



MARINE BRASS ENSEMBLE
Thursday, March 25, 2021 at 7:30 P.M. ET
Streaming at [youtube.com/usmarineband](https://www.youtube.com/usmarineband)
Major Ryan J. Nowlin, conducting

Colonel Jason K. Fettig, Director

Giovanni Gabrieli (1554–1612)
edited by Robert King

Canzona per sonare, No. 2

Henri Tomasi (1901–71)

Fanfares Liturgiques (1947)

Annonciation
Evangile
Apocalypse
Procession du Vendredi-Saint

Franz Biebl (1906–2001)
arranged by Maj Ryan J. Nowlin*

Ave Maria (Angelus Domini) (1964)

Edward Gregson (b. 1945)

Symphony in Two Movements (2012)

Toccata
Variations

*Member, U.S. Marine Band

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PROGRAM NOTES

Canzona per sonare, No. 2

Giovanni Gabrieli (1554–1612)

edited by Robert King

Italian composer Giovanni Gabrieli was one of the most influential composers of his time. As chief composer and organist for Basilica San Marco in Venice, a position that brought him great renown throughout Europe, he focused almost exclusively on vocal and instrumental music written especially for the church.

Of his many achievements, Gabrieli is perhaps most notably credited for his use of antiphony, a technique that places two vocal or instrumental choirs opposite one another, often alternating musical phrases or engaging in a musical dialogue from different positions in the performance space. With the awe-inspiring Basilica San Marco as his tapestry, Gabrieli strategically positioned his musicians around the church such that they could be heard with clarity and resonance throughout the sacred space.

This performance of Canzona per sonare No. 2, will be approached in this antiphonal fashion, where each of the four choirs will be placed opposite one another (north, south, east, and west) resulting in a stunning surround-sound experience.

Fanfares Liturgiques (1947)

Henri Tomasi (1901–71)

French composer Henri Tomasi did not always aspire to be a musician. Though it was evident from an early age that he possessed great musical talent, Tomasi dreamed of being a sailor. He was raised in Marseilles, France, and spent many summers on the Mediterranean island of Corsica, so it is not difficult to imagine why the sea called to him. However, his father recognized his musical gift and enrolled him in the Marseilles Conservatory, where he excelled. Tomasi was a natural pianist and improviser. By age fifteen he began to earn a living playing at local establishments throughout his hometown, to include cafés, hotels, and some of the earliest cinemas. Though his education was delayed slightly by World War I, a grant from Marseilles eventually enabled him to attend the Paris Conservatory. He began his studies there in 1921 in both conducting and composition. He continued to perform, but these performances were overshadowed by his great academic success. While at the Paris Conservatory he won both the First Prize in conducting and the highly prestigious Prix de Rome in composition.

By the mid-1940s, Tomasi had established himself as both a sought-after conductor and a composer of orchestral and chamber music. In 1944 he wrote an opera entitled *Miguel Mañara*, which eventually earned him repute as an operatic composer as well. Adapted from a play by Oscar Milosz, *Miguel Mañara* takes place in seventeenth-century Seville. It is a retelling of the legend of Don Juan, in which the aging libertine repents his ways. Miguel Mañara, Tomasi's Don Juan character, is won over by the innocence and charm of the young Girolama and renounces his life of debauchery in order to marry her. Sadly, only a few short months after their wedding, Girolama dies, and Miguel turns to religion for solace, living out his days as a monk.

Though the full opera was not premièred until 1956, Tomasi premièred a concert piece composed of four excerpted movements in the late 1940s. This concert piece became known as *Fanfares Liturgiques*. The work utilizes the largest forces of all of Tomasi's brass chamber music, with three trumpets, four horns, four trombones, tuba, timpani, and two percussionists. It has been referred to as a "symphony for brass" due to its musical depth and near adherence to traditional symphonic form. However, the piece also garnered criticism from the avant-gardists of the 1950s, who denounced it as neoclassicism for its decidedly tonal nature.

The first and shortest movement, *Annonciation*, originates from the third act of the opera, in which Miguel has just renounced his lecherous ways. His transformation is announced with a brilliant fanfare followed by a more introspective French horn feature. The movement concludes with a recapitulation of the opening fanfare. The second movement, *Evangile (Gospel)*, features the trombone in an extended recitativo solo, which evokes the reading aloud of sacred text. As we might expect from a symphony, the third movement, *Apocalypse*, is a scherzo. In this movement, Brother Miguel overcomes one final temptation by worldly desires. Fragmented phrases traded between the different sections highlight his internal struggle, as if he is being pulled in many directions at once.

