

# THE CRANE WIND ENSEMBLE

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## Program Notes • Friday, 15 February

*Of time and place...*

### PETITE SYMPHONIE

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*Charles Gounod*

The music and sensibilities of Charles Gounod fluctuated throughout his life between the poles of sacred and profane love, often ambiguously. Well-educated in the theory, practice, and history of music, his earliest successes as a composer came with settings of the mass in an austere, acapella style inspired by Palestrina. A brief flirtation with the priesthood in the late 1840s gave way to an infatuation with the famed opera singer Pauline Viardot, who led him to switch to opera, but his first efforts, marred by an effort to imitate Meyerbeer, were failures. His greatest mass, the *Messe solennelle de Sainte Cécile* of 1855, with full orchestra and soloists added to the choir, was florid, almost operatic in style, thus blending the two extremes. For the next decade, Gounod was at the height of his powers, and his engagement by the Theater Lyrique in 1858 led to the composition of the five operas for which he is remembered today. Dispensing with Meyerbeerian pretense, Gounod embraced his natural gift for writing unpretentiously lyrical music, wedding it to familiar stories. His greatest success came with his 1859 setting of the love story from Goethe's *Faust*. Rejecting spectacle for its own sake and seeking to humanize even the lesser roles, Gounod mixed song types and singing styles, formal expression and informal, to musically delineate character in ways never before seen in opera.

During the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71, he and his family took refuge in England. Success there turned to scandal when Gounod took an English opera singer as his mistress, and his wife fled back to Paris. After suffering a stroke in 1874, a badly shaken Gounod ended his affair and returned to France. Thereafter both the quality and quantity of his composing declined. After several operatic failures, he drifted back towards sacred music. An oratorio, *La Rédemption*, was performed to mixed and sometimes savage reviews.

Though Gounod wrote little instrumental music, the two symphonies of 1855, the *Petite Symphonie* of 1885, and a handful of late string quartets are all skillfully wrought essays in traditional forms, graceful and unpretentious. We can be grateful to the flutist Paul Taffanel, who commissioned the *Petite Symphonie* for a Paris concert series devoted to wind chamber music. Gounod took the Mozartian wind octet consisting of pairs of clarinets, oboes, horns, and bassoons and added a single prominently featured flute to the mix. With an overall character of elegant conversation, the work features a Haydnesque slow introduction to a lively allegro, and a slow movement like an operatic aria for flute

over sonorous winds. In the Scherzo and Finale, the musical ideas are beguiling both in their charm and in the manner of their distribution amongst the players.

*Note by Ron Drummond (Northwest Sinfonietta)*

### TO BE SUNG OF A SUMMER NIGHT ON THE WATER, OP. 91, NO. 1

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*Charles Delius*

Some of Delius' most transcendently ecstatic moments are entrusted to a wordless chorus, as if no words could adequately convey the peculiar fullness of the moment. One thinks of Zarathustra's encounter with Life and Wisdom in the third part of Delius' cantata *A Mass of Life*, or, preeminently, of the attainment of the summit in his *A Song of the High Hills*. Apart from the title, there is no programmatic suggestion underscoring the gratuitous blitheness of the two brief yet beguiling choral pieces *To be sung of a summer night on the water*. Composed in late spring 1917 at Grez-sur-Loing, one would hardly guess from them that the Great War was still rampant, or that Delius was a very sick man. The *String Quartet* (1916) was thoroughly revised during the winter, and a Scherzo added, while the major compositional achievement for the year was the bracing symphonic poem *Eventyr*. An inveterate walker, Delius had been active outside, taking long strolls and helping his wife tend their garden, in the back of their house facing the river Loing, characteristically a riot of wildflowers. Meanwhile, in America, his friend Percy Aldridge Grainger was promoting his works, though Delius' publishers were German and Austrian and the war left copies of his music in short supply. Nonetheless, Delius harbored plans for a trip to the United States, cut short in early summer by a return of syphilitic symptoms that nearly crippled him, forcing him to a spa in Normandy. Numbness in hands and feet responded slowly to treatment, but by July 24 he was able to take a 10-kilometer stroll, and by August he was well enough to go on holiday in Brittany with his wife. Apart from health-related interruptions, Delius' uncharacteristically scaled-back production is attributable to a turn toward works attempting to accommodate his essentially rhapsodic inspiration to sonata form -- e.g., the *Double Concerto for violin and cello* (1915-1916), the *Violin Concerto* (1916), the *Cello Concerto* (1921) -- giving way to a spate of miniatures in which matter and manner dovetail more successfully. Piano pieces, the *Dance for Harpsichord*, the *Air and Dance for Strings*, a generous bag of surprises in the incidental music for James Elroy Flecker's play *Hassan* (1923), and, more richly, *To be sung...* are Delius at his most fleetly charming and least alloyed. The latter were premiered by Charles Kennedy Scott and his Oriana Madrigal Society in London on June 28, 1921.

