

**Symphonic Winds**  
**Sounds of Sight**  
21 February 2009

Can we see sounds? Can we hear colors? Technically, those who can are considered synesthetes—people in whom one sensation produces a multiplicity of other sensations. The study of synaesthesia has become increasingly important as scientists advance their understanding of neurological functions, the nature of perception and the way in which our biology forces us to relate to the world around us; it has also been fundamental to enquiry into the potential of human sensory systems and how they are interrelated, and how that interrelation changes the way we react to and create things like music and art. Ultimately, synaesthesia is a condition whereby the input from the sensory systems becomes intermingled or crossed, resulting in shapes that exhibit colors or numbers that produce a color. For example, it is possible for a synesthete to look at a shape, say a triangle and perceive not only the shape of the triangle, but the pervading sense that triangle smells of chicken or popcorn. Or, similarly, she might hear a single note—perhaps middle C—and not only hear the note, but “hear” a bright blue as well. While this conjoining of senses requires only two sensory systems, in many cases of synaesthesia, the subject will experience the clashing of as many as four or even all five of his sensory systems to produce a sensation from just one stimulus. Synaesthesia is present in an estimated 1 in 10,000, to 1 in 25,000 individuals.

Many composers were synesthetes. Olivier Messiaen was. So was György Ligeti, who wrote: “I am inclined to synaesthetic perception. I associate sounds with colours and shapes. Like Rimbaud, I feel that all letters have a colour.... Major chords are red or pink, minor chords are somewhere between green and brown. I do not have perfect pitch, so when I say that C minor has a rusty red-brown colour and D minor is brown this does not come from the pitch but from the letters C and D. I think it must go back to my childhood. I find, for instance, that numbers also have colours; 1 is steely grey, 2 is orange, 5 is green. At some point these associations must have got fixed, perhaps I saw the green number 5 on a stamp or on a shop sign. But there must be some collective associations too. For most people the sound of a trumpet is probably yellow although I find it red because of its shrillness....” Michael Torke has created a body of “color music,” each piece’s harmonic center relating to a specific color for him (“Ecstatic Orange,” “Ash,” and so on). Alexander Scriabin also may have been a synesthete, having created a body of work strongly influenced by the writings and talks of the Russian mystic Helena P. Blavatsky; his unrealized magnum opus *Mysterium* was to have been a grand week-long performance including music, scent, dance, and light in the foothills of the Himalayas that was to bring about the dissolution of the world in bliss.

But for the other 9,999 (or 24,999) of us who are *not* synesthetes, are there connections—and not just metaphorical parallels and correlations—between the visual and aural arts? We could probably, in a Pavlovian sense, learn to associate certain colors with sounds, and vice versa, but that speaks more to societal conventions, rather than actual, intrinsic relationships. We can also perhaps agree, for example, that Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition* is aurally analogous to the paintings by Viktor Hartmann that he chose to re-interpret. But do we have to agree—and does the quality of either set of “pieces” depend on this connection? For example, Louis Andriessen’s *De Stijl* is based on Piet Mondrian’s *Composition with Red, Yellow, and Blue* (1927); Andriessen took the geometric proportions of the work, translated them into musical terms to derive the large-scale form of his music and then he assigned the “colors” to different instrumental groups. In technical terms, Andriessen’s work is Mondrian’s. However, as Andriessen quips: “People often say that the piece sounds like nothing Mondrian. From this we can derive a wonderful fact: evidently people have an idea how Mondrian should sound in music. All the same, I can really see that.”

This concert, then, explores ways in which music can be said to relate or connect to the visual arts. Edgard Varèse not only spoke of music in almost exclusively visual terms, he seems to have imbued musical sounds with a material physicality. James MacMillan, like Mussorgsky, tried to create musical translations of several works of art; in MacMillan’s case, though, we are, perhaps, left with a question: how much does an aural portrait of a person resemble the actual person (and what does this even mean, for a collection of tones to resemble either a portrait or the portrait’s actual sitter)? Jay Wadley constructs his music in a way akin to

an artist who creates mosaics—laying (aural) tiles down to create an emergent form, manipulating sounds and tones the way a sculptor might manipulate her clay. Karel Husa takes not a work of art, but an entire aesthetic outlook (Fauvism) as his inspiration. (If we agree that Husa has created an aural analogue to the visual Fauvist art, does that mean his music is Fauvist, too? If we use the same terms to describe both Fauvism and Husa's piece, does that necessarily mean they are aesthetically identical, or at least mutually resonant?) And finally, Michael Gordon's opera *Van Gogh* takes the life of the artist as his subject—does this musical commentary affect how he see van Gogh's work or understand his life?

Of course, as with any concert, there are connections operating at many sub-levels, too. *Octandre* is an acoustic equivalent of an electronic piece; *Upon Awakening* utilizes electronics. The Fauvists admired the work of van Gogh, so perhaps a connection between "St. Remy" (and its discussion of van Gogh's *The Reaper*) and *Les Couleurs Fauves* exists? Varèse often argued against what he deemed to be the conservatism of the musical establishment; van Gogh did the same—against both the religious and artistic establishments. Many of the works (or moments) seem to share a Cubist outlook, most obviously the T.S. Eliot movement of MacMillan's ...*as others see us*.... And so on. Of one thing we are sure: interactions between visual and aural arts certainly do exist, and so perhaps the music presented this evening may provide ways we *can* begin to see sounds, we *can* begin to hear colors.

### **Edgard Varèse: Octandre (1923)**

I decided to call my music "organized sound" and myself, not a musician, but a "worker in rhythms, frequencies and intensities." Indeed, to stubbornly conditioned ears, anything new in music has always been called noise. But after all what is music but organized noises? And a composer, like all artists, is an organizer of disparate elements. Subjectively, noise is any sound one doesn't like.

Varèse, in a lecture entitled *The Electronic Medium* (1962)

Born in France, Edgard Varèse (1883-1965) emigrated to the United States in 1915. Like the futurist Luigi Russolo, he called for a new concept of music and for new musical instruments; however, while Russolo was inspired by the concrete noises of everyday life (creating six "families of noises" that could be realized mechanically), Varèse's new musical vision was sparked by metaphors drawn from chemistry, astronomy, cartography, and geology. With his new definition for "music" and himself as a "musician," Varèse side-stepped the conventional distinction between music and noise. His music focuses on the *matter of sound*—on timbre, texture, and musical space. Although his complete surviving works only last about three hours, Varèse has been recognized as an influence by several major composers of the late 20th century (including Morton Feldman, Pierre Boulez, Iannis Xenakis, and Karlheinz Stockhausen). He composed two early masterpieces of electronic music: *Déserts* (1950-1954), realized in Pierre Schaeffer's Paris studio, and *Poème Électronique* (1957-1958), part of a "spectacle of sound and light" installed in the Phillips Pavilion designed by Le Corbusier for the World's Fair in Brussels. His use of new instruments and electronic resources led to his being known as the "Father of Electronic Music," while Henry Miller described him as "The stratospheric Colossus of Sound."

