

***Illumination* - Alison Yun-Fei Jiang**

“A shooting star, a clouding of the sight, a lamp,
An illusion, a drop of dew, a bubble,
A lightning flash, a thunder cloud, a dream—
This is the way one should see the conditioned.”
—the *Diamond Sutra* (translated by Paul Harrison)

Illumination draws inspirations from diverse light forms and natural phenomena depicted in a four-line verse from the *Diamond Sutra*, an influential text in East Asian philosophy. The sutra, titled with the evocative imagery of the diamond or thunderbolt, an abstract term for formidable power, symbolizes wisdom’s ability to cut through and shatter illusions to reveal ultimate reality.

Rather than directly portraying the imagery, my composition aims to capture the impressions and poetics of the shifting light forms and natural phenomena. Through interweaving rhythmic, melodic, harmonic, timbral, and textural materials, the piece metaphorically embodies philosophies of transformation and impermanence, echoing the transient nature of human existence.

I dedicate *Illumination* to my parents, Xiao Qiong Lu and Feng Jiang, for their love and support.
—**Program note by the composer**

***enargeia* - Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179), Hildur Guðnadóttir (1982–), Missy Mazzoli (1980–) & Sarah Kirkland Snider (1973–)/arr. Jarkko Riihimäki**

Emily D’Angelo’s *enargeia* draws disparate works together into dialogue, but it is a concept more than a curatorial exercise. Created by D’Angelo for the Deutsche Grammophon album bearing the same name, *enargeia* sets out to create a layered experience that weaves together the life and outlook of medieval polymath Hildegard von Bingen with evocative works written by women at the leading edge of today’s classical music.

Born in 1098, Hildegard von Bingen was a German abbess with an intense curiosity for the world in which she lived. Composition was just one of her many pursuits, and she certainly cannot have envisioned her work sharing the stage with a 21st-century symphony orchestra. Nonetheless, the freshness of her early explorations in monophonic melody and text -setting, fused with her deep mysticism and religiosity, ensure that her settings of Latin texts remain moving to audiences almost one thousand years later. D’Angelo places Hildegard and her music at the core of *enargeia*, with Hildegard’s strikingly contemporary sounds opening a kind of temporal gateway between past and present. Peering through this gateway from our modern vantage, we examine intersections between old and new, life and loss, and spiritual hope versus harsh reality.

In translation, Hildegard’s “O frondens virga” implores: “Oh blossoming bough standing in all your nobility just as the morning awakens [...] though we are frail deem us worthy, keep us from falling into habitual wickedness.” Composer Hildur Guðnadóttir makes almost the same plea in “Fólk fær andlit”; reflecting on the deportation of refugees in Iceland in 2015, the lyrics translate as iterations of the simple phrases “mercy” and “forgive us for.” “This World Within Me Is Too Small” and “You are the Dust” are arias from the opera *Song from the Uproar* by Missy Mazzoli (b. 1980). These two songs draw on the writings of Isabelle Eberhardt, a Victorian-era explorer, journalist, and Sufi who—like Hildegard—refused to suppress her worldly curiosity at a time when it was wildly against societal norms.

Three selections from the song cycle *Penelope* by Sarah Kirkland Snider (b. 1973) bring the arc of *enargeia* nearer to its end. “Dead Friend” considers the mourning process from the position of both the

grieving and the deceased, while “The Lotus Eaters” depicts a disoriented nighttime fantasy. “Nausicaa” brings *enargeia* back almost to where it began: just before a redux of Hildegard’s “O frondens virga”, D’Angelo sings, “Just take my hand, Stranger. Just take my hand and I will lead you home.”

Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68 - Johannes Brahms

Brahms began sketching his First Symphony in 1855, when he was 22, but did not complete it until 1876, when he was 43—so prestigious and intimidating was the legacy of Beethoven’s nine symphonies. (“You don’t know what it’s like to be dogged by *his* footsteps,” he remarked.) Brahms’s First earned much acclaim, and, coming late in a century dominated by radicals like Liszt and Wagner, was a coup for those who defended the validity of the old forms. (Hans von Bülow proclaimed it “the Tenth.”) Yet, despite its bows to Classical models like the four-movement plan, it was a deeply personal work founded on an original kind of symphonic technique: the forging of a dense, unified structure through intensive development of short, germinal melodic and rhythmic motifs. Arnold Schoenberg coined the term “developing variation” for this practice, and insisted that the purportedly “academic” Brahms was in fact the most progressive composer of his day.

The mighty slow introduction establishes the serious, even tragic tone of the first movement, and the subsequent “Allegro”, with its Beethovenian rhythmic drive, has the character of a dark, anguished scherzo (minor keys are unusually prominent). In the slow movement, which follows like sunshine after a storm, several themes are given out in sequence—so seamlessly that the music unfolds as a single outpouring of melody, growing ever more intense and passionate, and finally attaining real pathos. For the third movement, in place of a minuet or scherzo, Brahms wrote one of those gentle, glowing pastorales that would become his trademark, though he retained the conventional three-part (ABA) minuet-and-trio form.

In the slow introduction to the finale, a majestic horn theme (like an Alpine shepherd’s call) and a chorale-like melody in the brass seem to call for resolution; the “Allegro” that follows begins with a moving, hymn-like melody (strings) that resembles the “Ode to Joy” of Beethoven’s Ninth. When someone said so to Brahms, he famously replied that “any jackass” could see that. Indeed, it was a performance of the Ninth that had first got him thinking about writing a symphony at the age of 21. The finale is not without surprises (including the return of the “Alpine” horn theme), or moments of darkness and unease, but they pass. In a faster coda, in which the main “Allegro” theme is joined by the “chorale” from the introduction, the symphony comes triumphantly to a close. —**Program note by Kevin Bazzana**