

# Anchorage Symphony Orchestra

## NEWS RELEASE

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## Anchorage Symphony Orchestra

### *Echoes*

Saturday, November 10, 2018 – 8:00pm

Atwood Concert Hall, ACPA

**Anchorage, Alaska – October 23, 2018** – Twenty years ago Anchorage met up-and-coming conductor Randall Craig Fleischer who was chosen to lead the Anchorage Symphony Orchestra as its music director. On November 10<sup>th</sup>, the Anchorage community celebrates this partnership and at the Anchorage Symphony’s concert, *Echoes*. Tremendous growth has taken place within the Anchorage Symphony over the twenty seasons under Randy’s leadership including successful performances of challenging repertoire, fifteen new commissioned works, the expansion of Young People’s Concerts now serving 7,000 students, the introduction of multi-media works including the very successful Silent Film night, the expansion into concerts of popular music of various genres, and a host of highly successful collaborations.

There are too many highlights of Randy’s tenure to feature on one concert, so the Anchorage Symphony has chosen to honor him through music he loves, music that brought us together and a commissioned work he crafted that he calls a highlight of his career and his life.

In this quick “Randy tour” of his ASO tenure, this concert will showcase his love of Russian music. When the ASO first met Randy in 1992 he was visiting Alaska as the Associate Conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra then led by the legendary cellist and conductor Mstislav Rostropovich. “Slava”, as Randy affectionately calls him, was his mentor and had significant influence on Randy’s musical career. Born in Soviet Azerbaijan, Rostropovich was both a musical hero in the USSR and an outspoken champion for artistic freedom. Rostropovich would eventually leave the USSR in 1974, lose his citizenship and remain exiled until 1990 when he was allowed to return. At his first performance back in Russia, a young associate conducted the world renowned cellist and the National Symphony Orchestra in Dvorak’s *Cello Concerto*. That young conductor was Randy Fleischer. Just as Rostropovich is a musical hero to Randy – Shostakovich was just that to Rostropovich. In a 2006 New York Times interview, Rostropovich said of Shostakovich, “He was the most important man in my life, after my father.” To honor Randy, we honor his mentor’s mentor with a performance of Shostakovich’s *Festive Overture*.

Shostakovich was enjoying his new creative freedom after the death of Stalin when he received a frantic call. Just days before a concert commemorating the 37<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution, officials at the Bolshoi Theater found themselves without an opening work and asked Shostakovich, a musical consultant at the theater, if he could write something for them, quickly? Yes, he could. In just three days Shostakovich handed the manuscripts to a courier, ink still wet, for delivery to the copyists at the theater.

On November 6, 1954 *Festive Overture* premiered in Moscow and has remained a popular piece with musicians and audiences. After that first performance, Shostakovich’s friend, Lev Lebedinsky

described the piece as a “brilliant effervescent work, with its vivacious energy spilling over like uncorked champagne.” What a perfect way to begin an evening of celebration!

Continuing this “Randyversary” evening are two works he conducted at his audition concert 20 years earlier in November 1998, Mendelssohn’s *Hebrides Overture* and Strauss’ *Death and Transfiguration*. (It is interesting to note that ten years later Randy also included the *Hebrides Overture* on the concert program for the world premiere of his work *Echoes*!)

In 1829, Mendelssohn left Berlin with a childhood friend to sail around the British Isles. During this trip, he fell in love with Scotland, finding inspiration in its “comfortless, inhospitable solitude.” Upon his visit to the Scottish island of Staffa and its basalt sea cave known as Fingal’s Cave, he wrote to his sister, “In order to make you understand how extraordinarily the Hebrides affected me, the following came into my mind there.” The letter was accompanied by a few bars of the melody that he later used at the beginning of *Hebrides Overture*.

While Mendelssohn’s overture is a tone poem about his scenic trip, Strauss’ *Death and Transfiguration* is a tone poem about the final trip. Victorians and 19<sup>th</sup> century Europeans were fascinated with death and mysticism, which became popular inspiration for art at the time. In 1890, Strauss premiered his contribution to the muse with *Death and Transfiguration*, a musical depiction of the death of an artist as he flashes back on his life and finally ascends to heaven. Randy describes this piece as his, “favorite work in the Classical repertoire. It has everything. It has romance. It has beauty. I hope it sounds this beautiful when I make my journey.”

How could an evening honoring Randy not include the piece he calls “one of the highlights of my tenure (and my life).” Ten years ago, the ASO performed the world premiere of Randy’s composition *Echoes*, featuring indigenous music and dance from Alaska, Hawai’i and Massachusetts. Chosen from a pool of applicants, Randy was commissioned to write the work by the Education through Cultural and Historical Organizations (ECHO), a federally funded educational and cultural enrichment initiative. ECHO was comprised of five regional cultural institutions: the Alaska Native Heritage Center and Inupiat Heritage Center in Alaska; Bishop Museum in Hawai’i, the New Bedford ECHO project and Peabody Essex Museum in Massachusetts.

In preparation for the premiere 10 years ago Randy noted, “Writing *Echoes* was one of the most satisfying experiences of my musical life. As part of my agreement with the ECHO partners I was invited to each museum or Native Center and had the opportunity to see and hear a number of private performances of indigenous music. I taped these sessions and asked many questions about the history of each song or dance. In Barrow, I got up and danced along! (This was quite amusing to the dancers!) In making these journeys and studying this music I met many wonderful artists and found their passion for their culture inspiring. This was a journey of discovery for me – not only the discovery of new music but of new friends. It reinforced my belief that music is the language of peace and brotherhood. I’m so honored to collaborate with the ECHO partners on this musical exhibition which, in part, celebrates our own rich Alaskan musical legacy.”

The multi-media symphonic work incorporates New England sea music, and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Native American music, singing and dancing. It is structured in six scenes telling the story of ties between cultures in the 19<sup>th</sup> century maritime trade and whaling industry when ships would make their way from Massachusetts, sail around Cape Horn in South America to Hawai’i, and finally north to Alaska. Shortly after its premiere, *Echoes* was performed in a

chamber version at the Smithsonian's Museum of the American Indian in Washington DC. Anchorage audiences were thrilled with the performances in 2008, and patrons have been asking for another opportunity to experience *Echoes*. We proudly offer that opportunity on November 10<sup>th</sup>.

*Anchorage Symphony's Echoes, Saturday, November 10, 2018, (8pm) in the Atwood Concert Hall, Alaska Center for the Performing Arts. Infrared headphones for the hearing impaired are available concert night from the House Manager on the Orchestra Level. Tickets: Adult, \$52-\$27; Youth, \$24.75-\$12.50; Senior, \$46.50-\$24.50 (prices include surcharges and fees). Military, student and group discounts available. To purchase tickets, visit the CenterTix Box Office at the Alaska Center for the Performing Arts or [www.centertix.com](http://www.centertix.com) or call 263-ARTS (2787), toll free at 1-877-ARTS- TIX.*

**Program**

SHOSTAKOVICH Festive Overture  
MENDELSSOHN Hebrides Overture (Fingal's Cave)  
STRAUSS Death and Transfiguration  
RANDALL CRAIG FLEISCHER Echoes

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