In 1911, Arnold Schoenberg effectively "emancipated the dissonance" when he wrote in his *Harmonielehre*: "Chords are formed merely as *accidents of voice leading*, and they have no structural significance since responsibility for the harmony is borne by the melodic line. There you have it! ... *There are no non-harmonic tones, for harmony means tones sounding together* [Schoenberg's italics].... Non-harmonic tones are merely those that the theorists could not fit into their system of harmony." Commentators such as Paul Griffiths have extended this metaphor further: perhaps Debussy "emancipated" tone color from the shackles of harmony, or musical time from recognizable forms? Perhaps Stravinsky "emancipated" rhythm from the confines of meter? Bluntly put, though, these "emancipations" seem mundane compared to Varèse's goal—that of liberating sound and noise, of completely redefining what music was and could become. While the great modernist composers pushed against and extended every conceivable musical boundary, Varèse simply ignored those limiting boundaries. As Morton Feldman observed:

Noise is something else. It does not travel on these distant seas of experience. It bores like granite into granite. It is physical, very exciting, and when organized it can have the impact and grandeur of Beethoven.... Is noise actually so easy to arrive at? Noise is a word of which the aural image is all too evasive. On the one hand sound is comprehensible in that it evokes a sentiment, though the sentiment itself may be incomprehensible and far-reaching. But it is noise that we really understand. It is only noise which we secretly want, because the greatest truth usually lies behind the greatest resistance. Sound is all our dreams of music. Noise is music's dreams of us. And those moments when one loses control, and sound like crystals forms its own planes, and with a thrust, there is no sound, no tone, no sentiment, nothing left but the significance of our first breath—such is the music of Varèse. He alone has given us this elegance, this physical reality, this impression that the music is writing about mankind rather than being composed.

While as a conductor Varèse championed the works of his peers (presenting premieres of works by Stravinsky, Hindemith, Webern, Berg, Schoenberg, etc.), he felt himself to be very much on his own. As Jonathan Bernard writes: “[Varèse’s] steadfast and lifelong resistance to chumminess with other composers stemmed from several factors: for one, his dislike for schools of thought, such as neoclassicism or dodecaphony; for another, his conviction that most composers of his day were unable, by virtue of disposition or training, to think in really new or original ways. Musical composition in Varèse’s view, had been held back for some time in its progress by the failure of musicians to see the necessity of developing new instruments and new means of sound production in general, and by academic conservatism, which perpetuated old forms and old formulas.” Varèse, instead, preferred the company of painters and sculptors who, in his words, “responded to the world—the completely different world—in which they found themselves, while music was still fitting itself into arbitrary patterns called forms and following obsolete rules.”

However, that does not mean that Varèse necessarily dislikes older or other musics. As he stated 1959:

My fight for the liberation of sound and for my right to make music with any sound and all sounds has sometimes been construed as a desire to disparage and even to discard the great music of the past. But that is where my roots are. No matter how original, how different a composer may seem, he has only grafted a little bit of himself on the old plant. But this he should be allowed to do without being accused of wanting to kill the plant. He only wants to produce a new flower. It does not matter if at first it seems to some people more like a cactus than a rose....

However, he did crusade for the development and creation of new, electronic instruments, which he felt were necessary for the realization of his musical ideas, stating in two lectures (in 1936 and 1939):

When new instruments will allow me to write music as I conceive it, the movement of sound-masses, of shifting planes, will be clearly perceived in my work, taking the place of linear counterpoint. When these sound-masses collide, the phenomena of penetration or repulsion will seem to occur. Certain transmutations taking place on certain planes will seem to project onto other planes, moving at different speeds and at different angles. There will no longer be the old conception of melody or interplay of melodies. The entire work will be a melodic totality. The entire work will flow as a river flows.

We have actually three dimensions in music: horizontal, vertical, and dynamic swelling or decreasing. I shall add a fourth, sound projection—that feeling that sound is leaving us with no hope of being reflected back, a feeling akin to that aroused by beams of light sent forth by a powerful searchlight—for the ear as for the eye, that sense of projection, of a journey into space.

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Personally, for my conceptions, I need an entirely new medium of expression: a sound-*producing* machine (not a sound-*reproducing* one). Today it is possible to build such a machine with only a certain amount of added research.

If you are curious to know what such a machine could do that the orchestra with its man-powered instruments cannot do, I shall try briefly to tell you: whatever I write, whatever my message, it will reach the listener unadulterated by “interpretation.” It will work something like this: after a composer has set down his score on paper by means of a new graphic notation, he will then, with the collaboration of a sound engineer, transfer the score directly to this electric machine. After that, anyone will be able to press a button to release the music exactly as the composer wrote it—exactly like opening a book.

And here are the advantages I anticipate from such a machine: liberation from the arbitrary, paralyzing tempered system; the possibility of obtaining any number of cycles or, if still desired, subdivisions of the octave, and consequently the formation of any desired scale; unsuspected range in low and high registers; new harmonic splendors obtainable from the use of sub-harmonic combinations now impossible; the possibility of obtaining any differentiation of timbre, of sound-combinations; new dynamics far beyond the present human-powered orchestra; a sense of sound-projection in space by means of the emission of sound in any part or in many parts of the hall, as may be required by the score; cross-rhythms unrelated to each other, treated simultaneously, or, to use the old word, “contrapuntally,” since the machine would be able to beat any number of desired notes, any subdivision of them, omission or fraction of them—all these in a given unit of measure or time that is humanly impossible to obtain.

In his works for acoustic instruments, then, one can hear and see Varèse struggling to make “real” the sounds, noises, relationships, and trajectory that he imagine with the closest possible instrumental surrogates. In a work like **Octandre** (1923), he is not necessarily thinking about an “oboe melody” here or a “trumpet call” there; instead his challenge—and then the challenge for the instrumentalists—is to find new ways to best re-create or realize the abstract sounds he hears. And while *Octandre* may have a superficial appearance of traditional design—after all, it is written for all “traditional,” pitched/melodic instruments, and not the unpitched percussion and sirens that were already becoming hallmarks of his compositional language—and so is one of his most approachable scores, it is not a conservative reversion to his early post-Impressionistic language but instead a concise, precise consolidation of his musical language and philosophical ideas. Each of the eight players has demanding, often instrumentally-unidiomatic, sound lines to project into space, creating sound masses unheard of (in terms of tessitura, balance, dynamics, harmony, etc.) As Malcolm MacDonald writes in his *Varèse: Astronomer in Sound*:

Varèse could have called his work *Octet* (more likely in French, *Octour*)—for that is what it is, in the widest sense: a piece of music for eight players. Yet the title *Octandre*, though it certainly reflects the “eight-ness” of the ensemble, is not a musical term at all, but a botanical one. “Octandrous” flowers are those possessing eight stamens. By association, Varèse seems to want to compare his octet to an eight-pronged organism in the natural world. The connotations are sexual, and all eight players, though often treated as individuals, have an aggressively masculine music to project.

