

🎵 Program Notes 🎵



Tribute
to
Good Friends

March 4, 2023 at 7:30PM
Peebles Theater, Ferguson Center,
Christopher Newport University



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❧ Program Notes for March 4, 2023, Tribute to Good Friends ❧

Toccata Marziale (1924)

Ralph Vaughn Williams

Vaughan Williams' second work for wind ensemble, *Toccata Marziale*, was premiered in 1924 in what was to become the famed Wembley Stadium, as part of the British Empire Exhibition. The word "toccata" is derived from Italian and means "to touch." The martial strength and tempo of this work touches a quick succession of changing scenes. The opening fanfare introduces the motive theme that appears throughout the composition. The work is filled with great rhythmic energy and strong contrapuntal lines as the woodwinds dance around the solid background of the brass.

blue cathedral (1999/2020)

Jennifer Higdon

Blue... like the sky. Where all possibilities soar. Cathedrals... a place of thought, growth, spiritual expression... serving as a symbolic doorway in to and out of this world. Blue represents all potential and the progression of journeys. Cathedrals represent a place of beginnings, endings, solitude, fellowship, contemplation, knowledge and growth. As I was writing this piece, I found myself imagining a journey through a glass cathedral in the sky. Because the walls would be transparent, I saw the image of clouds and blueness permeating from the outside of this church. In my mind's eye, the listener would enter from the back of the sanctuary, floating along the corridor amongst giant crystal pillars, moving in a contemplative stance. The stained-glass windows' figures would start moving with song, singing a heavenly music. The listener would float down the aisle, slowly moving upward at first and then progressing at a quicker pace, rising towards an immense ceiling which would open to the sky... as this journey progressed, the speed of the traveler would increase, rushing forward and upward. I wanted to create the sensation of contemplation and quiet peace at the beginning, moving towards the feeling of celebration and ecstatic expansion of the soul, all the while singing along with that heavenly music.

These were my thoughts when The Curtis Institute of Music commissioned me to write a work to commemorate its 75th anniversary. Curtis is a house of knowledge - a place to reach towards that beautiful expression of the soul which comes through music. I began writing this piece at a unique juncture in my life and found myself pondering the question of what makes a life. The recent loss of my younger brother, Andrew Blue, made me reflect on the amazing journeys that we all make in our lives, crossing paths with so many individuals singularly and collectively, learning and growing each step of the way. This piece represents the expression of the individual and the group... our inner travels and the places our souls carry us, the lessons we learn and the growth we experience. In tribute to my

brother, I feature solos for the clarinet (the instrument he played) and the flute (the instrument I play). Because I am the older sibling, it is the flute that appears first in this dialog. At the end of the work, the two instruments continue their dialogue, but it is the flute that drops out and the clarinet that continues in the upward progressing journey.

This is a story that commemorates living and passing through places of knowledge and of sharing and of that song called life.

This work was commissioned and premiered in 2000 by the Curtis Institute of Music.
(Notes by Jennifer Higdon)

Concerto for Trombone and Wind Ensemble (2004)

Jeff Tyzik — Joshua Britton, soloist

There are few trombone concertos in the symphonic repertoire. Perhaps because the trombone is viewed as less virtuosic than other brass instruments such as the trumpet or French horn. Or maybe it's out of ignorance of the trombone's lyrical potential or versatility. But composers, historically speaking, haven't taken to it much.

According to pops conductor, arranger and trumpeter Jeff Tyzik, that was reason enough to write his Concerto for Trombone and Orchestra.

"As a composer one of the things you try to do is add to an area where there's little music available," he says. "It would be great to write a flute or clarinet concerto. The challenge is where there isn't too much."

Premiered in Rochester, New York, last year where Tyzik is principal pops conductor of the Rochester Philharmonic, the Concerto for Trombone and Orchestra is repeated in this weekend's Hartford Symphony season-opening concerts. The all-American program, led by HSO Music Director Edward Cumming, includes Bernstein's Symphonic Dances from "West Side Story" and works by Barber, John Corigliano and Elliott Carter. The featured soloist in Tyzik's concerto is HSO principal trombonist David Garcia.

"Most of the trombone concertos out there are written in one style. This piece has a lot of challenges," says Garcia, including mastering an array of musical influences from Afro/Cuban music, jazz, Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich to pops.

"[The concerto] has a wide range on the instrument -- four octaves, which is rather extreme but which I also enjoy," he says. "I like to be able to push the envelope a little."

The piece also pushes the orchestra, notes Tyzik. It plays more than mere accompaniment for the solo instrument, making it an integral part of the musical action. For instance, the first movement Prelude and Scherzo and the final movement Dance - with its rollicking 7/8 meter - contain antiphonal or "call and response" writing where the trombone makes a statement and the orchestra responds, and vice versa, in a sort of musical duel. The heart

of the concerto is the second movement's Lament, which expresses some of Tyzik's feelings about 9/11.

"I don't follow specific forms," says Tyzik. "What I feel instinctively is that it has to be logical. It has to make sense to me, has to be emotional, can't be dry or flat or be music that doesn't have soul."

In many respects, the concerto is the logical result of Tyzik's varied and distinguished musical career. A graduate of Rochester's Eastman School of Music where he now teaches, Tyzik has produced and composed theme music for network and cable programs, including the "ABC Monday Night Movie." He won a Grammy in 1986 for a collaboration with the Tonight Show Band and Doc Severinsen. Tyzik cites the trumpeter as a personal inspiration for his strong work ethic and musical mastery. Tyzik has also guest conducted across Europe and North America, including for a few HSO pops concerts last season.

