

# Williams College Symphonic Winds

## Contemporary American Music for Wind Ensemble

The development of wind playing has been one of this country's (USA) greatest contributions to music performance in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We have unleashed a force for music making that is unparalleled in the whole history of musical art.

Frederick Fennell (1954), founder, Eastman Wind Ensemble

Once in Amsterdam, a Dutch musician said to me, "It must be very difficult for you in America to write music, for you are so far away from the centers of tradition." I had to say, "It must be very difficult for you in Europe to write music, for you are so close to the centers of tradition."

John Cage (1961), late American composer

### **John Corigliano: *Gazebo Dances* (1973)**

John Corigliano, winner of the 2001 Pulitzer Prize in Music for his *Symphony No. 2*, is internationally celebrated as one of the leading composers of his generation. In orchestral, chamber, opera and film work, he has won global acclaim for his highly expressive and compelling compositions as well as his ever-expanding, kaleidoscopic technique.

Born in New York on February 16, 1938, Corigliano comes from a musical family. His father was concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic from 1943 to 1966 and his mother is an accomplished pianist. After studying with Luening, among others, at Columbia University (BA 1959), he worked as a music programmer for the *New York Times* radio station, WQXR, and as music director for WBAI. He also produced recordings for Columbia Masterworks (1972-3) and worked with Leonard Bernstein on the Young People's Concerts series for CBS (1961-72). During the period 1987-90, he served as the first composer-in-residence of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Corigliano holds the position of Distinguished Professor of Music at Lehman College, City University of New York and, in 1991, was named to the faculty of The Juilliard School. Also in 1991 he was elected to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, an organization of 250 of America's most prominent artists, sculptors, writers, architects, and composers; the following year, Musical America named him their first "Composer of the Year." Just this past March, The National Arts Club in New York City honored him with their Gold Medal. Also in recent months, the University of Texas at Austin Wind Ensemble premiered two new wind band works of Corigliano—arrangements of his *DC Fanfare* and the Tarantella from *Symphony No. 1*.

Other notable awards that Corigliano has won include: a Guggenheim Fellowship (1968), the Grawemeyer Award for Best New Orchestral Composition for his *Symphony No. 1* (1991), several Grammy awards (including two for Best Contemporary Composition—1991 and 1996) and the Composition of the Year award from the International Music Awards (1992) for his opera *The Ghosts of Versailles*, the first opera commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera since 1967. In March 2000, he won another coveted prize—the Academy Award for Best Film Score for "The Red Violin." Corigliano's first film score, for "Altered States," was nominated for an Academy Award in 1981; his second, for the British "Revolution," received the 1985 Anthony Asquith Award for distinguished achievement in film composition.

Corigliano writes the following regarding the work:

*Gazebo Dances* was originally written as a set of four-hand piano pieces, dedicated to a certain number of my pianist friends. I later arranged the suite for orchestra and concert band, and it is from the latter version that the title is drawn. The title *Gazebo Dances* was suggested by the pavilions often seen on village greens in towns throughout the countryside, where public band concerts are given on summer evenings. The delights of that sort of entertainment are portrayed in this set of dances, which begins with a Rossini-like Overture... and ends with a bouncy Tarantella.

For this evening's performance, two of Corigliano's *Dances* (there are four in the suite) will serve as a sort of "frame" in which to hear the remaining pieces—the concert will begin with the "Overture" and end with the "Tarantella."

**David Gillingham: *Serenade for Winds and Percussion "Songs of the Night" (1990)***

Dr. David Gillingham is currently Professor of Music Composition at the Central Michigan University School of Music. He earned Bachelor and Master Degrees in Music Education from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh in 1969 and 1977, and the Ph.D. in Music Theory and Composition from Michigan State University in 1980. His composition teachers include Roger Dennis, Jere Hutcheson, James Niblock and H. Owen Reed. Receiving a prestigious humanities fellowship during his third year at MSU, Gillingham completed his dissertation, *Concerto for Bass Trombone and Wind Ensemble*, dedicated to Curtis Olson, Professor of Trombone at Michigan State University. The concerto later won first prize in the 1981 DeMoulin Band Composition Contest, and was performed at the National Band Association's convention in 1982 with Curtis Olson as bass trombone soloist.

Dr. Gillingham's compositions have been performed throughout the United States, Europe and Japan. He is the recipient of numerous awards and honors including: First Prize in the International Barlow Composition Contest in 1990 for his *Heroes, Lost and Fallen* (a Vietnam memorial written for concert band); Third Prize in the 1988 Percussive Arts Society composition contest for his *Paschal Dances* for percussion ensemble; the Teaching Excellence Award at Central Michigan University; and Composer in Residence at several midwest universities and colleges. He is a member of ASCAP, Society of Composers, Inc., and the College Music Society.

