

# THE CRANE WIND ENSEMBLE

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*Program Notes • 25 November 2019*

## CHILDREN'S MARCH

### OVER THE HILLS AND FAR AWAY

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*Percy Aldridge Grainger*

Although Percy Grainger was born an Australian, he spent the majority of his professional life in England and America. He was an only child, and when his parents separated in 1890, he developed an inextricable bond with his mother that lasted until her death in 1922. She traveled and lived exclusively with Percy, acting as his caretaker, business manager, and closest confidant.

Rose Grainger was an accomplished pianist, and young Percy's earliest musical studies were kept within the family. He showed tremendous promise at the keyboard, and by 1895, he had reached the requisite age of thirteen to enroll in a conservatory. Rose and Percy left Australia for Germany where he was admitted to the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt am Main. After his graduation, mother and son relocated to London in 1901 and Grainger began his career as a concert pianist in earnest. During this time, he also composed feverishly and began to take particular interest in the native folk songs of his new home. In 1905, he set about in Brigg, Lincolnshire, on the first of what would become countless trips to the English countryside to collect and document the tunes often sung by the native residents. First on paper, and then with the newly developed wax cylinder, Grainger eventually documented more than 700 English and Danish folksongs. He delighted in the nuances and "imperfections" rendered by each singer and arranged dozens of these tunes for various ensembles. In what would become the defining feature of his work, he not only preserved the tunes, but also the irregular meters and unique interpretations of each singer who first shared the music with him.

After the outbreak of World War I, Grainger moved to New York in 1914 and called America his home for the remainder of his life. He made a triumphant American solo debut in 1915, playing a concert of his own works to a sold-out audience in Aeolian Hall. Celebrated tenor Enrico Caruso was in attendance along with several notable critics, and Grainger was hailed as a modern genius at the keyboard. The Evening Post reported that "...in less than half an hour he had convinced his critical audience that he belongs in the same rank as [Ignacy Jan] Paderewski and [Fritz] Kreisler, sharing their artistic abilities, and yet as unique as they are, something new and sui generis. The audience was stunned, bewildered, delighted."

Despite his burgeoning success in America, in 1917 Grainger decided to join the U.S. Army in support of the war effort. He served with the Coast Artillery Band until 1919, playing both oboe and saxophone (which he had taught himself to play, among many other instruments). This was Grainger's first true experience

with a concert band, and he was immediately taken with the unique sound of the ensemble. This encounter proved to be the beginning of his long and fruitful relationship with the wind band, resulting in dozens of works that have become the cornerstone of the ensemble's repertoire. In 1918, the same year he attained his U.S. citizenship, he composed his first original work for band, titled *Children's March*, "*Over the Hills and Far Away*."

Most of his works from this period were built upon the folk tunes Grainger had so diligently collected, and the melodies of *Children's March* seemingly spring from the same source. However, the work is built entirely upon original material and makes full use of the sonorous capabilities of the band, with special attention given to the double reeds, saxophones, and piano. In fact, *Children's March* is believed to be the first original work for concert band with an integrated piano part, complete with the unusual instruction at the very end of the piece that the player hit a string inside the instrument with a marimba mallet. The cheerful romp is dedicated to Grainger's "playmate beyond the hills" (whom the composer never identified by name) and was premiered on June 6, 1919, by the Goldman Band with the composer conducting.

*Note by the President's Own United States Marine Band*

## PRELUDE, FUGUE, AND RIFFS

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*Leonard Bernstein*

Leonard Bernstein loved jazz. He grew up in the swing era with his ears wide open, and the rhythmic thrust and sizzle of American popular music was as much chants of the *chazzan*. As an undergraduate at Harvard he wrote in a thesis that "jazz in the 20th century has entered the mind and spirit of America; if an American is a sensitive creator, jazz will have become part of his palette, whether or not he is aware of it." In 1948 Bernstein accepted a commission from bandleader Woody Herman to write a jazz work for his band, "The Thundering Herd." When he mailed the piece off to Herman in 1949, he didn't receive his \$1000 fee or even an acknowledgment of its receipt. Bernstein, ever busy with projects, shrugged, put the score to *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs* on the shelf and forgot about it. In 1952 he pulled it out again to serve as a ballet sequence in his musical *Wonderful Town*, but the ballet was cut from the show. *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs* finally received its long-delayed premiere performance by clarinetist Benny Goodman on October 16, 1955 as part of an *Omnibus* television program narrated by Bernstein called "What is Jazz?"

The work is scored for solo clarinet and a typical 1930's swing orchestra. It begins with a lively *Prelude* for trumpets and trombones that has a crisp texture reminiscent of neoclassical Stravinsky and is characterized by offbeat rhythms that alternate with "hot" swinging big-band outbursts. The saxophone section plays the quirky, raffish *Fugue*, then hard-driving piano and solo clarinet begin the brilliant, propulsive *Riffs* segment. This rises to a virtuosic climax that is truly "jumping" at the end. Here Bernstein combines the headlong *Riffs* theme with the

two fugue themes in a hell-bent-for-leather conclusion – a shout chorus of whirling, freewheeling repetitions that build in intensity to the finish.

