THE PRESIDENT'S OWN

**Lieutenant Colonel Jason K. Fettig, Director**

MARINE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Sunday, February 19, 2017 at 2:00 P.M.
Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center
Northern Virginia Community College
Alexandria Campus
Lieutenant Colonel Jason K. Fettig, conducting

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## Conflicts and Confluences

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91) — Overture to *Don Giovanni,* K. 527

Kenneth Watson (b. 1952) — Bassoon Concerto (2015)

Allegretto
Adagio
Moderato-Presto

*MSgt Christopher McFarlane, soloist*

*world première*

**INTERMISSION**

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–75) — Symphony No. 9 in E-flat, Opus 70 (1945)

Allegro
Moderato
Presto
Largo
Allegretto

The U.S. Marine Band with guest conductor Gerard Schwarz will perform Sunday, February 26 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 Holst, Hindemith, and Grainger.

# *PROGRAM NOTES*

## **Overture to *Don Giovanni,* K. 527**

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91)

The more than 600 works composed by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart during his thirty-five years of life included virtually every popular genre of the era. But despite his vast catalogue of symphonies, concerti, and chamber music, Mozart loved opera above all else. Not only was opera considered the very pinnacle of musical achievement in the Classical period; it spoke directly to Mozart's ideals as an artist. He adored the fantasy, drama, and humor afforded by the stage and found it a perfect vehicle to feed his creative imagination and constantly expand the boundaries of his musical language. Opera also produced the most lucrative commissions, and Mozart's overall financial health weighed heavily upon the demand, or lack thereof, for his operas. Mozart wrote twenty-two works that could be classified as operas during his lifetime, and the first was written when the composer was only eleven years old. He continued to write opera at a steady pace from that point forward, each work becoming increasingly more sophisticated. By the mid-1780s, he was one of the highest paid musicians in Europe. Known to be quite particular about the texts he used, Mozart developed a reputation for bullying librettists into shaping plots and characters according to his wishes. In 1785, this difficult process was completely dissolved when he met former priest turned librettist Lorenzo da Ponte. Their partnership resulted in three of his greatest operas: *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Così fan tutte*.

Although Mozart and da Ponte were in creative lockstep during the writing of their first opera, the première of *The Marriage of Figaro* had not gone well, as powerful government officials disapproved of its subject-matter satirizing the Aristocracy. The opera's initial run lasted only nine performances and the damage done to Mozart's reputation and finances worsened when Austria went to war with the Ottoman Empire in 1786. Larger commissions dried up and Mozart soon found himself accruing large amounts of debt and struggling to survive. Although his fortunes had taken a severe turn for the worse in Vienna, Mozart had long been held in the highest regard in Prague and a more successful production of *The Marriage of Figaro* mounted in Prague in December of 1786 led to the commission of a second work with da Ponte. *Don Giovanni* premièred in Prague in 1787 and is widely considered to be Mozart and da Ponte's greatest collaboration.

The plot of the opera centers on the young nobleman Don Giovanni, who has led a life of amorous pursuits. After many conquests, he finds himself the object of vengeance for three of his more abhorrent actions. First, he deserts his lover Donna Elvira. Then he attempts to rape Donna Anna, the fiancée of Don Ottavio, and in the process, kills her father, Il Commendatore. Lastly, he attempts to lure the lovely peasant girl Zerlina from her fiancée, Masetto. At the end of the opera, Don Giovanni enters hell for his sins by way of the spirit of Il Commendatore, embodied by his imposing statue in the cemetery.

The overture to the opera opens with a thundering cadence in D minor, and is followed by a brief and mysterious introduction that intones the darker undercurrents of the story. However, this episode soon gives way to a brilliant and effervescent Allegro that represents some of the composer's best thematic work.

## **Bassoon Concerto (2015)**

Kenneth Watson (b. 1952)

Lt. Col. Kenneth Watson, USMC (ret.), is a free-lance oboist and composer/arranger who currently resides in Lake Barcroft, Virginia. He earned a bachelor of music degree in music composition from Southern Methodist University in Dallas in 1974. While in school he composed and directed the soundtrack for an award-winning short documentary film, *Sometimes I Run,* currently preserved in the film vault of the Moving Image Research Collection (MIRC) at the University of South Carolina in Columbia. After graduation, he served as an oboe player in "The President's Own" U.S. Marine Band for two and a half years before becoming a Marine line officer and pilot in 1976, where he flew A-6E Intruders and EA-6B Prowlers. He later wrote and edited doctrine textbooks and served as an electronic warfare/information warfare specialist on senior staffs, retiring from the Marine Corps in

1997 as a Lieutenant Colonel. Watson had a second career with Cisco Systems, creating and managing its critical infrastructure protection team until his retirement from Cisco in 2011.

