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James C. Fellenbaum, Artistic Director

2021/2022

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A chamber orchestra concert

Sunday, November 7, 3:00 p.m.

Porter Center, Brevard College

James C. Fellenbaum, conductor

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL **Concerto Grosso in G Major, Op. 6, No. 1**
(1685–1759) A tempo giusto
 Allegro
 Adagio
 Allegro
 Allegro

WILLIAM GRANT STILL **Danzas de Panama**
(1895–1978) I. Tamborito
 II. Mejorana y Socavón
 III. Punto
 IV. Cumbia y Congo

INTERMISSION

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY **Andante Cantabile from String Quartet**
(1840–1893) **No. 1, Op. 11**

GUSTAV HOLST **St. Paul's Suite, Op. 29, No. 2**
(1874–1904) I. Jig
 II. Ostinato
 III. Intermezzo
 IV. Finale (The Dargason)

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About the Music...

by Alan M. Rothenberg

The string orchestra, consisting of only violins, violas, cellos, and basses, can trace its origins to the Baroque era, where small ensembles of string instruments would perform supported by a continuo—a cello or bass that would play the bass line, along with a harpsichord or organ that would outline the chords played by the other instruments. Many of the early symphonies of Mozart, Haydn, and their contemporaries are for strings only. During the nineteenth century, use of the continuo fell out of favor as composers began writing for larger orchestras with expanded wind, brass, and percussion groups. The twentieth century saw a resurgence of interest in the all-string ensemble, often through arrangements of pieces originally for string quartet.

Concerto Grosso in G Major, Op. 6 No. 1 George Frederic Handel (1685-1759)

German by birth, George Frederic Handel found his greatest success in England. Handel settled in London in 1712, after musical training in his native Halle. He then traveled to Italy where he was exposed to the new concerto grosso form championed by Antonio Vivaldi and Arcangelo Corelli. In a concerto grosso, the instruments are divided into a concertino group of soloists, a larger group called the ripieno or tutti, and a continuo group. The concertino and ripieno groups would typically alternate with the soloists performing more complex or virtuosic parts. Vivaldi felt pieces in this form should be three movements in the order fast-slow-fast, which developed into the Classical-era concerto form. Corelli advocated concertos with four or more movements.

After moving to London, Handel became famous for his presentations of opera and the newly invented oratorio, a way of presenting musical stories—usually based on Biblical incidents—without the

theatrical trappings of opera. At the time it was common practice to present short instrumental works between sections of operas and oratorios. In the fall of 1739, Handel composed twelve concertos patterned after those of Corelli, and performed them between sections of the oratorios and other large works performed during the 1739-1740 season. In April 1740, they were published in a single volume edition that sold out quickly and was reprinted at least five more times before the turn of the century.

The first concerto, in five movements, was completed on September 27, 1739, although the date of the first performance is unknown. Music historian and composer Charles Burney heard this concerto at a 1784 concert of Handel's music and wrote, "If the epithet grand... had been here intended to express sublimity and dignity, it might have been used with utmost propriety; for I can recollect no movement that is more lofty and noble than this."

Danzas de Panama

William Grant Still (1895-1978)

William Grant Still passed away almost half a century ago but is still considered "the dean of African American composers," partially because of his list of firsts: first American composer to have an opera produced by the New York City Opera (*Troubled Island*, 1949); first complete symphony by a Black American performed by a professional orchestra (*Symphony No. 1*, Rochester Philharmonic, 1931); first Black American to conduct a major American orchestra in a performance of his own works (Los Angeles Philharmonic, 1936); and more. He also composed music for films (usually uncredited) and worked as an arranger for theatre orchestras and early radio stars including Paul Whiteman, Sophie Tucker, and Artie Shaw.



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Still considered himself a composer first and a Black composer second and drew on the music of many ethnic groups in addition to his own. The 1953 *Danzas de Panama* uses Panamanian dance tunes and includes unusual effects designed to simulate the sound of native instruments. The first dance, *Tamborito* (“Little Drum”), is traditionally performed with percussion instruments; Still instructs some of the violins to be “tapped sonorously on their backs with the knuckles.” *Mejorana y Socavón* (“Marjoram and Tunnel”) combines a gentle waltz-like dance with a more forceful middle section. *Punto* (“Pointing”) is a graceful dance in compound meter that includes shoe tapping. The suite ends with *Cumbia y Congo*, a combination of two dances—a couples’ round dance traditionally associated with fiesta, and a colorful, energetic dance.

Andante Cantabile (from String Quartet No. 1, Op. 11)

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Tchaikovsky composed the first of his three string quartets in February 1871, and it was first performed at an all-Tchaikovsky concert in Moscow the following month. The quartet was well-received and has become a fixture of the string quartet repertoire. The second movement, marked “*Andante Cantabile*,” is particularly loved. The composer reported that Leo Tolstoy was moved to tears by this movement during an 1876 performance. The movement is also often performed by a full string orchestra.

