

Concerto for Horn and Orchestra

JOHN WILLIAMS

B. February 8, 1932, Long Island, New York

Written for Dale Clevenger, principal horn of the Chicago Symphony, and premiered by the orchestra on November 29, 2003 with the composer conducting.

Scored for solo horn with two flutes, piccolo, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, celeste, piano and strings (approx. 24 minutes).

No better introduction can be offered than the composer's own eloquent description of the concerto: "When I've tried to analyze my lifelong love of the French horn, I've had to conclude that it's mainly because of the horn's capacity to stir memories of antiquity. The very sound of the French horn conjures images stored in the collective psyche. It's an instrument that invites us to 'dream backward to the ancient time.'"

"Most cultures have had some form of horn in their histories. We remember the ram's horn Shofar, calling us to battle or prayer . . . or the conch, 'fabled shell instrument of the Titans,' or one can imagine the huge Viking horns that must have struck terror in the hamlets of northern Europe as the great ships were brought into the estuaries to begin their attacks. The horn stirs memories of fearful things, of powerful things, of noble and beautiful things!"

"In the first movement or section of my concerto, I begin with the distant pealing of the Angelus Bell, while the horn joins in, sending calls and signals to complete the picture."

"This is followed by The Battle of the Trees, suggested by the famous Celtic poem of that name, which describes groves of trees transforming themselves into warriors and led in battle by the brave oak. The horn enters the fray, as the percussion section creates sounds of trunks, branches, and twigs all colliding in the struggle."

"Nostalgia has been described as 'laundered memory' but our modern horn and oboe possess the power to produce it truly. They conjoin to 'dream backward' of a pristine glen in the third movement, Pastorale."

"In The Hunt, the horn plays its traditional role, getting the blood up, exhilarating the spirit and animating the chase."

"Finally in Nocturne, the day's end grants repose and a simple song is offered."

"With each movement title I've included a poetic quote, none of which is medieval, but simply chosen from writers that I've enjoyed, and in the music I have not deliberately adhered to, or purposely avoided the modalities and grammar of medievalism. Instead

I've written freely and with a sense of privilege and joy at working with the legendary horn player Dale Clevenger, who for so many years has been an inspiration to lovers and students, myself included, of the French horn.”

This performance is the Detroit Symphony Orchestra premiere of Williams' Concerto for Horn and Orchestra.