

# THE SYMPHONIC BAND

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*Program Notes • Thursday, 19 April 2018*

## FANFARE AND ALLEGRO

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*Clifton Williams*

James Clifton Williams Jr. was born in Traskwood, Arkansas, in 1923. Despite the financial difficulties of the depression of the early 1930's, Williams fared well in school, learning the piano, mellophone, and French horn. In his senior class of 600, he was voted the most outstanding in artistry, talent, and versatility. In 1942, he joined the Army Air Corps as a bandsman, serving as drum major and composing works at every opportunity. After the war, he attended Louisiana State University and went on to earn his MM degree at the Eastman School of Music in 1949. He taught at the University of Texas at Austin for seventeen years. In the 10 years before his death in 1976, he served as chairman of the department of theory and composition at the University of Miami, where he was influenced by and became close friends with Frederick Fennell.

In 1956, *Fanfare and Allegro* was the first composition to win the American Bandmasters Association's Ostwald Award for original band literature. It was the springboard to William's national acclaim as the composer of serious music for concert band. The *Fanfare* begins with a dynamic brass and percussion statement. The woodwinds enter with an ostinato figure that gradually shifts pitch from high to low. There is chordal development as a timpani roll leads directly to the *Allegro* movement, again introduced by the brass. A rhythmically complex interplay between the voices of the ensemble drives the movement forward to a dramatic climax.

*Note by Smith & Stoutamire*

## REFLECTIONS

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*Roger Nixon*

Roger Nixon was born and raised in California and received his Bachelor's, Master's and Ph.D. degrees in music from the University of California at Berkeley. He served as professor of theory and composition at San Francisco State University. Nixon has received many honors and awards for his compositions, most of which contain some imagery of "Old California".

The composer writes: "*Reflections* is reflective in both mood and shape; its general character resembles a chorale prelude. It is monothematic; a germinal phrase played by the solo flute functions as a basis for further melodic movement and motivial development." *Reflections* was published in 1965 and is dedicated to the San Francisco State University Band, Dr. Edwin C. Kruth, Conductor.

*Note courtesy of the Claremont Winds*

## BLUE CHERRY BLOSSOM

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*Skye Hamilton Carranza*

**Skye Noé Hamilton-Carranza** is a multi-instrumentalist and composer from Freeport, NY. He is a junior at SUNY Potsdam and their Crane School of Music, majoring in Oboe Performance and Music Composition. During his time there, he has performed with the Crane Concert, Jazz, and Symphonic Bands and the Crane Wind, Jazz and Latin Ensembles, as well as other groups such as the Long Island Wind Ensemble, the Crane Alumni Band, the ROBC Gospel Band, and as a guest artist with the Estilo Quartet. He is also a member of the NANM (National Association of Negro Musicians) and the Hicksville United Methodist Church.

**Eric Villalta** is a third-year Music Performance and Music Education major at the Crane School of Music from Williamsville, NY. Eric regularly collaborates with Crane student and faculty composers as a soloist, member of the saxophone ensemble, and as the soprano saxophonist in the Fratres Quartet. His is in the studio of Professor Casey Grev.

## SUITE FRANÇAISE

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*Darius Milhaud*

Darius Milhaud wrote *Suite Française*, his first extended work for winds, in 1945 on a commission from the publisher, Leeds Music Corporation, as part of a contemplated series of original works for band by outstanding contemporary composers. *Suite Française* was given its first performance by the Goldman Band in 1945. It was so successful that Milhaud was requested to re-score it for orchestra. The premiere of the orchestral edition was played by the New York Philharmonic. The composer provided the following notes about the work:

*The five parts of this suite are named after French provinces, the very ones in which the American and Allied armies fought together with the French underground for the liberation of my country -- Normandy, Brittany, Ile-de-France (of which Paris is the center), Alsace-Lorraine, and Provence.*

*I used some folk tunes of the provinces. I wanted the young Americans to hear the popular melodies of those parts of France where their fathers and brothers fought to defeat the German invaders who in less than seventy years have brought war, destruction, cruelty, torture, and murder, three times, to the peaceful and democratic people of France.*

## DRAGON RIDE

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*Jacob Ali*

**Jacob Ali** currently studies composition and trumpet at the Crane School of Music. A Troy, NY native, Jacob's work was featured at the 2014 NYSSMA

Winter Conference Young Composers' Showcase. His music has also been performed on Student Composer's Forums at the Crane School of Music. Jacob's teachers at Crane include John Ellis, Gregory Wanamaker, and Jerod Sommerfeldt.

