



Cheyenne
Symphony
Orchestra

Masterpiece 2 – Witty Winds & Boisterous Brass November 14, 2020

Fanfare for the Common Man—Aaron Copland

For the 1942-43 concert season, the distinguished English conductor of the Cincinnati Symphonic, Eugene Goossens, conceived the idea of commissioning fanfares from mostly American composers to open each of the forthcoming concerts. Those were dark times, indeed, for the world's democracies, and he sought to more or less repeat his success with a similar project in England during the First World War. The subsequent eighteen fanfares were written by many luminaries of the American music world at that time, and they vary significantly in musical style—and lasting success. The list of those to whom the various works were dedicated may seem a bit curious to us today, but they do reflect somewhat the unfocused—some would say naïve—conception of the task ahead as America went to war. I've examined them in manuscript at the Philadelphia Free Library, and all of them are eloquent, earnest responses to the world at hand. Some titles seem prosaic: *Fanfare for the Signal Corps* by Howard Hanson; some seem ambiguous: *A Fanfare for Friends* by Daniel Gregory Mason; and some a bit optimistic: *A Fanfare for the Fighting French* by Walter Piston. But only one has survived on concert programs—and everywhere else—and become a defining icon of America's self perception.

Aaron Copland was a committed populist during the 1930s—his enormously successful works from that time certainly bear that out—and what better dedicatee for a man of his persuasion than the “common man?” And for that matter, what better inspiration for the idea than the words of the Vice-President, Henry A. Wallace? Wallace, a controversial, but sincere, advocate of left-wing social and political views had given an important speech—and later entitled a book—with the phrase, “*century of the common man*,” and Copland, given his political orientation, would certainly have found resonance in the thought. That it bore fruit in the composer's psyche is self-evident.

Scored for the brass and percussion sections alone, its granite-like octaves and unisons, and open “American Sound” harmonies, punctuated by stentorian utterances from the percussion have assumed an unprecedented life in our musical culture. Even when alluded to abstractly by the legions of composers who have sought the feeling and sound of this remarkably concise work—we “know” instinctively what is being invoked. Copland knew that he had a gem on his hands, and soon used a version of the fanfare as the main theme of the last movement in one of his most important works, the Symphony No. 3. The latter work—first performed in 1946—was characterized by the composer as reflective of America's mood, having triumphed over an overwhelming challenge to its very existence. Seldom does art and popular feeling coalesce in such profound unanimity. The fanfare is now a national treasure.

Nocturno for Winds, op. 24—Felix Mendelssohn

Mendelssohn was a prodigy, born into a distinguished family of Jewish bankers and philosophers. He and his sister Fanny—also a talented composer, conductor, and pianist—were raised in a warm, intellectual, highly supportive artistic family. In point of fact, Felix and his sister were incredibly precocious. He was probably one of the best-educated major composers of all time. Voracious readers, interested in science and philosophy, and daily conversationalists with the leading minds of Germany, the siblings even started their own literary magazine in their early teens. Obviously, they matured quickly, and a stream of musical compositions soon flowed from them both. Mendelssohn was clearly one of the most important German composers of the 19th century, and infused the expressiveness of early romantic music with the clarity and intellectuality of Mozart and Haydn's classicism. This exquisite balance found expression in a wide variety of musical genres; Mendelssohn was as at home writing Protestant oratorios such as *Elijah* and *St. Paul* as he was composing chamber music and symphonies. He created a significant body of work in his relatively short life, including major works for orchestra that constitute an important part of today's repertoire. These works include five symphonies, six concert overtures, and six concertos.

His musical style reflects, to a large degree, his upbringing and his personality—it speaks of discipline, balance, and an overall cheerful, largely untroubled mien. While his compositions reflect solicitude for clear, balanced musical structures, and an obvious avoidance of excess of romantic emotion and empty virtuosity, there is nevertheless a sentimental and emotive quality to them. His personal musical voice reached maturity by the remarkable age of seventeen, a feat some say that even Mozart did not attain.

