

# WILLIAMS SYMPHONIC WINDS

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## MUSICAL STORYTELLING

Saturday, February 21, 2004

### Reynaldo Hahn: *Le Bal de Béatrice d'Este* (1905)

The music of Reynaldo Hahn (1875-1947) has been described as “quintessentially French,” as evoking “a Paris, indeed a way of life, forever gone and, like [Marcel] Proust’s world, retrievable only in precious moments where taste, sight, or the sound of a musical phrase provoke the memory, or even perhaps the collective unconscious.” It has by turns been both dismissed and praised for being “charming” and “nostalgic,” “sentimental” and “sensual.” Ironically, Hahn was not French by birth; although his family moved to Paris when he was only three years old; instead, he was born in Venezuela, the youngest of twelve children, to a German, Jewish father and a Venezuelan, Catholic mother. He demonstrated prodigious musical talents as a child, giving many performances in private houses, including his “professional” debut at the age of six, singing and playing the piano at the salon of the eccentric Princesse Mathilde de Metternich (Napoleon’s niece). At ten he entered the Paris Conservatoire where he studied with Massenet and Gounod and was a classmate of Ravel and Charpentier, and at thirteen his first song, *Si mes vers avaient des ailes*, was published. Hahn’s early (and lasting) reputation was founded primarily on his *mélodies*, which now hold an honored place in French vocal repertoire, alongside the songs of Gabriel Fauré. At the invitation of the writer Alphonse Daudet, Hahn composed music for the play *L’Obstacle* in 1890, his first stage work at the age of fifteen. He wrote several operettas and ballets, specialized in conducting Mozart operas, was a leading writer on music, and was appointed in 1945 the director of the Paris Opéra.

Known as much for his charm and exotic handsomeness as for his music and intellect, Hahn was a constant presence in the salons of Paris, capturing the love and attention of high society. He counted among his friends the poets Verlaine, who was said to have wept when he heard Hahn’s settings of his verses, and Mallarmé, who praised him with the stanza:

Le pleur qui chante au langage  
Du poète, Reynaldo  
Hahn, tendrement le dégage  
Comme en l’allée un jet d’eau.

The tear that sings in the word  
of the poet, Reynaldo  
Hahn gently releases  
like a fountain on a pathway.

In 1894, he met the aspiring writer Marcel Proust, who although three years older, was less well-known than Hahn. They were lovers for the first two years of an enduring friendship that lasted until Proust’s death in 1922. They shared a passion of painting and reading, and challenged each other regarding ideas of literature and music, of art and life; in fact, neither was ever to have another relationship with an intellectual equal. Proust praised Hahn’s music in a 1914 article for possessing “the irretrievable sweetness of a first promise or a first confession,” and included Hahn as an eponymous hero in his autobiographical novel *Jean Santeuil*. More touching, though, is Proust’s loving pen-portrait:

When he takes his place at the piano, with a cigarette in the corner of his mouth, everyone is quiet and gathers around to listen. Every note is a word or cry. His head is slightly tilted back: his mouth is melancholy and rather scornful. Thence emanates the saddest and warmest voice you can imagine. This instrument of genius, by name Reynaldo Hahn, moves our hearts, moistens our eyes, cures us one after the other in a silent and solemn undulation. Never since Schumann has music painted sorrow, tenderness, the calm induced by nature, with such brush strokes of human truth and absolute beauty.

A musical conservative who delighted in the music of the past and obsessed with musical and poetic form, Hahn achieved his biggest stage successes before the First World War with two ballets, *Le Bal de Béatrice d'Este* and *La Fête chez Thérèse*. Like his contemporary Fritz Kreisler, Hahn had a deft skill in evoking or suggesting different periods in musical history, such as eighteenth-century France, England in the Regency period, Mozart's Vienna, and so on. In writing the ballet *Le Bal de Béatrice d'Este* in Paris in 1905, but setting it in fifteenth-century Milan, Hahn blurs the line between Renaissance Italy and fin-de-siècle France. Although the ballet does not seek to retell an actual historical occasion, the work is firmly based within a historical context. Béatrice (1475-1497) was of the Italian noble family Este who ruled Ferrara from 1240-1597 and was celebrated for significant patronage of the arts throughout the Renaissance. In 1490, she married Ludovico Sforza the Moor, Duke of Milan. During Ludovico's reign, Milan was praised as the "new Athens"; he lavishly supported the humanities, many of the greatest artists of the day (including Leonardo da Vinci) resided in Milan to be near their patron. Béatrice, Duchess of Milan, was singularly noted for her tremendous beauty and charm, as well as for her love poetry and dancing; her grand balls were regarded highly throughout Italy.

