

CRANE SYMPHONIC BAND

Program Notes • 21 November 2019

SONGS OF THE WHALEMEN

Elliot De Borgo

Elliot Del Borgo graduated from the Crane School of Music in 1960, and also served on its faculty from 1966-95 as conductor, professor and dean. He composed well over 600 works for all media during his lifetime, but his great fondness was composing for younger ensembles – providing them exceptional literature to play.

Songs of the Whalemens employs two folk tunes in this single-movement (slow-fast) work. The slow, cantabile air “Adieu to Erin” is in A-B-A-B form and moves directly into the lively and contrasting sea shanty, “Blow Ye Winds,” in

A-B-A’ ANCIENT FLOWER

Yukiko Nishimura

Yukiko Nishimura comments that, “the melodies of this piece have a flavor of Oriental atmosphere. However, most of the harmonies are composed with a Western-style vocabulary.” Nishimura leaves the exact impression of *Ancient Flower* up to the performers. “You might imagine that the ancient flower is a dainty, tiny flower, perhaps an exotic flower; or perhaps something else. Whatever you imagine, the flower will bloom your way in this piece.”

The plaintive melody leaves lots of room for interpretive flexibility. Harmonically, *Ancient Flower* is built using 7th and 9th chords and employs unexpected and interesting chord progressions creating wonderful and complex harmony in an overall form of A-A-B-C-A-A-coda.

form.

SPOON RIVER

Percy Aldridge Grainger

Percy Grainger writes in his program note to *Spoon River*:

... a Captain Charles H. Robinson heard a tune called *Spoon River* played by a rustic fiddler at a country dance at Bradford Illinois in 1857. When Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology* appeared in 1914, Captain Robinson (then nearly 90 years old) was struck by the likeness of the two titles – that of the old tune and that of the poem-book – and he sent the *Spoon River* tune to Masters, who passed it on to me. The tune is very archaic in character; typically American, yet akin to certain Scottish and English dance-tune types. My setting (begun March 10, 1919; ended February 1, 1929), aims at preserving a pioneer blend of lonesome wistfulness and sturdy persistence. It bears the following dedication: “For Edgar Lee Masters, poet of pioneers.”

In scoring *Spoon River* Grainger liberally employs what he colorfully describes as *Tuneful Percussion* (bells, chimes, xylophone, marimba, vibraphone, etc.). Grainger further states, “I first came upon these fascinating instruments in profusion while on a concert tour in Holland in 1913 where I visited the Ethnomusicological Museum in Leyden. I was entranced by the percussion

instruments of Indonesia, especially those that used the lower octaves. Hence my lavish use of these warm and mellow instruments in an endeavor to offset the harsher tones of those long-established citizens of the orchestra, the xylophone and glockenspiel.” Grainger pioneered their use, these *tuneful percussions*, not always receiving the credit that is his due. Glenn Cliffe Bainum, Director of Bands (1926-1953) at Northwestern University, arranged the band version of *Spoon River* from the orchestral setting.

Program Note by Percy Aldridge Grainger

VARIANTS ON A MEDIEVAL TUNE

Norman Dello Joio

The distinguished musical career of Norman Dello Joio began for him at age fourteen when he became a church organist and choir director of the Star of the Sea Church on City Island, New York. A descendant of Italian church organists, his father was an organist, pianist, singer, and vocal coach. Dello Joio recalls his father working with singers from the Metropolitan Opera, arriving at their home in Rolls Royces. At the age of four, Dello Joio’s father began teaching him piano, and in his teens he began studying organ with his godfather, Pietro Yon, organist at Saint Patrick’s Cathedral. In 1939, he was accepted as a scholarship student at the Juilliard School, and studied composition with Bernard Wagenaar.

As a graduate student at Juilliard and while he was organist at St. Anne’s Church in New York, he arrived at the conclusion that he did not want to spend his life in a church choir loft, as composition began enveloping all of his interest. In 1941, he commenced studies with Paul Hindemith, the man who profoundly influenced his compositional style. It was Hindemith who told Dello Joio, “your music is lyrical by nature, don’t ever forget that.”

By the late forties, Dello Joio commanded significant acclaim as one of America’s leading composers, and by the fifties had garnered international stature. Awards and grants received include the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Award, the Town Hall Composition Award, two Guggenheim Fellowships, and a grant from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He won the New York Music Critics’ Circle Award in 1948, and again in 1962. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 1957 for *Meditations on Ecclesiastes* for string orchestra, and an Emmy Award for his music in the television special *Scenes from the Louvre*. In 1958, CBS featured him in a one-hour television special, *Profile of a Composer*.

The Mary Duke Biddle Foundation commissioned Dello Joio’s first wind band piece, *Variants on a Medieval Tune*, for the Duke University Wind Ensemble and Paul Bryan, its conductor. The work received its premiere performance on 10 April 1963. The medieval tune is “In dulci júbilo,” an early 14th century work attributed to Heinrich Seuse – a German mystic who, according to legend, heard Angels singing this tune and joined them in a dance of worship. Dello Joio’s set of variations begins with a brief introduction, the theme, and then five variants contrasting in tempo and character. These metamorphoses utilize the sonic possibilities of the wind band to the highest degree.