The charming little *Nocturno* for eleven wind instruments was composed in 1824, when the fifteen-year old Mendelssohn was vacationing with his father at Bad Doberan, a popular resort on the coast of the Baltic Sea. He had already composed some impressive works that year, a time when he was rapidly coming into musical maturity, and gaining a familiarity with works of significant composers such as Beethoven and Weber. Composed for the musicians of the a local court wind band—such groups were called *Harmoniemusik* in those times—his *Nocturno* expanded the usual four pairs of oboes, clarinets, and bassoons and horns with the addition of a flute, trumpet, and English bass horn (*corno inglese di basso*). The less said about the latter instrument the better; made of wood, with a metal bell and played with cup mouthpiece, it probably frightened the horses. But, the composer knew the ensemble needed a bit more bass support than the second bassoon alone could provide. So he scored for one of the many makeshift instruments needed in the brass section before finally the tuba was invented and problem solved. The latter, or perhaps string bass, is now the instrument of choice for the *Nocturno*.

Also known as *Overture für Harmoniemusik*, or *Overture for Band* in the US, the *Nocturno* has led a varied life—not only in titles, for there are versions for larger instrumentation as well. But, the one for eleven is the original. Cast in two sections, it opens with in a tranquil, bucolic vein, in the best Romantic style familiar from so many of his works, with a slightly more energetic middle section providing a bit of contrast. A spritely allegro second section provides a dashing conclusion, with the usual two main themes, a development, and recap.

Canzon Septimi Toni No. 2—Giovanni Gabrieli

There is perhaps no composer more beloved by modern brass players, and yet, relatively unknown to the general audience for symphony concerts than Giovanni Gabrieli. Standing at the juncture of the end of the Renaissance and the beginning of the Baroque eras in music, he was a musical giant whose influence spread far beyond his native Venice. Luminaries such as Heinrich Schütz traveled from Germany to study with him, and experience the glorious sound of the compositions he wrote for the ornate *Basilica di San Marco*. Among the cathedral's significant architectural features are multiple choir lofts, which inspired and situated the polychoral style for which Gabrieli and his compatriots are known, including Adrian Willaert, Giovanni's uncle and mentor, Andrea, and Claudio Monteverdi.

Fundamental to the style are multiple, relatively small groups of singers and instrumentalists, separated from each other in the multiple choir lofts overhead, who echo back and forth in a kind of call and response. This antiphonal style combines frequent sections of everyone together, as well, for a stunning acoustic experience. Today, of course, the average tourist in Venice has little idea of the musical importance that the unique architecture of the edifice fostered.

Gabrieli's second great collection of compositions was the *Sacræ Symphoniæ*, from 1597, containing both vocal and instrumental music; the *Canzon Septimi Toni No. 2* was one of the fourteen canzonas contained therein. "Canzona" is derived from the French "chanson" of the late Renaissance, basically a bouncy, little secular song. The Italians took its texture and general style and wrote compositions for instruments in like manner, and called them canzonas. "Septemi toni" simply means that what we, today, would call the key, the Italian composers of the time called the seventh mode, or mixolydian (think of G major without the F sharp).

While Gabrieli would have probably intended his canzonas for almost any combination of the popular instruments of the time, his works were often performed by groups of trombones and cornettos—the modern trumpet didn't come along until well over three hundred years later. Cornettos were wooden instruments played with cup mouthpieces and fingered rather like a recorder. They covered the soprano parts. Difficult to play well, they were characterized by one contemporary writer as "seldom well sounded, because the labor of the lips is too great." So true!

But, it doesn't matter. Today, Gabrieli's compositions are commonly played by modern brass, and they sound great! As one experiences the call and answer between the two groups and the power of them combined in this canzona, think of the stunning cathedral that inspired it and the splendid works to follow in the inimitable Italian Baroque.

