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[8.559372](#) - DAUGHERTY, M.: Fire and Blood / MotorCity Triptych / Raise the Roof  
(Kavafian, B. Jones, Detroit Symphony, N. Jarvi)

[English](#)

Michael Daugherty (b. 1954)  
Fire and Blood • MotorCity Triptych • Raise the Roof

*Fire and Blood* (2003), for violin and orchestra, was commissioned by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. The world premiere was given by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Neeme Järvi, with Ida Kavafian, solo violin, at Orchestra Hall, Detroit, Michigan on 3 May 2003. In 1932, Edsel Ford commissioned the Mexican modernist artist Diego Rivera (1886–1957) to paint a mural representing the automobile industry of Detroit. Rivera came to Detroit and worked over the next two years to paint four large walls of the inner courtyard at the Detroit Institute of Arts. His extraordinary *Detroit Industry* murals have inspired me to create my own musical fresco for violin and orchestra. It was Rivera himself who predicted the possibility of turning his murals into music, after returning from a tour of the Ford factories: "In my ears, I heard the wonderful symphony which came from his factories where metals were shaped into tools for men's service. It was a new music, waiting for the composer...to give it communicable form."

### I. Volcano

Before coming to Detroit, Rivera lived in Mexico City, surrounded by volcanoes. Fire is an important element in his murals, which depict the blaze of factory furnaces like erupting volcanoes. Volcanic fire was also associated with revolution by Rivera, an ardent member of the Mexican Communist party. He saw the creation of the Detroit murals as a way to further his revolutionary ideas. The music of the first movement responds to the fiery furnaces of Rivera's imagination. The violinist plays virtuosic triple stops, while the orchestra explodes with pulsating energy. The composition alternates between repeated patterns in 7/4 time and polytonal passages that occur simultaneously in different tempos. It concludes with an extended violin cadenza accompanied by marimba and maracas.

### II. River Rouge

At the Ford River Rouge Automobile Complex, located next to the Detroit River, Rivera spent many months creating sketches of workers and machinery in action. He was accompanied by his young wife, the remarkable Mexican painter Frida Kahlo (1906–1954). She lived in constant pain as a result of polio in childhood and a serious bus accident at the age of eighteen in Mexico City. Many of her self-portraits depict the suffering of her body. During her time with Rivera in Detroit, Kahlo nearly died from a miscarriage, as depicted in paintings such as *Henry Ford Hospital* and *My Birth*. The color of blood is everywhere in these works. She also had a passionate and playful side: she loved wearing colorful traditional Mexican dresses and jewelry, drinking tequila and singing at parties. Kahlo's labors, grief, and zeal for life added another perspective to Rivera's industry. This movement is dedicated to Frida Kahlo's spirit. The solo violin introduces two main themes. The first theme is dissonant and chromatic, flowing like a red river of blood. The second is a haunting melody that Kahlo herself might have sung, longing to return to her native Mexico. The orchestra resonates with floating marimbas and string tremolo, echoing like a mariachi band in the distance. The orchestration is colorful, like the bright tapestries of her dress. While death and suffering haunt the music, there is an echo of hope

### III. Assembly Line

Rivera described his murals as a depiction of "towering blast furnaces, serpentine conveyor belts, impressive scientific laboratories, busy assembly rooms; and all the men who worked them all." Rather than pitting man against machine, Rivera thought the collaboration of man and machine would bring liberation for the worker. The violin soloist in this final movement is like the worker, surrounded by a mechanical orchestra. The music is a roller coaster ride on a conveyor belt, moving rapidly in 7/8 time. This perpetual motion is punctuated by pizzicato strings, percussive whips, and brassy cluster chords. The percussion section plays factory noises on metal instruments like brake drums and triangles, and a ratchet turns like the wheels of the machinery. In addition to this acceleration of multiple mechanical rhythms, the musical phrasing recalls the undulating wave pattern that moves from panel to panel in Rivera's mural.

*MotorCity Triptych* (2000) for orchestra was commissioned by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. The world première was given by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Neeme Järvi at Orchestra Hall, Detroit, Michigan on 4 January 2001. The triptych in my title refers not only to an iconic art object in three parts, but also suggests a "Triptik" from the American Automobile Association: a fold-out map to mark a road trip to Detroit. My musical travelogue is in three movements which may be performed together or separately.