*Octandre*, then, is a short and pungent work. Almost all of the “melodies” and “harmonies” (or perhaps “horizontal projections” and “vertical simultaneities” are more accurate) are constructed from two intervals: the semitone (the smallest possible interval between two “tempered” pitches, although Varèse does often extend, via octave displacement, the semitone to a major seventh or minor ninth) and the tritone (not counting inversionally-equivalent intervals, the widest possible space between two pitches – and certainly the most tense/nervous combination). *Octandre* possesses many formal symmetries we might expect in older musics (ideas are “developed”—or, at least, they are “expanded”—as pitches “bounce” off of each other or “merge” into new composites; the final movement contains an obvious fugal sections), but it is, at core, the fundamentally organic processes that create different shapes and configurations from the opening small germinal entities that reveal Varèse’s radicalness.

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Upon Varèse’s death, composer/conductor/educator Pierre Boulez published the following memorial/obituary in the program of the Domaine musical concert of 24 November 1965 (translated from the original French by Martin Cooper), which seems to embody the uniqueness of Varèse—the man and his music:

Varèse,

In the heady days when we were musical apprentices, we thought of you as something strange, erratic, distant, mythical and apart, removed from us by vast dimensions of time and space.

A legendary hurricane still remembered for its wild destructiveness. You were summed up in a few oracular words, highly prized by us, on the transmutation of the material of music; in a faded record of *Ionisation*.

Seen in retrospect: a skeleton from a junk shop!

...

“For Edgard Varèse on the occasion of his eightieth birthday, loner and outsider, unique erratic.”

That was how we planned to present our homage in a programme agreed with you at a recent meeting—our last meeting. Because our gesture of friendship encountered a commonplace obstacle. Death. On 6 November 1965 there disappeared a human being much given to grumbling and banter, surly and abrupt, that is to say obstinate in friendship and rich in sympathy, a sympathy so deep that it discarded words and gestures as superfluous.

You remain very close to my heart, Varèse, because you are an *outsider*—forming the “margin” that justifies the lines of the page,

and because you are a *loner*;  
you have the deliberate wildness of the animal that does not go with the herd,  
the rarity of a diamond in a unique mount,  
an untiring patience in the elaboration of your sound combinations.  
“Varèse mysteries”?

No, you show no trace of any tendency to the esoteric as something artificial and obligatory. Your power of conviction is manifest, you force the listener to share the secret of your vitality and of that profound committedness that springs from the depths of your being, overcoming the mirages of the surrounding desert.

I find a tonic in the ozone of your scores, and in your example.

Your legend is deeply rooted in our era; we can now scrub the chalk (and water) circle of those magic or ambiguous words “experimental,” “precursor,” “pioneer”...

...

You have shown yourself to be one of the few cursors of your generation; only our acknowledgment of the fact is post-dated.

Farewell, Varèse, your day is over, and is just beginning.

### **Michael Gordon: *Van Gogh* (1991)**

Out of the stylistic “-isms” that dominated musical culture for much (if not all) of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a characterizable style emerged in the 1990s, a new “-ism” which seemed to try to synthesize much that preceded: *totalism* (sometimes also called *post-classical*), of which Michael Gordon (b. 1956, Nicaragua) is a prime exponent. As Kyle Gann defines it in his *American Music in the Twentieth Century*:

in the rawest meaning of the term... [*totalism*] suggests having your cake and eating it, too: in this case, writing music that appeals to audiences on a sensuous and visceral level, and yet which still contains enough complexity and intricate musical devices to attract a more sophisticated aficionado. It also implies using all of the musical resources available, so that Indian raga-like melodies may fit together with jazz harmonies with classical structuring devices. Totalist composers are those who admired minimalism’s ability to communicate to large audiences, yet also admired serialism’s ability to yield more and more information on further hearings, and also appreciated the inherent complexity, especially rhythmic complexity, of non-Western musics. As a result, totalist music can generally be characterized as having a steady, articulated beat, often flavored by rock or world music. That beat becomes a background grid for polyrhythms of great complexity. Elliott Carter and Milton Babbitt employ complex rhythms, too, but without a grid to hear them against; for totalist composers, being able to hear and calculate the complexity is essential. Totalist harmony can be either consonant, dissonant, or both—the distinction having ceased to be very important—but it is usually fairly static, concentrating on harmonic or melodies images that are easily memorable, even when quite complex.

Gann groups composers such as John Luther Adams (whose *Farthest Place* was performed by the Symphonic Winds and *Three Drum Quartets* from *Earth and Great Weather* was performed by the Percussion Ensemble, both last semester) and Lois V Vierk (whose *Red Shift 4* was performed by I/O New Music last month) into this category.... along with Michael Gordon. Alan Pierson (conductor of Alarm Will Sound) described Gordon’s music as: “hard-hitting, edgy, but includes music of impassioned lyricism.”

Gordon’s compositions demonstrate a deep exploration into the possibilities and nature of rhythm and what happens when rhythms are piled on top of each other, creating a glorious confusion; John Adams, who has conducted Gordon’s works with the London Sinfonietta and the Ensemble Modern Orchestra, calls these raw and complicated sounds “irrational rhythms.” His interest in adding dimensionality to the

concert experience has led to frequent collaborations with other artists. In *Decasia*, a multimedia orchestral work with films by Bill Morrison and spectacle by Ridge Theater, the audience stands in the middle of a three-tiered, triangular structure surrounded by 55 musicians and large projection scrims. His interest in the mysterious line between dissonance and consonance has led him to create works that distort traditional classical instruments with electronic effects and guitar pedals, including *Potassium* for Kronos String Quartet and *Industry* for cellist Maya Beiser. His most recent work—*Lighting at our feet*, a music/theater work in collaboration with Ridge Theater based on the words of Emily Dickinson—was workshopped and previewed at Williams College this past September and premiered in Brooklyn December 9-13, 2008.

His most regular and rewarding collaborations, however, have been with his wife, composer Julia Wolfe, and his friend David Lang. Besides co-writing several pieces together—the oratorios *Lost Objects* and *Shelter* (which includes Lang's "Before I enter" and "I want to live," performed by Symphonic Winds last November), and most recently *Singing in the Dead of Night* (a collaboration with Eighth Blackbird, and New York choreographer Susan Marshall), the three of them founded in 1987 *Bang on a Can*, described by the *San Francisco Chronicle* as "the country's most important vehicle for contemporary music." Once "only" a one-day new music festival, *Bang on a Can* is now a multi-faceted organization dedicated to commissioning, performing, creating, presenting and recording contemporary music and whose mission is "to expose exciting and innovative music as broadly and accessibly as possible to new audiences worldwide. And through its Summer Festival,"—held at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in North Adams every July—"Bang on a Can hopes to bring this energy and passion for innovation to a younger generation of composers and players." As Gordon explained in an interview, their project is demonstrating that, simply put, great music is great music, regardless of genre interpretation: "This is now concert music. Great concert music. Not classical or pop or "new" music. It's just great music. So that was, in a sense, what we were trying to do: break down the perception that it's this or that."

