

Throughline

NICO MUHLY

BORN: August 26, 1981, Randolph, VT. Currently living in New York City

COMPOSED: 2020

RECORDED/WORLD PREMIERE: September and October 2020 in Davies Symphony Hall and around the globe. Commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony, *Throughline* premiered as part of the digital presentation Throughline: San Francisco Symphony—From Hall to Home, which was first broadcast on local television and streamed online, November 14, 2020.

INSTRUMENTATION: violin, piano, electric guitar, bass, vocal, and flute soloists; 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), oboe, English horn, clarinet, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, keyboard, and strings

DURATION: About 17 mins

Nico Muhly offers the following comments on *Throughline*:

Throughline was composed especially for the legal and physical restrictions made necessary by the COVID-19 virus. A maximum of six orchestral players could be on stage at once, none of which could be a breath-based instrument (who had to be recorded individually). Soloists would be recorded remotely from across the globe, and it would all be assembled through an intricate video and audio editing process.

Each of the thirteen movements is a mini concerto, not just for one of the San Francisco Symphony's Collaborative Partners but for members of the Orchestra; for instance, one movement features Nicholas Britell on piano, playing with Principal Trumpet Mark Inouye, and in another movement, Pekka Kuusisto plays a kinetic, hyperactive duet with Principal Viola Jonathan Vinocour. Bryce Dessner's electric guitar is antagonized by trombones and tuba, with musical material shifting between the brass and an electric bass. The goal was to constantly illuminate individual San Francisco Symphony players as soloists as well as showing the musicians as team-players within their sections; in this sense it functions like a concerto grosso but with everybody shifting teams.

At the heart of the piece are three sections with more complicated origin stories. First, a piece of music [Three Fast Lines] in which I composed three lines of counterpoint and an artificial intelligence entity designed by Carol Reiley finished it, lending it a Bachian logic. Esperanza Spalding then improvised a piece for voice and bass, to which I added a subtle glaze of four cellos [Improvisation No. 2]. A brief Bach chorale with solo viola ushers in the last three movements (featuring Claire Chase, Julia Bullock, and Esa-Pekka Salonen), which employ a single set of chords in slow rotation over moderate music (for bass flute), slow music (for voice, with a text by Thomas Traherne), and incredibly slow music, which imagines Esa-Pekka conducting the orchestra through touch and gesture, from 6,000 miles (rather than six feet) away. —Nico Muhly