*Note by Matthew Naughtin*

## FLOURISHES AND MEDITATIONS ON A RENAISSANCE THEME

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*Michael Gandolfi*

*Flourishes and Meditations on a Renaissance Theme* was commissioned by the President's Own United States Marine Band and is dedicated to them, their Director, Colonel Michael J. Colburn, and their Associate Director, Major Jason K. Fetting.

*Flourishes and Meditations on a Renaissance Theme* is a set of seven variations on an anonymous Renaissance melody that is simply titled *Spagnoletta*. It is derived from a popular melody titled *Españoleta*, or "Little Spanish Tune." I first knew this melody as quoted by Joaquín Rodrigo in his *Fantasia para un gentilhombre* for guitar and orchestra. I also found this tune in the 1970's in a collection of Renaissance songs for classical guitar, and I have played it in that form countless times over the years. I was motivated to probe this elegant tune with which I have been acquainted for four decades, with the expectation that it would prompt a wealth of ideas unique to such a longstanding relationship. The beauty and elegance of the original tune resides in its simplicity, so I chose to present it at the outset of the piece in a clear and streamlined orchestration. The basic nature of character of each variation is revealed in the labels that are placed in the score:

(Theme)

Variation I. (A Cubist Kaleidoscope)

Variation II. (Cantus in augmentation: speed demon)

Variation III. (Carnival)

Variation IV. (Tune's in the round)

Variation V. (Spike)

Variation VI. (Rewind/Fast Forward)

Variation VII. (Echoes: a surreal reprise)

The form of *Spagnoletta* is AA BB and coda. This tripartite form is reflected in the large-scale design of my pieces, which is also comprised of three parts, each of which mirrors important structural features of the original.

The first part of *Flourishes and Meditations on a Renaissance Theme* consists of variations I and II. Each of these variations adheres strictly to the form of *Spagnoletta*. Additionally, variation I has a kinship to cubist painting in which various features of the original are fragmented, framed and juxtaposed, resulting in a kaleidoscopic amplification of details. Variation II uses the entire *Spagnoletta* melody as a cantus firmus while new melodies and lines are sounded over it; an ancient musical technique popular in medieval and renaissance times.

The second part is comprised of variations III, IV, and V. These variations are the most wide-ranging of the set, but always maintain motivic connections to *Spagnoletta*. Variations III and V are each expressed in AA form, an obvious reference to the formal repetitions of the originals. Variation IV uses motives of *Spagnoletta* to form a mobile or layered ostinato, upon which a type of canon known as a "round" is sounded. The melody of this round is built with melodic motives found in *Spagnoletta*.

Variations VI and VII form the third and final part of the piece and function similarly to the coda of *Spagnoletta*, which introduces no new melodic material but utilizes previously heard motives in new permutations that lead to the final cadence. In this spirit, variation VI points in two directions: it forecasts the main texture of variation VII while briefly reflecting upon each variation already heard (in reverse order). Variation VII returns to the original *Spagnoletta* melodies but places them in a new "dream-like" environment featuring a series of pulsating patterns and textures interwoven with strands of each of the original melodies, all of which move the piece to a gentle close.

While composing this piece, I experienced a wealth of rich emotions, among which were the great joy and deep satisfaction of writing for The President's Own United States Marine Band, the quintessential concert band of our time. I cannot overstate the significance of being called upon by this magnificent assembly of dedicated and supremely skilled musicians. It was also profoundly moving to connect, over several centuries, to the composer of *Spagnoletta*, a kindred spirit in the love of music-making.

*Note by Michael Gandolfi*

## THIS AUTOMATIC EARTH

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*Steven Bryant*

The Automatic Earth, for wind ensemble + electronics, addresses the ongoing climate catastrophe and evokes the psychological effect of the impending disruptive change to our entire way of living on the planet, even under a best-case scenario. Our way of life is unsustainable: therefore, it will not continue. The piece weaves together two threads: the climate crisis, and the technological transformation of what it is to be human. The tandem acceleration of technological wonder and ecological catastrophe means, at best, a strange, unrecognizable future, likely within our own lifetimes. I do not know if we will survive as a species: if we continue as we are now, average world temperature will increase around 8°C within eighty years, which would result in runaway warming and a Venus-like atmosphere that virtually no life on earth can withstand. If we do survive, it will be via monumental feats of geo-engineering and human re-engineering, surpassed only by an extraordinary change in our willingness to cooperate with each other. Humanity will be forever altered. This way of life will die. The question is whether or not we will die with it.

*Note by Steven Bryant*