CONCERT BAND

Program Notes • Wednesday, 27 February

MOONSCAPE AWAKENING

Joni Greene

Moonscape Awakening came to life during the Oregon Bach Festival when I was approached by band director, James Geiger, who was looking to commission a work for his band at West Laurens High School in Dublin, Georgia. Mr. Geiger specifically asked for a work in the spirit of my choral piece, Autumn Reflections, which focuses on warm colors of scenic imagery.

Thus the inspiration for Moonscape Awakening begins with the presentation of color and texture within the choirs of the wind ensemble. The title is descriptive of a shimmering moon that slowly rises and bursts into an awakening of full presence and intensity. The process of progression to the moon’s zenith is presented musically as a slow building of melody, texture, note duration, and range. The culmination of these elements reaches an apex about halfway through the work. An arch form is then revealed as the music slowly dissipates in texture and rhythmic intensity, signifying a weakening of the moon’s presence.

Moonscape Awakening comprises several layered melodic strands. The work’s motivic fragments are derived from a solo in the bass clarinet. The full presentation of this main theme is embedded at several points in the work and serves as a melodic echo throughout. Along with the theme’s motivic fragments, rising flourishes of sixteenth-notes add to the progression of intensity and arrival. After the apex, a journey of releasing tension begins through a spinning out of melodic ideas in the brass and woodwind choirs. The work comes to a close after a final resonating chord with the return of the solo flute.

Moonscape Awakening received its premiere on May 6, 2008 by the West Laurens Wind Ensemble, conducted by James Geiger.

Note by Joni Greene

S Y M P H O N Y N O . 2

Frank Ticheli

The symphony’s three movements refer to celestial light – Shooting Stars, the Moon, and the Sun.

Although the title for the first movement, “Shooting Stars,” came after its completion, I was imagining such quick flashes of color throughout the creative process. White-note clusters are sprinkled everywhere, like streaks of bright light. High above, the Eb clarinet shouts out the main theme, while underneath, the low brasses punch out staccatissimo chords that intensify the dance-like energy. Fleeting events of many kinds are cut and pasted at unexpected moments, keeping the ear on its toes. The movement burns quickly, and ends explosively, scarcely leaving a trail.

The second movement, “Dreams Under a New Moon,” depicts a kind of journey of the soul as represented by a series of dreams. A bluesy clarinet melody is answered by a chant-like theme in muted trumpet and piccolo. Many dream episodes follow, ranging from mysterious, to the dark, to the peaceful and healing. A sense of hope begins to assert itself as rising lines are passed from one instrument to another. Modulation after modulation occurs as the music lifts and searches for resolution. Near the end, the main theme returns in counterpoint with the chant, building to a majestic climax, then falling to a peaceful coda. The final B-flat major chord is colored by a questioning G-flat.

The finale, “Apollo Unleashed,” is perhaps the most wide-ranging movement of the symphony, and certainly the most difficult to convey in words. On the one hand, the image of Apollo, the powerful ancient god of the sun, inspired not only the movement’s title, but also its blazing energy. Bright sonorities, fast tempos, and galloping rhythms combine to give a sense of urgency that one often expects from a symphonic finale. On the other hand, its boisterous nature is also tempered and enriched by another, more sublime force, Bach’s Chorale BWV 433 (Wer Gott vertraut, hat wohl gebaut). This chorale – a favorite of the dedicatee, and one he himself arranged for chorus and band – serves as a kind of spiritual anchor, giving a soul to the gregarious foreground events. The chorale is in ternary form (ABA’). In the first half of the movement, the chorale’s A and B sections are stated nobly underneath faster paced music, while the final A section is saved for the climactic ending, sounding against a flurry of 16-notes.

My second symphony is dedicated to James E. Croft upon his retirement as Director of Bands at Florida State University in 2003. It was commissioned by a consortium of Dr. Croft’s doctoral students, conducting students and friends as a gesture of thanks for all he has given to the profession.

Note by Frank Ticheli

SYMPHONIC BAND

ARMENIAN DANCES

Aram Khachaturian

Aram Khachaturian is probably best-known outside of Russia for his “Saber Dance” from the ballet, Gayane [Happiness]. His concertos for violin and piano, in addition to his incidental music and film scores made him a popular musical figure in his native land. Khachaturian's music is deeply rooted in Armenian folklore – so much so that several of his themes evolved into Armenian national songs.

