

Ramsey Lewis (b. 1935)
Concerto for Jazz Trio and Orchestra

Lewis composed this work in 2014-15. The premiere, with his trio and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, was on August 8, 2015, as part the annual Ravinia Festival.

In 2014, Ramsey Lewis was offered a commission by Welz Kauffman, president of the Ravinia Festival: for a major work to performed in celebration of Ramsey Lewis' 80th birthday. A legendary Jazz performer, Lewis was no stranger to Classical composition - in 2009, he had composed a large multimedia symphonic work titled *Proclamation of Hope*, to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth. But composing what he calls a "long-form" work is still something relatively new for him. In an interview published shortly before the premiere, he described his creative process, which involved improvising "for hours on end" and recording it, but also working from bits of sketch material:

"Fortunately I have a workbook of manuscripts. That helped a lot. In those manuscripts I have melodies and ideas that have come to me, for whatever reason and for no particular project or song. While I'm practicing, something may come and I'll say, oh, that's nice. And I'll put these little ideas - sometimes maybe only a few notes - into my manuscript file. And you never know."

The result is a four-movement work in which his trio takes the solo role, and that freely combines Jazz improvisation and more closely-defined music for the orchestra. Lewis worked with longtime arranging partner Scott Hall on the orchestral sections. On their working relationship Lewis notes:

"We met and talked for a while, and it went so well that he's now my partner in these works. I don't arrange at all, except for my trio. The first big piece we did together was *Proclamation of Hope*. We often talk in terms of colors, of changing the color in this movement. He'll talk about a softer color here, more boldness there..."

On his intent in the *Concerto for Jazz Trio and Orchestra*, Lewis shared:

"I'm a Romanticist at heart, not in the Tin Pan Alley sense, but in the spirit of the Romantic period of classical music. I like beautiful melodies. I imagine only how a given part will sound when the orchestra comes in, or perhaps doesn't come in. And there are parts when the orchestra is on its own and soaring. The only thing in my mind was the evening itself and how the music would sound; my intent was to let the music follow its own logic and not some external narrative."