



CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES
Sunday, February 12, 2017 at 2:00 P.M.
John Philip Sousa Band Hall
Marine Barracks Annex
Washington, DC

Lieutenant Colonel Jason K. Fettig, Director

Arthur Bliss (1891–1975)

Quintet for Oboe and Strings (1927)

Assai sostenuto
Andante con moto
Vivace

SSgt Trevor Mowry, oboe
MSgt Regino Madrid and SSgt Sheng-Tsung Wang, violin
GySgt Tam Tran, viola
MGySgt Marcio Botelho, cello

Richard Strauss (1864–1949)
arranged by John Sheppard

Suite of Waltzes from *Der Rosenkavalier*

GySgt Amy McCabe, SSgt Brandon Eubank, and GySgt Brad Weil, trumpet
SSgt Cecilia Buettgen, GySgt Douglas Quinzi, GySgt Jennifer Paul,
and SSgt Timothy Huizenga, horn
SSgt Russell Sharp and SSgt Christopher Reaves, trombone
SSgt Daniel Brady, bass trombone
MSgt Mark Thiele, tuba
GySgt Jonathan Bisesi, percussion
GySgt Robert Singer, conducting

INTERMISSION

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

Sonata for Cello and Piano

Prologue: Lent, sostenuto e molto risoluto

Sérénade: Modérément animé

Finale: Animé, léger et nerveux

SSgt Charlainé Prescott, cello

SSgt Christopher Schmitt, piano

Hugo Wolf (1860–1903)

Italian Serenade

SSgt Christopher Franke and SSgt Sheng-Tsung Wang, violin

SSgt Sarah Hart, viola

SSgt Charlainé Prescott, cello

David Lang (b. 1957)

these broken wings (2007)

part 1

part 2 (passacaille)

part 3 (learn to fly)

GySgt Steven Temme, soprano saxophone

SSgt Zachary Gauvain, clarinet

GySgt Jonathan Bisesi, percussion

SSgt Christopher Schmitt, piano

SSgt Chaerim Smith, violin

SSgt Charlainé Prescott, cello

The Marine Chamber Orchestra will perform Sunday, February 19 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 Mozart, Watson, and Shostakovich.

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PROGRAM NOTES

Quintet for Oboe and Strings (1927)

Arthur Bliss (1891–1975)

The Quintet for Oboe and Strings, written in 1927, represents a significant shift in the compositional style of Sir Arthur Bliss. After serving as an officer in World War I, the British native began composing harmonically daring works for unusual groups of instruments inspired by Igor Stravinsky and Maurice Ravel. He eventually developed a reputation as “the cleverest writer among the English composers of our time,” according to esteemed music critic Samuel Langford. Edward Elgar, another influence on Bliss and representative of the more conservative musical establishment of Britain, went so far as to call Bliss’ *A Colour Symphony* of 1922 “disconcertingly modern.” However, soon after his marriage in 1925, Bliss’ musical language became more lyrical, pastoral, and romantic. Bliss scholar Andrew Burn cites the Oboe Quintet as one of three pieces where “Bliss’ voice assumed the mantle of maturity ... all are imbued with a quality of contentment reflecting his serenity.” Thereafter, the music of Bliss came to represent the musical establishment of Britain, as epitomized by his being knighted in 1950 and his appointment as Master of the Queen’s Music in 1953. In this role, Bliss wrote music for royal ceremonies and other important occasions.

One can detect “Bliss the enfant terrible” and “Bliss the traditionalist” coexisting within the Oboe Quintet itself. The overall character of the piece is expansive, with long intertwining melodies characterized by wide intervallic leaps. While the whole work is accessible, the first movement possesses a certain degree of harmonic ambiguity as it glides effortlessly between major and minor, never remaining in either mode for long. This vacillation persists right to the end of the movement, and the oboe holds the final note alone, leaving the matter unsettled. The second movement opens with an unabashed love song, when an unexpected snippet of a shepherd’s pastoral tune leads into a lilting dance. This dance builds to an *agitato* restatement of the love song. Once the energy dissipates the shepherd’s tune returns in full, meandering its way to a contemplative conclusion. The final movement opens with vivacious galloping music, yet Bliss cannot resist introducing yet another sweeping melody. The music then segues into a section labeled Connelly’s Jig, which starts out as an unadorned country dance until given a full treatment of variation and ornamentation by the composer. The piece ends in a flurry of notes from the oboe punctuated by *forzando pizzicati* in the strings, furiously building to the final dramatic chord.

Suite of Waltzes from *Der Rosenkavalier*

Richard Strauss (1864–1949)

arranged by John Sheppard

Richard Strauss, a composer made rich and famous by his monumental, avant-garde, and dissonant operas like *Salome* and *Elektra*, composed *Der Rosenkavalier*, “a comedy for music,” with librettist Hugo von Hofmannsthal to great acclaim, premiering in January 1911 in Dresden. Strauss decided he needed a change of pace from his heavy modern compositional style, and decided to write what he referred to as a “Mozart Opera.” It was quite popular with the public, and was performed nearly fifty times during that year. To accommodate the large audiences, special “*Rosenkavalier*” trains ran between Berlin and Dresden during 1911 in Germany.

Strauss and Hofmannsthal made an unlikely pair, as the librettist tended to be withdrawn, with more refined tastes, and Strauss was more of a showman, who knew “what would sell.” However, through their partnership on *Der Rosenkavalier*, Strauss and Hofmannsthal became one of the most

well-known composing teams and went on to collaborate on operas such as *Ariadne auf Naxos*, *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, and *Arabella*.

