

PROGRAM NOTES

Quincy Symphony Orchestra & Chorus

December 12, 2020 Quincy, Illinois

Dr. Paul Borg

Our Christmas Concert this year happens during times that have provided real challenges for musicians. Our symphony and chorus members, however, are up to that challenge in order to share a celebration of many familiar Christmas carols and other holiday songs. We do perform in small groups, keeping ourselves safe. Since everything is being done “virtually,” we invite you to sit back in a comfortable chair and relive your many Decembers past by watching and listening at home. We hear compositions that include both old and new works and arrangements meant to cheer us up and to evoke more serious thoughts on these holidays.

Works by British classical composers include Ralph Vaughan Williams’ *Fantasy on “Greensleeves”* for strings, harp, and flute. *Greensleeves* is an old English folk song from the Elizabethan period. However, its Christmas connection only occurred in the 19th century when the poetic verses “What Child Is This?” were written for the tune by William Chatterton Dix. Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) included this tune in an orchestral interlude for his 1928 opera *Sir John in Love*, and in 1934 Ralph Greaves created the arrangement we hear today.

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) composed his *Ceremony of Carols* in 1942 during the dark days of World War II as he was at sea returning to Britain from his short exile in the United States. Texts are from *The English Galaxy of Shorter Poems*. “There is no Rose” (from a 15th-century Trinity College manuscript) combines early Middle English and Latin; “This little Babe” (poem by Robert Southwell) darkly contrasts good and evil—Jesus and Satan. Britten’s emerging compositional style of complex, overlapping musical lines is prominent.

Other pieces for our choral ensembles include original lyrics and music for singers and unusual combinations of instruments. Jan Reese’s *Joyfully Sing Noel* (1993) includes bells, here performed by orchestral bells, instead of hand bells, which would require far too many performers! *How will we know?* (2000) by poet John Parker and composer David Lantz (born 1956) uses an oboe to reinforce the melodic line later in the piece. *Shepherds’ Celebration* by Jon Paige includes violin and tambourine to enliven the sound. And snare drum and finger cymbals accompany *Do You Hear What I Hear?* arranged by Harry Simeone (1910-2005).

The Flonzaley String Quartet was one of the earliest chamber groups to focus on chamber music exclusively. Sponsored by a wealthy New Yorker, the quartet’s name derives from their rehearsal and earliest performing space, Edward J. de Coppet’s summer villa in Switzerland. Subsequent tours in Europe and the United States proved immensely successful. From their

origin in 1903 until their last concert in New York in 1929, they were acknowledged as one of the greatest chamber groups of the time. Most of their performances and recordings were of the great string quartets of the Classical, Romantic, and early Modern eras. Stravinsky composed his “Three Pieces for String Quartet” for them in 1914. However, for encores, the group appealed to more popular tastes, including the Christmas Hymn *Adeste Fideles* we hear in our program. The second violinist, Alfred Pochon (1878-1959), arranged many of the quartet’s performance pieces and encores. Their most successful encores were published in four esteemed sheet music collections by Carl Fischer Publishers, revised and rearranged by Mr. Pochon for string quintet. The Publisher states “The revision and re-arrangement of these encores by one of the Flonzaley Quartet’s own members, Alfred Pochon, adds an undeniable touch of authority. An intimate insight into the quartet’s artistic interpretations is offered by the provision of fingering, phrasing, bowing and dynamic marks generally used by the quartet.”

During the last several decades, many musicians (performers, composers, arrangers) have created new compositions to original poetry by contemporary authors. Also, old favorites continue to abound in arrangements for various types of groups. Our program includes several arrangements by James M. Stephenson (born 1969), who earlier composed *Meditations and Grooves*, commissioned by the Quincy Symphony Orchestra Association. A trumpeter himself, he is especially adept with works for brass instruments, including the arrangements we hear today from his 2019 collection “Holiday Standards for Brass Quintet.” *A Holiday Fanfare Medley* (2019) includes “Il est né, le divin enfant,” “Pat-a-Pan,” “Bring a Torch, Jeanette Isabella,” “We Three Kings of Orient Are,” “Come, All Ye Shepherds,” and “Good King Wenceslas.” During the current pandemic, he cleverly re-arranged his *Holiday Carol Medley* (2000) for an “Adaptable Ensemble,” any five musicians who can fill in the various parts. Included are “I Saw Three Ships,” “Pat-A-Pan;” “Lo, How A Rose,” “I Have a Little Dreidel,” and “Jingle Bells.”