Within the framing processional and recessional, the interior movements of the suite consist of three Renaissance dances (although with a subtly more modern sensibility), a character sketch of Béatrice's sister Isabella ("Ibérienne"), and an impression of da Vinci's controversial painting *Leda and the Swan*.

### **Darius Milhaud: *La Création du Monde*, Op. 81 (1923)**

Out of all this has come one real masterpiece, one full-length, fully developed jazz work that had such character and originality that even today it sounds as fresh as it did when it was written in 1923. It is a ballet called *The Creation of the World*, by the brilliant French composer Darius Milhaud. I take the liberty of calling this work a masterpiece because it has the one real requisite of a masterpiece — durability. Among all those experiments with jazz that Europe flirted with in this period, only *The Creation of the World* emerges complete, not as a flirtation but as a real love affair with jazz.

Leonard Bernstein

Milhaud's *Création du Monde* was the first and remains the best jazz piece from a classical European composer.

Dave Brubeck

American popular culture became an international trendsetter with the emergence of jazz at the end of World War I. While much of the American artistic establishment dismissed jazz as unworthy and insignificant, European composers, including Paul Hindemith and Igor Stravinsky, recognized its exciting vitality, incorporating this style into new works. With its freedom of interpretation, its complex rhythmic ingenuity, and its unique and subtle timbral combinations, jazz influenced the works of a generation of composers seeking alternatives to the Romanticism of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Among the most prolific of twentieth-century composers, with a catalogue running well past 400 works and in every conceivably genre, Darius Milhaud (1892-1974) absorbed music wherever he went and transmuted the received impressions into his own work. From the popular music of Brazil (in *Le boeuf sur le toit*) to the folk music of his native France (in *Suite française*), he constantly demonstrated his belief that to try to assimilate was to create. Milhaud became intrigued with the latent potential of jazz when he heard the Billy Arnold Jazz Band playing in a Hammersmith dance hall in London in 1920; he became obsessed after a trip to New York City in 1922. He spent many evenings listening to the Leo Reisman band and the Paul Whiteman orchestra, trying to analyze and absorb this music. He took many trips to Harlem to hear the black musicians play in clubs which were still wholly unfrequented by white musicians, and he took home to France a collection of Black Swan "race" records which he played again and again. Milhaud was determined to use jazz—which he described as "music that was completely

different, the melodic lines, set off by the percussion, overlapping contrapuntally in a throbbing mixture of broken, twisted rhythms”—as the basis of a chamber work.

Ballet, not chamber music, ultimately provided the advantageous framework for his sophisticated evocation of jazz. As with other Paris composers Debussy and Stravinsky, writing for the ballet became for Milhaud the impetus for writing a work that would become a significant monument of early twentieth-century music. When the impresario Rolf de Maré of the Ballets Suédois asked him to collaborate on a ballet based on African creation myths with the surrealist writer Blaise Cendrars, the scene designer Fernand Léger and choreographer Jean Börlin, Milhaud realized that he had been given the perfect opportunity to blend classical and jazz elements in a major work. *La Création du Monde* premiered on October 25, 1923 (a year before Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*), creating scandal and meeting initial critical bewilderment. While immediate critical reaction to the score was that it was frivolous and suited more to the dance hall than to the concert hall, Milhaud noted dryly in his *Notes Without Music*, “Ten years later the selfsame critics were discussing the philosophy of jazz and learnedly demonstrating that *La Création* was the best of my works.”

