



A hidden gem for classical music lovers in Delaware

The Curtis on Tour Brass Quintet

*Curtis on Tour is the Nina von Maltzahn global touring initiative
of the Curtis Institute of Music*

Saturday, January 23, 2021

2:00 PM

Bethel United Methodist Church Hall
Lewes, DE

PROGRAM

<i>Little Folk Suite from the Western Hemisphere for Brass Quintet</i>	William Grant Still
<i>Where Shall I Be When the Great Trumpet Sounds?</i>	(1895–1978)
<i>En Roulant Ma Boule</i>	
<i>Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor, BWV 582</i>	Johann Sebastian Bach
	(1685–1750)
	arr. Neil Balm
<i>Quintet No. 1, Op. 73</i>	Malcolm Arnold
<i>Allegro vivace</i>	(1921–2006)
<i>Chaconne: Andante con moto</i>	
<i>Con brio</i>	

INTERMISSION

<i>A Suite of Dances</i>	Tylman Susato
<i>La Mourisque</i>	(1500–1561)
<i>Bransle Quatre Bransles</i>	
<i>Ronde</i>	
<i>Basse Danse Bergeret</i>	
<i>Ronde: Mon Amy</i>	
<i>Pavane Battaille</i>	
<i>Copperwave</i>	Joan Tower
	(b. 1938)
<i>Porgy and Bess Suite</i>	George Gershwin
<i>Overture to Catfish Row</i>	(1898–1937)
<i>Summertime</i>	arr. Jack Gale
<i>A Woman Is a Sometime Thing</i>	
<i>My Man's Gone Now</i>	
<i>I Got Plenty o' Nuttin'</i>	
<i>Bess, You Is My Woman Now</i>	
<i>Oh Lawd, I'm On My Way</i>	

-Program Subject to Change-

Program Notes

STILL

Little Folk Suite from the Western Hemisphere for Brass Quintet (1968)

The life and career of composer William Grant Still qualifies as the quintessential American "success story." Often respectfully referred to as the "dean of African-American composers," Still was born in Woodville, Mississippi to a family of Negro, Indian, Spanish, Irish and Scottish ancestry. He was the son of two teachers. His father, who performed as a local bandleader, died when his infant son was 3 months old. Still's mother moved with him to Little Rock, Arkansas, where she taught high school English for 33 years. There she met and married Charles B. Shepperson, who nurtured his stepson William's musical interests by taking him to operettas and buying him Red Seal recordings of classical music, which the boy greatly enjoyed.

Growing up in Little Rock, Still started violin lessons at age 15 and taught himself to play the clarinet, saxophone, oboe, double bass, cello and viola. He graduated at 16 from M. W. Gibbs High School. His mother wanted him to go to medical school, so Still pursued a Bachelor of Science degree program at Wilberforce University, a historically black college in Ohio. There he conducted the university band and started to compose and to make orchestrations. He was awarded scholarships to study at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music.

In 1918, Still joined the United States Navy to serve in World War I. In addition to his other duties, when it became known that Still was a trained musician, he was engaged to play the violin for the meals of officers on the *U.S.S. Kroonland*. After the war, Still moved to New York, where he worked as an arranger for several popular performers including W.C. Handy (composer of the immortal *St. Louis Blues*) and Artie Shaw, whose hit, *Frenesi*, he orchestrated. Also he played in the pit orchestra for Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake's musical, *Shuffle Along*. Later in the twenties, he served as the arranger of *Yamekraw*, a "Negro Rhapsody" composed by the Harlem Stride pianist, James P. Johnson. Still had arrived in New York at the perfect time, actively participating in the African-American cultural awakening of the 1920s known as the "Harlem Renaissance."

Still's attention then turned to classical composition for good. 1930 saw the creation of his *Symphony No. 1 (Afro-American)*, which was premiered in 1931 by the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra. It established his reputation, and has remained his most popular and frequently recorded work.

A move to Los Angeles in 1930 expanded his horizons into film and radio, initiating Still's compositional maturity and most prolific period. He worked as an arranger of popular music, writing for Willard Robison's *Deep River Hour*, and Paul Whiteman's *Old Gold Show*, both popular NBC Radio broadcasts. He also arranged music for films including *Pennies from Heaven* and *Lost Horizon*. In 1936, Still conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra; he was the first African American to conduct a major American orchestra.

He was the first African American to have an opera performed on national United States television when his *A Bayou Legend*, completed in 1941, premiered on PBS. In 1949 his opera

Troubled Island, about Jean Jacques Dessalines and Haiti, was performed by the New York City Opera.

During his life William Grant Still composed nearly 200 works, including five symphonies and nine operas. He received two Guggenheim Fellowships, and was awarded honorary doctorates from Oberlin College, Wilberforce University, Howard University, Bates College, the University of Arkansas, Pepperdine University, the New England Conservatory of Music, the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, and the University of Southern California. He was posthumously awarded the 1982 Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters award for music composition for *A Bayou Legend*.

