

PROGRAM NOTES

Overture for Band, Op. 24 (1824)

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809-1847)

Arr. Robert J. Garofalo

Mendelssohn wrote the original version of this work when he was just 15 years old while visiting the spa and resort town of Bad Doberan near Rostock. It was originally scored for the 11 member Harmonie band of the spa town. While the original score was soon lost, Mendelssohn rewrote the work in 1826 and presented it under the title "Nottorno." Later Mendelssohn rewrote the work again in 1838 for 23 winds and percussion and titled it "Overture for Wind Band." This Overture represents one of the very earliest of compositions for modern Wind Ensemble in the repertoire. The arrangement you hear today is a hybrid of these earlier versions mixing the small ensemble and the large band sonorities.

Mendelssohn was, like the earlier Mozart, a child prodigy performing and composing at a very high level as a child. His most important works today are his symphonies and incidental music written for plays.

Merry Mount Suite (1933)

Howard Hanson (1896-1981)

Arr. Charles Garland (1964)

I. Overture / II. Children's Dance / III. Love Duet

Merry Mount is an opera in three acts by American composer Howard Hanson; its libretto, by Richard Stokes, is loosely based on Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "The May-Pole of Merry Mount", taken from his *Twice Told Tales*. Hanson's only opera, it was commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera in New York City.

The opera received its world premiere in concert at the fortieth annual May Festival of the University Musical Society in Ann Arbor, Michigan (at Hill Auditorium), on May 20, 1933, with the composer conducting the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. The cast included Leonora Corona, Rose Bampton, Frederick Jagel, Chase Baromeo, John Charles Thomas, and George Galvani.

Its world stage premiere by the Metropolitan Opera was given on February 10, 1934. At its premiere, the opera received a total of fifty curtain calls, still a house record. The opera was performed eight more times during the season, but never returned to the Met's repertoire, and subsequent performances have been scarce.

The opera is unusual in that its libretto was written without a composer in mind. Stokes had conducted comprehensive research into Puritan fanaticism, sexual obsession, and demonology; he found that it often reached pathological levels, and usually ended in death as a form of punishment, or redemption, for its victims. While he found his title in a story by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Stokes crafted an original libretto which some compared to *The Scarlet Letter*. Upon completion of the text, Stokes went in search of a composer, finally finding one in Howard Hanson. Hanson, for his part, was new to the composition of opera, although he had already written a fair amount of choral music. Still, he was already respected as an elder statesman of American classical music, and such was his reputation that the Metropolitan was convinced to commission the work. Merry Mount would be the fifteenth American opera, and the last but one, presented at the Met during the tenure of Giulio Gatti-Casazza as company director.

The bluntness of the language used in the libretto surprised many, and was remarked upon even during rehearsals.

Despite its initial appearance of success, *Merry Mount* was dropped from the repertoire after the 1933–34 season, and has not enjoyed many revivals since. Hanson compiled a suite for orchestra from excerpts of the piece which consists of the prelude, the children's dance from Act I, the love duet from Act II, and the prelude and ballet from Act II. This has enjoyed more popularity than the opera, and has received multiple recordings.

In April 2014, *Merry Mount* was revived in two performances at the Eastman Theater in Rochester by the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra. On May 7, 2014, the same orchestra played *Merry Mount* at Carnegie Hall in New York, its first New York performance in 80 years.

The arrangement played tonight includes 3 sections, the Overture, charming Children's Dance, and romantic Love Duet. This arrangement was written in 1964 by the late Roosevelt University Music Professor, Dr. Charles Garland. No longer published and having not been performed in many years, the BGSB acquired the score and parts from Roosevelt University and presents this music for the first public performance in many decades.

Irish Tune from County Derry **Molly on the Shore** **Percy Grainger (1882-1961)**

Percy Grainger (1882-1961) was a piano prodigy turned composer who was known for his strange personal habits, his colorful prose, and his equally unusual music – his many admirers today still recognize that he possessed “the supreme virtue of never being dull.” Born in Australia, he began studying piano at an early age. He came to the U. S. at the outbreak of World War I and enlisted as an Army bandsman, becoming an American citizen in 1918. He went on to explore the frontiers of music with his idiosyncratic folk song settings, his lifelong advocacy for the saxophone, and his Free Music machines which predated electronic synthesizers. His many masterworks for winds include *Lincolnshire Posy*, *Handel in the Strand*, and *Molly on the Shore*.

