

PROGRAM NOTES

REPERTORY ORCHESTRA by Nancy Campbell and Lois Wiggins

Ancient Aires and Dances

Ancient Aires and Dances is a set of three orchestral suites by Italian composer Ottorino Respighi. In addition to being a renowned composer and conductor, Respighi was also a notable musicologist, and his interest in Italian music of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries led him to compose works inspired by the music of these periods. This arrangement of the “Balletto” movement from Suite No. 1, composed in 1917, captures the noble elegance and beauty of Respighi’s marvelous work.

In the Bleak Midwinter

(From the composer’s notes) The traditional hymn “ in the Bleak Midwinter” was composed by Gustav Holst in 1908. It is the second movement of The Holst Winter Suite and the work that inspired the creation of the three-movement tribute to Holst. Ms. Alta Sue Hawkins, a retired Virginia Band band director, suggested the title to Robert W. Smith as a possible symphonic band setting. Unfortunately, Ms. Hawkins passed away before the work was completed.

In remembrance of Ms. Hawkins, Mr. Smith re-scored the work for publication. Following an opening fanfare statement, the melody is first stated by solo clarinet. The clarinet solo represents Ms. Hawkins, a clarinet plate rand teacher for more than three decades. The clarinet is joined by a French horn, euphonium (trombone in the orchestral arrangement) and a second French horn representing Ms. Hawkins and each of her three children on their chosen instruments. A woodwind choir followed by the full ensemble state the hauntingly beautiful melody for the final time. The composer uses the traditional American folk melody “Shenandoah” as the contrapuntal line representing Ms. Hawkins’ birth and rest in the beautiful valley of Virginia.

In December of 1992, Mr. Smith married into the Hawkins family. His setting of “In the Bleak Midwinter” is dedicated to Ben, Chuck, and his Susan in loving memory of their mother, Alta Sue.

Procession of the Nobles

Rimsky-Korsakov's *Mlada*, first produced in 1892, is half-opera and half-ballet, and its libretto is unbelievably complex, even by the standards of opera librettos. Set a thousand years ago in an imaginary kingdom called Retra on the shores of the Baltic, *Mlada* tries to fuse Wagnerian opera with ancient Russian legend, and the result is an absolutely fantastic story. Princess *Mlada*, a role that is danced rather than sung, has been murdered by her rival *Voyslava*, who sets out to secure the love of *Yaromir*, *Mlada*'s lover. The story involves magic, evil spirits, and trips into the underworld, and at the climax an entire village is submerged by an overflowing lake and *Yaromir* and *Mlada* are seen ascending on a rainbow.

The only remaining familiar music from *Mlada* is the *Procession of the Nobles*. This orchestral introduction to Act II bursts to life with a rousing brass flourish, soon followed by the processional music, a noble tune in E-flat major. This is music of color and energy, and in the opera it is punctuated by shouts from the crowd at the festival. A central section just as vigorous as the opening leads to a return of the march tune and a rousing close.

CONCERT ORCHESTRA by Marcello Cormio

Florence Price (1887-1953), Colonial Dance

Florence Price's *Colonial Dance*, for which we have no date of composition, is a brief, rapidly-moving symphonic work written in triple time. For Price, "Rhythm is of preeminent importance. In the dance, it is a compelling, onward-sweeping force that tolerates no interruption." This energetic composition is in fact full of festive rhythms inspired by African American folk music and dance, while at the same time very much maintaining a footing in the classical European tradition, in particular that of Dvorak's *Slavonic Dances*. This stylistic eclecticism highlights Price's ability to nod to both traditions while also developing her own unique voice.

The composition's liveliness and brilliancy capture the spirit of celebration and joy, infusing stylistic features of the past with Price's own unique compositional style. Through her entire musical output, Price always seeks to honor the rich cultural heritage of her ancestors while showcasing her personality as a composer.

The piece opens with a rhythmic and energetic theme, introduced by the full orchestra. The orchestration is vibrant and colorful, with the different sections of the ensemble alternating and complementing each other to create a dynamic and engaging musical landscape.

