

Odna Zhizn (A Life)

Christopher Rouse

Christopher Rouse is among the most respected composers of his generation, noted especially for works of compulsive rhythm, vivid color, and catholicity in bringing together the traditions of classical and popular music. He graduated from the Oberlin College Conservatory of Music in 1971. (Twenty-five years later his alma mater would award him an honorary doctorate.) He went on to work privately with George Crumb for two years, and then reentered academia to pursue composition studies with Karel Husa and Robert Palmer at Cornell University, which granted him a D.M.A. degree in 1977. Also influential in Rouse's ascent was the composer William Schuman, one of the founders of Lincoln Center.

Rouse has worked at the University of Michigan, the Eastman School of Music (1981–2002), and The Juilliard School, where he has taught since 1997 (full-time since 2002). The course on rock music that he introduced at Eastman was the first such class to receive full accreditation at any of the leading American conservatories. He has received honors for his music through grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, a League of Composers/I.S.C.M. Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and, in 1988, the Kennedy Center Friedheim Award for his Symphony No. 1. In

1993 his Trombone Concerto – written as one of the New York Philharmonic's 150th Anniversary Commissions and premiered by the Orchestra and Principal Trombone Joseph Alessi in

1992 – won its composer the Pulitzer Prize in Music. Our audiences will also remember Rouse's piano concerto *Seeing*, a meditation on insanity inspired by the lives of Robert Schumann and the rock musician Skip Spence, commissioned and premiered in 1999 by the New York Philharmonic; his Violin Concerto, performed in 2001 (with Cho-Liang Lin as soloist); his Symphony No. 2, which the Orchestra programmed in 2006; and *Rapture*, an orchestral study in spiritual ecstasy that was given its New York premiere in 2008 and is a rare departure from the emotional darkness that is more typical of his oeuvre, and that is richly represented in *Odna Zhizn*.

In 1993 Rouse was honored with an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Music, and in 2002 the Academy elected him to its membership. Also in 2002 Rouse's *Concert de Gaudí*, a guitar concerto, received the Grammy Award for Best Classical Contemporary Composition. In 2009 he was named Musician of the Year by *Musical America*, which, in announcing the award, cited particularly his skill as a composer of symphonic scores.

Rouse has served as composer-in-residence for the Indianapolis, Baltimore, and Pittsburgh symphony orchestras, as well as at the Santa Cecilia and Schleswig-Holstein music festivals (both of these at the invitation of Leonard Bernstein), the du Maurier New Music Festival in Winnipeg, and the Tanglewood, Pacific, and Aspen music festivals.

In Short

Born: February 15, 1949, in Baltimore, Maryland

Resides: in Baltimore, Maryland

Work composed: completed November 2, 2008; commissioned by the New York Philharmonic, Alan Gilbert, Music Director; dedication: "For Natasha"

World premiere: these performances

Estimated duration: ca. 20 minutes

Alan Gilbert on Christopher Rouse

Christopher Rouse is one of the most important American composers working today, and I'm very happy that he agreed to write a piece for this program for this first season of mine. He is a composer who really writes what he hears, and by that I mean [his work is] very honest, and he uses his very deep musical sensibility to come up with his musical language. There are a lot of composers who, by contrast, I feel employ a certain technique in generating the notes that end up on the page. Chris is, I think, a true composer in the old-fashioned sense: he hears the music that he writes and he puts it down on the page and it comes out as a very, very honest voice. That's why I really believe in his music.

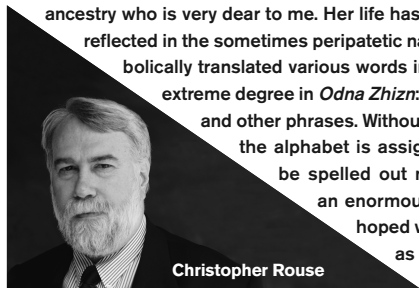
Although he has written in various genres, Rouse is most widely recognized as an orchestral composer. His music has been programmed by every major American orchestra in addition to many of the principal orchestras of Europe, Australia, and Asia. Among his recent works are the ballet *Friandises*, composed for New York City Ballet and The Juilliard School and premiered in 2006 in Juilliard's centennial gala, broadcast on *Live From Lincoln Center*; *Wolf Rounds* for wind ensemble, premiered in 2007 at Carnegie Hall; his Concerto

for Orchestra, unveiled in 2008 at the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music; and his Oboe Concerto, premiered a year ago by Basil Reeve and the Minnesota Orchestra just prior to the composer's 60th birthday. Concertos have emerged as a particular interest of Rouse. In addition to those already mentioned (for piano, trombone, violin, guitar, and oboe) he has produced concertos for cello (introduced by Yo-Yo Ma), flute (for Carol Wincenc), clarinet (first played by Larry Combs), and percussion (*Der gerettete Alberich*, premiered by Evelyn Glennie). A trumpet concerto is currently in the works, on commission from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Instrumentation: three flutes (one doubling piccolo), two oboes and English horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, vibraphone, marimba, orchestra bells, bass drum, bongos, sizzle cymbal, Chinese cymbal, gong, suspended cymbals, tam-tam, slapstick, maracas, ratchet, crotales, brake drum, water gong, harp, celesta, and strings.

In the Composer's Words

In Russian, "odna zhizn" means "a life." This work has been composed in homage to a person of Russian ancestry who is very dear to me. Her life has not been an easy one, and the struggles she has faced are reflected in the sometimes peripatetic nature of the music. While quite a few of my scores have symbolically translated various words into notes and rhythms, this process has been carried to an extreme degree in *Odna Zhizn*: virtually all of the music is focused on the spelling of names and other phrases. Without actually explaining my "code," I'll just say that each letter of the alphabet is assigned a pitch and (occasionally) a duration, and words will be spelled out musically according to the letters of those words. It was an enormous challenge for me to fashion these materials into what I hoped would be a satisfying musical experience that functions both as the public portrayal of an extraordinary life as well as a private love letter.



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