At age nineteen, Khachaturian began his music study at the Gnessin’s Music School in Moscow. There he studied cello and composition. In 1929, he
transferred to the Moscow Conservatory, taking up study with Miasovsky and Vassilenko. After his schooling, Khachaturian played a prominent role in musical society – conducting, composing, and teaching [at the Moscow Conservatory].

The Armenian Dances are but one of several examples of Khachaturian’s wind band writing. These dances were originally written for the Red Army Cavalry Band in 1943, and then edited to accommodate full, modern band instrumentation by Ralph Satz. It is unknown whether the themes are borrowed from Armenian culture or are original. Regardless, these dances show Khachaturian’s flair for melody and his penchant for layering rhythm to evoke mood.

**Islas y Montañas**

*Shelly Hanson*

_Tocata_ is the first movement of the suite, _Islas y Montañas_, commissioned originally by the Minnesota Youth Symphonies, and then by Craig Kirchoff, for the University of Minnesota Bands. _Tocata_ (the Spanish spelling of the familiar Italian word) is a fanfare based upon the music of Caribbean people of African descent. Many traditional rhythms of the Santeria religion are incorporated into this piece. Although “tocata” is the word in Spanish used for “fanfare,” it is also used in the sense of its root meaning, “touch.”

_Volver a la Montañas_ (Return to the Mountains) is based upon several folk tunes of the Quechua (“Inca”) people of Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. Near the end of the movement, the folk song _Séparacion_ (Separation) is quoted briefly. The words are, “my mother told me not to cry, though I’m leaving the mountains forever.” Over the past century, many of the Quechua people have had to leave their villages forever due to the economic difficulties pressures from trying to maintain their traditional mountain lifestyle. The movement opens with a stately processional, followed by a fast dance, and a return to the processional theme, with trumpets echoing the flute melody.

_Seis Manuel_. The _seis_ is the traditional song and dance form of the Jibaro people – the peasant farmers in the mountains of Puerto Rico. At least 50 distinct types of _seis_ have been identified. “Seis,” literally means “six” in Spanish; the musical term originally referred to a dance for six men or six couples. This movement, _Seis Manuel_, is based upon a traditional recurring harmonic pattern called the _seis mapayé_, over which the singer improvises a melody. Because of the very long tradition of military bands in Puerto Rico, with particular importance placed upon low brass and clarinets, those instruments play the role of “soloist.” In keeping with Puerto Rican tradition, the _seis_ is named after someone important to its creation. In this case, Manny Laureano, who commissioned the complete suite with his wife, Claudette, for the Minnesota Youth Orchestras.

_La Tumba de Alejandro García Caturla_. Like so many other composers from the Americas, Alejandro García Caturla studied briefly in Paris with famed teacher Nadia Boulanger. Fascinated with Afro-Cuban music and especially that of the Santeria religion, Caturla used complex folk rhythms, polytonality, dissonant chords often build in fourths or fifths, pentatonic scales, and a very limited melodic range such as that used by Santeria singers. In the tradition of the French tumbao, a memorial piece, this movement is a tribute to Caturla, murdered the age of 34, by incorporating many of the elements of his style. The Spanish equivalent term, “tumba,” also is used for the large conga drum. Programmatically, this tumba seeks to intermingle the tragic loss of Caturla with references to the Santeria bembé, funeral rites, and particularly the characteristics of the goddess Oya. She is the goddess of the wind, and of the cemetery; she can be the gentlest of breezes, or the angriest of hurricanes. Traditional poetry of praise to Oya refers to her as one who guards the frontier between life and death; she can be a nine-headed apparition, associated with nine flashes of lightning. The first part of the piece depicts mourners calling out to Oya, the fast section that follows shows the results of her appearing to them in earthly form. The ending refers to the conclusion of the Santeria mourning process, which involves taking a plate outside and publicly smashing it nine times to free the spirit of the deceased. Musically some of Oya’s rhythms are quoted, as is the Christian _Dies Irae_; and the two eight-bar themes on which the piece is built incorporating a rising interval of a fourth associated with an invocation to Oya, as well as the initials AGC.

_Note by Shelly Hanson_

**Symphony No. 3**

*Vittorio Giannini*

Vittorio Giannini 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.

The composer wrote this about his Symphony No. 3:

_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.