

THE CRANE WIND ENSEMBLE

Program Notes • September 22, 2017

Overture to *Candide*

Leonard Bernstein/arr. Grundman

As a conductor, composer, pianist, author, broadcaster, and humanitarian, Leonard Bernstein left indelible marks on an astonishing range of endeavors. His catalog of compositions range from witty, light-hearted songs and superb musicals to substantial operas, ballets, concertos, and symphonies. These works are united by a strong sense of the composer's personal style, reflecting his deep understanding and celebration of the human condition. The Broadway musicals *Candide* and more famous *West Side Story* came into being during the same period. *Candide* was composed between 1953 and 1956, premiering on December 1, 1956 and *West Side Story* opened a year later. However, unlike the monumental success of *West Side Story*, *Candide* has had a troubled history. The book for the original version, written by famed playwright Lillian Hellman, proved too dark and weighty for the show to find success in the popular theatre. *Candide* had a disastrous initial run of just seventy-three performances, and though Bernstein and several different collaborators created further versions, none were entirely successful.

The plot comes from a satiric tale by the eighteenth-century French author Voltaire. *Candide* is a young man who believes in the philosophy set out by his teacher— that everything happens for the best. His adventures take him around the world where he encounters a long series of catastrophes. In the end, he renounces his former outlook and resolves to build a new, honest, and hopeful life.

Bernstein's bright and witty music satirically pays homage to the defining characteristics of the play's setting through variations on the classical dances and empty-headed operatic conventions of its time. The Overture weaves together snippets of the various themes into a bright, vivacious potpourri that Lillian Hellman once called "the perfect piece of slap-dash."

Komm, süsßer Tod

Johann Sebastian Bach/arr. Reed

In early 1736, while working in Leipzig, J.S. Bach contributed sixty-nine songs and arias for inclusion in a songbook called *Musicalisches Gesangbuch*. Edited by Georg Schmelli (1676–1762), the songbook was intended as a practical

collection of sacred music for the Lutheran congregations in Leipzig. *Komm, süsßer Tod* was one of three original melodies Bach composed for the collection.

The text for *Komm, süsßer Tod* is as follows:

Komm, süßer Tod, komm selge Ruh!	Come, sweet death, come blessed rest!
Komm führe mich in Friede,	Come lead me to peace
Weil ich der Welt bin müde,	For I am weary of the world,
Ach komm! ich wart auf dich,	Oh come! I wait for you,
Komm bald und führe mich,	Come soon and lead me,
Drück mir die Augen zu.	Close my eyes.
Komm, selge Ruh!	Come, blessed rest!

This poignant text corresponds to the Lutheran view of death as an inevitable release from the difficulties of life. In the eighteenth century, death was not considered the funereal tragedy it is today, but more of a celebratory freedom in anticipation for the eternal joys in heaven. Bach's setting of *Komm, süsßer Tod* often juxtaposes minor and major harmonies to express this notion of death as a blessing in which man triumphs over the forces of evil.

Bach's Fugue à la Gigue

Johann Sebastian Bach/arr. Holst

In July 1708, at the age of 23, Bach attained a position in Weimar as Kapellmeister under Duke Wilhelm Ernst. It was here that he began his steady output of fugues for which he would later be referred to as "Master of the Fugue." *Bach's Fugue à la Gigue* is based on Bach's Fugue in G Major [BWV 577], a charming and energetic gigue originally written for organ.

English composer Gustav Holst (1874-1934) first encountered the fugue as a student and like many scholars, thought the work seemed austere compared to the grandeur and expansiveness of Bach's other organ fugues. In a 1932 interview Holst said,

"When I was studying organ some forty years ago, it struck me that of all Bach's organ works, just one, this fugue, seemed ineffective on the instrument for which it was composed. . . . I made no attempt to orchestrate it at the time, but when the British Broadcasting Corporation requested me to write a large work for their military band, I decided to get my hand in—not having written for band for several years—by scoring *Fugue à la Gigue* before attacking my own work, which was to be the *Prelude and Scherzo Hammersmith*."

Holst himself gave the title *Bach's Fugue à la Gigue* to the work, but was careful not to give a false impression. On the title page of the score he wrote, "The title 'Fugue à la Gigue' describes the work perfectly, but there is no reason

to think that it was so named by Bach.” The work was completed in May 1928 and was premiered later that summer by the BBC Wireless Military Band with Holst conducting.

