

THE CRANE WIND ENSEMBLE

Program Notes • 21 October 2016

RESURGENCES

E quando você quer alguma coisa, todo o Universo conspira para que você realize seu desejo. ~ Paulo Coelho

The human mind is a complex and fascinating thing. The subtle, sometimes subconscious, or even serendipitous connections it makes provide perpetual opportunity for reflection. Case in point: this program. Both its contents and its subject matter have parallels that revealed themselves after selection.

While typical ensemble programming takes into account historical and stylistic variety of repertoire, difficulty, duration, breadth of technical, formal, and musical dimensions, as well as pedagogical sequencing (in the attempt to facilitate a higher likelihood of “reasonably stress-free” success), oftentimes other more interesting and sometimes surprising aspects reveal themselves upon further study. This program is no exception.

I am quite familiar with Maslanka’s *Symphony No. 4* and its use of hymn tune material, and deducing & confirming that Andrew Boss’ *À la Machaut* indeed utilized fragments of the Renaissance composer’s music was no great task, as he quite helpfully cites his sources. However, the connections in and between Biedenbender’s *Schism* and Bryant’s *Concerto* with respect to the reuse of their own material, and their parallel fondness for Anton Webern and his compositional style were complete surprises to me. Each of these works is preoccupied, in their own way, with aspects of “musical resurgence” – a rebirth of musical material or intent, re-focused into a new context to suit a particular compositional and aesthetic purpose. This resurgence serves as a particular form of commentary: socio-political (Biedenbender), personal admiration (Bryant), coloristic/timbral (Boss), and spiritual (Maslanka).

The universe, it seems, does have your back when working to create experiences for musicians and audiences alike. As a final thought: every performance is by nature its own resurgence – a new birth in the waters of inspiration and creativity into which these intrepid and determined musicians continually wade – unique, never to be heard in quite the same way ever again.

BKD

SCHISM

David Biedenbender

Schism is about divisions. I wrote *Schism* in 2010 in the midst of the turbulent national mid-term elections, a time that, in the context of more recent political turmoil, actually seems quite tame. I was overwhelmingly frustrated by the sophomoric mud-slinging and ridiculous lies being told by many politicians and

the variously allied media, but I was also somewhat amused by what was nothing short of a nationwide goat rodeo*.

Much of the musical material is transcribed almost note for note from an improvisation I played on the piano and recorded in the early stages of sketching the piece. I remember being interested in combining the pointillism of Anton Webern’s music with a bluesy rock groove, so much of the piece is based on a single, simple, eighth note based, divided melodic line that jumps around the piano in very large leaps. I think of the musical affect as similar to the compound melodies in J.S. Bach’s *Unaccompanied Cello Suites*, where a single melodic line is perceptually transformed through large leaps into multiple voices, though, in the end, I used the ensemble to actually hold out the notes the piano could not to add color, character, and attitude to the independent voices. I also wanted to play with the notion of groove by dividing it in unusual and unexpected ways, almost like running a few of the licks and grooves through a meat grinder.

*A **goat rodeo** is a slang term for a chaotic situation, often one that involves several people, each with a different agenda/vision/perception of what’s going on; a situation that is very difficult, despite energy and efforts, in which to instill any sense or order.

Note by David Biedenbender

TROMBONE CONCERTO

Steven Bryant

The first inkling of an idea to write a concerto for Joe Alessi came when we shared a program at the University of Miami in November, 2011. He was performing John Mackey’s concerto, *Harvest*, with Gary Green and the Frost Wind Ensemble, and my own *Concerto for Wind Ensemble* followed on the same program. Joe very generously came out to sit in the audience after his performance to hear my work, and the following year at the Midwest Clinic in Chicago, we finally had a chance to sit down for coffee, and with the support of Jerry Junkin, put this project into motion.

In creating music specifically for Joseph Alessi, I was drawn to his expressive, unbelievably beautiful tone on the instrument, as well as his ability to flatten everything in his path without sacrificing that beauty. In movement I, I sought to “hide” his tone by having him play much of the time muted, and making the music pungent, nasal, and somewhat irritating at times, in order to heighten the open, melodic unveiling in the second movement. The final movement harnesses his power to create a state of euphoria.

Unlike most of my other music, I initially created a long (for me) melody instead of a short motive as the basis of all three movements of the work, and drew motivic material from that as needed. Despite my original intention, the full, uninterrupted melody never makes an appearance in the piece. Also of note, a particular four-note chord from movement IV of Webern’s *Six Pieces for Orchestra* informs the work. I quoted this same work of Webern in my *Concerto for Wind Ensemble*, the work Joe first heard in Miami which sparked his interest

in my music, so it serves as a subtle connecting thread between these two events. The music is absolute – there is no program or storyline apart from the inherent drama of the soloist dancing around (and often above!) the ensemble in the Concerto’s traditional fast-slow-fast movement structure.