Gordon wrote his opera ***Van Gogh*** in 1991 while he was in Amsterdam (where he befriended, and studied with, Louis Andriessen). The piece developed into a collaborative theater work with video artist Elliott Caplan, and the two original presentations of the piece, one in New York and one in Vienna, were called "Van Gogh Video Opera." In 2003, though, Gordon re-orchestrated the work (adding cello, bass, and piano) and eliminated the video component; in this new version, the work was re-premiered by the Crash Ensemble in Dublin and recently recorded by the New York new music ensemble Alarm Will Sound. As Gordon writes: "The opera is an evocation of the inner life of the artist Vincent Van Gogh through letters to his brother Theo. I started writing Van Gogh because of my total love and obsession with the letters Vincent Van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo. I made trips to Holland and Southern France, Arles and St. Remy, to explore and get the vibes of the areas.... The piece is divided into six parts [three of which—movements 2, 4, and 6—are being performed this evening] and I put together the final texts myself, drawing from the letters Vincent wrote to Theo, in many cases combining lines from different letters or from different places in the same letter. What attracted me so much to these letters was the pain, the rawness, and the brutal honesty. I really found it hard to believe that anyone could tell another person, even his brother, the raw emotions that he experiences—so painful, so lonely, so humiliating."

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### **"Borinage"**

*There is an old academic school, a steel armor of prejudice and convention.*

*There may be a great fire in our soul, and no one ever comes to warm themselves by it. One must tend that inward fire, wait with how much impatience for the hour.*

*Dear Theo: One of the reasons I am out of employment now—that I have been out of employment for years—is simply that I have other ideas than the gentlemen who give their places to gentlemen who think as they do.*

*Dear Theo: I would be very glad if you could see in me something other than an idle fellow because there are two kinds of idleness. There is the man who is idle from laziness and lack of character, from the very*

*baseness of his nature. Then there is the other man who is idle in spite of himself, who is inwardly consumed by a great longing for action, because he seems to be imprisoned in some cage.*

Van Gogh tried formal studies in theology but couldn't persevere through the rigorous and formal academic studies, so instead he got a quick diploma from an evangelical school and was sent to work in the coal mine district (the Borinage) of Belgium among the miners. He took his mission very seriously; believing that to follow Christ's example would mean to live a hard life—at least as difficult as the lives of those to whom he was preaching—Vincent gave up his rented room in return for the dreariest hut in the village, gave away all his clothes, his small amount of money, and his bed, lived only on scraps of bread, and went down into the mine to experience the people's difficult life. He would descend into the mines with the miners and subsequently walked around town with the same blacken soot the town folk had on. However, the more he "lowered" himself to live among the people he wished to serve, the more disturbed and worried the church leaders became, particularly when he began teaching more about Jesus' complete love and forgiveness for all people and less about specific official Church doctrine. Eventually, the Church leaders, considering him too far-out, too wild, kicked him out. Confused and depressed, Vincent wandered for about a year, cutting off contact with his family, including his trusted confidant Theo. When he did surface again, though, he revealed to Theo his new feelings about religion and art. While the time that he spent in the Borinage area of Belgium was short (on and off from the end of 1878 to the beginning of 1880), it was one of the most intense episodes of his life, and can be recognized as the true turning point in both his art and his religion; during this period—and probably by as early as 1879—Vincent decided to make his living as an artist, forsaking a career in theology. The subject of "Borinage" is his reaction to the "old academic school," which in this case is technically organized religion, but which can be extended to the art world as well. One can also see in these letters the beginning of Vincent's madness and his early struggles to verbalize what he was thinking and feeling.

### **James MacMillan: ...as other see us... (1990)**

James MacMillan (b. 1959, Ayrshire, Scotland) is generally regarded as the pre-eminent Scottish composer of his generation. His music is notable for its extraordinary directness, rhythmic excitement, raw emotional power, and spiritual meditation. Strongly-held religious and political beliefs, coupled with community concerns, inform both the spirit and subject matter of his music, while references to Scottish folk music imbue MacMillan's work with a strong sense of the vernacular. As MacMillan admits:

When I was younger, I used to play a lot of folk music and sing a lot, and maybe I didn't realize it at the time, but there was an absorption of that style going on. I don't do it any more and I think now the influence of folk music happens without thinking about it. It's gone under the skin – whereas when I was younger, I was making conscious attempts to try to bring it into my language. Because it's conscious, it can sometimes be a little more clumsy perhaps, or it can evoke pastiche, or you feel the inverted commas going up: "here's the folk bit." It's been important to absorb that element so that it becomes second nature rather than feeling your way self-consciously into a folk world. And I think that's what's happened: a lot of the ornamentation and the modality that comes out of my music now happens without a second thought. It's just there. But the practical involvement had to happen for that deeper engagement to take place.

His music has been performed worldwide by orchestras including the London Symphony Orchestra, New York and Los Angeles Philharmonics and Cleveland Orchestra; in particular, his percussion concerto *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel* (1992) has received over 400 performances. He has worked with and written pieces for percussionist Evelyn Glennie; cellist Mstislav Rostropovich; pianist/organist Wayne Marshall; conductors Leonard Slatkin, Sir Colin Davis, Sir Andrew Davis, and Marin Alsop; and choreographer Christopher Wheeldon. *The Guardian* describes MacMillan as: "...a composer so confident of his own musical language that he makes it instantly communicative to his listeners." While MacMillan is both praised and criticized for writing music generally regarded as "accessible," he has commented:

I'm quite unapologetic about my interest and acknowledgement of traditions. When I was younger I suppose I wasn't as aware, consciously, of perhaps how important those traditions were to be. I suppose my natural milieu for a long while was the contemporary music world, and I still regard that as part of my natural habitat. I'm very much aware that I'm regarded as quite a traditionalist, even a conservative, in the new music world,

and that has been a bit of a surprise to me, to suddenly appear the conservative in some people's eyes. When I was younger, I did my own bit of experimenting, and I still do to an extent, but it's settled into an acknowledgement on the importance of tradition, musically, where these forms have always been important.... Modernism has acknowledged its debt to tradition, and maybe I'm prepared more than most to acknowledge it in my music. Intellectually, tradition has flowed through the 20th and 21st centuries in a way that perhaps the more hard-line modernists tried to resist. I don't see music, and indeed many aspects of culture, in terms of radical and conservative; these are outdated analyses as far as I'm concerned. I think those who form into packs, one side and the other—into left and right, or avant-garde and conservative—are missing the point a lot of the time. You can't stop tradition. Tradition will always make its impact in one way or another, and the great error of modernism has been that conceit that they tried to avoid tradition.