Vientos y Tangos

Michael Gandolfi

Michael Gandolfi’s earliest musical involvement was as a self-taught guitarist in rock and jazz improvisation beginning at age eight. As his improvisational skills developed, he became increasingly interested in music composition and began formal study in his early teens. He received his undergraduate and graduate degrees in composition from the New England Conservatory of Music, as well as fellowships for study at the Yale Summer School of Music and Art, the Composers Conference, and the Tanglewood Music Center.

The composer offers the following remarks about his composition:

Vientos y Tangos (Winds and Tangos) was commissioned by The Frank L. Battisti 70th Birthday Commission Project and is dedicated to Frank Battisti in recognition of his immense contributions to the advancement of concert wind literature. It was Mr. Battisti’s specific request that I write a tango for wind ensemble. In preparation for this piece, I devoted several months to the study and transcription of tangos from the early style of Juan D’arienzo and the ‘Tango Nuevo’ style of Astor Piazzolla to the current trend of ‘Disco/Techno Tango,’ among others. After immersing myself in this listening experience, I simply allowed the most salient features of these various tangos to inform the direction of my work. The dynamic contour and the various instrumental combinations that I employ in the piece are all inspired by the traditional sounds of the bandoneon, violin, piano, and contrabass.

A Grainger Set

Percy Aldridge Grainger

Scored for band in 1919, *Children’s March* was initially composed as a piano solo between 1916 and 1918. At the time it was rescored, Grainger was a member of the 15th Band of the United States Coast Guard Artillery Corps stationed at Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn, New York. This experience enabled him to understand the wind band in new ways and he spent his free time learning the intricacies of each instrument and experimenting with its possibilities. In *Children’s March*, Grainger highlights the more specialized timbres of the band—specifically the bassoons, English horn, and saxophones. This is also one of the first works for band in which the piano is an integral component to the overall ensemble texture.

The buoyant theme of *Children’s March* is an original conception, though scholars have suggested that it is adapted from Smetana’s *Ma Vlast* or even based on a popular marching song of the 18th century. However, neither of these speculations has been successfully proven. The Goldman Band of New York premiered the military band version of *Children’s March* on June 6, 1919 at Columbia University with Grainger conducting. A mystery surrounds the work’s dedication, which honors “my playmate beyond the hills.” Grainger left no clue as to the identity of the dedicatee, although many scholars suspect it could be Karen Holton, a Scandinavian beauty with whom the composer corresponded for eight years but would not marry because of his possessive mother’s jealousy.

While originally composed as a work for piano and later arranged for two voices, harp, and orchestra in 1912, Grainger created the military band version of *Colonial Song* in 1918 while also stationed at Fort Hamilton. Grainger intended to “express feelings aroused by my thoughts of the scenery and people of my native land.” He added,

“Perhaps it is not unnatural that Colonials living more or less lonely in vast countries and struggling against natural and climatic hardships should run largely to that patiently yearning, inactive sentimental wistfulness that we find so touchingly expressed in much American art; for instance in Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, and in Stephen C. Foster’s adorable songs ‘My Old Kentucky Home,’ ‘Old Folks at Home,’ etc.

Colonial Song was originally intended as the first of a series of “Sentimentals” but Grainger ultimately abandoned the project because of the critique *Colonial Song* received from renowned English conductor, Sir Thomas Beecham, who said, “You have achieved the almost impossible! You have written the worst orchestral piece of modern times!”

Like the other two works, *Shepherd’s Hey* was originally written for piano but later transcribed for military band while Grainger was at Fort Hamilton. It is based on a traditional English Morris Dance that was collected by Percy Grainger’s longtime friend, Cecil J. Sharp, in 1906 from the Bidford Morris Dancers— a popular dance troupe located south of Birmingham, England. The tune of *Shepherd’s Hey* is akin to the North English Morris Dance “Keel Row” that is danced by teams of Morris men decked out with bells and quaint ornaments. Fiddlers and/or a pipe and tabor (a type of fife and drum) played the tune in several rural districts across England and the word ‘Hey’ denotes a particular figure [i.e. step] in Morris Dancing. In Grainger’s setting, he takes four variants of the *Shepherd’s Hey* tune and sets them in his own inimitable style, adding contrapuntal lines derived from the melody itself. Grainger “lovingly and reverently” dedicated the work to the memory of his esteemed mentor and friend, Edvard Grieg, who had died in 1907.