Watson studied oboe with Evelyn McCarty, Don Baker, and Eric Barr, and composition with Alvin Epstein and Thom David Mason. His Suite for Oboe and Jazz Piano Trio was premièred in New York City in August 2014 by Peter Cooper, principal oboist with the Colorado Symphony, at the International Double Reed Society's annual conference. He conducted the partial premiere of his Missa Jubilate Deo at the Lincoln Cathedral in England in July 2016. He has published arrangements for double-reed ensembles, and released two CDs: *The Barret Quartets* and *Mendelssohn, Gershwin, Still*.

Watson's Concerto for Bassoon and Chamber Orchestra was composed in 2015 for principal bassoon of the U.S. Marine Band, MSgt Chris McFarlane. The work exists on two levels; formally as a virtuosic symphonic showcase for the soloist, and emotionally as a work that was informed by the composer's unique experiences and perspective as both a musician and a military officer. Watson explains:

> The original inspiration for this piece was the inner turmoil experienced by military members coping with loss, separation, and re-integration after long deployments. During my 23-year Marine Corps career, my family made 15 household moves and I had several unaccompanied deployments. In one two-year period, I lost six friends in aviation mishaps. Through my experiences and serving with others who have worked through long separations and tragic events, I have come to appreciate our uniqueness as individuals as well as the universality of our common humanity. I drew on this rich palette of emotional material, using instability, stability, dissonance, and consonance to express the ideas of inner conflict and resolution.

The first movement of the concerto superimposes two themes over an unstable harmonic structure that continuously descends and then returns, like long ocean waves. These elements come together in a fugue introduced by the entire double-reed section. The unstable foundation persists into the second movement, which begins dark and angry. Ambiguously major and minor chords accentuate the dissonance. As the foundation stabilizes, the solo and the orchestra develop melancholy melodies, transitioning to a more positive major mode near the end in a hymn-like section. The final movement provides an upbeat conclusion, layering the ambiguous major-minor modality and 12-tone rows over a rock-solid, jazzy, repetitive C-major foundation.

### MSgt Christopher McFarlane, soloist

Bassoonist Master Sergeant Christopher McFarlane of Williamsville, New York, joined "The President's Own" United States Marine Band in March 1994. He was appointed principal bassoon in 2010. MSgt McFarlane began his musical instruction at age nine. After graduating from Williamsville South High School in 1986, he earned a bachelor's degree in music from Indiana University (IU) in Bloomington 1990 and a master's degree in music 1993 from Louisiana State University (LSU) in Baton Rouge. He studied with Timothy McGovern of the University of Illinois, William Ludwig of LSU, Bernard Garfield of the Philadelphia Orchestra, and Sidney Rosenberg of IU. Prior to joining "The President's Own," he performed with the Baton Rouge Symphony in Louisiana.

## Symphony No. 9 in E-flat, Opus 70 (1945)

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–75)

Dmitri Shostakovich's incredibly diverse and prolific musical oeuvre is a fascinating reflection on his complicated personal and professional life. His career as an artist was plagued by the repressive censorship of the communist Soviet regime. Like many other musicians and artists of the time, his creations were closely scrutinized by the government and Shostakovich often was forced to either withhold compositions he suspected would not meet with government favor or conceal the true meaning of his work. On at least two occasions, his work was officially condemned which could very well have cost him his life. The first was in in 1936, when an anonymous article titled "Chaos Instead of Music" was released criticizing Shostakovich's new opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* for its explicitness and dissonance. Stalin denounced the work as antithetical to the Soviet artistic heritage. It was during this time that Shostakovich was composing his adventurous Fourth Symphony, but he withdrew its première for fear of worsening his reputation with government officials (it would not be played until 1961). His status was rehabilitated somewhat the following year with the introduction of his masterful Fifth

Symphony. It was hailed as a nationalistic triumph that celebrated the Russian spirit, yet elements of its true meaning of rebellion from hardship and oppression remained cleverly hidden deep within.

In the subsequent years during the Second World War, Shostakovich's symphonies were carefully scrutinized and generally looked upon favorably, especially the monumental Seventh, subtitled "Leningrad" and Eighth. As the Soviets entered Germany and the war came to a close in 1945, the timing was perfect for Shostakovich to bring a great wartime symphonic trilogy to its culmination with a mighty Ninth Symphony of Beethovenian proportions that would celebrate the great Russian triumph. Such an endeavor was all but required of Shostakovich and he knew it. Feeling the pressure, he made several inferences to the new work around this time, saying that he was composing "a symphony of victory with a song of praise" and even indicated that he would fulfill expectations that it be a grand choral symphony complete with soloists. He was also quoted in the press as announcing that "on the threshold of approaching victory, we must honor with reverence the memory of the brave soldiers who have died, and glorify the heroes of our army for all eternity."