Petite Symphonie—Charles Gounod

Popular acclaim in the arts is often a cruel mistress—those at the acme of public approbation, with the passage of time, can sink into "benign neglect." For example, during the first half of the 1930s, there were perhaps few Hollywood stars to equal Kay Francis. She was the highest paid actor with

Warner Brothers, making more than six times the salary of Bette Davis. Today, who remembers her except those devotees of Turner Classic Movies? And in a somewhat like situation, Charles Gounod. Of course, he is the composer of *Faust*, perhaps the most performed opera of the nineteenth century, and the ubiquitous *Funeral March for a Marionette*. But for all his great acclaim in France during the middle of the century, in this country one doesn't hear that much of his many operas, church music, and songs these days. His song, *O Divine Redeemer*, until recently was an evergreen vocal solo in church, as well as the ubiquitous *Ave Maria*. Conservative Catholics still enjoy his *St. Cecilia* mass, but in general, his corpus has fallen upon hard times.

During his heyday he was hailed for his great gift for melody, his clear, lucid musical structures, and his great respect for the tenets of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven—not to mention Palestrina. In general, he was not that active in instrumental composition, but was committed to and gifted in opera and sacred music. As he grew older, he was greatly respected, and influential upon a later generation of significant French composers such as Ravel and Massenet, but his music gradually was seen as somewhat old fashioned. With all that in mind, the composition of the little masterpiece, *Petite Symphonie*, is much-treasured gift of his old age.

The most acclaimed flautist of the latter nineteenth century in France—or perhaps, anywhere—was Paul Taffanel, professor of flute and virtuoso member of the best orchestras. Among his many accomplishments was the founding in 1879 of the *Société de Musique de la Chambre pour Instruments à Vent* (Chamber Music Society for Wind Instruments), a group whose aim was to promulgate the burgeoning interest in music and performance of wind music in France. Coincidentally, the great nineteenth-century instrument designer Theodore Boehm had made significant improvements to woodwind instruments, encouraging players and composers alike to support this increased attention. The result was a significant growth in important compositions for the woodwinds, in various combinations. One of the respected composers from whom Taffanel requested compositions was Gounod.

The result was the 1885 *Petite Symphonie* for woodwind nonet (a pair of horns traditionally had been a standard part of the small wind band). The addition of a flute to the conventional wind octet was not only a felicitous musical stroke, but, no doubt, was also recognition for Taffanel's talent and leadership in the society. While, of course, Gounod was renowned for vocal music, we should remember that his early musical training included study with the esteemed Czech composer, Anton Reicha, professor at the Paris conservatory. A prolific composer for many genres, Reicha is known particularly for his twenty-five highly praised works for woodwind quintet. Performed widely in Europe, they set new standards of technical challenge and musical integrity for that genre, and it can be assumed that they had some influence on the pupil Gounod.

While characteristic of the romantic musical style of the day in France, the *Petite Symphonie* is nevertheless founded in the transparent, straightforward elements of the musical Classicism of, say, a symphony by Haydn or Mozart. Accordingly, Gounod provides four movements that mirror the structure of a prototypical Classic symphony.

The first movement begins with a slow introduction—like so many of Haydn's—followed by a cheerful, bustling allegro in the expected sonata form.

The second movement features a ravishingly lyrical solo for flute—its beauty is equaled by few in the literature. A rollicking scherzo follows, evoking a bucolic hunting scene. The *finale* is a jaunty rondo, whose melodic invention just never seems to falter, and is a perfect example of the composer's innate gifts.

Selections from *The Perfect Fool*—Gustav Holst/Friedman

Gustav Holst is one of England's most revered composers, creator of musical works in great variety: choral music, songs, band music, orchestral works, ballet, and more. His musical purview was remarkably diverse, and his compositions are frequently performed and appreciated in Great Britain. His popularity there bears comparison with his good friend and fellow composer, Ralph Vaughan Williams. In this country the matter is somewhat different. His reputation rests largely, and solidly, upon *The Planets*, and his two immortal works for band, *Suites No. 1 and No. 2 for Military Band*. It is hard, indeed, to participate in American public school music band programs without having performed one or both of the latter classics. They simply stand at the top of the repertoire for band, and almost every American band student knows them well. On the other hand, however, those who frequent professional orchestra concerts in this country largely know Holst through his acclaimed orchestral work, *The Planets*.