**...as others see us...** was commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery, London for the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. MacMillan offers the following about this work:

Robert Burns craved the gift "to see ourselves as others see us" and it can indeed be an illuminating, if even devastating, experience to see or hear how one is perceived by others. This must especially be the case when one's characteristics are captured on canvas, in print, or in music. In composing these "sound paintings" of prominent figures whose portraits hang in the National Portrait Gallery I was attempting an objective character analysis of each one, from my own particular perspective. In order to maintain this distance throughout, I use an old Scottish dance tune that is transformed from one piece to the next to capture the character and the historical context of each portrait.

Four of the six movements of MacMillan's piece will be performed this evening. (Movement #2—John Wilmot, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Rochester—and Movement #4—George Gordon, 6<sup>th</sup> Baron Byron and William Wordsworth—will not be performed.) The first movement—Henry VIII (1491-1547)—was inspired by a portrait by Hans Holbein the Younger of Kings Henry VIII and Henry VII completed in 1537. This very large drawing was actually the preparatory drawing for the left half of an immense wall-painting to be completed to honor the birth of Henry VIII's son Edward, later Edward VI, in October 1537, and to commemorate the strength and triumphs of the Tudor dynasty. Holbein's wall-painting, however, was destroyed in the Whitehall Palace fire of 1698, and the cartoon for the right-half (featuring Henry VIII's third wife, Jane Seymour, and his mother) has since been lost; all that remains of this piece—one of Henry VIII's most important artistic projects—is the preparatory cartoon for the left-side, still one of the most memorable images of royalty ever created. MacMillan describes his music for this movement as "butch, macho, and has an almost bullying manner." Over a driving riff, the Scottish tune is blared out in wrong-footed meters and parallel harmonic layerings in a raw parody of a Tudor dance. As MacMillan continues: "Gradually other elements intrude to convey the brutality and egotistical madness of this misogynistic tyrant. For example, Henry's famous composition *Greensleeves* which, over the next few centuries, was performed at public executions in England and in Europe—an apt use of a tune whose composer callously sent wives, friends and countless subjects to their deaths."

The work's third movement (second performed this evening) is a musical translation of Sir Godfrey Kneller's oil sketch (presumably for a full-scale allegorical painting which seems never to have been carried out) of Queen Anne's great Commander-in-Chief, John Churchill, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Marlborough (1650-1722). Stylistically, Kneller's portrait is heavily influenced by Rubens, while in spirit it conveys Britain's confidence as a European power. The central figure in the sketch is, of course, the conquering martial hero; MacMillan conveys Churchill's physical strength and power through soaring, but ragged lines played to by the two instruments with the most easily recognized martial connotations: trumpet and percussion. On the left is Hercules with his club and a key (possibly a symbol of submission) and a woman offering him a castle—these are portrayed by clarinet and bassoon. Under Marlborough's horse's hooves is the dishevelled figure of Discord, being trampled into the ground—and given appropriate music on cello and double bass. In the clouds, among swirling floating figures, sits Justice and Victory, crowning the duke with laurel, represented musically by repetitive, spinning material on flute, violin and viola.

The portrait of T.S. Eliot (1885-1965) by the art critic and painter Patrick Heron (1920-1999) that serves as the basis for the next movement (fifth movement in the complete suite) was painted the year after Eliot was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. This portrait is a happy collaboration between two of the

leading contemporary theoreticians and practitioners of poetry and painting, as both held radical positions, both were concerned with ideas in the abstract, and both were immensely influential; in fact, Eliot remains probably the greatest poet of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to write in English, his *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1915) and *The Wasteland* (1922) signaling a new anti-romantic spirit in English poetry which has remained of supreme importance ever since. This is one of two Cubist portraits by the painter in the National Portrait Gallery's collection; the subject for the other—art-critic Herbert Read—was suggested to Heron by Eliot. As MacMillan writes: "I attempt to capture the split personality of this poet, seen in this cubist portrait by Patrick Heron. I took the two profiles to refer to his dual national characteristics—this American who was fascinated by England and especially by High Anglican ritual. Therefore his Englishness is captured by a quasi-liturgical music, and his American-ness is presented in a 1920s jazz style for which he was reputed to have a keen interest."

The final movement was inspired by a portrait by Maggi Hambling (b. 1945) of Dorothy Mary Hodgkin (1910-1994), one of the outstanding scientists of her generation. Hodgkin carried out pioneering work on the structure of penicillin in the 1940s, was awarded in 1964 the Nobel Prize for Chemistry for her work on the structure of vitamin B-12, and in 1969 established the chemical structure of insulin. Recipient of the Order of Merit (only the second woman—after Florence Nightingale—to receive the award), Hodgkin was also a tireless advocate and worker for international peace and diplomacy. In the portrait, Hambling presents Hodgkin immersed in her work: her desk is covered with computer print-outs, a structure model of the four molecules of insulin stand in the foreground. Hambling's expressionistic technique and the crowded composition stress Hodgkin's intense intellectual activity, and this is further emphasized by the way the artist has given her four hands, distorted by arthritis, but energetically busy. Describing his music for this movement, MacMillan explains: "As if to indicate the depth of this woman's intellect I have the strings playing a solemn and serene series of chords over which I attempt to achieve a gradual synthesis of two separate processes. It is as if she is trying to find some scientific solution of which the two basic elements are: a) a melodic interaction between violin and clarinet and b) an imploding durational process on piccolo, trumpet and [contrabass clarinet]. The two processes, as if by chemical reaction, gradually merge to become one single element."

### **Michael Gordon: "The Hague – Part II" from Van Gogh**

*To work for the market is, in my opinion, not the right way. Rather more trouble on a serious study than a kind of chic to flatter the public. (I heard he laughed at my becoming a painter.) Sometimes in moments of worry I have longed for some of that chic. But, thinking it over, I say: "No! Let me be true to myself." The principal reason for my not making water colors is that I must draw more seriously, paying more attention to proportion. That is more practical than his practical talks about what is saleable.*

*Today I met Mauve and had a very painful conversation with him. I asked him to come see my works and talk things over. Mauve refused point blank: "I will certainly not come to see you." At last he said: "You have a vicious character." Then I turned around. It was on the dunes and I walked home alone. I have ears, Theo. If somebody says: "You have a..." What ought I do then?*

*Then Tersteeg told me: "Mauve and I will see to it that Theo stops sending you money. You failed before and now you will fail again, it will be the same story. Of one thing I am sure: you are no artist, you started too late, you must work for a living."*

*Theo, if you can, write soon. And of course, the sooner you can send the money, the better it would be for me. I spent my last penny on this stamp.*