The fourth and final movement, *Procession du Vendredi-Saint*, depicts a traditional Holy Week procession common to Seville. At this point in the opera, Miguel has just lost his wife. As the procession solemnly passes, a holy spirit sings words of guidance to Miguel, who is desperate with grief. Though the original soprano voice is omitted in the chamber version of this movement, Tomasi evokes the somber march of the penitents through an unrelenting *Dies Irae* ostinato. In the final section of the piece, the *Dies Irae* evaporates into an ethereal Corsican hymn: Miguel has a spiritual epiphany and receives his redemption.

Ave Maria (Angelus Domini) (1964)

Franz Biebl (1906–2001)

arranged by Maj Ryan J. Nowlin*

Franz Biebl was a German composer and music educator. His family was devastated by the first World War, which claimed the lives of his father and two brothers. As a result, his surviving family's support for his musical pursuits was limited. In 1939, Biebl accepted a music teaching position at the Mozarteum University in Salzburg, Austria. Soon thereafter, the Second World War altered the trajectory of his life. Drafted in 1943, he was captured by American forces in 1944, and remained there until his release in 1946. Unable to return to his job in Austria due to his German nationality, Biebl eventually secured a position as church music director in a small town in Germany.

It was there that the story of this well-known setting of *Ave Maria* unfolded. From an account by Wilbur Skeels, who published other compositions of Biebl's, came the following description:

Herr Biebl told me that when he was organist/choirmaster and teacher in the Fürstenfeldbruck parish near Munich he had in his church choir a fireman. It was common for companies, factories, police and fire departments, etc. to sponsor an employees' choir, which often would participate in choral competitions and festivals with other similar choirs. This fireman asked Biebl to please compose something for his fireman's choir for such an occasion. The result was the *Ave Maria* (double male choir version).

Interestingly, the piece garnered little attention in Germany. It was not until the American *a cappella* group Chanticleer recorded the piece that the setting came to international attention, nearly fifteen years after its initial publication.

This arrangement for brass was conceived with Biebl's original double chorus version in mind. The two choirs are divided into conical brass (horns, euphoniums, and tubas) positioned on stage and cylindrical brass (trumpets and trombones) in the opposite balcony. Much like Giovanni Gabrieli's writing, the resulting calls and responses gradually unify to form one voice.

Symphony in Two Movements (2012)

Edward Gregson (b. 1945)

My Symphony in Two Movements was originally written for brass band in 2012, and jointly commissioned by the National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain and the National Youth Brass Band of Wales to celebrate their sixtieth and thirtieth anniversaries respectively.

In 2014, I was asked, whilst attending a performance of the symphony in the USA, about the possibility of writing a new version for symphonic brass, something I responded to with enthusiasm as I knew the nature and style of the work would suit a symphonic brass instrumentation rather well. The symphony lasts for some nineteen minutes and is structured in two linked movements. The form is based on that used by [Ludwig van] Beethoven in his final piano sonata (Opus 111), which is in two movements only: a compact sonata-form allegro, followed by a more expansive theme and four variations. [Sergei] Prokofiev also adopted this same model for his Second Symphony of 1925.

The opening Toccata is highly dramatic but compact, whilst still retaining the "traditional" structural elements of exposition, development, and recapitulation; indeed, it also has the "traditional" element of a contrasting second subject—a gentle, lyrical modal melody first heard on flugelhorn. In contrast, the longer and more substantial second movement Variations is built around a slowly unfolding chorale-like theme, followed by four variations which in turn are mercurial (fast, starting with all instruments muted), march-like (menacing, with short, rhythmic articulations underpinning a strident melody), serene (a series of solo "romances" alongside echoes of the chorale), with an emerging theme eventually bursting into a climax of passionate intent; whilst the final variation is a dynamic concertante-like scherzo, with the music gradually incorporating elements of the main ideas from the first movement, thus acting as a recapitulation for the whole work. It reaches its peroration with a return to the very opening of the symphony, ending as it began, with dramatic intent.

The work is scored for a large brass ensemble (six trumpets, four horns, three trombones, euphonium, and two tubas), with timpani and percussion. Most of the melodic material of the symphony is derived from the opening eleven-note "row," which contains various intervallic sets, and although the work is not serially conceived, it does use some typical quasi-serial procedures. The music is both technically and musically challenging, but besides exploiting the dramatic "up front" nature of brass instruments, it also shows another side of their nature: the lyrical and expressive.

— Edward Gregson