## GAIAN VISIONS

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*Frank Ticheli*

Inspired by the natural beauty of my immediate surroundings and by my concerns about the environmental future of our planet, I composed *Gaian Visions* in July of 1990 during a residency at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire. The title of the work refers to *Gaia*, the Earth goddess of ancient Greece, and to British scientist James Lovelock's *Gaian Hypothesis*, which holds that the Earth is a living, self-regulating organism that is capable of annihilating anything it perceives to be a threat, including the environmentally-destructive human race itself.

The work is in three movements:

### **I. Forgotten Forests. This section depicts the imposing grandeur of Gaia.**

A whirling, animated texture, representing the timelessness of nature, is created by the juxtaposition of independent rhythmic layers. The layers, in order of descending importance, are:

1. a half-note ostinato in the third clarinets and vibraphone;
2. a quarter-note ostinato in the piccolo, xylophone, and glockenspiel;
3. a constant flow of undulating eighth-note chords in the saxophones and horns;
4. a series of triplet arpeggios in the first and second clarinets; and
5. a profusion of busy sixteenth-note scalar passages in the flutes.

On top of this conglomerate, the brasses engage in a rapid interchange of short, fleeting gestures that emerge to the foreground, then quickly recede. The tension mounts, unleashing a climactic succession of open brass sonorities. The movement ends with hints of a bird, a frog, distant thunder.

### **II. Desecration. This section depicts the environmental plagues of modern society.**

Relentless rhythms and wild, tonally ambiguous harmonies function as the primary driving forces. A rapid three-note call is the main melodic idea. The dramatic climax of the movement occurs when the open brass theme from the first movement (representing Gaia) returns in conflict with the material of the second movement. The movement ends in an unresolved explosion of sound, and moves without pause into Movement III.

### **III. Redemption. This section depicts a hope-filled prayer to Gaia.**

The main melody is first stated by the oboe, then passed throughout the ensemble in several keys, accompanied by a pair of lower lines which ascend deliberately by step over a period of twenty-one bars. The goal of this rising texture is articulated by a final impassioned statement of the melody. A brief coda follows,

alluding to the material from the first movement. The ending is unresolved, an unanswered question.

The Gamma Phi Chapter of Kappa Kappa Psi commissioned *Gaian Visions* in honor of Dr. Donald E. Bowen, fifth president of Stephen F. Austin State University. On February 22, 1991, the Stephen F. Austin State University Symphonic Band, John Whitwell, conductor, premiered *Gaian Visions* in Kansas City, Missouri, at the 50th-anniversary convention of the College Band Directors National Association.

*Note by Frank Ticheli*

## FIRST SUITE IN E-FLAT, OP. 28 NO. 1

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*Gustav Holst*

Although it is uncertain for which occasion Gustav Holst wrote his *First Suite in E-flat*, his daughter and biographer Imogen Holst speculates that the piece was most likely written for either the Festival at the People's Palace of 1909, or for a contest sponsored by the Worshipful Company of Musicians that same year. Whatever its genesis, Holst's *First Suite* languished unperformed for eleven years before its first documented performance on 23 June 1920 at Kneller Hall by the Royal Military School of Music Band.

In an interesting turn of events, this premiere preceded the initial performance of Holst's *Second Suite in F*, also for military band, by two years - almost to the day. Ironically, the *Suite in F* also received an unwarranted hiatus of eleven years, having been composed in 1911. Both works achieved immediate critical acclaim in the London press, and have since become cornerstones of the wind band repertoire along with works by Percy Grainger and Ralph Vaughan Williams.

The melodies in *First Suite in E-flat* unfold from an original, germinal idea: the first three notes of the work - E-flat, F, and C. Cast in three movements - "Chaconne," "Intermezzo" and "March" - Holst intended the suite to be played *attacca*, without break.

In "Chaconne," Holst draws upon Baroque influences, blurring the line between two variation forms - the passacaglia and the chaconne. Holst spins fifteen harmonic, melodic, and orchestrational variations based upon the melody presented in the first eight measures. The fleet-footed "Intermezzo" provides stark contrast to the brooding gravitas of the first movement. Holst employs a simple ABA form to showcase his melodic aesthetic and penchant for bitonal composition. In the introduction to "March," the three-note germinal melody is inverted. True to its title, however, this British quick-march serves as a rousing conclusion to the suite. In addition to its own theme, Holst reprises the "Chaconne" theme in a "Land of Hope and Glory" style [Americans know this as *Pomp and Circumstance*]. Eventually, these two themes combine in thrilling counterpoint, leading to the climactic coda with a dynamic marking of *ffff* !