Little Folk Suite from the Western Hemisphere for Brass Quintet contains Still's arrangements of two folk songs.

Where shall I be when the great trumpet sounds? is in the genre of a spiritual.

En roulant ma boule (translated as Roll On, My Ball, Roll On) is based on a French-Canadian children's song. It tells a tale of ducks, hunting and an evil prince, with a big silver gun, while all the while you can picture a small child rolling a ball down a lane.

William Grant Still's work is not new to Coastal Concerts. Audience members may recall that in January 2015 the Marian Anderson String Quartet performed an arrangement of his *Songs of Separation*.

BACH

Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor, BWV 582 (ca. 1710)

This is one of Bach's most important and well-known works, composed most likely for organ, when the composer was in his twenties. Like many of Bach's works, this piece lends itself particularly well to the brass repertoire.

It begins with a simple, repeating statement - a quietly unassuming, stepping *passacaglia* bass line, deep in a low register. The melody of this *passacaglia* - a form which has roots in Spanish street dances - may have been borrowed from earlier works of other composers. Free borrowing of musical ideas was common in the baroque period, as it is today in the world of jazz. It's what Bach does with this musical building block that sets this work apart. Twenty variations develop over the *passacaglia* "foundation," each seemingly more daring than the previous. Robert Schumann described these variations as "intertwined so ingeniously that one can never cease to be amazed." It remains an important piece even today as it sets the standard for the *passacaglia* form.

Just when one seems to be free of the *passacaglia* line, it breaks into fragments and forms the subjects of the double fugue as a kind of "musical hologram." As the fugue reaches its climax, a *fermata* chord sends the work into the final cadence.

ARNOLD

Quintet No. 1, Op. 73 (1961)

English composer Malcolm Arnold studied composition at London's Royal Conservatory of Music. Early in his career, Arnold was principal trumpet of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, but subsequently concentrated solely on composing. He generated a large body of film scores

(he won an Academy Award for the music to *Bridge on the River Kwai*), ballets, operas, works for orchestra and band, and chamber music.

The development of Arnold's compositional style can be traced step-by-step to his teenage years as a young trumpet student. Arnold studied with the principal trumpet for London Philharmonic Orchestra, and thereby learned orchestral music from the inside out, acquiring compositional techniques by playing them in an ensemble. He also studied jazz, which influenced his stylistic idiom. Arnold often wrote for his friends and colleagues in the London Philharmonic Orchestra, infusing their personalities into his pieces. Much of his income came from composing film music after World War II, so he studied different music forms from around the world in order to gain a greater understanding of them. The culmination of all of Arnold's musical experience led to a musical language that combined jazz and classical styles, utilized exciting rhythmic and harmonic treatment, and was balanced between humor and seriousness.

The *Quintet No. 1* is quintessential Arnold. The quick outer movements sparkle, with characteristically brisk metronome marks setting the two trumpets, often in close canon, against the trio of horn, trombone and tuba. The middle movement, a *chaconne*, is dark and tragic, but is followed with hope in the third movement. His intimate playing knowledge of brass from his London Philharmonic Orchestra days is revealed by his expert use of the contrast of tone color and timbre of the brass family in different registers throughout the work. The quintet is remarkable for the equal virtuosity expected from each player.

This work was commissioned and first performed by the New York Brass Quintet (NYBQ). The work's direct style, catchy melodies and audience appeal ensured immediate success on both sides of the Atlantic and did much to launch and popularize the brass quintet as a viable recital ensemble. The success of Arnold's *Quintet* led to a flowering of brass quintet repertoire, and a proliferation of virtuoso ensembles, over the following two decades.

SUSATO

A Suite of Dances from *Danserye* (1551)

Not much is known about Susato's early life, but he begins appearing in various Antwerp archives of around 1530, working as a calligrapher as well as an instrumentalist: trumpet, flute and tenor pipe are listed as instruments that he owned. It is possible that Susato also ran a musical instrument business. In 1543, he founded a highly successful music publishing house.

As a choral composer, Susato wrote (and published) several books of masses and motets which are in the typical style of the time, as well as two books of *chansons* for two or three voices; these were specifically designed to be sung by young, inexperienced singers.

Additionally, Susato was a prolific composer of instrumental music, much of which is still performed today. His book of dance music, *Danserye*, is comprised of 46 pieces in simple but artistic arrangement.

La Mourisque (Moorish dance, or *Moresca*) in the sixteenth century was a type of "exotic" dance which was associated in the parlance of the time with the Moors (European Muslims).

Bransle Quatre Bransles: The *bransle* was performed by a chain of dancers, usually in couples, with linked arms or holding hands. The dance alternated a number of larger sideways

steps to the left (often four) with the same number of smaller steps to the right, so that the chain moved gradually to the left. It is still danced in France today.

Ronde: This was a lively Renaissance country dance, in which the participants danced in a circle or a line.