Note by Steven Bryant

À LA MACHAUT

Andrew Boss

À La Machaut integrates thematic material from 3 works of the great Medieval composer Guillaume de Machaut while adding a colorfully modern touch. The piece opens with a slow introduction using melodic and harmonic material from his polyphonic chanson *Puis qu'en oubli* (“Since I am forgotten”). The upbeat percussion transitions the piece to the main material, quoting the melody of his secular virelai, *Douce jame jolie* (“Sweet lovely lady”). This piece also uses material from the Kyrie to Machaut’s *Messe de Notre Dame*. A reflective middle section brings back the slow material from the introduction while maintaining the upbeat rhythms introduced earlier in the percussion. A short recapitulation revisits the virelai in several contrasting textures, leading to a climactic variation with shimmering winds, blasting percussion and low brass. A final tutti variation harmonizes the virelai and closes the piece.

Note by Andrew Boss

SYMPHONY NO. 4

David Maslanka

The sources that give rise to a piece of music are many and deep. It is possible to describe the technical aspects of a work – its construction principles, its orchestration – but nearly impossible to write of its soul nature except through hints and suggestions.

The roots of *Symphony No. 4* are many. The central driving force is the spontaneous rise of the impulse to shout for the joy of life. I feel it is the powerful voice of the Earth that comes to me from my adopted western Montana, and the high plains and mountains of central Idaho. My personal experience of the voice is one of being helpless and torn open by the power of the thing that wants to be expressed – the welling-up shout that cannot be denied. I am set aquiver and am forced to shout and sing. The response in the voice of the Earth is the answering shout of thanksgiving, and the shout of praise.

Out of this, the hymn tune *Old Hundred*, several other hymn tunes (the Bach chorales *Only Trust in God to Guide You* and *Christ Who Makes Us Holy*), and original melodies which are hymn-like in nature, form the backbone of *Symphony No. 4*.

To explain the presence of these hymns, at least in part, and to hint at the life of the Symphony, I must say something about my long-time fascination with Abraham Lincoln. From Carl Sandburg’s monumental *Abraham Lincoln*, I offer

two quotes. The first is a description of Lincoln in death by his close friend David R. Locke:

I saw him, or what was mortal of him, in his coffin. The face had an expression of absolute content, or relief, at throwing off a burden such as few men have been called on to bear – a burden which few men could have borne. I have seen the same expression on his living face only a few times, when after a great calamity he had come to great victory. It was the look of a worn man suddenly relieved. Wilkes Booth did Abraham Lincoln the greatest service man could possibly do for him – he gave him peace.

The second, referring to the passage through the country from Washington D.C. to Springfield, Illinois of the coffin bearing Lincoln’s body:

To the rotunda of Ohio’s capitol, on a mound of green moss dotted with white flowers, rested the coffin on April 28, while 8,000 persons passed by each hour from 9:30 in the morning till four in the afternoon. In the changing red-gold of a rolling prairie sunset, to the slow exultation of brasses rendering *Old Hundred*, and the muffled boom of minute guns, the coffin was carried out of the rotunda and taken to the funeral train.

For me, Lincoln’s life and death are as critical today as they were more than a century ago. He remains a model for this age. Lincoln maintained in his person the tremendous struggle of opposites raging in the country in his time. He was inwardly open to the boiling chaos, out of which he forged the framework of a new unifying idea. It wore him down and killed him, as it wore and killed the hundreds of thousands of soldiers in the civil war, as it has continued to wear and kill by the millions up to the present day. Confirmed in the world by Lincoln was the unshakable idea of the unity of the human race, and by extension the unity of all life, and by further extension, the unity of all life with all matter, with all energy, and with the silent and seemingly empty and unfathomable mystery of our origins.

Out of chaos and the fierce joining of opposite comes new life and hope. From this impulse I used *Old Hundred*, known as the *Doxology* – a hymn of praise to God; *Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow*; *Gloria in excelsis Deo* – the mid-sixteenth century setting of Psalm 100. Psalm 100 reads in part:

¹Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands.

²Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing.

⁴Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

I have used Christian Symbols because they are my cultural heritage, but I have tried to move through them to a depth of universal humanness, to an awareness that is not defined by religious label. My impulse through this music is to speak to the fundamental human issues of transformation and re-birth in this chaotic time.

Note by David Maslanka