After leaving the Borinage, van Gogh spent most of the next eight years living and traveling through and between the Netherlands and Paris, developing his skills as an artist, but still with only a negligible amount of critical praise—and still subsisting almost wholly on the gifts of his brother Theo. In 1882, he moved to the Hague (where he lived for about two years), and with money from his cousin-in-law Anton Mauve (1838-1888), purchased his first house. (Mauve was Dutch realist painter and a leader in the Hague School. The young van Gogh worked under him for a short period, until they had a quarrel; Mauve respected van Gogh's talent, but insisted that he develop traditional skills in drawing and modeling.) The midpoint of the

opera, "Hague – Part II" is the first place in the piece that painting is dealt with. Vincent is still early in his painting career, he's still figuring out what to do and how to do it. A total outsider, he understands the plasticity of the "art market," and then later relates to Theo a humiliating encounter with his art contacts, Mauve and the art dealer Tersteeg. (Tersteeg was a friend and mentor to Vincent during Vincent's youth; when Vincent moved back to The Hague in 1882 as a fledgling artist, he expected much from Tersteeg, but the latter deemed van Gogh's associates with the prostitute Sien Hoornik reprehensible and turned his back on him. They never spoke again.) And all this time, Theo is supporting Vincent, so he's further humiliated into asking Theo "the sooner you can send the money the better it would be for me. I spent my last penny on this stamp."

### **Jay Wadley: *Upon Awakening, Still Burning* (2009)**

Jay Wadley (b. 1983), a winner of a 2007 Charles Ives Scholarship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, received a Master's degree and Artist's Diploma in Music Composition from the Yale School of Music and a Bachelor's degree from Oklahoma City University. His "If I Spoke, I'd Be Screaming" was selected as alternate in the Minnesota Orchestra Composers Institute and "Sketches on a Disillusioned Love" for orchestra was a regional winner in the 2005 SCI/ASCAP student commission competition. Having performing backgrounds in both popular and classical styles, Jay combines diverse influences from rock, electronic, jazz, modern classical, and experimental musics. Currently Jay is assisting Rufus Wainwright in the orchestration and copying of his new opera, *Prima Donna*. He is Assistant Manager in the Yale Center for Studies in Music Technology, a T.A., in the Yale Department of Music teaching Composition and Electronic Music and his compositions can now be heard on the Fox Television show "Lie to Me." This past summer, he completed a summer fellowship representing his company, Found Objects Music Productions, with the Yale Entrepreneurial Institute. ultimately leading to the company's representation by Bob Rice of Four Bars Entertainment (FBI), the world's largest provider of music for games. (As a group, composers in FOMP have completed eight independent films that have appeared at numerous festivals and on public television stations around the nation.) Jay's composition teachers have included Martin Bresnick, Aaron Jay Kernis, Edward Knight, and Ezra Laderman; he has attended masterclasses with John Adams, John Corigliano, David Maslanka, and Evan Ziporyn.

Jay has written the following about his new work:

With every piece, I attempt to explore something new in my compositional process. ***Upon Awakening, Still Burning for Trumpet, Wind Ensemble, and Electronics*** has proven to be one of my more challenging musical explorations, mostly due to its practical requirements. When Tom Bergeron approached me about writing the piece, I found myself searching for a new process of collecting musical material. I worked to develop a consistent electronic sound world and find organic and practical ways of combining electronics with a large acoustic ensemble, all while keeping the trumpet at the forefront of the piece. Ultimately, I began the process at a computer, developing my ideas one after another as they would lay back through powerful software, hardware and top of the line sampled instrument sounds that provided instant gratification. As the piece progressed, I met new challenges, as the transition from working on my computer to creating an accurate representation of the work in score form proved far more difficult than exporting a simple MIDI file. The wild musical and orchestration misrepresentations of the sampled instruments, combined with the electronics, forced me to reconsider the direction of much of the piece. Besides the problems of basic software incompatibilities, I ran into significant software malfunctioning issues, which caused me to lose massive amounts of information. I guess this is one area where pencil and paper have significant advantages....

Ultimately, these challenges, malfunctions, and setbacks all helped shape the piece into its current formal structure. *Upon Awakening, Still Burning* is in one large movement and is based on a collection of three ideas stated in the exposition after an extended introduction. There are two cadenzas, the first of which is fully improvised by the soloist above an unmeasured, underlying support of bell tones, aleatoric figures, and electronics. The electronics throughout the piece are based on midi and

audio content, from the work's original form, sent through multiple synthesis modules to create the final audio. All electronics are controlled within Ableton Live, a loop-based software music sequencer.

*Upon Awakening, Still Burning* was commissioned by Thomas Bergeron, the Yale Concert Band (Thomas Duffy, director), and the Williams College Symphonic Winds (Steven Bodner, director).

### **Michael Gordon: “St. Remy” from *Van Gogh***

*I think I have done well to come here. For by seeing the actual truth about madness, I am losing my fear of the thing. And the change of surroundings is doing me good, though there are some who howl and rave continually. In spite of that, people get to know each other very well. I can, for instance, sometimes chat with one who speaks incoherently. A new man has arrived who is so worked up that he smashes everything and shouts day and night. He tears his shirts violently, too. And, up till now, though he is all day long in a bath, he hardly gets any quieter. They say we must put up with others so that others will be put up with us and help each other when attacks come on. They told me of a case where someone had wounded himself as I did, in the ear. It's almost a whole month since I came here. Not once has the least desire to be anywhere else come to me.*

*The treatment of the patients at this hospital is certainly easy. One could follow it even while traveling for they do absolutely nothing.*

*Yesterday I began again something that I see from my window. A field of yellow stubble that they are plowing. A canvas I am struggling with begun some days after my attack: “A Reaper.” The study is all yellow, terribly thickly painted, but the subject is fine and simple, for I see in this reaper a vague figure fighting like the devil in the midst of the heat, to get to the end of his task. The image of death in the sense that Humanity might be the corn he is reaping. But there's nothing sad in this death. It goes its way in broad daylight, flooded by a sun's golden light.*

Throughout his life, van Gogh produced more than 2000 works, including around 900 paintings and 1100 drawings and sketches. Most of his best-known works, though, were created during his final two years, before he committed suicide in 1890. In 1888, Vincent arrived in Arles, the capital of Provence; in the hopes of starting a kind of artist colony, he purchased the Yellow House in Arles, and for nine turbulent weeks lived there with the also-young and relatively obscure artist Paul Gauguin. During their brief, but exhilarating time together, van Gogh developed what would become his uniquely recognizable style, incorporating brighter and bolder colors into his work; among other works, his *Sunflowers* were created while in Arles. Two months after Gauguin arrived, however, Vincent suffered a psychological crisis following a breakdown in their friendship that culminated in his cutting off part of his left ear. He committed himself to a mental institution in St. Remy, thinking that maybe he could get some help or at least be prevented from violently hurting himself again. While he developed a kind of violent seizures, he struggled to continue working, creating among other masterpieces *The Starry Night* while in St. Remy. Vincent would be institutionalized in St. Remy for much of the rest of his short life, suffering recurrent bouts of mental illness (which have been voluminously debated, in particular as to the effect his illness may have had on both his physiological perception of the world and its affect on his art), leading eventually to his suicide (by gunshot).

