

PROGRAM NOTES

QUINCY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA AMERICAN HORIZONS

April 12, 2025 Quincy, Illinois

Majestic River, by **Jeremy Beck**, was commissioned in 2008 by the Quincy Symphony Orchestra Association for the 60th Anniversary of the Quincy Symphony Orchestra. Beck's composition is subtitled "a symphonic poem," and its title refers to the Mississippi River.

The composition unfolds in one movement in three parts, A-B-A'. The first A section has the tempo marking *Allegro con spirito*. The middle B section is more quietly entitled *Adagio pensiero*. The third section then abruptly returns to the A material. The principal thematic idea is introduced immediately at the opening of the composition. It may be characterized as noble and majestic, reflecting the title. The opening of the slower B section presents a tender theme in the strings, answered by the horns. But this section belongs especially to the strings as they mount higher and higher, reaching a notable climax. The winds also have their say as this section is about to lead to a return of the opening musical material. The returning A section is punctuated with accented chords, and as the close of the composition approaches there are brilliant falling scale passages especially in the strings, leading to an exciting close. ~ *Dr. Jeremy Beck*

Resolve, for large orchestra, by **James Romig**, was commissioned by the Quincy (Illinois) Symphony Orchestra for premiere performance on April 12, 2025. Over the course of the composition's 10 minutes, musical material from the initial phrase of Gustav Mahler's "Adagietto" (from the Fifth Symphony) is substantially elongated, reorchestrated, and reimagined as a nebulous, surreal sonic landscape. The work's title refers to the musical technique of suspension and resolution, where a momentary harmonic dissonance eventually gives way to a satisfying consonance. But when this process is slowed to a glacial pace and moments become minutes, traditional notions of pitch hierarchy dissolve and disappear into an opaque, pandiatonic environment of unhurried, overlapping waves of reverberant sound. ~ *Dr. James Romig*

Concerto for Horn and Orchestra, by **Randall E. Faust**, is a brief, sonic illustration of the History of the Horn. The earliest Horns had no valves and played the natural harmonic series tones. Around 1750, a hornist from Dresden, Anton Hampel, is credited with some of the earliest research on "Stopping the Horn." So, this ***Prelude-Nocturne*** uses a variety of colorful sounds of the earliest Horns. These Horn sounds are accompanied by many of the earliest and pre-historical instrumental sounds: the sounds of percussion instruments.

How are these unique Horn colors created? The ***Prelude-Nocturne for Horn and Percussion***, the first movement of this Concerto is dedicated to Marvin Howe-whose treatise on "Stopped Horn" described how Stopping the Horn lowers the pitch of the given open note down to a half step above the next lowest partial in the harmonic series. For example, starting on a third space c (eighth partial) stopping the Horn lowers the pitch to a b-flat-a half step above the next lowest partial-b-flat. Likewise, the seventh partial b-flat is lowered down to an a-flat, g-down to f, and e-down to d-flat - which is a half-step above the fourth partial-c. This creates what one could call a pitch set that sounds like a "melodic major Phrygian scale." This is all illustrated in this ***Prelude-Nocturne***. Also, this scale is the source material of the pitch content for this entire Concerto. (Note that the open harmonic series 7th partial b-flat will sound flat compared to notes in equal temperament. That sound is correct.)

When the Horn was used in the Classical Orchestras of the 18th and early 19th centuries, the Horn was considered a part of the Wind Section. Often, pairs of Horns were used as part of Wind Octets and/or Wind Quintets. The second movement of this Concerto—The ***Scherzo***, likewise features the Solo Horn in juxtaposition with the Woodwind Section of the Orchestra. This movement is dedicated to the hornist Thomas Bacon who I often heard practicing a flexibility exercise that uses the pitch set first used in the previous ***Prelude-Nocturne***.