Born of German and Latvian descent in rural England to a musical, middle-class family, Holst received a musical education early, playing the violin and piano, and later taking up the trombone, the mastery of which his father thought would help his asthma. Holst worked for a while as village organist and choirmaster before attending the Royal College of Music, where he met his life-long friend Vaughan Williams. He eventually focused on the trombone, and earned a modest living early on as a member of various orchestras. He soon gave that life up, however, and spent the rest of his life teaching music in a private girls' school.

His musical style is more personally idiomatic than perhaps most significant composers. It is a reflection of his life-long devotion to Hindu philosophy and Sanskrit texts, a deep interest in traditional English folksong, and a selective employment of various contemporary "modern" musical elements. One will hear modality, bi-tonality, poly-tonality, marvelous cross rhythms, masterful counterpoint, and other progressive techniques, but withal, his works have a curious accessibility to them. And they all seem to be unique. He resisted being pigeon-holed, and perhaps his works are reflective of the man's somewhat enigmatic personal qualities.

Holst wrote some eleven operas, but one would have to say that most of them enjoyed minor or no significant success. However, after the great acclaim of *The Planets* in 1914, his reputation as a major composer was secure. At the end of the war, while working with army veterans (he was always comfortable with and devoted to teaching amateurs, youth, and other non-professionals), he conceived the idea of a rather unusual opera. *The Perfect Fool* was the result, and first performed at Covent Garden in 1923. The work of parody was vaguely a send up of the major nineteenth-century operatic composers and their works: Wagner, Verdi, and their ilk. Unfortunately, the libretto bordered on incomprehensibility and the work was in general, a resounding flop.

What we have left is the attractive, dynamic ballet music that opens the opera, and it has enjoyed widespread performance and popularity as an orchestral suite since. And, as an arrangement for large brass choir, it fits very well. Those familiar with *The Planets* will easily identify many of the affinities between these two works.

The suite's three major sections constitute a ballet danced by the Spirits of Earth, Water, and Fire, beginning with an invocation (depicted in stentorian trombones) by a wizard summoning the Earth Spirits in a nighttime rite. His musical summons becomes a leitmotif throughout the ballet. The Earth Spirits are not the most sensitive nor sophisticated, and their stomping, grotesque dance in the off-kilter 7/8 time aptly evokes their subterranean abode. The dance of the Spirits of Water follows, and they're much nicer entities. In a gauzy serenity, they present "the essence of love distilled from Aether." (The muted brass harmonies sound remarkably modern: Stan Kenton in the early 1920s!) A solo euphonium leads us to the last dance, one for the Spirits of Fire, and a maniacal conflagration it is: "burning, scorching, blasting." A relentless pulse leads to an apparent incineration, followed by fitful dying embers and a return of the opening invocation of the wizard, who apparently tired of it all, falls asleep.

Hammers—Allison Loggins-Hull

This unusual composition for solo flute and four percussionists is unique in a variety of ways, but typical of the wide-ranging musical imagination of the composer. She is clearly in the forefront of avant-garde composers for flute with various other instruments, but is increasingly writing for larger ensembles, as well. A virtuoso performer, Loggins-Hull is engaged in an active career of composing and performing, not only in the New York City area, but nationally, as well. A graduate of SUNY Purchase in flute performance, she also holds a MA in composition from NYU. The breadth of her music activities is impressive: composition, solo performances, television, radio, movies—you name it. To that, she adds a dedicated career in education at a variety of distinguished institutions.

Her musical style is nothing, if not imaginative. Electronic effects, elaborate percussion, vocals for the flutist, she consistently challenges the listener in a constant kaleidoscope of novel and creative musical concepts. *Hammers* is a frenetic, herky-jerky composition for solo flute and percussion ensemble—the latter composed primarily of an imposing variety of drums, played by four percussionists. Formally, it's rather like a rondo, that is, a musical idea that begins and ends a composition, and which returns from time to time, with a somewhat limited number of contrasting ideas heard in between.