This Suite of Waltzes from the opera was arranged for the Metropolitan Opera Brass by noted New York trumpet player John Sheppard. The work opens with the famous horn call from the beginning of the opera, an homage to Strauss's father, who was a virtuoso horn player. The other two waltzes in this suite hail from the third act of the opera, where they are played by the offstage banda.

Sonata for Cello and Piano

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

Claude Debussy's flair for the dramatic is evident in his self-description: "Try as I may, I can't regard the sadness of my existence with caustic detachment. Sometimes my days are dark, dull, and soundless like those of a hero from Edgar Allan Poe; and my soul is as romantic as a Chopin Ballade." Debussy felt suffocated in his domestic life, had been recently diagnosed with cancer, and carried a great deal of anxiety about the First World War. These stressful life events, coupled with his turbulent outlook on the world, made composing very difficult for him during 1915. Needing to find focus, Debussy retreated to a house by the sea where he experienced a burst of creativity, during which he wrote the Cello Sonata, the Violin Sonata, and his Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp; the final three works of his life.

Of the Cello Sonata, Debussy shared with his publisher Jacques Durand, "It's not for me to judge [the Cello Sonata's] excellence, but I like its proportions and its almost classical form, in the good sense of the word." To most listeners, the sonata's form is hardly classical, and he continues his expansion of the sonata frontier by mixing harmonic modalities and rapidly shifting tonalities. He also uses many extended cello techniques such as guitar-like pizzicato, false harmonics, and ponticello (playing with the bow across the bridge), which create otherworldly timbres and a stark contrast to the rich countermelodies in the piano. Debussy expertly utilizes the acoustics and ranges of the cello and piano so that both instruments can be heard by the audience at all times. And though the cello and piano do not often play the same compositional material, they work together as a team by constantly playing off of each other's motifs to reach the thematic highs and lows together. His style stood out from the great composers who came before him, such as Ludwig van Beethoven and Johannes Brahms, because of Debussy's refusal to conform with the expected harmonies and compositional techniques of the times. He has been quoted as saying, "People who are happy just with beauty of sound are hard to find," and so perhaps he wrote his Cello Sonata simply to please himself.

Italian Serenade

Hugo Wolf (1860–1903)

Hugo Wolf was born in Windischgrätz, a city in the Austrian Empire (now Slovenia). His father taught him both violin and piano from the early age of four. His first failure in the academic world came early, as he was dismissed from not just one, but three secondary schools (one dismissing teacher commenting on his "damned music.") After acceptance into the Vienna Conservatory, he was again kicked out over a "breach of discipline." Wolf had a fiery personality and dealt with bouts of depression stemming from an early contraction of syphilis at eighteen years of age that left him unable to compose for years at a time. In between these bouts of depression, Wolf was a prolific and energetic composer. He idolized the composer Richard Wagner, and thus is best known for his vocal works,

including hundreds of lieder (songs), three operas, and numerous choral works. Of the relatively few instrumental works Wolf composed, his Italian Serenade is the one most commonly heard.

Composed in May 1887, Wolf's Italian Serenade was originally intended to be a full string quartet with three movements, but circumstances did not allow for that. Having just returned to composing after years of relatively little compositional output (in addition to ending up on the losing side of a public feud with Johannes Brahms), Wolf set to work on three sets of lieder based on poems by Goethe, Joseph von Eichendorff, and Joseph Viktor von Scheffel. Perhaps in an effort to prove that he could compose instrumental music as well as Brahms, Wolf also began work on a string quartet. Shortly after beginning work on the quartet, Wolf's father passed away, sending him into another severe bout of depression. He never finished the work as he originally intended, although sketches of other movements have been found, and eventually came to terms with the already finished portion as a stand-alone piece he would call the Italian Serenade.

The Italian Serenade bears a close resemblance to a lieder from Wolf's set based on Joseph von Eichendorff's poems "Der Soldat I" that tells of an errant knight's surprise encounter of an Italian wedding serenade at a nearby castle. The work became known as the first of Wolf's "mature style," and certainly has its roots in the vocal style of music he was more familiar with composing. The way the different instruments are used together is quite vocal in nature, with themes being passed from pair to pair. The cello solo in the middle of the piece seems more reminiscent of a recitative from an opera than something from the quartet repertoire. While Wolf's life was filled with depressive and neurotic obsessions, the Italian Serenade, with its energetic and singing melodies, stands as a shining example of his brilliant but troubled compositional mind.

these broken wings (2007)

David Lang (b. 1957)

these broken wings was commissioned by the ensemble eighth blackbird, as part of an entire concert of first performances. The first half was to be the première of Steve Reich's Double Sextet. For the second half they commissioned Michael Gordon, Julia Wolfe, and me to make something that could follow Steve's powerful piece. We came up with a plan for us each to make individual pieces that could be put together for the occasion, each calling on a different aspect of the blackbird's virtuosity, and held together by the glue of the choreographer Susan Marshall, who would stage the players in the performance of our music. The amazing musicality of the players and the intense imaginations of Susan led them to the emotional center of the music we had written, and the result was quite moving, and very exciting. Michael's and Julie's and my pieces may be played either together or separately from each other, and we agreed that our pieces would have titles taken from the song Blackbird by the Beatles, although, other than the titles, our music has nothing to do with that song.

The three movements of *these broken wings* concentrate on three different physical and musical challenges. The first movement consists of music that requires incredible stamina and intense concentration. Sad, falling gestures dominate the slow second movement, and I gave the vague but hopefully inspiring instruction that the players should drop things when they are not playing. In the last movement I wanted to make a music that danced and pushed forward, in the hope that it would encourage the musicians to do so as well.

—David Lang

This performance modifies the original instrumentation of the work with a soprano saxophone substituting for the flute and piccolo part by permission from the composer.