



Colonel Michael J. Colburn, Director

UNITED STATES MARINE BAND
Sunday, February 23, 2014 at 2:00 P.M.
Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center
Northern Virginia Community College
Alexandria Campus
Colonel Michael J. Colburn, conducting

Themes and Variations

Charles Ives (1874–1954)
orchestrated by William Schuman
transcribed by William Rhoads

Variations on “America”

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562–1621)
transcribed by Ramon L. Ricker*

Variations on “Mein junges Leben hat ein End”
 (“My Young Life Is at an End”)

George Gershwin (1898–1937)
transcribed by SSgt Ryan Nowlin*

Variations on “I Got Rhythm”
GySgt AnnaMaria Mottola, piano soloist

Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951)

Theme and Variations, Opus 43a

INTERMISSION

D. W. Reeves (1838–1900)
edited by Keith Brion

Fantasia Humoresque on “Yankee Doodle”

Sir Edward Elgar (1857–1934)
transcribed by MSgt Donald Patterson*

Variations on an Original Theme, Opus 36, *Enigma*

*Member, U.S. Marine Band

The Marine Chamber Orchestra will perform Sunday, March 2 at 2:00 P.M. in the Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center at Northern Virginia Community College, Alexandria Campus. The program will include works by Beethoven, Haydn, and Prokofiev.

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PLEASE NOTE: The use of recording devices and flash photography is prohibited during the concert.

Webnotes for February 23, 2014

Variations on “America”

Charles Ives (1874–1954)

orchestrated by William Schuman

transcribed by William Rhoads

Although this work was composed when Charles Ives was just eighteen, it provides the listener with a foreshadowing of the composer whose mature works would change the very landscape of twentieth-century American music. Ives was a true nationalist who frequently used patriotic and popular American melodies as the foundation of his progressive experiments. This set of variations was originally written for the composer to play on organ, but the young Ives was forbidden to perform it by his father, who found the variations a bit too irreverent. The variations have been colorfully described by Ives scholar Jonathan Elkus as “a snappy figural variation, a sinuous barber-shop setting, a jaunty European cavalry march, a ‘midway’ polonaise, and a scherzo.” The work gained attention in a transcription for orchestra by American composer William Schuman, and was later reconfigured for concert band by William Rhoads.

Variations on “Mein junges Leben hat ein End” (“My Young Life Is at an End”)

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562–1621)

transcribed by Ramon L. Ricker*

The theme and variation form undoubtedly arose from the technique of improvisation, and one of the most accomplished early practitioners of keyboard improvisation was Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck. Born in the Netherlands in 1562, Sweelinck hailed from a family of organists, including his father, grandfather, and uncle. But none of his elders achieved the fame of Sweelinck (who chose to use his mother’s maiden name), equally renowned for his playing, teaching, and composing. He served as organist at Amsterdam’s Oude Kerk (“old church”), for an astounding forty-four years. Although his only assigned responsibility was to perform as the church’s organist, the “Regulative Principle” observed in Calvinist church practice at the time forbade the use of organ during the service itself. Instead, organists were encouraged to perform variations on church hymns before and after the service to familiarize the congregations with this music. Sweelinck applied these variation skills to a wide range of melodies in his compositions, but none more successfully than in his variations on the secular tune “Mein junges Leben hat ein End” (“My Young Life Is at an End”), his best-known composition. The haunting and melancholy melody is German in origin, and was most likely brought to Sweelinck’s attention by a student from that country.

Variations on “I Got Rhythm”

George Gershwin (1898–1937)

transcribed by SSgt Ryan Nowlin*

GySgt AnnaMaria Mottola, piano soloist

George Gershwin’s fame was at its peak when he composed a set of variations on his melody “I Got Rhythm” in late 1933 and early 1934. He had already composed his landmark Rhapsody in Blue as well as his Concerto in F, and wanted to create another work that he could perform with orchestras when he toured as a soloist. The work received its première with the Boston Symphony Orchestra on January 14, 1934, just a few weeks after Gershwin completed it. The variations are as playful as the melody itself, taking the popular tune through a waltz, a harmonically adventurous setting that may be a light-hearted

job at the serialist composers of his day, a Chinese episode, a jazzy variation, and a grand finale that is vintage Gershwin. Although it is not as well known as his aforementioned works for piano and orchestra, the Variations on “I Got Rhythm” has been a favorite of a number of soloists, including noted Gershwin interpreter Oscar Levant. The work will be performed by GySgt AnnaMaria Mottola in a new transcription for concert band by SSgt Ryan Nowlin.