Irish Tune from County Derry is a setting of a now-famous tune from the Irish county of Derry in the north (also sometimes called Londonderry). This classic arrangement features beautiful, delicate part-writing for both woodwinds and brass, highlighting each family in turn. The Columbia Summer Winds performances of this piece in summer 2009 are dedicated to the memory of our departed friend, Daniel Tedlie. While this tune is widely associated with the lyrics “Danny Boy”, it in fact has rich history of lyric settings of which “Danny Boy” is a relative latecomer. Grainger’s setting may or may not have had any particular set of lyrics in mind. Grainger’s first settings were published in 1918, whereas various lyrics date back to 1855 or earlier. “Danny Boy” did not appear in print until 1913.

Grainger originally wrote *Molly on the Shore* in a 1907 string setting as birthday gift for his mother (who exerted perhaps an undue influence on him during her lifetime). The wind band setting is but one of many, and it appeared in 1920. Two quotes about this piece illustrate the uniqueness of Grainger’s approach to music:

“In setting Molly on the Shore I strove to imbue the accompanying parts that made up the harmonic texture with a melodic character not too unlike that of the underlying reel tune. Melody seems to me to provide music with an initiative, whereas rhythm appears to me to exert an enslaving influence. For that reason I have tried to avoid rhythmic domination in my music — always excepting irregular rhythms, such as those of Gregorian Chant, which seem to me to make for freedom. Equally with melody I prize discordant harmony, because of the emotional and compassionate sway it exerts.”

“One of the reasons why things of mine like Molly on the Shore and Shepherd’s Hey are good is because there is so little gaiety and fun in them. While other composers would have been jolly in setting such dance tunes, I have been sad or furious. My dance settings are energetic rather than gay.”

The selection is an arrangement of two contrasting Irish reels, “Temple Hill” and “Molly on the Shore” that present the melodies in a variety of textures and orchestrations, giving each section of the band long stretches of thematic and countermelodic material. It mostly features the woodwind section of the band, especially the clarinets and saxophones. The opening 1st clarinet solo is a common audition excerpt in the key of B flat major for clarinet, or concert F major for C Flute or Bassoon.

First Suite in Eb for Military Band (1909), Op. 28 **Gustav Holst (1874-1934)**

I. Chaconne / II. Intermezzo / III. March

Gustav Holst (1874-1934) was a British composer and teacher. After studying composition at London's Royal College of Music, he spent the early part of his career playing trombone in an opera orchestra. It was not until the early 1900s that his career as a composer began to take off. Around this same time he acquired positions at both St. Paul's Girls' School and Morley College that he would hold until retirement, despite his rising star as a composer. His music was influenced by his interest in English folk songs and Hindu mysticism, late-Romantic era composers like Strauss and Delius, and avante-garde composers of his time like Stravinsky and Schoenberg. He is perhaps best known for composing *The Planets*, a massive orchestral suite that depicts the astrological character of each known planet. His works for wind band (two suites and a tone poem, *Hammersmith*) are foundational to the modern wind literature.

The *First Suite* is particularly important to the later development of artistic music for wind band. Holst wrote it in 1909 for an ensemble that came to define the instrumentation that bands would use for at least the next century and beyond. Oddly, it was not performed until 1920, and published a year later. Since then, the *First Suite* has left an indelible mark on band musicians and audiences around the world. Its appeal is in its simplicity and its artistry. While there are difficult passages and exposed solo work in many instruments, it places few extreme demands on the players, and it uses a straightforward and easily-identifiable theme throughout its 3 movements. Yet this theme is turned and pulled into many different forms, and put on an emotional roller-coaster of doubts, sweet reveries, ecstatic joy, and triumph. Truly, the impact that the *First Suite* still makes on those who hear it is impossible to put into words. It is a classic piece of art music that has helped to define the development of a century of wind band music.

The suite is one of the few band originals that have been transcribed for symphony orchestras. Various instruments repeat the opening theme, the *Chaconne* incessantly as others weave filigrees about the theme. In the middle of the movement the principal theme is inverted for several repetitions. The *Intermezzo* is based on a variation of the *Chaconne* theme, presented first in an agitated style, then in a cantabile mood, the two styles alternating throughout the movement. The two themes of the *March*, one dynamic and the other lyric, are also taken from the *Chaconne* theme, the first being something of an inversion, whereas the lyric theme is "right-side up". Eventually the two are combined in a thrilling counterpoint leading to the ending.

El Camino Real (1985) **Alfred Reed (1921-2005)**

El Camino Real (literally "The Royal Road" or "The King's Highway") was commissioned by, and is dedicated to, the 581st Air Force Band (AFRES) and its commander, Lt. Col. Ray E. Toler. Composed during the latter half of 1984 and completed in early '85, it bears the subtitle "A Latin Fantasy."