Milhaud adopted the exact instrumentation of the pit orchestra for the black opera *Liza* composed by Pinkard which he heard in Harlem: a chamber orchestra of eighteen instruments, including a string quartet with a saxophone replacing the viola, and with a rhythm section of drums, piano, and bass. His music parallels Cendrars's creation scenario that centered not on a violent, turbulent clash of primeval forces (as is often encountered in western cultures), but on a confident and congruous development, on the love between a man and a woman. The work opens in darkness, an inchoate mass of dancers poised on stage. Over subtly shifting harmonies layering the major and minor modes, a sweet, almost Bach-like melody played on the saxophone elicits slinking responses from the two trumpets, which provide the first hints of jazz in the work. A sudden “hailstorm” created by the piano and the drums leads to an intricate, academic, jazz fugue led by the double bass, depicting the African gods of creation Mzamé, Mebère, and Nkwa—each new fugue statement exemplifying the sprouting and hatching of the new world: explosive, yet tightly organized. The frenzy stops abruptly, and the ensuing developmental section portrays the evolution of the creatures of the natural world. As Rory Gury has written:

Out of the central mass of entwined bodies, life commenced to erupt. Trees shot up, leaves fell from their branches and, touching the earth, metamorphosed into strange animals. Each creature evolved individually. At last human appendages began to appear—a leg, a torso, and finally a complete man and a complete woman.

Milhaud takes care to capture the sounds of this evolution: a growing tree with a tender oboe melody, rapidly developing creatures with melodic fragments that continually pop through the texture, an excited world anticipating the arrival of Man and Woman in the tense, twittering flutes, and finally the awaited arrival of the humans in a restless capriccio imbued with a sense of discovery. The Man and Woman notice each other in a sensual dance that skillfully combines the capriccio in mellow flutes with the oboe melody, now in the two violins. From this emerges the dance of desire, a long-arching clarinet solo punctuated by jazz rhythms derived from the fugue subject, which explodes into a veritable rhythmic tempest, with music coming from seemingly every corner of the world—the dance of fulfillment, the dance of creation. As the serenity of the opening returns, the saxophone restates the gentle melody of the overture, although now above harmonies which are decidedly brighter and more optimistic. Cendrars's script ends with the following:

The couple is joined.  
The dance subsides, is slowed and restrained, everything grows calm.  
Group by group, the dancers disperse, and the couple, locked in an embrace,  
drifts offstage as if borne by a wave.  
It is spring.

### **Johan de Meij: *Journey in the Dark* (from *Symphony No. 1: "Lord of the Rings"*) (1987)**

As these dangers became more frequent, their march became slower. Already they seemed to have been tramping on, on, endlessly to the mountains' roots. They were more than weary, and yet there seemed no comfort in the thought of halting anywhere. Frodo's spirits had risen for a while after his escape, and after food and a draught of the cordial; but now a deep uneasiness, growing to dread, crept over him again. Though he had been healed in Rivendell of the knife-stroke, that grim wound had not been without effect. His senses were sharper and more aware of things that could not be seen. One sign of change that he soon had noticed was that he could see more in the dark than any of his companions, save perhaps Gandalf. And he was in any case the bearer of the Ring; it hung upon its chain against his breast, and at whiles it seemed a heavy weight. He felt the certainty of evil ahead and of evil following; but he said nothing. He gripped tighter on the hilt of his sword and went on doggedly.

Book 2, Chapter IV: "A Journey in the Dark," 303-304.

Described as "a work of immense narrative power" (*The Nation*) and as "one of the great fairy-tale quests in modern literature" (*Time*), J.R.R. Tolkien's epic *The Lord of the Rings* has entertained millions of readers since the publication of the first volume, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, in 1954. A classic battle of good and evil, the novel details the adventures of the hobbit Frodo and his companions as he seeks to destroy the One Ring, saving Middle-Earth from the Dark Lord Sauron. Once Frodo's companions were chosen—Gandalf the Grey; the future king Aragorn; Boromir; Gimli the dwarf; Legolas the elf; and hobbits Merry, Pippin, and Sam—they left from Rivendell en route to Mordor. After being thwarted in their attempt to pass over the Misty Mountains, the Fellowship decided to take the treacherous path *through* the mountains, through the abandoned dwarf mines of Moria, and over the narrow Bridge of Khazad-Dûm. This journey, one of the first adventures and dangers that would befall the Fellowship before the Ring was finally cast away, would have seemingly grave consequences.

'A Balrog,' muttered Gandalf. 'Now I understand.' He faltered and leaned heavily on his staff. 'What an evil fortune! And I am already weary.'

... The Balrog reached the bridge. Gandalf stood in the middle of the span, leaning on the staff in his left hand, but in his other hand, Glamdring gleamed, cold and white. His enemy halted again, facing him, and the shadow about it reached out like two vast wings. It raised the whip, and the thongs whined and cracked. Fire came from its nostrils. But Gandalf stood firm.

