

**TCO Allison Loggins-Hull:  
*Grit. Grace. Glory.***

by Mike Telin



When Allison Loggins-Hull was named The Cleveland Orchestra's Daniel R. Lewis Composer Fellow, she hoped that the three-year fellowship would culminate in a large work informed by the city the Orchestra calls home. And she thought the best way to do that was to get to know its people and community organizations.

"It takes time to do this kind of work in a meaningful way," she told *Clevelandclassical.com* during a May 2023 [interview](#). "During my initial visit last fall, which was the first time I was

ever in Cleveland, I spent time at museums, the Fatima Family Center, Global Cleveland, Karamu House, Cleveland School for the Arts, and The Baseball Heritage Museum. All of these offered very different tastes of Cleveland in an effort to introduce myself and let people know what I was envisioning."

On Thursday, May 8 at 7:30 pm at Severance Music Center, under the direction of Franz Welser-Möst, The Cleveland Orchestra will present the world premiere of Loggins-Hull's *Grit. Grace. Glory* — a musical story inspired by the people and history of Cleveland. The concert also includes Mozart's *Symphony No. 40* and Sergei Prokofiev's *Symphony No. 4*. The program will be repeated on Friday at 11:00 am (no Prokofiev) and Saturday at 8:00 pm. Tickets are available [online](#).

Did Loggins-Hull enjoy immersing herself in the city? "Oh gosh, I'm beyond enjoying myself," she said during a Zoom conversation. "I've fallen in love with this orchestra and with the people I've had the opportunity to work with outside of the hall. I've never

had a professional experience like this — it felt like I was becoming part of a larger family. It was life changing.”

The composer said that she was pleasantly surprised to find so much humility and such a sense of loyalty that people have for Cleveland. And the work’s title, *Grit. Grace. Glory.* reflects her thoughts about the city. “I spent a lot of time thinking about the title,” she said. “I wanted it to be concise because I had a lot of thoughts. After many edits it’s my attempt to sum up my biggest takeaways.”

The 22- minute, four-movement work for large orchestra begins with ‘Steel.’ “I wanted to go for this energy of perpetual motion right away, and steel represents the history of Cleveland both figuratively and metaphorically. There’s an energy that feels like we’re building something, moving forward. I thought about trains — the movement and pace of trains, all kinds of trains including the Underground Railroad.”

Loggins-Hull said that she began her residency by visiting the Cozad Bates House. “I went with people from the Orchestra’s community engagement and education departments, and this was my first realization of the vital role that Cleveland played in the Underground Railroad.”



The second movement, ‘Shoreline Shadows,’ is inspired by the work she did with students at the Cleveland School of the Arts.

“I spent an afternoon there with a group of middle and high schoolers. Some were singers, some played string instruments. There was a guitarist, a drummer, and some wind players. We broke up into several smaller groups, and I gave each of them a prompt: think about what Cleveland means to you, something symbolic of Cleveland, or a story about Cleveland.”

Loggins-Hull said that each of the four groups wrote a piece of music. One piece was called ‘Gentrification Battle.’ Another was ‘New to Cleveland,’ which was based on the warmth and hospitality a couple of the students felt when they first arrived in the city. Another was called ‘The Lake,’ and the fourth was called ‘Gun Violence.’

“You can imagine the very different experiences and perspectives they had. Although their pieces are only about a minute to 90 seconds long, what they ended up with was really fantastic. I have recordings of all of them.”

Loggins-Hull said that ‘Shoreline Shadows’ was the most challenging movement for her to write. “It took a while to figure out how to integrate the four ideas in a cohesive way, and then how to orchestrate it. I mashed up a few themes and made solos out of others. I also added some embellishments to make it mine and more collaborative. But the students’ music is the source of that material. I’m so happy that everything came together in this beautiful way. And I’m so happy I was able to include that youth perspective — I’m really proud we did that.”

Discussions with Global Cleveland connected Loggins-Hull with Cleveland’s Ukrainian community. “That’s how I came across the bandura — I went to the Ukrainian Museum and I thought I’ve got to know more about this instrument. When I worked with the Bandura School their ensemble played a traditional piece that I made an arrangement of and they played it with members of the Orchestra string section.”

The composer said she was amazed to discover an instrument she had never seen or heard. “That made it possible for me to be exposed to a culture that I knew very little about, and I’m very happy I had the opportunity to learn as much as I did. And to work with that group of students. Those kids were so respectful and professional. And I got to try some Ukrainian food — you learn a lot from the food.”

Loggins-Hull, who is a flutist, said she enjoyed the time she spent at the Fatima Family Center and Karamu House. She also worked with members of the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra. “I did a little bit of coaching, and spent some time specifically with the flute section. I always love to work with students that age — it’s refreshing. They have different interests and concerns so it’s nice to be able to show them my work. Classical musicians always have lots of questions. I think it’s good to show them other career paths and I’m happy to do that.”

Another place of discovery was the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. “I was there with my husband. We went for fun but I became obsessed with it. I thought ‘I have to figure out a way to get rock and roll into the piece, because it feels like it would have been a really big oversight if I had not acknowledged that in some way. It’s a huge part of American history and music history.’”

The composer said that in the final movement ‘Ode,’ she wrote a note in the score for the string players to ‘play it in Led Zeppelin style, like *Kashmir*.’ So I’m curious to see how they interpret that.”

Closing out our conversation, Allison Loggins-Hull said that she's thankful to everybody she had the opportunity to engage with. "I'm so excited about the premiere — it's going to be a wonderful week. I'm going to be sad to say 'bye, but I will definitely be back. I will come to Cleveland just to hear a concert."

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