As the piece unfolds, Price incorporates elements of syncopation, call and response, and polyrhythms, drawing upon her African American musical roots. These rhythmic and melodic features infuse the music with a sense of vitality and reflect the joyous nature of communal dance traditions.

Amidst the energetic and rhythmic sections, Price also includes fleeting moments of respite and reflection. The music briefly transitions to more lyrical passages, allowing for introspection and beauty. These interludes provide a balance to the lively and exuberant sections, showcasing Price's compositional versatility.

Colonial Dance is a celebration of cultural heritage and resilience, and serves as a testament to the artistic contributions of African American composers and their invaluable role in shaping the modern classical music landscape.

Aram Khachaturian (1903-1978), Waltz from Masquerade Suite

Masquerade was written in 1941 by Aram Khachaturian as incidental music for a production of the play of the same name by Russian playwright Mikhail Lermontov. It premiered on June 21, 1941 in the Vakhtangov Theatre in Moscow. Masquerade was the last production staged by the theatre before the invasion of the USSR by Germany, and the production run was cut short. The music is better known in the form of a five-movement suite, which includes the Waltz in tonight's program.

The famous waltz theme gave Khachaturian much trouble in its creation: moved by the words of the play's heroine, Nina – *"How beautiful the new waltz is! ... something between sorrow and joy gripped my heart."* – the composer struggled to "find a theme that I considered beautiful and new". His former teacher, Nikolai Myaskovsky, attempted to help Khachaturian by giving him a collection of romances and waltzes from Lermontov's time. Although these pieces did not provide any immediate inspiration, Khachaturian admitted that "had it not been for the strenuous search" for the appropriate style and melodic inspiration, he would not have discovered the second theme of his waltz which acted "like a magic link, allowing me to pull out the whole chain. The rest of the waltz came to me easily, with no trouble at all."

In the end, the piece truly captures the spirit of the quote from the play, with its charming mixture of passion, nostalgia, and a brilliant vitality, and with an unmistakable dark Russian flair. Khachaturian dedicated the waltz to the actress who played Nina, Alla Kazanskaya.

Alan Silvestri (b. 1950), arr. Custer, Forrest Gump Suite

This suite is a symphonic concert medley based on Alan Silvestri's original soundtrack for the celebrated 1994 movie starring Tom Hanks and directed by Robert Zemeckis.

The piece opens with the beautiful, suspended atmosphere of the soundtrack's main theme, which in the movie is heard during the initial, iconic "feather scene".

After a darker, more introspective middle section, mainly scored in the low register of the strings, and evoking the more sorrowful moments in the story, the suite finds its joyous conclusion in a full orchestra, boisterous celebration based on the "Run, Forrest, run!" theme.

Forrest Gump is one of the most memorable and moving scores by Silvestri, and this arrangement renders it in all its splendor with a brilliant use of the orchestral palette and a kaleidoscope of instrumental sounds, from the delicate piccolo opening, to luscious string melodies, to excited brass fanfares and colorful percussion.

SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA by Marcello Cormio

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975), Festive Overture, op. 96

The composition of the Festive Overture (1954) coincided with a period of relative serenity in Shostakovich's life. After Stalin's death in the spring of the previous year, 1954 was a year of moderate creative activity for the composer, in which he was able to calmly reflect on the relation between "program music" and Russian society's contemporary culture.

On this topic, Shostakovich wrote: *"The composer of a symphony, a sonata or a quartet does not need to declare a program, but is obliged to have it as the ideal basis of the work... In me, the ideal program always comes before the music."*

These thoughts came directly into play during the composition of the Festive Overture, written in 1947 to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the October Revolution, but only completed in 1954. The premiere took place on the occasion of the thirty-seventh anniversary of the October Revolution on November 6, 1954 at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow. The premiere in the West was conducted by Maurice Abravanel at the helm of the Utah Symphony Orchestra, in New York on November 16 of that same year.