Dr. Gillingham has written the following about this work:

*Serenade for Winds and Percussion* seeks to faithfully recreate the spirit of the classical serenade of Mozart's time. Since wind instruments could project better than strings, these serenades were often used for outdoor performances. Though it is not intended that the *Serenade for Winds and Percussion* be performed outdoors, the theme of the work deals with outdoor associations of the night.

The performance this evening will consist of three of the five movements of the *Serenade*: "Apparitions"—a haunting scherzo-like depiction of the multitude of shadows cast on moonlit nights; "Nocturnal Life-Forces"—a march of all the living creatures that adorn the darkness of the night; and "Journey into Daylight" which brings the listener out of the darkness and into the reality of the new day with dramatic fanfare.

**Robert Kurka: *The Good Soldier Schweik Suite* (1956)**

Robert Kurka was born in Cicero, Illinois, December 22, 1921 and died in New York City on December 12, 1957. After studying the violin with Kathleen Parlow and Hanz Letz, he attended Columbia University and received his M.A. in 1948. Although largely self-taught in composition, he studied briefly with Otto Luening and Darius Milhaud. From 1948 to 1951 he taught at The City College of New York and then at Queens College, as well as serving as composer-in-residence at Dartmouth College. In addition to receiving commissions from the San Diego Symphony Orchestra (1955) and the Paderewski Fund for American Composers (1952), Kurka received an award from the National Institute of Arts and Letters (1952), two Guggenheim Fellowships (1951 and 1952), and was co-winner of the George Gershwin Memorial Award in 1950.

Neo-classical in style and influenced by the folk music of former Czechoslovakia (his parents' birthplace), Kurka's work is characterized by its use of repeated melodic and rhythmic motifs, the appearance of dissonant elements within a tonal structure and an energetic rhythmic drive. He is best known for his orchestral suite *The Good Soldier Schweik* (1956), which the following year he expanded into a two-act opera that has been performed many times since its posthumous premiere by The New York City Opera company in 1958. *The Good Soldier Schweik* is often compared with Kurt Weill's *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*, performed by the Symphonic Winds this past February; not only are their tonal languages and instrumentation similar, but both combine references to popular musical idioms (dances, marches, the ballad style) with pungent dissonances and brittle rhythms for ironic effect.

Shortly before his untimely death from leukemia, Brandeis University honored him with a Creative Arts Award, which read: "To Robert Kurka, a composer at the threshold of a career of real distinction."

Kurka wrote the following about his *The Good Soldier Schweik Suite*:

The *Suite* was inspired by the brilliantly realistic anti-war satire by the Czech novelist Jaroslav Hasek. Written shortly after WWI, the story is that of a civilian, the common man, forced to become a soldier who must fight for a cause for which he has no sympathy. Although he is classified by his German masters ("the authorities") as "feeble-minded" (that is, someone who does not quite appreciate their reasons for waging war), Schweik is, in reality, crazy like a fox, exposing the arrogance, stupidity, and hypocrisy of these "authorities" by his seemingly idiotic behavior. In spite of the indignities to which Schweik is subjected, his optimism manages to emerge indestructible and triumphant. He is, therefore, not only a single individual, but also the symbol of the common people and their resistance to a war from which they can derive no benefit, only suffering.

Each of the six short pieces which comprise the *Suite* represents a general idea or theme which recurs throughout the book, rather than any specific episode. The OVERTURE is a character sketch of Schweik, the good-natured common man, the genial collector of homeless dogs. The LAMENT represents the elements of sadness and seriousness which underlie many of the episodes, such as the outbreak of war. The MARCH, of course, represents the soldier's chief means of getting from place to place - Schweik does quite a bit of it. The WAR DANCE represents the "authorities," both civilian and military, and their fanatical pounding of the war drum. The PASTORAL represents both the calm and repose of the world Schweik hopes to maintain as well as the dark tragedy of the world in which he often finds himself. The FINALE is Schweik's optimism, triumphant and indestructible in the end.

### **Daron Aric Hagen: Wedding Dances from *Bandanna* (1998)**

Daron Hagen has created a catalogue of over a hundred works in every genre from art song and chamber music to full-scale operas and immense orchestral and choral works. Commissions have come from major artists, ensembles, and orchestras around the world, including the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Gary Graffman, Jaime Laredo and the Kings Singers. He has received numerous awards and accolades, including the Kennedy Center Friedheim Award, a Rockefeller Foundation grant, Columbia University's Bearns Prize, an Ives Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the ASCAP-Nissim Prize, the Barlow International Composition Prize and a Friedheim Award. Hagen's music has been described as "utterly brilliant" (*New York Times*), while he has been described as the creator of "dangerously beautiful melodies" (*New York Post*).

