



CLEVELAND
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PROGRAM NOTES

Imani Winds

October 5, 2021 – 7:30 p.m.

Kulas Hall, CIM

Scherzo, Op. 48

Eugene Bozza

Born: Nice, 1905

Died: Valenciennes, 1991

Composed: 1944

French violinist, conductor, and prodigiously prolific composer, Eugène Bozza is particularly well remembered for his many works for wind instruments. His brief Scherzo for wind quintet is like the flight of a whole swarm of bumblebees, spirited, lively and virtuosic: a brilliant concert opener if ever there was one.

Woodwind Quintet

Elliot Carter

Born: New York, 1908

Died: New York, 2012

Composed: 1948

The Elliott Carter of the Woodwind Quintet is not yet the composer the world came to know as one of the most radical modernists in 20th-century music. The composer himself said that this is the kind of piece his former teacher, Nadia Boulanger, always wanted him to write. The two-movement quintet, which was dedicated to Boulanger, is, without a doubt, French in spirit: it combines an ingratiating melodic style and idiomatic instrumental writing with harmonic and rhythmic “spices” that keep it from becoming a routine affair. In fact, the work is much more adventurous harmonically than comparable works by Carter's French contemporaries (for instance, Jean Françaix, whose own woodwind quintet dates from the same year 1948). Carter's gentle pastorale is almost constantly shot through with chromaticism and dissonant clashes. In the second movement, the influence of jazz and ragtime is unmistakable, though the polyphonic writing remains rather intricate in spite of the light tone of the music. The flippant ending was described by French musicologist Max Noubel as “nose-thumbing.” Noubel added: “By proving how elegantly he could make this style his own, Carter became entitled to turning his back on it.”

Cinq danses profanes et sacrées (“Five Dances”)

Henri Tomasi

Born: Marseille, 1901

Died: Paris, 1971

Composed: 1959

Like his contemporary Bozza, Tomasi was born in Southern France, and had Italian roots. He, too, made his reputation mostly with his works for wind instruments, although both composers wrote prolifically in all genres. The title of Tomasi's “Profane and Sacred Dances” alludes to Debussy's famous pair of movements for harp and strings, but this little suite, dedicated to the Reicha Wind Quintet of Prague, contains a much wider range of moods. It is enough to read the movement titles (“Rustic Dance”—“Profane Dance”—“Sacred Dance”—“Wedding Dance”—“Warrior Dance”) to get an idea of the diversity of moods intended. Tomasi used a great many mixed meters, and gave each player plenty of virtuosic solo moments. The slow third movement—marked “ceremonial, like a prayer”—serves as the center of symmetry around which the more rambunctious dances are arranged. The free cadenzas for oboe and clarinet in the first movement, the startling percussion effects in the second, the alternation of playful and lyrical passages in the fourth, the harsh accents and wild ostinatos in the fifth contribute so many vivid colors to this brilliant set of character studies. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of Tomasi's death, and numerous commemorative events have been taking place in France.

Six Pieces

Anders Hillborg

Born: Sollentuna, Sweden, 1954

Composed: 2007

Swedish composer Andres Hillborg, whose large catalog of works is regularly performed all over the world, has offered the following comments on the composition on tonight's program:

The opening piece of my *Six Pieces for Wind Quintet* is written in a quasi-tonal style, remotely reminiscent of Stravinsky; it starts out with an eruptive gesture of upward scales, followed by soft, long-spun melodic lines accompanied by a gentle walking bass in the bassoon.

This scheme is repeated once, but when the opening gesture appears a third time, instead of continuing as before, the music blazes into the second Movement, a ferocious flow where the instruments imitate and echo each other in a furious tempo.

This is followed by a calm movement where the bassoon again provides a steady walking bass through an idyllic landscape featuring the flute in a repetitive perpetuum mobile-pattern.

The fourth piece, in contrast, is a wild and heavy orgy with strong focus on pulse and aggressive syncopations, mainly based on octatonic scales (=regular alternation of major and minor seconds).

The 5th piece also uses octatonic scales as basic material, but contrasts to all the other ones in being extremely calm and slow in character.

The last piece starts with wide, sustained chords suggesting vast, open landscapes, and ends with a crazed funky race on the verge of the playable.

Six Pieces for Wind Quintet was written for and commissioned by The Royal Stockholm Opera Wind Soloists in 2007.

Afro-Cuban Concerto

Valerie Coleman

Born: Louisville, 1970

Composed: 2001

Flutist-composer Valerie Coleman, who founded Imani in 1997 and played in the group for many years, wrote *Afro-Cuban Concerto* for the ensemble in 2001. The printed score contains the following commentary:

Afro-Cuban Concerto is a work that focuses on Afro-Cuban rhythms, the feel of Santeria worship, and the virtuosity of wind instruments. (Santeria worship has its origins in the Caribbean and is based on the Bantu and Yoruba beliefs of Western Africa combined with elements of Roman Catholicism.) Often mistaken for a 'neo-classic' work due to its harmonic structure, the essence within the Concerto is purely African and Cuban. All African-derived music has a basic structure from which all music from every genre (including classical) has benefitted. It is the feel of spirituality, passion, and rhythmic precisions that brings the essence of Afro-Cuban music to life in this piece. As with virtually all of the composer's works, performers are encouraged to improvise when they have solos (within the Afro-Cuban vernacular for this work), and embellish when the mood hits.

-Peter Laki

Mr. Laki is a musicologist and Visiting Associate Professor of Music at Bard College. He has been the annotator for the Society's program booklet since 2012, having previously served as annotator for the Cleveland Orchestra from 1990 to 2007. He is a native of Budapest and holds a Ph.D. in music from the University of Pennsylvania.