'You cannot pass,' he said. The ores stood still, and a dead silence fell. 'I am the servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor. You cannot pass. The dark fire will not avail you, flame of Udûn. Go back to the Shadow! You cannot pass.'

... With a bound the Balrog leaped full upon the Bridge. Its whip whirled and hissed... At that moment Gandalf lifted his staff, and crying aloud he smote the bridge before him. The staff broke asunder and fell from his hand. A blinding sheet of white flame sprang up. The bridge cracked. Right at the Balrog's feet it broke, and the stone upon which it stood crashed into the gulf, while the rest remained, poised, quivering like a tongue of rock thrust out into emptiness.

With a terrible cry the Balrog fell forward, and its shadow plunged down and vanished. But even as it fell it swung its whip, and the thongs lashed and curled about the wizard's knees, dragging him to the brink. He staggered and fell, grasped vainly at the stone, and slid into the abyss. 'Fly, you fools!' he cried, and was gone.

Book 2, Chapter V: "The Bridge of Khazad-Dûm," 321-322.

Composer Johan de Meij is a versatile musician, active also as a trombonist with the Orkest de Volharding in the Netherlands and as a guest conductor throughout Europe, Japan, and the United States. Inspired by Tolkien's novel, his five-movement *Symphony No. 1: "The Lord of the Rings"* won the prestigious Sudler Competition Award in 1989. The other four movements of the symphony are concerned with character portraits of important persons and places in the novel—Gandalf, Lothlorien, Gollum, and the Hobbits. The fourth movement, *Journey in the Dark*, is a retelling of the march through

Moria. Throughout the symphony, de Meij utilizes the interval of the perfect fifth as a Wagnerian leitmotif representing Gandalf; in this movement, the motto obtains greater significance, depicting the heroic battle and Gandalf's apparent death.

The fires went out, and blank darkness fell. The Company stood rooted with horror into the pit. Even as Aragorn and Boromir came flying back, the rest of the bridge cracked and fell. With a cry Aragorn roused them.

...They stumbled wildly up the great stairs beyond the door... Out of the Gates they ran and sprang down the huge and age-worn steps, the threshold of Moria... They looked back. Dark yawned the archway of the Gates under the mountain-shadow. Faint and far beneath the earth rolled the slow drum-beats: *doom*. A thin black smoke trailed out. Nothing else was to be seen; the dale all around was empty. *Doom*. Grief at last wholly overcame them, and they wept long; some standing and silent, some cast upon the ground. *Doom, doom*. The drum beats-faded.

Book 2, Chapter V: "The Bridge of Khazad-Dûm," 323.

### **Michael Colgrass: *Winds of Nagual* (1985)**

*Winds of Nagual* is extraordinarily visual, story-telling music in a way that has gone wholly out of fashion since the great Strauss tone poems like *Don Quixote*. *Winds* is a tone poem for wind ensemble based on the books by Carlos Castaneda about his experience with the Indian sorcerer Don Juan. The music is full of the mystery and the matter-of-fact, it has mountains and rivers and bubbles in it, singing and dancing, meditation and the moon, all precisely, colorfully and imaginatively caught. There is even an audible philosophical point about coexistent worlds of spirit and body. Music in the low brasses resembling Wagner's Annunciation of Death becomes instead an affirmation of life - it immediately gives way to a clowning dance only a fool would call "trashy," although that is its musical idiom.

Richard Dyer (*Boston Globe*), writing after the premiere

Michael Colgrass (b. 1932) was first drawn to music when he saw drummer Ray Bauduc in a movie playing *Big Noise from Winnetka* with the Bob Crosby Band. When he entered the University of Illinois as a percussion student of Paul Price, he had every intention of studying only jazz; in fact, he made his living as a jazz drummer, performing 5-6 nights a week. Eventually, his interests began to widen, encompassing composition studies with Darius Milhaud, Wallingford Riegger, and Lukas Foss. After graduation, he spent twenty-one months as timpanist in the Seventh Army Symphony Orchestra in Stuttgart, Germany, before moving to New York City in 1956, where he free-lanced as a percussionist with such diverse groups as the New York Philharmonic, Dizzy Gillespie's band, the original *West Side Story* orchestra on Broadway, the Columbia Recording Orchestra's *Stravinsky conducts Stravinsky* series, and numerous ballet, opera and jazz ensembles.