77TH SEASON OPENING CONCERT

The piece is scored for a large instrumentation, including triple woodwinds and a sumptuous contingent of brass. It opens with a triumphant fanfare, followed by a Presto of vigorous character and voluminous sonority, in which strings and winds alternate on lively, virtuosic thematic material. A horn solo doubled by the cello section introduces a theme of greater breadth and melodic splendor; this phrase is then elaborated and taken up by the entire orchestra. After a return of the two main themes, and shortly before the conclusion, a sonic climax of drama and excitement is reached, leading into a return of the brass fanfare in an amplified statement by the full symphonic forces. A precipitous and clangorous conclusion powerfully closes the piece. All in all, the Festive Overture is an impressive work, exuding vitality and positivity, ideal for outdoor ceremonies.

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937), Bolero

Bolero is one of the last pieces written by Ravel. It was composed in 1928 as music for a ballet commissioned by the famous Russian dancer Ida Rubinstein, who choreographed the piece that same year at the Opéra Garnier of Paris.

The piece has an elementary structure, solely based on the dance rhythm of the bolero in the snare drum, with an invariable tempo and a uniform and repetitive melody. This structure is used as a tool to unleash the composer genius and imagination as an orchestrator, with a progressive crescendo until the end.

Ravel himself considered Bolero as some sort of futile composing exercise and study in orchestration. Nevertheless, the work became an instantaneous international success. It is still today one of the most performed classical pieces worldwide, and, ironically, the piece the composer became most famous for and is most commonly associated with.

When Ravel received Ida Rubinstein's commission in 1927, he was enthusiastic about it: the idea was to create a "ballet with a Spanish character", and initially the composer planned to orchestrate six pieces taken from the "Iberia" piano suite by Spanish composer Isaac Albéniz. Albeniz's rights, however, were the exclusive property of Enrique Arbós, pupil of Albéniz, so the project came immediately to a halt, and Ravel was about to abandon it. Then, he decided to write what he considered an experimental piece, "without a real form, without a development and practically without modulations: a theme, rhythm, and orchestra".

His intentions are perfectly applied to the creation of a score that does not cease to seduce and excite modern audiences. Ravel's unrivaled mastery of the art of orchestration is displayed here in an incredible use of unusual combinations of instruments, producing unique orchestral colors, which at times sound almost unreal. And the progression of what probably is the longest crescendo in the

history of music, through the gradual addition of orchestral layers over about sixteen minutes of time, from a single snare drum to the final massive display of symphonic forces, always proves to be among the most electrifying experiences one can have in a music hall.

Arturo Márquez (b. 1950), Danzón no. 2

Mexican composer Arturo Márquez is the author of a series of danzónes, works based on an elegant Cuban dance that also has become popular in Veracruz, Mexico. Danzón No. 2 was commissioned by the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and was premiered in 1994 by the Orchestra Filarmonica de la UNAM in Mexico City. The work received international acclaim and propelled the composer into the international spotlight.

In Márquez's own words:

“The idea of writing the Danzón No. 2 originated in 1993 during a trip to Malinalco with the painter Andrés Fonseca and the dancer Irene Martínez. They are both experts in salon dances, with a special passion for the danzón, which they were able to transmit to me from the beginning, and also during later trips to Veracruz and visits to the Colonia Salon in Mexico City. From these experiences onward, I started to learn the danzón's rhythms, its form, its melodic outline, and to listen to the old recordings by Acerina and his Danzonera Orchestra. I was fascinated and I started to understand that the apparent lightness of the danzón is only like a visiting card for a type of music full of sensuality and seriousness. It is a genre which old Mexican people continue to dance with a touch of nostalgia and a jubilant escape towards their own emotional world; we can fortunately still see this in the embrace between music and dance that occurs in the state of Veracruz and in the dance parlors of Mexico City.

The Danzón no. 2 is a tribute to the environment that nourishes the genre. It endeavors to get as close as possible to the dance, to its nostalgic melodies, to its wild rhythms, and although it contains violations of the dance's intimacy, form, and harmonic language, it is a very personal way of paying my respects and expressing my emotion towards true popular music.”