The somewhat melancholy main theme of this movement is based on an old Russian song Tchaikovsky heard during the summer of 1869 when he was staying at his sister’s house in Ukraine. One of the workmen frequently sang this tune, and Tchaikovsky included it in his collection of Russian folk song arrangements for piano. The wistful second theme is by the composer.

St. Paul’s Suite

Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

Because of the popularity of his orchestral suite *The Planets*, many consider Gustav Holst a “one-hit wonder” composer, which unfortunately causes his many other fine pieces, including those for orchestra, to be neglected. His music for military band is considered an essential part of the modern wind ensemble repertoire, and he contributed many beautiful works to the choral literature.

The son of an organist and choirmaster, Holst learned to play piano (which he loved) and violin (which he hated). He also took up the trombone, which became his main instrument after he developed neuritis in his right arm. At London’s Royal College of Music, his teachers included Hubert Parry and Charles Villiers Stanford. Holst supported himself by playing trombone in various orchestras, at one point performed under Richard Strauss. In 1895, Holst met Ralph Vaughan Williams, and they became lifelong friends, critiquing each other’s works and becoming advocates for the preservation, study, and use of English folk song.

In 1903, Holst decided to curtail his freelance trombonist career and concentrate on composition. He also began teaching, eventually becoming the director of music at St. Paul’s Girls’ School in Hammersmith, a position he held from 1905 until his death. He wrote many pieces for performance by the students at St. Paul’s, but the continuing popularity of these works show the merit of music initially written mainly for educational purposes.

While Holst’s *The Planets* brought him unwelcome fame, the increased name recognition allowed him to travel the world. Even when ill-health forced him to cut back his activities he preferred to spend his time composing in the soundproof room St. Paul’s built specifically for his

use. Holst's early compositions show the influence of Wagner and Richard Strauss, but his encounter with English folk song and his interest in English composers of the renaissance, especially Thomas Morley and Thomas Weelkes, transformed his orchestral music. His works gained a directness of expression, often attributable to the incorporation of folk songs.

The 1913 St. Paul's Suite was written in appreciation for the new music facilities the school built for him. Initially for string orchestra, Holst later added optional parts for wind instruments though the piece is most often heard in its original orchestration. Holst's daughter Imogen, one of the strongest advocates of his music, points to the four-movement suite as "the most spectacular proof of his faith in his pupils... Holst never wrote down to his students." The first movement Jig uses two themes that are first developed

individually and then combined. The second movement's Ostinato begins in the second violins, and the other instruments play melodies around it. The Intermezzo alternates a slow, exotic melody with faster dance sections. The final movement is derived from Holst's Second Suite for Military Band written the previous year—the movement uses two tunes from The Dancing Master, a collection of melodies and instructions for English Country Dance first published in 1651 by John Playford. The tune "Dargason" is presented and put through a series of variations, then it is ingeniously combined with the now well-known tune "Greensleeves."

Program Notes © 2021 by Alan M. Rothenberg www.noteperfectnotes.com



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Cameron Rehberg, *principal*

Amanda Tant

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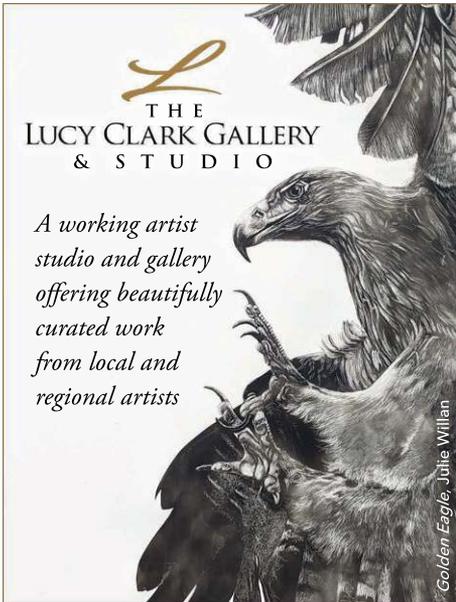
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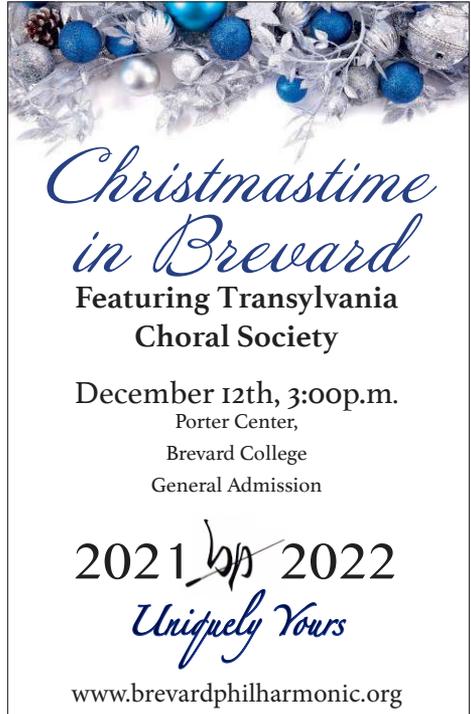


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