STEVE HEITZEG:
Born in Albert Lea (near
Kiester), Minnesota,
October 15, 1958; now
living in St. Paul,
Minnesota

SYMPHONY IN SCULPTURE
• World Premiere: first performances at these
  concerts on September 29 & 30, 2012.
  (Duration c. 25 minutes)

The composer, in describing his new work,
writes:
“This work is commissioned by the
Des Moines Symphony to commemorate its 75th
Season in 2012-2013. Symphony In Sculpture is
dedicated to John and Mary Pappajohn.

It has been my privilege to compose this
work for the Des Moines Symphony and Music
Director Joseph Giunta to launch the symphony’s
75th Anniversary Season. My aspiration in
‘collaborating’ with the sculptures has been to
portray them through sound, perhaps adding a
further dimension to these intriguing works,
Symphony In Sculpture is dedicated to John and
Mary Pappajohn for their vision and deep
understanding of the power of art to change a
culture and community in a positive way.

I. MOONRISE. East. January and MOONRISE.
East. August (Ugo Rondinone)
Marked ‘Night Ritual,’ the work begins as a slow,
pre-dawn fanfare and procession with low and
mysterious piano, harp and string chords pitched
in D Minor.

This leads into a mixed meter and lightly
textured dance-like section—in an attempt to
reflect the different moods of the two sculptures.
When the opening procession returns, this time
it is larger in scope. Since sculptor Ugo
Rondinone is Swiss, I’ve scattered the ring of
cowbells throughout the movement, evoking the
sound of herds in the Swiss Alps and paying
tribute to Mahler.

II. Spider (Louise Bourgeois)
The thematic materials of this movement derive
from LGBTQ (B Minor seventh and G Major
seventh chords have prominent roles) since the
sculptor Louise Bourgeois was an advocate for
same-sex marriage and gay rights in her
work—creating several works late in her life to
promote equality. Scored for strings only, this
movement is in perpetual motion to symbolize
spiders’ fabulously spinning and Louise Bourgeois’
active protest against inequality.

III. Back of a Snowman (White) and Back of a
Snowman (Black) (Gary Hume)
With the sounds of sleigh bells, glockenspiel,
trumpet, harp, celesta and strings, this playful
movement honors the joy of making snow
people.

IV. Ancient Forest (Deborah Butterfield)
When I met with John and Mary Pappajohn this
past April in Des Moines, Mr. Pappajohn
mentioned that he had suggested to sculptor
Deborah Butterfield that she might name her
large horse sculpture—which the Pappajohns
commissioned specifically for the new Sculpture
Park—Bucephalus, the name of Alexander the
Great’s horse. With a nod to the Pappajohns’
Greek heritage, I’ve begun this movement as a
massive march, imagining the sound of
Alexander the Great’s army on the move.

I wanted the movement to reflect not only
the power of Greek horses, but the Native
American ponies of the Plains as well. What
follows is a folk-infused dance of celebration to
close the movement. Both Respighi’s Pines of
Rome and Theodorakis’ film score for Zorba the
Greek were models for this movement.
V. Post-Balzac (Judith Shea)

‘Is it nothingness or does a spirit reside? Music will certainly live inside…’

There is a sense of loss in the hollow space where a person should be inside Judith Shea’s sculpture. Yet, there is also an evocation of comfort, even though the robe is cast in bronze and not soft fabric. To portray this, I have scored this movement in the exact instrumentation of Elgar’s Nimrod, one of the most famous and beautiful adagios ever composed.

VI. T8 (Mark di Suvero)

This sculpture screams steel, so it is in the music. Scored for brass and percussion only, there is much rhythmic reference to the number eight and many chords are repeated eight times. Even the 3/8 meter suggests the sound of a car starting as percussionists play only car parts and two small glass Coke bottles. I chose an American populist feel and industrial sound for this movement because at night, the sculpture T8 and the red neon lights of American Dream Machine, across the street, seem to play off each other—the steel of T8 and steel in cars are both a part of the American Dream. (On my visit in April, I stopped in American Dream Machine looking for car parts, and they graciously supplied me with parts for the symphony.)

VII. White Ghost (Yoshitomo Nara)

Part girl, part dog, White Ghost is a silent centurion of the sculpture park, with eyes shut in meditation, head humbly bowed and arms open. I felt the movement called for serene music all in the ‘white’ key (as she is) of C. To evoke Japanese garden music, White Ghost is scored for solo flute, strings and percussion—gongs, bells, bowed cymbal, singing bowl and bamboo wind chimes. As White Ghost seems to have morphed into her current form, the music, too, morphs throughout the movement.

VIII. Thinker on a Rock (Barry Flanagan)

A brief, bright and clear fanfare for the contemplative mind—human and otherwise.

IX. Nomade (Jaume Plensa)

Sculptor Jaume Plensa’s sculptures share a deep respect for all cultures and reference the beautiful universality of the world in their inclusiveness, approachability and playfulness. To reflect this, and the notion implied in the title of the sculpture that we are all nomadic, this movement begins with the sound of a shruti box drone, one of many transportable instruments employed here. (Similar to a harmonium, this small wooden instrument with a system of bellows frequently accompanies other instruments in Indian classical music. In this performance I have included an electronic shruti box for its cross-cultural purposes. “Shruti” means “hearing, revelation” in Sanskrit.)

Percussion instruments such as hand drums, finger cymbals, seed rattle and tambourine propel the movement forward and underscore the mixed meter melody centered in F Sharp and based on a synthetic scale.

Celebration and dance abound, but they are interrupted by a searching, bittersweet melody that remains unresolved and rotates between A Major and G Major seventh chords. The earlier dance theme returns briefly, then the work closes with the full orchestra expanding on the searching theme.

While researching and composing this work I made several visits to the Pappajohn Sculpture Park. More than once, I have been asked to take photos of couples and families inside and in front of Nomade, Part shelter and part sculpture, there is something quite universal about this piece that draws people to it, emphasizing that we exist together on a beautiful planet. To me, the aura around Nomade is love, welcoming everyone in its space—no words needed, just like music.”