“St. Remy” is the closing vignette of the opera, capturing both the trapped, confined aspect of Vincent's life—both physical and psychological—in and out of the St. Remy mental institution, as well as his lucid, recognition of his condition. At the end, Gordon sets a description of a painting (*The Reaper*—featured on the program cover) that Vincent works on at St. Remy. The soprano melody is anxious, but transcendent—urgent and radiant simultaneously—as Vincent writes to his brother about his work and its implications: death is not to be feared or mourned.

### **Karel Husa: *Les Couleurs Fauves* (1995)**

While clashes and dissonance appear in his paintings, there are also incredibly subtle nuances. The forcefulness of his expression is always tempered by a lyrical freshness and exquisite harmonies.

Russell Clement, writing about Henri Matisse, *Les Fauves: A Sourcebook*

Perhaps no other composer has had such an impact on the development of the contemporary wind band than has Karel Husa...It is clear that Husa's music has influenced composers, conductors, performers, and audiences like very few composers of [the twentieth and twenty-first centuries]...Perhaps Mr. Husa's biggest contribution

has been the influence he has made on the thousands of young musicians who have either performed his music or have played under his baton. Every person who has met Karel Husa knows him to be a kind and gentle soul, whose music seems to radiate from deep within. His love and compassion for others is reflected through his music.

Rodney Winther, Music Director, CCM Wind Symphony

Sadly, for Karel Husa (b. Prague, 7 August 1921), the beginning of a life in music was neither kind nor gentle, as he deserved—his early education was under the shadow of the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia. A student protest in 1939 provided the Germans with the pretext they sought for closing all the universities in Prague, including the technical institute where Husa was then pursuing studies in engineering. Further, they ordered most of the students deported to Dresden for work in munitions factories. The conservatories of art and music were allowed to remain open, however, and in 1941 Husa barely escaped deportation by gaining admission to the composition class at the Prague Conservatory. While he developed rapidly, his studies at the Conservatory were carried out in an atmosphere of constant stress and uncertainty; in the final year of the war, all classes at the Conservatory were suspended until the liberation of Czechoslovakia in 1945. The following year, Husa was granted a fellowship by the French Government and traveled to Paris, where he studied with Arthur Honegger at L'École Normale de Musique, as well as unofficially with Darius Milhaud at the Paris Conservatoire and with Nadia Boulanger. Almost immediately, Husa's music began to attract attention: his lyrical *String Quartet No. 1* was awarded the Prix Lili Boulanger and won praise from influential Parisian music critics. Although in 1948 a music critic in Prague hailed Husa as "one of the greatest hopes for Czech music," by 1949 the newly installed Communist government revoked his passport when he declined to return to Czechoslovakia to serve an oppressive regime. A refugee, Husa lived a precarious existence in Paris, earning an irregular income as a free-lance conductor. In 1954, at the invitation of the American musicologist Donald Grout, Husa accepted a position at Cornell University—initially teaching music theory and conducting the university orchestra—where he remained, teaching composition to countless young composers, until his retirement in 1992.

Husa's creative strength derives from his uncompromising individuality, logically construed aesthetic principles, and firmly held ethical beliefs. His style is capable of assimilating and adapting such varied techniques as serialism, microtones, and aleatorism within a wide expressive range. He has composed for an impressive array of instrumental combinations, and has explored virtually every important musical genre except opera. His early works are in a broadly neo-classical idiom, reflecting the influences of Honegger and Stravinsky, the Czech nationalists, and Czech and Slovak folk music. By the end of the 1950s, Husa began to move away from these styles—and the extended tonality on which they were predicated—towards a more austere, atonal idiom. He experimented with serial techniques, adapting them to his own expressive purposes, writing with characteristic vital rhythms and an unerring dramatic flair. Husa's mature style, then, is perhaps best described as a personal synthesis of all of these features: he retained the clarity and formal logic of neo-classicism, the expressive qualities and intervallic contours of the folkloric idiom, and the intricate motivic interrelationships derived from serialism—all combined with his ongoing fascination with exploiting new and unusual instrumental techniques and combinations.

Husa is best known for a series of large scores that, according to Husa biographer Byron Adams, "derive their considerable power from the combination of coruscating orchestration and formal invention with an emotional depth that reflects his political, ethical and humanitarian concerns." Foremost among such works are those Husa calls his three "manifests" (scores intended to address serious issues of international concern): *Music for Prague 1968*, *Apotheosis of this Earth* (1971, rev. 1972) and the ballet *The Trojan Women* (1981). While the introspective *String Quartet No. 3* (1968) was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1969, its success has been overshadowed by the "manifest" written the same year—*Music for Prague 1968* for concert band, which has received over 10,000 performances. Inspired by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, *Music for Prague 1968* is more than a memorial to a tragic episode in the history of one city; as Adams writes: "its cries of anguish and indignation are relevant wherever the innocent are crushed and victimized by the strong."

The fall of the Communist government in 1989 paved the way for Husa's triumphant return to Prague. On

13 February 1990, Husa realized a long-time (twenty one-year) dream—performing *Music for Prague 1968* (in the orchestral version) in Prague, conducting the State Symphony Orchestra. Husa was given a tumultuous reception by both the orchestra and the audience, and learned that tapes of his music had circulated underground, just as in his youth the forbidden scores of Bartók, Honegger, and Stravinsky were distributed in quiet defiance of the Nazi oppressors. He has since become a welcome visitor to Prague, often conducting his works with ensembles such as the Czech Philharmonic. In the fall of 1995, President Vaclav Havel of the Czech Republic recognized Husa's central importance to the ongoing tradition of Czech music by awarding him the Gold Medal of Merit of the Czech Republic—perhaps fulfilling the early critic's prophecy that Husa was “one of the greatest hopes for Czech music.”

Through his long and distinguished career, Husa has received significant recognition for his musical contributions. In addition to winning the Pulitzer Prize, Husa has been awarded: grants from the National Endowment of the Arts, Koussevitzky Foundation commissions, two Guggenheim Fellowships (1964, 1965), the Friedheim Award of the Kennedy Center (1983), the first Sudler International Wind Competition prize (1983) for *Concerto for Wind Ensemble*, the Grawemeyer Award (1993) for his *Cello Concerto*, and the Czech Academy for the Arts and Sciences Prize. He was elected to the Royal Belgian Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1974, and to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1994. He has received honorary doctorate degrees from more than ten schools, including the Cleveland Institute of Music, Ithaca College, New England Conservatory, and the Academy of Musical Arts in Prague. Husa has conducted many of this country's most prominent wind ensembles and the world's major orchestras, including those in Paris, London, Prague, Zurich, Hong Kong, Singapore, New York, and Boston. While he has written for almost every conceivable medium, his works for wind ensemble/band are generally regarded as his most significant. **Les Couleurs Fauves** (1995) is one of the latest in a list of pieces that Husa has written for wind ensemble/band, that includes *Divertimento for Brass and Percussion* (1958), *Music for Prague 1968*, and *Apotheosis of this Earth* (1971), concerti for alto saxophone (1967), percussion (1970), and trumpet (1974), and most recently *Cheetah* (2007).