Trained at the Curtis Institute and Juilliard, Hagen has studied with many notable composers, including Ned Rorem, David Diamond, Joseph Schwantner, Bernard Rands, and Witold Lutoslawski. He taught composition at Bard College for 10 years, as well as at the City College of New York, New York University and Princeton University. He also served on the Curtis Institute of Music faculty from 1996 to 1998 and as composer-in-residence of the Ohio Opera Theater and the Long Beach (California) Symphony Orchestra.

The commissioning of *Bandanna* by the College Band Directors' National Association was a three-part commission: an opera with wind ensemble accompaniment in the pit, an overture for band, and a suite of music from the opera (the *Wedding Dances*). All three parts were premiered at the 1999 CBDNA National Conference at The University of Texas at Austin. *Bandanna* has already been performed by several opera companies, both in Europe and in the United States; of a recent performance (and recording session for a soon-to-be-released CD), the Las Vegas Review Journal even wrote, "*Bandanna* is a banner of triumph! Hagen's work is glorious. This opera should be destined to become a standard in the repertoire."

Described as "*Othello* on the Rio Grande," *Bandanna* is an opera set in 1968 in a small border town in Texas. Drawing heavily on Shakespeare's tale of love and betrayal, it is the story of a chief of police, Miguel Morales, and two officers, Jake and Cassidy, who once served with him in Vietnam and who now serve with him in the town police. Jake, who is resentful of Cassidy's advancement over him, is playing a dangerous double-role as policeman and guide to successive groups of illegal immigrant workers. With the encouragement of a morally bankrupt union organizer, Kane, Jake determines to convince Morales that his wife, Mona, is having an affair with Cassidy. In the end, groundless jealousy provokes Miguel to strangle his wife with her own bandanna, shoot his colleague, and ultimately, himself.

The second act of the opera begins with the anything-but-happy wedding reception of Jake and his young wife Emily, at which the principle characters of the opera pair off in a sequence of wedding dances. During the course of the dances, Mona—the pretty wife of Morales—dances innocently with each of her husband's associates, culminating in a chance pairing with Cassidy. Growing increasingly drunk and his rage mounting, Morales sees this as confirmation of their

having an affair. He calls her a dirty whore and, after a moment of stunned silence, he lunges for her, but the crowd closes in and a humiliated Mona runs out with Cassidy.

Hagen provides the following information regarding the content of each dance:

Dance No. 1: Jake, Morales' lieutenant, and his bride Emily, dance to a waltz whose melody is associated with Jake's sentiment, "*Donde esta mi querida?*"

Transition: Emily breaks away from him and sings of her misgivings over pulsating clarinets.

Dance No. 2: Morales and Mona dance to another waltz which combines their two melodies. His melody is associated with the vow: "I pledge myself to Mona, my fountainhead;" hers to the first words we hear her say to him: "Miguel, you've been gone so long." The waltz deepens into the melody we associate with Mona's credo: "For the alder and the willow nail their colors to their masts."

Transition: Jake reminisces about his days as a single man.

Dance No. 3: Morales dances a rumba with Emily. The tune associated with the first words of Morales' credo, "Again and again, where a neon sign leaves a little red stain on the desert air" is combined with Emily's lament about Jake, "When I reached across my pillow, the night before last, there was only dark."

Dance No. 4: Jake and Mona dance an old-fashioned, traditional tango. The words to this melody, although they change throughout the opera, are always associated with the idea of seduction.

Dance No. 5: Kane, a decadent, bad man, abruptly wheels a very young girl onto the dance floor, to a crude, 1950's rock-'n-roll version of the music he used earlier in a labor speech to migrant workers.

Dance No. 6: Mona dances, initially with reluctance, though she gradually becomes more responsive, with a man named Cassidy to a strong power ballad setting of a tune associated with the idea of "crossing over" from Mexico to America and from Life to Death. In this context, it underpins her husband Morales' "crossing over" from sanity to madness as he watches her with Cassidy.

Epiphany: Morales "loses it," lunges at Mona. She and Cassidy flee. The wedding reception breaks up. The suite ends with the various tunes of the opera charging through Morales' fevered mind as he decides to kill Mona.

### **Lukas Foss: *Elegy from Concerto for Band (2002)***

Ever since his early days as a musical "wunderkind," Lukas Foss has shown himself to be one of that rare breed—an all-around musician, enjoying equally stellar reputations as a composer, conductor, pianist, educator, and spokesman for his art. The prestigious honors and awards he has received emphasize his importance as one of the most brilliant and respected personalities in American music. In 1983, he was elected to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, of which he is now a Vice Chancellor, and he is the holder of eight honorary doctorates.

