

Steel Symphony

Patrick Greene (b. 1985)

If you trace the path of Paul Revere's famous ride out into the hills west of Boston, continuing just a bit beyond the spot where British troops captured and interrogated him at gunpoint, you'll likely see a huge house on a rambling plot of land. This estate once belonged to a wealthy Boston businessman named Julian de Cordova, an art-lover who donated his property to the town of Lincoln on the condition that, upon his death, it be turned into a public art museum. The deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, as it's now known, opened to the public in 1950, and it remains an immensely popular—and immensely relevant—attraction to this day.

My wife and I moved to Lincoln this past February, and one of our great joys has been spending many a sunny Saturday morning wandering around the sculpture garden. After a few visits, I noticed that I tended to gravitate toward three works in particular: a monstrous beast frozen mid-stride, a stream of steel barrels cascading down the hillside, and a set of child-sized soldiers splayed out in the forest. *Steel Symphony* explores the essential characteristics of each of these artworks, deriving from them its musical material, its structure, and its programmatic thrust.



The first movement is based on *Putto 4 over 4*, the aforementioned “beast” by the American sculptor Michael Rees. It's a twelve-foot-tall monster of a thing that looks, more or less, like a nightmare-creature leaping down the knoll behind the museum's central mansion. Rees created the piece by first crafting a small, scale model of an imagined creature with two chubby, cherubic legs and two arm-length, spindly fingers. He then brought the model to a computer animator, and they worked together to create a short video of how the thing might walk around if it were alive. Finally, Rees, chose his

favorite frame from the animation reel, molded a larger-than-life recreation of it, and coated the whole thing with iron. In writing the first movement, “Putto 4 over 4,” I imagined a scenario in which the sculpture comes to life after all the visitors have left for the day. It starts with a jolt of energy, which then settles into a passacaglia, slowly unspooling, creaking and groaning its way to vitality. It builds to a virtuosic climax, where the beast is careering and tumbling around the park.

The second movement, “**Lincoln**,” is based on the same-named work by another American sculptor: Dewitt Godfrey. It's a massive assemblage of COR-TEN steel tumbling down the hillside from the museum to the road below, and it's really something to behold in person. The whole thing is basically a series of self-similar cylinders, piled one



on top of the other, of various sizes and weights. Whereas “Putto 4 over 4” told its musical story from the perspective of the sculpture itself, “Lincoln” takes as its perspective that of an observer walking alongside it. Starting at the top of the hill, where the cylinders are small and loosely packed, the music is simple, repetitive, circular. As the observer progresses down the hillside, the music picks up momentum, heft, and complexity, as the sculpture slowly transforms into a twenty-foot tall, towering behemoth. As the hill levels out, the sculpture—and the music—returns to the humble circularity of the beginning.



The British/Welsh sculptor Laura Ford’s haunting tableau, *Armour Boys*, inspired the music of the third and final movement. It’s a series of boy-sized bronze figures, five of them, dressed in knight-in-shining-armor costumes, splayed about the sculpture park’s sylvan periphery. Because the boys are wearing masks, one can’t really discern if they’re sleeping (perhaps having tired themselves out with war games) or if they’ve been killed in an actual battle. I decided to let this ambiguity seep into the music, but, at first, I couldn’t quite decide how. As I sat among the sculptures on a rainy

day while the park was closing, it hit me: I’d write the music from the boys’ perspectives, transporting the scene to April of 1775, shortly after shots were fired (just down the road) on the Lexington Green. As I looked out over Flint Pond, I imagined crowds assembled across the way singing hymns of war in the spring rain. I started riffling through volumes of Revolutionary War-era poetry, and found one by the Hartford-based soldier/poet, David Humphreys, that seemed to really capture the spirit of the time. I then set the whole poem as a hymn, stripped the words away, and “orchestrated” it on the organ. To capture the ambiguity of the piece, I shrouded the hymn in layers of harmonic and rhythmic interference, bringing to the music a similar sense of open-endedness—a “mask” obscuring its face, leaving the listener a little unsure of what exactly they’re hearing.

A composer, singer, and conductor, **Patrick Greene (b. 1985)** is a rising artist in the world of contemporary art music. Hailed by the *Boston Musical Intelligencer* as a composer of “true musicality,” Mr. Greene writes music that wholeheartedly embraces the aesthetic diversity of the modern world. Recent engagements include performances by the Boston Musica Viva, the Atlanta Chamber Players, the New Haven Symphony Orchestra (and Wind Quintet), Christopher Houlihan, Transient Canvas, Balletik Duo, and many others. As a frequently commissioned choral composer, Patrick’s music has been performed by choirs across the United States as well as Germany, Portugal, and Italy.

In the fall of 2010, Patrick won the Rapido! New England competition. In January, 2011, at the Rapido! Take Two!! National Finals in Atlanta, his piece *abstractEXTRACTION* garnered the Internet Audience Favorite Award. Mr. Greene’s piece *The Long Walk* was recently chosen as the official anthem of Trinity College’s Cornerstone Campaign, a \$32.9 million-dollar restoration

project. In 2011, Patrick became the youngest commissioned composer in the two-decade history of Boston Musica Viva Family Concerts.

Mr. Greene earned his MM degree in Composition from The Boston Conservatory in May 2010, where he studied with Andy Vores and Dalit Warshaw. He graduated with a BA in Music from Trinity College in 2007, as a student of Gerald Moshell, Douglas Bruce Johnson, and John Rose.

Patrick is a member of the Society for Music Theory, the American Composers' Forum, CompositionToday.com, and the Society of Composers, Inc. He is also a founding member of the Fifth Floor Collective and the Equilibrium Concert Series. Outside of music, he is the Global HR Coordinator for Oxfam America, an international NGO headquartered in Boston. He lives with his wife, the actress Micah Greene, and their son Jude in Lincoln, Massachusetts.