Basse Danse Bergeret (Shepherd's low dance) was popular in the 15th and early 16th centuries, especially at the Burgundian court. The word *basse* describes the fact that partners move quietly and gracefully in a slow gliding or walking motion without leaving the floor. The *basse danse* was a precursor of the *pavane*, a dignified processional dance.

Ronde: Mon Amy: Country round dance titled "My Friend".

Pavane Battaille: The Battle Pavane was a dignified processional dance common in Europe during the 16th century. The *pavane* was a successor of the *basse danse*.

TOWER

Copperwave (2006)

Born in New Rochelle, New York, Joan Tower spent nine childhood years in Bolivia. She performed her undergraduate studies at Bennington College and graduate work at Columbia University (from which she earned both M.A. and D.M.A. degrees).

Many of Tower's earliest works were composed for the Da Capo Chamber Players in New York, of which she was a founding member, and for which she served as pianist from 1969 to 1984. After gaining recognition for her first orchestral composition, *Sequoia* (1981), a tone poem which structurally depicts a giant tree from trunk to needles, she went on to compose a variety of instrumental works. These included several that paid homage to composers such as Beethoven (*Concerto for Piano*), Stravinsky (*Petroushskates*), and Copland (*Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman*). She was the first composer chosen for a *Ford Made in America* consortium commission. The resulting work was performed in every state of the union during the 2005-2007 season. The 2008 recording of this piece won three Grammy Awards. Tower's other works include the *Island Prelude*, five string quartets, and an assortment of other tone poems.

Joan Tower has been lauded by *The New Yorker* as "one of the most successful woman composers of all time", while her bold and energetic compositions have been performed in concert halls around the world. Known as a generous and compassionate colleague, Tower has served frequently as consultant, lecturer, panelist, and mentor to people and institutions in music and academia. She is currently Asher Edelman Professor of Music at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, where she has taught since 1972. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and serves on the Artistic Advisory panel of the BMI (Broadcast Music, Inc.) Foundation.

Composer's note

"Copperwave was commissioned for the American Brass Quintet by the Juilliard School for its centennial celebration. This commission was supported by the Trust of Francis Goelet. The work is dedicated with great admiration to the distinguished American Brass Quintet.

"My father was a geologist and mining engineer and I grew up loving everything to do with minerals and rocks. Copper is a heavy but flexible mineral that is used for many different purposes, and most brass instruments are made of copper. The ideas in this piece move in waves, sometimes heavy ones and at other times lighter - also in circles, turning around on the same notes. Occasionally, there is a Latin type of rhythm [conga] that appears, which is a reminder of my years growing up in South America...".

GERSHWIN

Porgy and Bess Suite (1936)

Gershwin's ambition to write a real opera, rather than musicals, culminated in 1935 in *Porgy and Bess*, a blending of spirituals, jazz and blues, that is probably his most enduring stage work. It is a gritty story of life and death in Catfish Row, one of the poor black tenements of Charleston, South Carolina. Gershwin stipulated that his "American folk opera" always be performed by an African-American cast. He arranged an orchestral suite from the music a year later.

The genesis of *Porgy and Bess* began with the 1925 publication of DuBose Heyward's short novel *Porgy*. When George Gershwin read *Porgy*, the story of a disabled beggar living in a Charleston tenement complex called Catfish Row, and his love for the disreputable Bess, he contacted Heyward with the idea of making an opera of it. Gershwin was, however, in no hurry to work on this project, having plenty of commissions for Broadway shows. So Heyward and his wife, Dorothy, turned *Porgy* into a hugely successful play that ran for over a year on Broadway.

Finally, by early 1934 Gershwin was working in earnest on the project. Heyward condensed his play and wrote the lyrics for many of the songs, while Ira, Gershwin's brother and frequent collaborator, came on board to polish some of Heyward's lyrics and write others. The collaboration worked splendidly, with Heyward writing poetry that George set to music, and Ira more often setting words to music that George had already composed. Many of these songs have been considered American classics from the very first. In the concert hall *Porgy and Bess* has had countless performances and the work's popularity has held steady over the years. George Gershwin's score has maintained a strong concert-hall presence since 1935, circulating most widely in his own *Porgy and Bess Suite*. The sequence in the suite follows along with the story:

- The rousing opening *Overture to Catfish Row* segues quickly into the most quietly rapturous song of the opera, *Summertime*, sung by the young mother Clara. Her husband, Jake, counters her lullaby with *A Woman Is a Sometime Thing*. After the brutal Crown kills a man during the craps shoot that follows, *My Man's Gone Now* is sung by Serena, the wife of the murdered man.
- In the next act Porgy, with banjo accompaniment, sings of his happy-though-penniless life, *I Got Plenty o' Nuttin'*, and joins Bess in the opera's great love duet, *Bess, You Is My Woman Now*.
- When Porgy returns to Catfish Row to find Bess gone, we hear the opera's finale, whose music is joyful - though the dramatic situation is poignant as Porgy resolves to follow after Bess with *Oh, Lawd, I'm On My Way*.