

The New England Philharmonic presents Miracles and Rhapsodies featuring the Boston premiere of ‘MacNeil Lehrer Variations’ based on one of the most enduring theme songs in television history

Also featuring the Boston premiere of
Brian Robison’s ‘In Search of the Miraculous’
Tsai Performance Center | February 27, 2016 at 8 p.m.

BOSTON — The [New England Philharmonic](#) under the direction of [Richard Pittman](#) will present **Miracles and Rhapsodies** on **February 27 at 8 p.m.** at the **Tsai Performance Center**. The concert features two Boston premieres: **“MacNeil Lehrer Variations”** from **Bernie Hoffer** and **Brian Robison’s “In Search of the Miraculous.”**

In 1975, the “Robert MacNeil Report,” a nightly half-hour news program that provided in-depth coverage of a different single issue each evening, debuted locally in New York with Jim Lehrer as the Washington correspondent. Just a few months later, the successful program was retitled **“The MacNeil/Lehrer Report”** and was distributed nationally by the Public Broadcasting Service. To commemorate the success of the show and the new format, a theme song was commissioned.

Composer Bernie Hoffer recalls how the original theme song was conceived. “I was invited to submit an entry for the theme music for this program. At my request, a meeting with the principals was held where I played records and discussed the type of music that would be appropriate. I then sent in three demos, and they picked one that most closely resembled what they were looking for.” Hoffer continues, “It was decided that the music should be contemporary sounding with rock influences. A recording session was then planned, and the music was recorded the following week. The instrumentation was two trumpets, two horns and a rock rhythm section that consisted of electric guitar, electric piano, electric (Fender) bass, and percussion.”

The result was a jazz-rock waltz in five-bar phrases that became **“Theme Music for the MacNeil/Lehrer Report”** and would receive an Emmy nomination.

Seven years and 30 major broadcast awards later, the program was enlarged to an hour, and Hoffer received another call. Producers decided that the theme music was to be retained but was to be upgraded to a more classical format. A symphonic orchestra was to be used, and the jazz-rock influences were to be downplayed. The result was the music that we hear today, although all the thematic materials remained true to the original.

“When the opportunity arose for me to create a large orchestra work based on the MacNeil/Lehrer theme, I jumped at it because I enjoy working with materials that are familiar both to me and to my audience. After all, how many ‘serious’ composers can work on new music that is already familiar to listeners throughout the United States and Canada — which led me to the structure of the ‘MacNeil Lehrer Variations.’”

The **“MacNeil Lehrer Variations”** was completed by Hoffer in 1990 and recorded later that same year with the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Richard Pittman, NEP’s music director, and released on Albany Records in 2012.

The NEP concert on February 27 will also feature a Boston premiere by Brian Robison, “In Search of the Miraculous.” The work takes its title from a book by P.D. Ouspensky (1878-1947) and from Robison’s perspective describes composers “in the act of composition.” The composer continues, “My process of writing always begins as a rational enterprise of design and construction, but many of the music’s attractive characteristics develop from intuitions I can’t explain.”

The work was born from Robison’s 2000 Whitaker Commission from the America Composers Orchestra and was performed by the orchestra for its world premiere at Carnegie Hall in 2003.

The evening will also include **Sergei Rachmaninoff's "Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini," op. 43**, featuring pianist **Randall Hodgkinson** and **Roy Harris's Symphony no. 3**.

Tickets for the NEP's **Miracles and Rhapsodies** on February 27, 2016, at 8 p.m. at the Tsai Performance Center are available at www.NEPhilharmonic.org.

About the New England Philharmonic Now performing its 39th season, the NEP, under the direction of Richard Pittman, is internationally renowned for its daring programming encompassing both contemporary and traditional works. The volunteer orchestra has earned nine ASCAP awards for Adventurous Programming and was included in the Arts Fuse's top10 list of notable classical music performances of 2014. The orchestra's illustrious past includes the installation of three landmark programs. The NEP became the first orchestra of its size to support a Composer-in-Residence (1985), introduce a Call for Scores Program (1985), and establish a Young Artist Competition (1994), legacies that endure today.

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