As Music Director of the Brooklyn Philharmonic, the Buffalo Philharmonic and the Milwaukee Symphony, Foss has been an effective champion of living composers and has brought new life to the standard repertoire. The adventurous mix of traditional and contemporary music that he programs and conducts with the Brooklyn Philharmonic at the Brooklyn Academy of Music was described in 1986 by the New York Times as "The most engrossing and unusual programs in town... Our musical life would be richer if Lukas Foss ... could hire himself out as a sort of

'programmer at large.' He seems incapable of a mechanical idea." In 1973, he began the famous "Meet the Moderns," a series of new music concerts and discussions with composers. Foss has lectured widely at colleges and universities throughout North America and has guest conducted such major orchestras as the Boston Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, Berlin Philharmonic, London Symphony Orchestra, and the Tokyo Philharmonic, among others.

As a composer, Mr. Foss has eagerly embraced the musical languages of his time, producing a body of well over one hundred works that Aaron Copland called, in 1974, "among the most original and stimulating compositions in American music." Tom Johnson in the *Village Voice* went further: "Little by little he is knitting together a body of work which may actually speak for contemporary culture as a whole more eloquently than any other." For all their diverse styles, Foss's works spring from a distinct personality: enthusiastic, curious and receptive to every kind of musical idea. Not coincidentally, these are the same attitudes he has instilled in audiences with his performances of the classical repertory and new music. In short, he has been one of his era's most communicative and representative composer-performers.

In 1937, as a fifteen-year-old prodigy, Lukas Foss not only came to America to study at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music, he had his first work published: a series of piano pieces written mostly on the New York subway. By age 18, the young musician had graduated with honors from Curtis, and was headed for advanced study, in conducting with Serge Koussevitzky at Tanglewood and in composition with Paul Hindemith at Yale University. He won his first New York Music Critics' Circle Award in 1944 for his cantata *The Prairie* based on Carl Sandburg's poem. The year following he became the youngest composer ever to receive a Guggenheim Fellowship. In 1950–51 he was a Fellow of the American Academy in Rome and in 1950–52 the recipient of a Fulbright grant.

When Mr. Foss was named to succeed Arnold Schoenberg as professor of composition at the University of California at Los Angeles in 1953, the University probably thought it was replacing a man who made traditions with one who conserved them; that is not how things turned out. Indeed, Mr. Foss followed his curiosity into the very den of the avant-garde. In 1957, in search of the spontaneous expression that lies at the root of all music, he founded the Improvisation Chamber Ensemble, a foursome that improvised music in concert, working not from a score but from Foss's ideas and visions. The effects of these experiments soon showed in his composed works, where he began probing and questioning the ideas of tonality, notation, and fixed form, often opting instead for serialism, indeterminacy and graphic notation. The pinnacle of these experiments came in 1960 with his work *Time Cycle* for soprano and orchestra, a setting of texts about time by Auden, Houseman, Kafka and Nietzsche, that was first performed by Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic, with interludes by Foss's Improvisation Chamber Ensemble. At the premiere, Mr. Bernstein, in an unprecedented gesture of respect, performed the entire work twice that same evening. *Time Cycle* won the New York Music Critics' Circle Award of 1961 and has remained Foss's most performed and recorded work.

Mr. Foss' compositions of the last twenty-five years prove that a love for the past can be reconciled with all sorts of innovations. Whether the musical language is serial, aleatoric,

neoclassic or minimalist, the "real" Lukas Foss is always present; in fact, Foss once wrote that he finds "it is infinitely more challenging to use many techniques—often in the same piece— and, yes, make them my own." The essential feature in his music is the tension, so typical of the 20th century, between tradition and new modes of music expression. With the more conservative musical taste of the 1980s and 90s, Foss revisited the neo-classicism and Americana of his earlier works, composing again in traditional instrumental and choral genres, but not forgetting the experimental techniques of his of the 1960s. In fact, he himself was quoted as saying that he strove "to be as crazy as I was in my avant-garde music and yet tonal." These later works present music that is frank in sentiment, imaginative in an almost pictorial way, yet refined and witty in execution.

Commissioned by a consortium of 20 high schools and colleges from Ohio, Kentucky, Illinois, Michigan, Texas, and Massachusetts, Foss's *Concerto for Band* does not demonstrate any of the "avant-garde tendencies" that characterize his best-known works. Instead, his love of early music seems to be at display here, polyphonic counterpoint abounding in this straightforward, tonal work. The "Elegy" is the second movement of the *Concerto*, which is in four movements: Fanfare-Elegy-Fanfare-March. Rather than a mournful lamentation, the "Elegy" is a simple, reflective song. Although he has arranged two of his works for concert band, *American Fanfare* (1990) and *Griffelkin March* (1989), the *Concerto* is Mr. Foss's first original work for wind band. The Williams Symphonic Winds will premiere the entire work, as well as a commissioned work from California-based composer John Frantzen, during its 2002-2003 season.