VOX POPULI

Richard Danielpour

Although a composer with a full docket of compositions, Danielpour made room in his busy schedule to accept a commission on behalf of the Evansville Philharmonic Orchestra for a work to inaugurate their new hall - a rare honor and occasion. He also took the assignment as a gesture of personal and professional friendship for Maestro Alfred Savia, who has been a loyal champion of Danielpour's work since 1992, when the Evansville Philharmonic performed his *First Light*. Since then, composer and conductor have kept in constant touch, and Maestro Savia programmed a second Danielpour work in Evansville, *Toward the Splendid City*, in 1996.

The Eykamp commission also gave Danielpour the opportunity to include in his catalog a short piece, less than ten minutes, which G. Schirmer, his publisher had been requesting. And he was challenged, he said, to write a piece that would be eminently playable. *Vox Populi*, he believes, is likely to sound more difficult than it actually is.

The Latin title *Vox Populi*, "voice of the people," reflects the fact that Danielpour began the piece in Italy in June, at a villa in Tuscany where he has composed for several years. There he set down the first draft in four days at intensive work. He then returned to the United States to begin a residency at the Marlboro Music Festival, where he began working on the orchestration during the first ten days of July. At the end of that month he finished the piece at Yaddo, an artists' community in Saratoga Springs, New York.

The title is also an allusion to the fact that Evansville is a place where the "voice of the people" means something, where people from all walks of life join together to make things happen, such as rescuing a historic theater and returning it to artistic usefulness.

Vox Populi is developed using traditional "classical" music techniques, but it is flavored with ideas and sounds and rhythms that are rooted in American popular music and jazz, which been the people's musical voice. And the definition of popular music is elastic enough here to include a large chronological sweep. There is even a "certain wink" in places, particularly in the brass writing, at the popular music of the 1920s, appropriate for a hall originally built in 1919.

The music itself is also traditional in the sense that, although it moves forward in time, it retains a certain internal nostalgia, remembering where it has been and alluding to its past. The form of the work can be characterized as an "arch," in the center of which the music turns back on itself, discards the accretions of its previous progress, and returns to its beginnings. In its musical structure *Vox Populi* is a veritable metaphor for the structure in which it is being premiered, the restored Victory Theatre.

Program Note by G. Schirmer Co.

ENGLISH DANCES, OP. 27

Malcolm Arnold

Malcolm Arnold composed *English Dances, op. 27* in 1950 at the behest of his publisher, Bernard de Nevers, who suggested a suite of dances to parallel the offerings by Antonin Dvorak (*Slavonic Dances*) and Bela Bartok (*Romanian Folk Dances*). Arnold ultimately composed eight original melodies embodying the quintessence of traditional English folk dance and song. The works were divided into two sets, opuses 27 and 33 and dedicated to de Nevers. No program or title accompanies any of the movements. Only descriptive tempi are given. Both sets of works were enthusiastically received, motivating later works – most notably *Four Scottish Dances, op. 59*.

Arnold colorfully embodies the spirit of folk music by setting his melodies in the ancient modes. The first dance "Andantino" is in Dorian, a minor-sounding mode used in the most ancient of airs. The lilting theme is first heard by flute and oboe against an ostinato accompaniment by horns, timpani, and muted trumpets. The energetic second dance "Vivace" is Mixolydian, having a flattened seventh degree in an otherwise major scale. The disconsolate and elegiac third dance "Mesto" is in minor Aeolian, with a pentatonic theme that rises a major third in each of its iterations, ending on the notes it began with. The final dance "Allegro Risoluto" parallels the Mixolydian mode of the second movement in a rousing finale in which the melody passes from one section to another with the brass playing the chief role.

RHAPSODY

James Curnow

Originally written by the composer as a teaching piece for his own euphonium students, *Rhapsody for Euphonium* is dedicated to the memory of the composer's teacher, Leonard Falcone. Since its first release in 1978, *Rhapsody for Euphonium* has gone on to become a very important part of the euphonium literature.

The composition begins with an unaccompanied soliloquy by the soloist. This beautiful melody, set in the Dorian mode, establishes the *molto espressivo* style of the first third of the composition. Six measures later, the ensemble enters, playing undulating rhythmic patterns that help to create intensity. The solo continues with the euphonium presenting musical material, which is imitated and answered by the accompanying ensemble.

The second third of the composition features an exciting scherzo that presents call and response type statements between the soloist and the ensemble. Contrasting dynamics, exciting syncopation and fast-paced sixteenth passages also highlight this portion of the solo.

The last section of the solo features the extremely melodious tone of the euphonium in a lovely obbligato passage. This obbligato flows over melodic material from the first third of the piece. Via a rapid *accelerando*, the solo moves into a brilliant coda, which recapitulates many of the thematic ideas from earlier passages.

Program Note by James Curnow