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## Program Notes (MUAP 621 – Recital)

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Kevin Cotter  
Recital: Wind Conducting  
MUAP 621 JC SP21  
Dr. James Colonna

### Program Notes

TOCCATA FOR BAND (1957)  
Frank Erickson (1923-1996)

Composed in 1957, Toccata for Band has enjoyed a long and successful place in the musical heritage of the American concert band. Frank Erickson (1923-1996) was an American composer, conductor, arranger, educator and author. Erickson received his Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in Music from the University of Southern California in 1950 and 1951, respectively. Frank Erickson has a number of excellent band titles to his credit that have each become part of the fabric of wind band education for both students and directors: *Air for Band*, *Balladair*, *Black Canyon of the Gunnison*, *Blue Ridge Overture*, *Norwegian Folk Song Suite*. Of particular interest, Erickson served as the arranger for great works Percy Aldridge Grainger, *Irish Tune from County Derry* and *Children's March*. He was a life member of the National Band Association, elected to the Academy of Wind and Percussion Arts in 1986, and a member of ASCAP, Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, Pi Kappa Lambda, Phi Beta Mu, and the American Bandmasters Association.

The Italian term "toccata" meaning "touch" one might use to describe, in a musical context, the musical aptitude of a keyboardist, typically an organist. The purpose of the work, displaying the prowess or ability of the musician, is evident in the compositional form of *Toccata for Band*. This stately work by Frank Erickson is formed around a "toccata theme" first introduced by the tutti ensemble, and marked by an eight bar phrase of smartly played eighth and sixteenth notes in upper woodwinds, brass, and snare drum.

Throughout the work, the performer must strive to create homogenous texture within their instrumental section. One may hear ornamental and lyrical themes for woodwinds and fanfare-like statements from the brass. In passages when the full band performs, appropriately placed percussion deepens moments of importance, creating a dimension that feels wholly larger than the contrasting sections of the brass or woodwinds. In *Toccata for Band's* lyrical "B" section, Erickson creates growing harmonic textures among the climbing thematic material, echoing counter melody, and supportive harmony.

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## VARIATIONS ON DOWN AMPNEY (2004)

Jack Stamp (b.1954)

*Variations on Down Ampney* by Jack Stamp is a work greatly influenced by the work of Fisher Tull, with *Sketches* being the model for the creation of this work. It is based on the hymn tune, Down Ampney, named for the small village that composer Ralph Vaughn Williams was from. The theme is best known as the hymn “Come Down, O Love Divine.”

Dedicating the piece to his Dr. Rich Fischer in celebration of his 30 years of teaching at Concordia University, the composer writes:

I have known Rich Fischer for over twenty years. We first met the summer of 1983, each of us beginning doctorates in wind conducting at the University of Northern Colorado with Eugene Corporon. Both of us were away from our families for the first extended period of time, and both of us were miserable homesick! When our teacher left Northern Colorado for Michigan State, we both followed him and completed our degrees at MSU. For the past twenty-one years, Rich has been my brother in both music and life. So, when Kathy Fischer asked me if I could write him a work in celebration of 30 years at Concordia, I couldn't say no.

In honor of his friend's major instrument, the theme is first introduced in the french horn, followed by fragmentation of the theme within instrumental sections. With characteristic writing of both Stamp as composer and a knowledge of the genre, writing for woodwinds and brass are each idiomatically appropriate, contributing to the success of the piece. The work does have serious and/ or demanding moments, but is tempered with a modicum of humor and joy.

During the work the composer includes examples of fugue, mixed meter, and chamber writing which counterbalance moments of large sweeping thematic presentation. The performer has to pay close attention to the role their instrument fills in a given setting; it may change several times throughout the work. In its final statement, the theme is presented in grand chorale form, over moving lines in the bass voices. The piece is a wonderful opportunity for students to experience the compositional techniques used by Fisher Tull in an accessible format for high school bands.

## FIRST SUITE IN E-FLAT FOR MILITARY BAND (1909)

Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

Prior to 1909, works for wind bands were largely orchestral transcriptions and arrangements of popular music. Very little serious literature for concert band existed to attract the attention of great composers and audiences. Band had been regarded as an alternative ensemble to the orchestra. The *First Suite in E-Flat for Military Band* by Gustav Holst provided audiences with a new work that used instruments not as simply replacements for string instruments but as celebrations of their own tonal quality. The work is one that defied the common role of wind bands and gave them something that was their own, tasteful, mature, exciting, and new.

The work is in three movements, each based on the same three note motive introduced in the first movement by the low brass in the *Chaconne* theme. The first movement, *Chaconne*, introduces an eight bar theme that is ever present through changes of instrumentation, texture, and

inversion. Each restatement has a setting which allows the band an opportunity to introduce Holst's sweeping command of tone color and orchestration. The second movement, *Intermezzo*, is a work with two contrasting elements, a spritely formed dance and a long lyrical melody with energetic accompaniment. The third movement, *March*, introduces a new march theme and then concludes by combining all the thematic material of movements two and three together.