In the 19th century, brass instruments with valves were invented-and composers of the late 19th century took advantage of the strength and color of the brass sections. In addition, the mute was developed and first used at the end of the Pastoral Symphony of Beethoven. The colors of muted brass instruments were notable in the

works of impressionist composers and later in the sounds of 20th century jazz compositions. In this movement, ***Cadenza and Fanfare***, the open and stopped colors of the Solo Horn are juxtaposed against the colors of muted brasses, solo percussionists, and pizzicato strings! The ***Cadenza and Fanfare*** is dedicated to my Horn Professor at the University of Iowa who gave me the opportunity to study much of the literature and techniques of music from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The ***Rondo*** employs all of the instruments of the orchestra and summarizes many of the materials and techniques heard throughout the previous movements. Even though it includes some modern sounds, it also pays its respects to Joseph “Ignaz” Leutgeb-the Hornist who commissioned and inspired the many concertos by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

In addition, let me express my appreciation for the inspiration and encouragement of both ***Maestro Bruce Briney*** and ***Virtuoso Hornist Thomas Jöstlein***-as well as the members of the ***Quincy Symphony Orchestra***-who are bringing the orchestral edition of this work to life! ~ *Dr. Randall E. Faust*

Perhaps more than any other 20th century American composer, **Aaron Copland** captured the spirit of the American heritage in his music. ***The Tender Land Suite for Orchestra***, includes music from his folk opera which premiered in New York City in 1954. Farming – cultivating the soil of America’s heartland and reaping the benefits of its harvest for a balanced and fulfilling life are central to the opera’s theme. Set in the rural Midwest during the Great Depression, the opera tells the story of a young farm girl and her coming-of-age journey as she grapples with the desire to leave her small-town life and seek broader horizons. Through its narrative and musical themes, the opera evokes the dignity and meaningfulness of labor, and explores themes of innocence, longing, and the bittersweet nature of leaving home.

The *Suite* concludes with the most beloved song from the opera, ***The Promise of Living***. The orchestral version starts softly, like the awakening of early morning with the birds singing, and unfolds into a majestic hymn of thanksgiving. The final chord encompasses the full range of the orchestra, just as the final chord in the vocal version ends dramatically with the entire choir singing fortissimo. Today’s performance is accompanied on the movie screen by majestic photography of Quincy and our surrounding rural area by **Toni Taylor** of **Tiger Imagery**.

The Promise of Living, lyrics by Horace Everett (Erik Johns)

The promise of living with hope and thanksgiving, Is born of our loving our friends and our labor.

The promise of growing with faith and with knowing, Is born of our sharing our love with our neighbor.

The promise of loving, the promise of growing, Is born of our singing in joy and thanksgiving.

For many a year we’ve know these fields And know all the work that makes them yield.

We’re ready to work, we’re ready to lend a hand. By working together we’ll bring in the blessings of harvest.

We plant each row with seeds of grain, And Providence sends us the sun and the rain.

By lending a hand, by lending an arm Bring out the blessings of harvest.

Give thanks there was sunshine, give thanks there was rain,

Give thanks we have hands to deliver the grain.

O let us be joyful, O let us be grateful to the Lord for his blessing.

The promise of living, the promise of growing

The promise of ending is labor and sharing and loving.

Dance Episodes from the Ballet, Rodeo, by Aaron Copland. Throughout the depression and war years, Copland's most popular works were inspired by American folk motifs, notable among them the ballets *Billy the Kid* (1938), *Rodeo* (1942) and *Appalachian Spring* (1944). Impressed by the success of *Billy the Kid*, the Ballet Russe wanted a cowboy ballet for its own repertory. *Rodeo*, or "*The Courting at Burnt Ranch*," was an enormous success, receiving 22 curtain calls at its premiere in 1942.

The ballet story, as the original program notes explain, deals "with the problem that has confronted every American woman, from earliest pioneer times, and which has never ceased to occupy them throughout the history of the building of our country: how to get a suitable man." In the plot, a cowgirl from Burnt Ranch competes with city girls for the attentions of the local cowboys. She goes to a rodeo, then to a Saturday night dance at the ranch house, where a roper and a wrangler fight for her. She realizes she is in love with the roper and goes off with him, while the wrangler finds consolation with the rancher's daughter.

Shortly after the premiere, Copland adapted four dances from the ballet into an orchestra suite, receiving the first performance with the Boston Pops Orchestra under Arthur Fiedler in 1943. The QSO performs three of those dances today: 1) ***Buckaroo Holiday***, which includes motives from folk songs *Sis Joe* and *If He'd Be a Buckaroo by His Trade*, 3) ***Saturday Night Waltz***, which begins with the strings tuning-up for the more formal dancing, and 4) the lively ***Hoe-Down***, featuring the foot-stomping frontier tunes, *Bonyparte* and *McLeod's Reel*.
~ Dr. Lavern Wagner