Theme and Variations, Opus 43a

Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951)

Arnold Schoenberg’s only work for concert band, his Theme and Variations, Opus 43a, was written in 1943 when the composer was nearly seventy years old. He had emigrated from Germany to the United States in 1934 to escape the oppression of the Nazi regime. After a year in Boston, he relocated to Los Angeles, where he remained for the rest of his life, teaching at the University of Southern California and the University of California, Los Angeles.

Schoenberg’s Theme and Variations was written for band in response to a recurring request from Carl Engel, the president of his American publisher G. Schirmer, who felt there was a dearth of high quality original compositions for the concert band, and especially for the burgeoning phenomenon of school bands. Engel implored Schoenberg to write something substantial for winds, and the composer complied with a work that is still considered to be among the finest ever written for the medium, and a composition of which Schoenberg was justifiably proud:

It is one of those works that one writes in order to enjoy one’s own virtuosity and, in addition, to give a group of amateurs—in this case wind bands—something better to play. I can assure you—and I think I can prove it—that as far as technique is concerned it is a masterpiece; I know it is inspired. Not only because I cannot write even ten measures without inspiration, but I really wrote the piece with great pleasure.

While Schoenberg did employ some modern techniques in the variations, the general effect of this music is tonal and traditional. Of his shift back toward tonality late in life, the composer wrote:

A longing to return to the older style was always vigorous in me; and from time to time I had to yield to that urge. That is how and why I sometimes write tonal music. To me stylistic differences of this nature are not of a special importance. I do not know which of my compositions are better; I like them all, because I liked them when I wrote them.

Given his reputation as a modernist, it may come as a surprise to learn of Schoenberg’s affinity for the waltzes of Johann Strauss or his fascination with the music of George Gershwin, but one can easily hear the influences of these composers and many more in his Theme and Variations.

Fantasia Humoresque on “Yankee Doodle”

D. W. Reeves (1838–1900)

edited by Keith Brion

The theme and variation form has been most commonly used as a showpiece for soloists, with each successive variation demonstrating a different aspect of the soloist’s technical prowess or expressiveness. This style of presentation reached its peak in America during the “golden age” of the concert band, a period lasting from the 1880s until the 1930s. One of the earliest pioneers of the American concert band was David Wallace Reeves, leader of the American Band of Providence, Rhode Island. His Fantasia Humoresque on “Yankee Doodle,” introduced in 1878 and published in 1885, was composed not to

feature a single soloist, but to demonstrate the skills of several sections of his band. In addition to showcasing the talent in the American Band, these variations also highlighted the significant advances made in the production of woodwind and brass instruments as a result of the industrial revolution. These advances meant that band musicians could now play with a similar level of virtuosity as orchestral players, an improvement bandleaders such as D. W. Reeves were eager to demonstrate.

Variations on an Original Theme, Opus 36, *Enigma*

Sir Edward Elgar (1857–1934)

transcribed by MSgt Donald Patterson*

Occasionally a composer will create a work within a well-established form that is unlike anything that precedes it, serving as a reminder of the incredible creative possibilities that still exist all around us. This is exactly what British composer Edward Elgar did with his Variations on an Original Theme, a work better known by its informal title, *Enigma* Variations. A lifelong fan of puzzles, riddles, and codes, this composition provided the composer with a unique opportunity to combine his favorite hobby with his passion for music. The work is a mystery on several levels.

First, each of the variations is a musical portrait of a friend or loved one who is represented by a series of initials or a nickname at the beginning of the variations. However, this was a puzzle easily solved by anyone familiar with Elgar's family and friends, and Elgar himself provided the answers when a piano roll version of the music was published in 1929. The second puzzling element of the work is the unique nature of the melodic fragments that appear to constitute the theme. These fragments are indeed heard at the beginning of the piece, the traditional position of a theme, and it is clearly this material that is developed in the subsequent variations. But Elgar does not label this introduction as the "theme," instead affixing the term "enigma." Adding to the mystery is the following statement from the composer:

The Enigma I will not explain—its 'dark saying' must be left unguessed, and I warn you that the connection between the Variations and the Theme is often of the slightest texture; further, through and over the whole set another and larger theme 'goes', but is not played ... so the principal theme never appears, even as in some recent dramas ... the chief character is never on the stage.

Music scholars and code breakers of every ilk have attempted to solve this riddle for decades, with possible answers ranging from Auld Lang Syne to a musical epigram of the last name of Johann Sebastian Bach. Try as they might, no one has yet cracked the code, a fact which would have undoubtedly delighted the composer. Elgar did express concern that the interest in the riddle would overwhelm the work itself, suggesting: "There is nothing to be gained in an artistic or musical sense by solving the enigma ... the listener should hear the music as music, and not trouble himself with the intricacies of the programme." Even without the mystery of the *Enigma*, in this composition Elgar created one of the most beautiful and beloved examples of the theme and variation technique ever written.