, its endless cycle providing reassurance and tragedy, hope and heartbreak, for every generation.

The clarity of its tonal idiom hypnotizes and charms the listener - hence its undeniable popular appeal. The music of the oratorio emits positive spiritual energy in the traditions of American art.

It’s very American to cherish one’s family and freedoms more than any grand national project. By recognizing that, Lee Johnson has created a most American oratorio. His music is also robustly American musically, resounding with rhythms and tune types we remember from Copland and Barber and Bernstein, not to mention John Adams. But none of it sounds derivative. Mr. Johnson possesses an insider’s knowledge of the music that sounds like home to us, and he uses it without apology. The result is a work of art that communicates immediately: „from the heart to the heart,“ as Beethoven liked to say.

A Symphonic Film

This “American Oratorio” is an extraordinary new addition to the genre of symphonic film. The massive score abounds in bold musical gestures that work in direct symbiotic relationship with the libretto's texts. However, just as easily and throughout the film, the libretto is also in direct opposition to its own surface level subject matter. This polarizing approach to text setting and film making is designed to show just how contradictory and paradoxical life in the middlehalf of the 20th century was when one explores the supposed American point of view.

Open source historical films, the U.S. wartime propaganda machine, and the trusting socially engineered public school classroom of American life during the 1940's, 50's and 60's are the cultural forum of filmographic resources for this film.

Humor and hope also abound in EVERY MATTER UNDER HEAVEN. One needs only recognize that even in the midst of our most noble and serious efforts we just might find

ourselves lovingly laughing at what it means to be human. This ability to stand back and observe from afar is one of the surprising benefits of art that makes use of historical filmography; it's also one of the features that makes the symphonic film EVERY MATTER UNDER HEAVEN so fresh and at the same time avant garde.

The libretto of EVERY MATTER UNDER HEAVEN concludes with the words, "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man". The film ends with the scene of a man racing home from his not so important job at a refrigerator factory to sit down for dinner with his loving and completely average American family. By looking deeper into these benign clichés the current unprecedentedly globalised community would do well to remember that the things we cherish most must not be used as motivational devices to cause us to strategically deny others from having the same potential for fulfillment and happiness with every matter under heaven.

(Used texts by Dr. Victoria Adamenko, Dr. Lyn Schenbeck and Lee Johnson)