

PROGRAM NOTES

Quincy Symphony Orchestra, Quincy, Illinois

February 13, 2022

Dr. Paul Borg

Our theme “Courage & Spirit” speaks to some aspect of every work we hear this afternoon: first, the courage and spirit of our student concerto winners; second, the spirit and determination in becoming the first African-American woman considered a serious composer; third, the courage to be inspired by human tragedy in creating a musical composition.

Florence Price, born in Arkansas, received her musical training at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston where she received diplomas in Organ Performance and Piano Teaching while also studying composition. She eventually ended up in Chicago where the Chicago Symphony premiered her prize-winning First Symphony in 1933. During her career she composed over 300 compositions, including 20 full orchestral works and over 110 art songs. The *Dances in the Canebrakes* were written as piano pieces. Canebrakes were the southern fields where slaves were used to harvest sugar and other crops. The dances reflect how music helped contribute to the spirit of workers. The underlying rhythms of the three dances were derived from stage and ballroom dances from the time of Scott Joplin (c. 1900) and earlier: a rag, a slow drag, and a cakewalk. African-American composer William Grant Still orchestrated them after Price passed away in 1953.

Both of our soloists have selected works of considerable challenge, both in terms of technical skill and emotional expression.

Composer Toshiro Mayuzumi, born in Yokohama, Japan, received his musical training both in Tokyo and Paris. His curiosity led him to create musical works in a wide variety of musical styles, including *musique concrète* and electronic music. His *Concertino for Xylophone* demands a mastery of the instrument. In the third movement, we hear some almost frantic hammering that ends with a brilliant finish.

Édouard Lalo, a French violinist and composer, only achieved international fame in the 1870s. Among the best-known of his works is the *Symphonie espagnole*, a five-movement violin concerto that makes use of stereotypical Spanish musical idioms. Its first movement begins and ends with rhythmically aggressive statements, later enhanced by the soloist’s passagework. Imbedded in the movement are lyrical lines, punctuated by the orchestral accompaniment.

Composer Jennifer Higdon is one of America's most acclaimed figures in contemporary classical music, receiving the 2010 Pulitzer Prize in Music for her *Violin Concerto*, a 2010 Grammy for her *Percussion Concerto*, a 2018 Grammy for her *Viola Concerto* and, most recently, a 2020 Grammy for her *Harp Concerto*. In 2018, Higdon received the prestigious Nemmers Prize from Northwestern University which is awarded to contemporary classical composers of exceptional achievement who have significantly influenced the field of composition. Higdon enjoys several hundred performances a year of her works, and *blue cathedral* is today’s most performed contemporary orchestral work, with more than 650 performances worldwide. Her works have been recorded on more than sixty CDs. Higdon's first opera, *Cold Mountain*, won the International Opera Award for Best World Premiere and the opera recording was nominated for two Grammy Awards. Higdon writes in her own notes (excerpted here):

“Blue...like the sky. Where all possibilities soar. Cathedrals...a place of thought, growth, spiritual expression...serving as a symbolic doorway into and out of this world. . . . As I was writing this piece, I found myself imagining a journey through a glass cathedral in the sky. . . . the image of clouds and blueness permeating from outside. . . . the stained glass windows’ figures would move with song, singing a heavenly music. . . . I wanted to create the sensation of contemplation and quiet peace at the beginning, moving towards the feeling of celebration and ecstatic expansion of the soul, all the while singing along with that heavenly music.

The Curtis Institute of Music commissioned me to write a work to commemorate its 75th anniversary. . . . I began writing this piece at a unique juncture in my life and found myself pondering the question of what makes a life. The recent loss of my younger brother, Andrew Blue, made me reflect on the amazing journeys we all make in our lives, . . . learning and growing each step of the way. . . . This is a story that commemorates living and passing through places of knowledge and of sharing and of that song called life.”

Chicago area composer James Stephenson’s works have been performed by leading orchestras around the world, hailed by critics as having “straightforward, unabashedly beautiful sounds.” His growing catalog boasts concerti and sonatas for nearly every wind instrument, in addition to the violin and piano. Jim is active in the concert band world with premieres occurring at major venues. A highly sought-after arranger, his arrangements have been performed/recorded/broadcast by virtually every major orchestra in the country, including the Boston Pops, Cincinnati Pops, NY Pops and more. Stephenson writes (excerpted here):

“*there are no words* was composed as a response to the tragic mass shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, on June 17, 2015 . . .

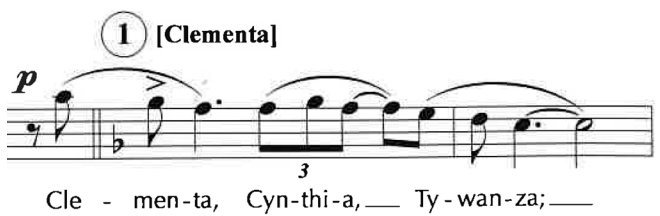
Dedicated to the nine victims, Clementa, Cynthia, Tywanza, Ethel, Sharonda, Daniel, Myra, Susie, and DePayne, [the piece]. . . begins with dissonant sounds representing the terrible action itself, and immediately the number nine (symbolizing the nine victims) is prevalent. There are nine opening chords, using nine notes which get removed one by one. [The] ensuing section . . . conveys shock and confusion and trying to come to grips with the reality that just happened. . . a mournful . . . solo . . . represents the terrible sadness of it all. This section is followed by music of a more angry character. Eventually, the anger subsides and gives way to a final section symbolizing the unqualified and total forgiveness that the families of the victims demonstrated in the aftermath of the tragedy. Throughout this section, I put the names in the score/parts, and a chime for each victim - the pulsing of the forgiveness, as it grows and grows.

I tried to represent (my understanding of/feelings about) stages of grief/shock that must accompany this type of event.”

① [Clementa]

p

Euphonium Solo




Cle - men-ta, Cyn-thi-a, Ty-wan-za; —

② [Cynthia]

6

240



E - thel, Sha-ron-da, Dan - iel; My-ra, Su-sie, De - Payne.