Colgrass has an uncanny ability to write accessible music that simultaneously challenges the intellect and stirs the emotions. His highly personal compositional technique draws on a diversity of styles, reflecting his widespread interests, and involves a free-flowing mixture of tonal and atonal harmonic language. His compositions have been commissioned and performed by such groups as the Boston Symphony, the New York Philharmonic, The Lincoln Center Chamber Music Society, the Manhattan and Muir String Quartets, the Brighton Festival in England, and numerous other orchestras, wind ensembles, chamber groups, choral groups and soloists. Colgrass is the recipient of many grants and fellowships, including two Guggenheim Fellowships, a Rockefeller Grant, and First Prize in the Barlow and Sudler International Wind Ensemble Competitions for *Winds of Nagual* (1985). He also won the 1978 Pulitzer Prize for Music for *Déjà vu* and an Emmy Award in 1982 for the Public Broadcasting System documentary "Soundings: The Music of Michael Colgrass". Besides composing, Colgrass has for twenty-five years been giving workshops throughout North America in performance excellence, combining Grotowski physical training, mime, dance and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). He is the author of *My Lessons with Kumi - How I Learned to Perform with Confidence in Life and Work*.

Colgrass has offered the following on the work:

*Winds of Nagual* is based on the writings of Carlos Castaneda about his 14-year apprenticeship with don Juan Matis, a Yaqui Indian sorcerer from Northwestern Mexico. Castaneda met don Juan while researching hallucinogenic plants for his master's thesis in Anthropology at UCLA. Juan became Castaneda's mentor and trained him in pre-Colombian techniques of sorcery, the overall purpose of which was to find the creative self - what Juan calls the *nagual*.

Each of the characters has a musical theme: Juan's is dark and ominous, yet gentle and kind; Carlos's is open, direct and naïve. We hear Carlos's theme throughout the piece from constantly changing perspectives, as Juan submits him to long desert marches, encounters with terrifying powers and altered states of reality [often through the use of psychotropic substances]. A comic aspect is added to the piece by don Genaro, a sorcerer friend of Juan's, who frightens Carlos with fantastic tricks like disappearing and reappearing at will.

[Although] the score is laced with programmatic indications, ... the listener need not have read Castaneda's books to enjoy the work, and I don't expect anyone to follow any exact scenario. My object is to capture the mood and atmosphere created by the books and to convey a feeling of the relationship that develops as a man of ancient wisdom tries to cultivate heart in an analytical young man of the technological age.

The following, however, is a more complete listing of Colgrass's "exact scenario":

#### I. THE DESERT

Don Juan emerges from the mountains.  
Carlos approaches don Juan.

#### II. CARLOS MEETS DON JUAN

The first conversation...  
Don Juan shows Carlos a new concept of himself.

#### III. DON GENARO APPEARS

Genaro clowns for Carlos.  
Genaro satirizes Carlos.  
Genaro laughs.  
Genaro leaps to a mountain top.  
Genaro disappears.

#### IV. CARLOS STARES AT THE RIVER AND BECOMES A BUBBLE

Carlos stares at the river, and is transfixed by the ripples of the water.  
Carlos is mesmerized by the bubbles, and becomes a bubble.  
Carlos travels with the river.  
Carlos tumbles in cascades of water.  
Juan jolts Carlos awake with a shrill voice.  
Carlos feels euphoric, and climbs out of the water.

#### V. THE GAIT OF POWER

Don Juan shows Carlos how to leap between boulders in the dark.  
Carlos tries it.  
Something moves in the dark.  
A terrifying creature leaps at Carlos.  
Carlos runs... it chases him.  
The creature grabs his throat.  
Carlos exerts his will.

#### VI. ASKING TWILIGHT FOR CALMNESS AND POWER

Carlos calls to the desert from a hilltop.  
Carlos dances.  
Carlos meditates.  
Carlos moves again.  
He feels a deep calm and joy.  
Nightfall... mist rolls in and the moon rises.

#### VII. JUAN CLOWNS FOR CARLOS

#### VIII. LAST CONVERSATION AND FAREWELL

Carlos leaps into the abyss...  
and explodes into a thousand views of the world.