However, privately the composer was struggling with the idea and deeply troubled by the expectation that he should produce a monument of victory that would essentially serve as a de facto tribute to Stalin himself. Shostakovich's public pronouncements were designed to relieve some of the mounting pressure to deliver something special, but they only served to increase the demand to deliver. "They wanted a fanfare from me, an ode," he states in the memoirs dictated to Solomon Volkov. "They wanted me to write a majestic ninth symphony. Everyone praised Stalin and now I was supposed to join in this unholy affair. And they demanded that Shostakovich use quadruple winds, choir and soloists to hail the leader. All the more because Stalin found the number auspicious: The Ninth. He would be able to say, there it is, our national ninth." Shostakovich was faced with the unenviable dilemma to either produce a work that would be seen as unabashed praise for Stalin and hence please his critics or–as he had to a degree in his Eighth Symphony–infuse the work with some of the fear and sorrow embedded in the oppressive culture of the times.

Shostakovich ultimately chose a third path. In truth, he had actually begun work on the symphony the previous year and well before Soviet victory was assured. The war ended in May of 1945 and the score to the long-awaited Ninth Symphony was completed in August. Given the considerable anticipation and statements of intention from the composer himself, no one was prepared for what they would hear. Reactions to the symphony ranged from surprise to anger; rather than a grand symphonic tribute to the indomitable Russian spirit, Shostakovich had produced a short, neo-classical work filled with humor, lightness, and unmistakable episodes of sardonic wit. At just twenty-seven minutes in length, the entire symphony was shorter than some individual movements from his previous two symphonies, and it was written for a modest orchestra with a tone that was precisely the polar opposite of what most had wanted. "Musicians will love to play it and critics will delight in blasting it," the composer commented. That would turn out to be a substantial understatement. Stalin was reportedly incensed upon hearing the work, and although other Russian authorities were mixed in their own assessment of the Symphony, the axe of censure came down on the composer once again a few years later.

In 1948, Shostakovich was again subject to musical court-martial by Stalin's head of cultural affairs, Andrei Zhdanov. The government cracked down once more on "formalism…catering to the purely individualistic experiences of a small clique of aesthetes" that rejected "national character" and "deep organic connection with the people and their legacy of music and folk song." Shostakovich was an obvious target and many of his controversial works, including the Ninth Symphony, were ultimately banned from performance. In the years that followed, Shostakovich would continue composing music that would not attract as much public attention, including chamber music and scores for films, but it would be another eight years before he would dare compose another symphony. This would be the longest gap in his substantial contribution to the genre during his professional life.

The Ninth Symphony is cast in a mold similar to Sergei Prokofiev's famous Classical Symphony, with its vibrant articulation, transparent textures, and relative scarcity of dissonance. The classical overtones are plainly evident in the brief first movement, its standard sonata form following that of an 18th century symphony. It includes a literal repeat of the first section, which is the only time the composer would employ this device in any of his symphonies. Although the form is old-fashioned, the themes are not; the movement is imbued with both sass and wit from beginning to end, with Shostakovich setting the extreme ranges of the orchestra across the table from one another in playful dialogue. A bold and comical trombone fanfare repeatedly interrupts the piccolo's perky iterations of the second theme before the rest of the orchestra takes its turn skipping through the jaunty and off-kilter episodes.

The second movement is the longest of the work and is immediately cut from darker cloth. Here is perhaps the only hint of Shostakovich's pledge to "honor with reverence the memory of the brave soldiers who have died."

Part melancholy song, part bittersweet dance, the winding theme first introduced by a solo clarinet almost feels like a slow waltz, but with the normal three-beat pulse interrupted at the end of each phrase with an added note of hesitation.

The final three movements are linked together without pause, beginning with a brief and relentless Scherzo in which the three main bodies of the orchestra–woodwinds, brass, and strings–take turns trying to outdo each other at a searing tempo. But rather than build to a frenzied conclusion, the Scherzo then suddenly dissolves and is overtaken by a mighty interjection from the low brass that signals the arrival of the fourth movement. Two menacing declarations are each followed by an operatic soliloquy from a solo bassoon. The second extended solo of the fourth movement cleverly morphs directly into the principal theme of the fifth and final movement. The sudden transitions from pathos to playfulness throughout the symphony are notably jarring, and emergence of the Finale brings the mood immediately back into the realm of the jester. A simple and blithe theme perpetually gathers intensity and volume with an almost sinister determination to the end. One can only wonder if the composer not only deliberately failed to meet expectations for an epic symphonic ode to victory, but also carefully wove deeper meaning into the seemingly benign and cheerful melodies of the symphony to inherently belittle the symbolic power of Stalin and subtly thumb his nose at the establishment with each turn of phrase.