*Note by Adrian Corleoni*

## HAMMERSMITH, OP. 52

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### *Gustav Holst*

Gustav Holst composed *Hammersmith*, his last work for military band, in 1930 at the behest of the BBC Military Band. Although rehearsed, the work never received a performance by that band, and Holst made an orchestral transcription of the work that was premiered the following year.

In 1932, while guest conducting at Harvard University, Holst was contacted about conducting *Hammersmith* at the final concert of the American Bandmasters' Association convention during April of that year. The United States Marine Band, "The President's Own" performed the world premiere of the original military band version of *Hammersmith*, although Holst was prevented from taking part in the concert due to an ulcer flare-up.

Although mentioned by many sources, *Hammersmith* was not performed again until 1954, when Robert Cantrick performed the work with his band at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh. It is only since that performance that the work has come to be recognized as a major work in the wind band repertoire.

Those who knew nothing of his forty-year-old affection for the Hammersmith district of London were puzzled at the title. The work is not program music. Its mood is the outcome of long years of familiarity with the changing crowds and the changing river: those Saturday night crowds, who were always good-natured even when they were being pushed off the pavement into the middle of the traffic, and all the stall-holders in that narrow lane behind the Broadway, with their unexpected assortment of goods lit up by brilliant flares, and the large woman at the fruit shop who always called him "dearie" when he bought oranges for his Sunday picnics. As for the river, he had known it since he was a student, when he paced up and down outside William Morris's house, discussing Ibsen with earnest young socialists. During all the years since then, his favorite London walk had been along the river-path to Chiswick.

In *Hammersmith*, the river is the background to the crowd: it is a river that goes on its way unnoticed and unconcerned.

*Note by Jon C. Mitchell & Imogen Holst*

## THEME AND VARIATIONS

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### *Verne Reynolds*

The impact of Verne Reynolds on the world of horn players cannot be overstated. His tenure as professor of Horn at the Eastman School of Music from 1959-1995 allowed him to mentor students that would go on to occupy seats in prominent orchestras and institutions around the world.

Born in Lyons, Kansas in 1926, he began the study of piano and singing at an early age. At 13, he started playing horn in high school band after the director gave him a horn and some lessons. Reynolds joined the Navy and played both

piano in jazz groups and horn in military bands. After World War II, he earned degrees at Cincinnati Conservatory, The University of Wisconsin, and studied as a Fulbright Scholar at The Royal College of Music.

While in college, Reynolds began composing, with *Theme and Variations* as his first published work. It won the 1950 Thor Johnson Brass Award. Verne Reynolds went on to publish more than 60 works, including etudes and method books. His earlier compositions are reminiscent of Hindemith's compositional style and language.

## PRELUDE IN THE DORIAN MODE

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### *Antonio de Cabezón*

Antonio de Cabezón was one of the 16<sup>th</sup> century's greatest keyboard performers and composers. Blind from infancy, born of noble parents, he became composer and organist to the court of Charles and Isabella. He later served Phillip II, with whom he traveled throughout Europe.

De Cabezón's music is richly polyphonic. Although he composed primarily for keyboard instruments, his music also possesses a haunting vocal quality. His *tientos*, such as *Prelude in the Dorian Mode*, are instrumental fantasies built upon an opening motive. These compositions make masterful use of fugal counterpoint, creating tensions between the motive and imitative secondary lines. In this *Prelude in the Dorian Mode*, the opening minor-mode motive repeats at regular intervals throughout the main body of the work, forming a basis for the four-part polyphony evolving around it.

When Percy Grainger created this band setting, Leopold Stokowski's orchestral Bach transcriptions were much in vogue. Unlike Stokowski's gleaming – modern sounding Bach – Grainger skillfully recalls the darker historical quality of the *tiento* and its vocal counterpart, the motet. The music is de Cabezón; the expressive concept and colors are entirely Grainger's. His modern setting is beautifully evocative of de Cabezón's Renaissance world.

*Note by Keith Brion*

## DRAGON RHYME

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### *Chen Yi*

*Dragon Rhyme* for symphonic band is in two movements: I. Mysteriously-Harmoniously, and II. Energetically. The first movement is lyrical, and the second powerful. Featuring the basic intervals found in Beijing Opera music, the thematic material in both movements is matched, and used economically for development throughout the work. The instrumental texture is rich in colors, from transparent and delicate to angular and strong. Taking the image of the dragon, which is auspicious, fresh and vivid, the music is layered and multidimensional. It symbolizes Eastern culture. When it meets the world, it becomes part of the global family.

*Note by Chen Yi*