Interestingly, and perhaps betraying the “visual” nature of Husa's music, Adams has written: “In [Husa's] search for colourful and novel sonorities, he creates vividly expressive musical canvases, filled with arresting timbres and startling juxtapositions of texture.” Just as many artists have been inspired by music, so have many composers found their inspiration in the world of visual art. Besides the composers whose works are featured tonight, one need only look to composers such as Morton Feldman (who was moved by the massive canvases hung in an intimate sanctuary in Houston—*Rothko Chapel*), or Henry Brant (who found sympathetic associations with Simon Rodia's “Watts Towers”—*Verticals Ascending*) to find works inspired by specific works of art. Husa recognizes, too, his kinship with visual artists—specifically, the Fauvists.

The advent of Modernism is often dated by the appearance of the Fauves in Paris in 1905; while Fauvism was once thought of as a minor, short-lived, movement, it is now recognized as having paved the way to both cubism and modern expressionism in its disregard for natural forms and its love of unbridled color. The Fauves exploded onto the scene with a wild, vibrant style of expressionistic art that shocked the critics, as described by Russell Clement:

The scandal of the Parisian art world in 1905 was Salle VII of the third annual Salon d'Automne in the Grand Palais. Its walls throbbed with raw color—color squeezed straight out of tubes, ravishing the eyes and senses, clashing in dreamy harmonies flung directly on the canvas; color that dared to tint human flesh pea green and tree trunks a violet red; color that not only refused to imitate nature, but was used to suggest form and perspective. The public was confused. Angry critics ridiculed these paintings and their makers. In jest, one critic dubbed these artists “*les fauves*” or wild beasts. (Louis Vauxcelles walked into Room VII, spotted a bronze neo-Renaissance bust of a child by sculptor Albert Marque, surrounded by the carnival of colors blazing on the walls, and wisecracked, “*Donatello parmi les fauves*”—“Donatello among the wild beasts.”) The name stuck.

*Les Fauves* (led by Henri Matisse, and including his friends Marquet, Derain, Vlaminck and Braque) greatly admired van Gogh, who said of his own work: “Instead of trying to render what I see before me, I use color in a completely arbitrary way to express myself powerfully.” The Fauvists carried this idea further, translating their feelings into color with a rough, almost clumsy style. The Fauvists believed absolutely in

color as an emotional force—color lost its descriptive qualities and became luminous, creating light rather than imitating it. As Sarah Whitfield writes: “The act of painting itself was at the heart of the matter. Fauvism was the first ‘movement’ to insist in explicit terms that a painting is the canvas and the pigments. The idea that a picture is the sum of the marks made on the canvas rather than a mirror held up to life, or to nature, or to literature accounts for the chief characteristics of the first true Fauve paintings being composed of briskly applied strokes, patches and dabs of brilliant colour.”

Clement’s description of Matisse—“While clashes and dissonance appear in his paintings, there are also incredibly subtle nuances. The forcefulness of his expression is always tempered by a lyrical freshness and exquisite harmonies.”—seems equally accurate when describing Husa’s music, especially his *Les Couleurs Fauves*, commissioned by Northwestern University School of Music in tribute to its director of bands, John Paynter, upon his retirement after forty years of teaching. (Sadly, Paynter died before the work’s premiere in November 1996.) Husa writes the following about his work:

I have always been fascinated by colors, not only in music, but also in nature and art. The paintings of the Impressionists and Fauvists have been particularly attractive to me, and their French origin accounts for the French title of my piece. The two movements gave me the chance to play with colors—sometimes gentle, sometimes raw—of the wind ensemble. I was reminded of those French painters, whom I admired as a young student in Paris. They called themselves fauvists (vivid, wild), for they used both, often powerful strokes of brushed with unmixed colors. Their paintings, though, breathe with sensitivity, serenity, and gentleness.

In the first movement, “Persistent Bells,” Husa has created a tableau where the sounds of bells are ever-present, the entire wind ensemble transformed into an enormous, resonant bell choir. In 1992, Husa said that, to serve as a contrast to *Music for Prague 1968*, he “would like to write a piece about Prague that would be beautiful and happy, because [his] years there were beautiful.” Perhaps this is it. Prague, known as the “City of Hundreds of Towers,” has used its church bells as calls of distress and calls of victory. Here, Husa seems to be creating the effect of bells ringing around the city of Prague—not in war, but in peace and beauty. A haunting melody in the oboe hovers weightlessly, answered by the distant sound of pealing bells. The solo then becomes a duet, then a trio, continuing to grow until all of the woodwinds have joined the reaching, hopeful song. This process of melodic expansion is paralleled in the underlying harmonies. Like ringing bells, sounds may slowly dissipate, but they do not stop; the fabric’s density increases as each pitch is sustained: B, A#, G#, and so on—until the entire B-major scale resonates simultaneously. Once the scale is “built,” the brass explode into a shimmering chorale of dense, bright harmonies. In palindromic fashion, the clustered scale-harmonies (forcefully articulated) break-off one at a time, leaving a lone piccolo—the wind ensemble’s smallest, highest “bell”—barely audible, nervously fading into the distance.

The modernist interest in the “primitive,” which led Matisse and his followers to adopt a deliberately “simple” approach to their painting, also led many artists to collect African masks that would become integrally important to early 20th-century art; “Ritual Dance Masks” is Husa’s attempt to aurally interpret the symbolic meaning of such “primitive” art. On a technical level, and like the first movement, “Ritual Dance Masks” is about the layering and development of motivic processes. One could speak of ostinati, canons, inversions, and retrogrades, of pitch clusters, aleatoric moments, complex poly-rhythms, and virtuosically-difficult writing—but those are just the logical, methodological tools of Husa’s craft. What he has created—through the most meticulous (if not easily-apprehended) means—is a powerful, primitive, ritualistic procession of uncommon passion. Overwhelming in its intensity, frenetic in its energy, Husa offers a compelling, if frightening, analogy to the visual Fauvists. “Ritual Dance Masks” is completely unrelenting. Propelled by the convergence of the multiple melodic ideas (underpinned by the *Bolero*-esque ostinato of the snare drum), the piece ends in a cathartic, apothecotic eruption—marked by Husa: “Exaltando.”

To me music is excitement, enjoyment, exultation. It’s such a joy to prepare a work, then to perform it. After that one can say, “I didn’t like the piece.” I would hate to create music that is boring. That would be the end.

Karel Husa