Serious academic attention and frequent performances by reputable ensembles have affirmed *First Suite's* position as an essential work of the repertoire, one that helped to establish a proper wind band sound. Since the *Suite* was composed in 1909, it is widely accepted to be the first significant composition approximating what is today's standard band instrumentation. Many of the compositional decisions Holst made in this piece are still used by modern composers. Not only has this piece provided an excellent example of what is possible in concert band, it has made a clear assertion to its audience, performers and conductors that the concert band medium is one of maturity, artistry, and facility.

#### PSALM FOR BAND (1954)

Vincent Persichetti (1915-1987)

Persichetti's *Psalm for Band* came at a time in 1953 when the composer had attracted some attention to the concert band movement with his other works, *Divertimento for Band* and *Pageant*. Later in 1956, the composer would write the great *Symphony No.6*. The composer received classical training in Philadelphia at the Combs College of Music, the Curtis Institute, And Philadelphia Conservatory. Persichetti went on to hold teach positions in composition at his alma mater, Combs College, and later the Juilliard School of Music.

Additionally, Persichetti wrote for the church throughout his life. He composed two volumes titled *Hymns and Responses for the Church Year*, the first of which was completed in 1956. These volumes contained melodies and thematic material from Persichetti's instrumental works. It was in the second of the two, published in 1987, that he included a piece titled *Creation Hymn*, with the manuscript indicating the melody originating in his work, *Psalm for Band*. Curiously the composer wrote the words of the hymn under a pseudonym "Michael Needle", which was later changed to "Anonymous" as he did not want acclaim for writing sacred works.

The work contains numerous examples of Persichetti's wish that thematic material is shared within sections and between instrumental families. The piece is in three sections, the presentation of chorale material, a tutti statement of the theme, and a flourishing treatment based on fragmentation of the material.

#### SYMPHONY IN B-FLAT (1951)

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963)

In 1951, Paul Hindemith had been engaged to conduct the US Army Band; he also agreed to compose "a little something." *Symphony in B-Flat* by Paul Hindemith marked a return to grand symphonic writing from a contrapuntal perspective, presenting a new frontier for wind instruments. The *Symphony in B-Flat* has been at the forefront of examples of great concert band literature and has influenced directors, composers, and performers ever since. It became a beacon

for great wind band literature, drawing many new listeners by its example. Hindemith had achieved something that many thought was impossible, a work for concert band of serious artistic quality.

Discussing Hindemith's *Symphony in B-Flat* Richard Miles stated the work "also helped convince other world-class composers that the band was a legitimate vehicle for serious musical expression." The piece is one that celebrates the traditional forms of Baroque and Classical masters and Hindemith saw his work to be an extension of theirs. Thematic material presented in each movement of the Hindemith is treated with a similar care and usage one might find in a work of J.S. Bach or Johannes Brahms in his *Symphony No.3*. Each theme is integral to the overall structure of the work. Author Richard Miles states, "This three movement work is a masterpiece of contrapuntal technique and thematic integration, a 'breakthrough piece' in the development of wind band literature."

Each movement presents a considerable challenge to the ensemble, both rhythmically and harmonically, and care must be taken in preparing the piece for performance. The *Symphony in B-Flat* often favors the use of one melodic line with singular accompaniment. The themes introduced each have a corresponding accompaniment. Hindemith's purposeful use of tone color creates space for themes to grow and evolve. This presents a style that was to be considered typical of Hindemith: purely musically motivated, elementally simple, 'objective' music-making. And yet, for all its merit and structure, perhaps the piece's greatest contribution was the wake it left once produced.

Frederick Fennell, founder of the Eastman Wind Ensemble, included the *Symphony* in the regular repertoire of the ensemble, even programming it for the inaugural concert of the group in 1952. It is the combination of the quality of the work itself, the advocacy of ensemble directors like Fennell, and the support of composers who like Hindemith chose to explore a new genre of musical expression in writing for the wind band that firmly cements *Symphony in B Flat* as one of the most important compositions in 20th century band literature.

Programming together Holst's *First Suite in E-Flat* and Hindemith's *Symphony in B Flat* elicits a natural comparison between the great works, which present in microcosm an experience for the listener that describes the evolution of the concert band body of literature throughout the first half of the 20th century. Both contain similar aspects of motivic development and share juxtapositions of both lyrical and technical themes. Yet, equipped with the knowledge that Paul Hindemith would have been well aware of the *First Suite* and its 50 year history upon his creation of the *Symphony in B-Flat*, Hindemith may have used such a perspective to encourage a further evolution of the compositional form familiar to concert band audiences of the time.

The first movement of each suite makes heavy use of a central theme based on a smaller motive, providing opportunities for variations and fragmentation of melody, revealing itself to the listener in full recapitulation before the end of the movement. In the second movement, the two themes are in contrast to each other and each operate within their own metric structure. Both themes, introduced separately, are complementary to each other and are performed together before the conclusion of the movement. The third movement begins in a strict march like quality, the Holst relying on the three note motive for its development, yet the Hindemith reveals the

original thematic material had been present the entire time, perhaps an improvement upon the Holst or a challenge Hindemith set for himself.

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