I. *Motown Mondays* is inspired by the legendary performances of Motown artists, on nine consecutive Mondays during the summer of 1966, at The Roostertail nightclub in downtown Detroit. Motown Records, founded in Detroit by Berry Gordy, Jr., became one of the most successful and influential recording companies in American pop music. The distinctive Motown sound combined rhythm and blues, gospel, soul, funk, and rock, often accompanied by a large studio orchestra that included members of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra string section. As a teenager in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, I performed many Motown songs such as *Cloud Nine* on the Hammond Organ in my band called *The Soul Company*. To evoke the sound of Motown legends such as The Supremes, Marvin Gaye and the Temptations, I divide the orchestra into various solos, duets, trios and quartets, leading up to an elaborate funky fugue in the coda. To recall the falsetto voices, low bass rumblings, and lush gospel harmonies of Motown singers, I often have the instruments of the orchestra play in their extreme high and low registers. In addition to soaring Marvin Gaye-like melodies played by the violins, we hear the string section strumming pizzicato chords like a rhythm and blues guitar. Descending major seventh chords are heard in the woodwinds and antiphonally positioned percussion instruments provide lively polyrhythmic counterpoint.

II. *Pedal-to-the-Metal* is a high-speed drive along Michigan Avenue in Detroit, the automobile capital of the world. I create a musical landscape that takes us along never-ending neon signs, nightclubs, 1950s motor inns, diners, bars, Middle Eastern restaurants, antique shops, and used car lots. I frame and re-frame imaginary sounds from these worlds, as they pass by in fragmented orchestrations, melodies, and counterpoints to suggest the movement of cars from the factory assembly line to the highway's double lane.

III. *Rosa Parks Boulevard* pays tribute to the woman who, in 1955, helped set in motion the modern civil rights movement by her refusal to move to the back of the bus in Montgomery, Alabama. In 1957, she moved to Detroit, Michigan, where she lived until her death in 2005. One of the many honors bestowed upon Rosa Parks is a downtown Detroit boulevard bearing her name. In the fall of 1999, I had the pleasure of attending a Sunday church service with Rosa Parks at the St. Matthew African Methodist Episcopal Church in Detroit. For more than four decades she attended this modest church with the motto "The Church Where Everybody Is Somebody" hand-painted over its entrance. I joined Rosa Parks and the congregation in singing various gospel hymns and listening to the preacher's inspired oratory. After the service, she told me her favorite piece of music was the traditional African-American spiritual, *Oh Freedom*.

Since her association with the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. in the 1950s, Rosa Parks viewed the words spoken by African-American preachers as a source of strength. Preachers also inspired African-American poet James Weldon Johnson. In the preface to *God's Trombones*, his 1927 volume of poetry, Johnson describes how the preacher "strode the pulpit up and down in what was actually a very rhythmic dance, and he brought into play the full gamut of his wonderful voice, a voice—what shall I say? Not of an organ or a trumpet, but rather of a trombone, the instrument possessing above all others the power to express the wide and varied range of emotions encompassed by the human voice—and with greater amplitude. He intoned, he moaned, he pleaded, he blared, he crashed, he thundered. I sat fascinated; and more, I was, perhaps against my will, deeply moved; the emotional effect upon me was irresistible."

*Rosa Parks Boulevard* features the trombone section, echoing the voices of generations of African-American preachers in Detroit and across the country. Fragments of the melody *Oh Freedom* are played in musical canons by the trombones, which I associate with the preacher. I also introduce a musical motive, which I associate with Rosa Parks, first heard in the woodwinds and vibraphone. These lyrical sections alternate with a turbulent bus ride, evoked by atonal polyrhythms in the trumpets, horns and non-pitched percussion. The recurrence of ominous beating in the bass drum at the end of the work reminds us that while progress was made in civil rights in the twentieth century, there is still much to be done in the twenty-first century.

*Raise the Roof* (2003) for timpani and orchestra was commissioned by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra for the opening of its Max M. Fisher Music Center, and is dedicated to Peter and Julie Cummings. The world première was given by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Neeme Järvi, with Brian Jones, timpani, at Orchestra Hall, Detroit, Michigan on 16 October 2003. *Raise the Roof* is inspired by the construction of grand architectural wonders such as the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris (1345) and the Empire State Building in New York City (1931). I create a grand acoustic construction by bringing the timpani into the foreground and giving the timpanist the rare opportunity to play long expressive melodies, and a tour de force cadenza. I incorporate a wide variety of timpani performance techniques: extensive use of foot pedals for melodic tuning of the drums, placement of a cymbal upside down on the head of the lowest drum to play glissandi rolls, and

striking the drums with regular mallets, wire brushes, maraca sticks, and even bare hands. *Raise the Roof* is in the form of a double variation. The first theme of the double variation, played initially by the tuba, is presented in various timbral and rhythmic guises such as a "guaguanco". The second theme of the double variation, first heard in the flutes and then the timpani, is reminiscent of a medieval plain chant. The two themes are passed around in canons and fugues and other permutations throughout the ensemble to create elaborate patterns, as in a gothic cathedral. *Raise the Roof* rises toward a crescendo of urban polyrhythms and dynamic contrasts, allowing the ensemble to create a grand acoustic construction.

Michael Daugherty

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