The music is based on a series of chord progressions common to countless generations of Spanish flamenco (and other) guitarists, whose fiery style and brilliant playing have captivated millions of music lovers throughout the world. These progressions and the resulting key relationships have become practically synonymous with what we feel to be the true Spanish idiom. Together with the folk melodies they have underscored, in part derived by a procedure known to musicians as the "melodizing of harmony," they have created a vast body of what most people would consider authentic Spanish music.

The first section of the music is based upon the dance form known as the Jota, while the second, contrasting section is derived from the Fandango, but here altered considerably in both time and tempo from its usual form. Overall, the music follows a tradition three-part pattern: fast-slow-fast.

The first public performance of *El Camino Real* took place on April 15th, 1985, in Sarasota, Florida, with the 581st Air Force Band under the direction of Lt. Col. Ray E. Toler.

Alfred Reed is beloved among concert band musicians. Among over 200 published works, classic compositions from his pen include: *Russian Christmas Music* (his first work for band, 1944); *Armenian Dances* (1972); and *The*

Hounds of Spring (1981). A meticulous craftsman, he was known for his colorful and lush orchestrations. He was born in New York and began his formal music training at the age of 10. During World War II he served in the 529th Army Air Force Band. Following his military service he attended the Juilliard School of Music, studying under Vittorio Giannini, after which he was staff composer and arranger first for NBC, then for ABC. In 1953 he became the conductor of the Baylor Symphony Orchestra at Baylor University where he received his B.M. in 1955 and his M.M. in 1956.

George Washington Bridge (1951) **William Schuman (1910-1992)**

Born in the Bronx, William Schuman (1910-1992) dropped out of business school to pursue composition after hearing the New York Philharmonic for the first time. He became a central figure in New York's cultural institutions, leaving his presidency of the Juilliard School to become the first director of Lincoln Center in 1962. All the while he was active as a composer. He received the inaugural Pulitzer Prize for music in 1943. He shared a fondness for wind music with his Juilliard contemporaries Vincent Persichetti and Peter Mennin, from which came many classic works for wind band. His music is generally characterized by great emotional tension and rhythmic vivacity, with contrapuntal structures which reach great complexity. His harmonic language is characterized by the use of bitonality. Schuman died in 1992 in New York City.

Schuman wrote *George Washington Bridge* in 1950. The piece is subtitled "An Impression for Band" and was premiered that summer at the Interlochen Music Camp in Michigan. From the score:

"There are few days in the year when I do not see George Washington Bridge. I pass it on my way to work as I drive along the Henry Hudson Parkway on the New York shore. Ever since my student days when I watched the progress of its construction, this bridge has had for me an almost human personality, and this personality is astonishingly varied, assuming different moods depending on the time of day or night, the weather, the traffic and, of course, my own mood as I pass by.

I have walked across it late at night when it was shrouded in fog, and during the brilliant sunshine hours of midday. I have driven over it countless times and passed under it on boats. Coming to New York City by air, sometimes I have been lucky enough to fly right over it. It is difficult to imagine a more gracious welcome or dramatic entry to the great metropolis."

Symphony No. 3 (1961) **Vittorio Giannini (1903-1966)**

II. Adagio / IV. Allegro con Brio

Vittorio Giannini (1903-1966) was an Italian-American composer and teacher. He wrote operas, songs, symphonies, and a handful of wind band works. His Symphony no. 3 is one of the staple long-form works in the wind band repertoire. For most of his career he taught in New York at the Juilliard School and the Manhattan School of Music. He also taught at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute and founded the North Carolina School for the Arts.

According to the Oklahoma City University Program Notes Resource for Band Directors, Giannini had this to say about his *Symphony No. 3*:

"The Symphony No. 3 was composed on a commission by the Duke University Band and its conductor, Paul Bryan, during the summer of 1958, in Rome Italy, where I was spending my vacation. It is my second work for band; the first, Preludium and Allegro, was commissioned by Richard Franko Goldman. I can give no other reason for choosing to write a Symphony to fulfill this commission than that I "felt like it," and the thought of doing it interested me a great deal.

I will not go into the technical details of the work. Basically, the listener is not concerned with them beyond what they can hear for themselves. I follow no 'isms' when I compose; I try to project and communicate a feeling, a thought that is in me at the time, using whatever technique is suggested by my mood to achieve this communication.

The form of the movements is this: first movement – sonata allegro; second movement – A B A; third movement – A B A B; fourth movement – sonata allegro. There is no program – only what I heard and felt at the time. I hope it makes music.”

The Buffalo Grove Symphonic Band will close tonight's concert with movements 2 and 4 from the Symphony.

~ Compiled and Composed by Howard M. Green