"Accessibility is a natural thing [for me]," says the composer, who emphasizes the lyrical and rhythmic aspects of the concerto. (Its extensive percussion component includes an African djembe drum.) In his pops programming, he also deliberately chooses a cross-section of music that he feels will appeal to a broad audience.

"There are people who want a symphonic experience who don't have the stomach for the Verdi Requiem," he says.

Tyzik wrote his concerto beginning with the finale and then finishing with the first movement, which he nearly completed in one weekend. He says he has great respect for the instrument and the soloist for whom it was written, Mark Kellogg of the Rochester Philharmonic. Tyzik and the orchestra received an NEA grant to support the project.

In February, the concerto will be performed by Kellogg and the symphony again at Carnegie Hall.

❧ INTERMISSION ❧

Variations for Wind Band (1957/1988 /1997)

Ralph Vaughan Williams, trans. Hunsberger

Ralph Vaughan Williams spent two years between school and university in musical study at the Royal College of Music. After taking a degree at Cambridge, he returned to the Royal College in London for further study, then visited Germany, where he heard the Wagnerian music dramas and stayed to study with Max Bruch. He returned to England to receive a doctorate in music at Cambridge. With his friend, Gustav Holst, Vaughan Williams cut the ties that had bound English music to Germany and Italy. Instead of looking for good models on the Continent, these two young Englishmen decided to seek them at home in England's own past.

He was commissioned to write his Variations for the 1957 National Brass Band Championship of Great Britain. The work was first transcribed for orchestra by Gordon Jacob and renamed Variations for Orchestra, and subsequently transcribed for wind band by Donald Hunsberger as Variations for Wind Band.

Vaughan Williams used the four-bar opening theme from the Variations in his Symphony No. 9 in e minor, which he was writing concurrently. Although the theme is original, it is influenced heavily by British folk songs, which Vaughan Williams had researched extensively, as evidenced by the "sweeping lyrical lines, bold choral-like statements, florid figures, delicate intertwining solo lines, use of modal writing and harmonies, and counterpoint" that he included in the Variations which include a waltz, a polonaise, a chorale, a canon, an arabesque, and a fugue.

The great British brass band tradition has been fostered since 1860 by an annual competition for bands. Originally held in the Crystal Palace (until that edifice burned in the 1930s), it is a major event at the Royal Albert Hall in London. Each year there is a new test piece, required of all bands, and in 1957 Ralph Vaughan Williams (by then a revered, grandfatherly figure in British music), and this composition was created expressly for that purpose.

Three Preludes on Welsh Hymn Tunes: II. Rhosymedre (1920/1972)

Ralph Vaughn Williams

Rhosymedre is the name of a hymn tune written by the 19th-century Welsh Anglican priest John David Edwards. Edwards named the tune after the village of Rhosymedre in the County Borough of Wrexham, Wales, where he was the vicar from 1843 until his death in 1885.

The tune was used by Ralph Vaughan Williams as the basis of the second movement of his organ composition Three Preludes on Welsh Hymn Tunes. Although best known in its original version for solo organ, it is also well known as an orchestral arrangement by Arnold Foster published in 1938. The prelude has been arranged for other instruments or combinations of instruments, including solo piano, piano duet, clarinet choir and four recorders. It was famously performed at the Funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, and at the weddings of her two sons, Prince William and Prince Harry.

Symphony No. 8 in d minor: II. Scherzo alla marcia (1956)

Ralph Vaughn Williams

Scherzo alla marcia is the second movement of Vaughan Williams's Eighth Symphony which was first performed by Sir John Barbirolli in Manchester, England, in 1956. It is scored only for wind instruments, balancing the following movement, Cavatina, which is for strings alone. The Scherzo contains three themes and a fugato section, including a lively

trio. Contrapuntal writing permeates the work, reminiscent of the music of his contemporary Paul Hindemith.

Light, witty, and brief, the Scherzo alla Marcia could be used to balance a more serious or lengthy work in the concert program. It is deceptively difficult; Vaughan Williams’s contrapuntal approach obscures the downbeat, and performers may find themselves playing what feels right rather than what is actually written. It is worthwhile to draw attention to the humorously abrupt ending because Vaughan Williams’ abstraction of time may catch audiences by surprise.

English Folk Song Suite for Military Band (1923)

Ralph Vaughn Williams

At the beginning of the twentieth century, European composers, including Vaughan Williams and Percy Grainger, developed an interest in collecting folk music. Vaughan Williams employs nine folk songs in his Folk Song Suite. The first movement begins with Seventeen Come Sunday, a tale of a soldier enticing a pretty maid, followed by Pretty Caroline in which a sailor, gone seven years, returns to his true love. The third melody tells Vaughan Williams’ favorite biblical tale of the rich man and Lazarus. A reprise of the folk tunes concludes the movement. The second movement is more haunting with a solo oboe introducing My Bonny Boy, a tale of unrequited love. Green Bushes tells another tale of unanswered passion. The final movement contains four melodies from Somerset, a county at the southwestern tip of England. Blow Away The Morning Dew is a light and jaunty melody. The rousing war ballad High Germany, asks, unsuccessfully, for a soldier’s maiden to follow him to war on the Continent. A daughter pleads with her father over an arranged marriage in The Tree So High. An allegory of the cultivation and harvesting of barley corn is told in the final tune, John Barleycorn.

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