The first idea is a kind of "hiccupping" fragment that is—well—"hammered" away at, followed by a completely different idea of sustained, soft conjunct tones down low. These ideas alternate until we reached the more-or-less middle of the composition, that takes us to the higher regions of the flute range. The percussion section is featured in an interlude before a return to the exploration of the ideas from first section that brings us to an end of this rather remarkable piece. Admittedly, most of us would find the work an advanced exercise in musical style. Yet, one commentator aptly has pointed out that it has

more than a little in common with the frenzied duet between violin and percussion that ends Stravinsky's classic chamber work *L'Histoire du soldat* of a century ago!

Music for the Royal Fireworks, HWV 351—George Frideric Handel

Handel, of course, shares the bill with J. S. Bach as the two dominant, most respected, and influential composers of the late Baroque period—roughly the first half of the 1700s. And while they both exemplify the basic musical styles of the time, they differ in many important ways. Bach was a servant of the church, whose cantatas and other sacred works—as well as works for keyboard—are one of the great legacies of music. He was inspired by Italian vocal style, French dance rhythms, and German contrapuntal traditions, and integrated them into the peerless music that we know. He lived modestly in small towns, never traveled very far, and while not an obscure composer, was primarily known for his ability as an organist.

Handel, on the other hand, lived among the “rich and famous,” garnered his reputation from his many operas, traveled freely, and was in the employ of earls, princes, and kings. He became a British subject, grew rich, and was buried with state honors in Westminster Abbey. In contradistinction to Bach, Handel was a master of composing in the various national styles, choosing to preserve their distinctive characteristics—a “coördinator” of national styles, as one scholar deemed him. He early on spent time in Italy, composing operas, cantatas, and oratorios, and learning well the Italian style. Returning to Germany, he became the head of music for the Elector of Hanover, whom we all remember as the future King George I of Great Britain. Handel moved to London permanently in 1712, and soon became the musical toast of the country, esteemed for his operas in the Italian style, and, of course, later, his oratorios. The last decade of his life was marred by ill health, a serious accident, and by his death in 1759, a botched cataract operation that had left him blind.

His integration into the musical life of the nation at the highest level was complete. He furnished many compositions for the British monarchy, and the *Music for the Royal Fireworks* is representative. Wars between the great powers of Europe plagued the Western world during most of the 1740s, 50s, and 60s. We all remember the French and Indian Wars in this country—sideshowes to European wars, including the Seven Years' War of 1756-63. The precursor to that war was the War of the Austrian Succession of 1740-48. In both wars, all the big powers fought each other under a variety of complex, often deceptive pretenses. In any case the peace treaty that ended the first conflict—the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748)—was the occasion for a great celebration in London. And in the spirit of the extravagant festivities, Handel, England's greatest composer, was called upon to provide the music to accompany a stunning fireworks show in London's Green Park.

The gala event was devised and masterminded by Italians, who came to design and build the pavilions, and oversee the fireworks. A really big show it was, with over a hundred cannons, twenty-four oboes, twelve bassoons, nine trumpets, nine horns, and a gaggle of drums. King George was adamant that only these wind instruments be employed, for they constituted the military

bands of the time, but Handel later added optional string parts. For this event Handel provided a suite consisting of five movements: an overture, a bourée, a siciliana, an allegro, and two successive minuets

Music for the Royal Fireworks opens with an overture. In those days there were more or less two kinds—French and Italian—and this one is French. Stemming from its use in French operas of the century before, its standard form is one that opens slowly, with the stately dotted rhythms so appropriate for the operas of the court of Louis XIV. That quickly yields to a faster section, and then ends with a return of the pompous opening. Music lovers will remember that Handel's overture to his evergreen *Messiah* is exactly in this style.

Handel's music was a great success, and along with his *Water Music* (written much earlier), joined *Messiah* as his greatest hits. Alas, that could not be said of the celebration, itself. After rain delays, the fireworks caught the temporary pavilions on fire—along with a woman's clothes—and several soldiers were grievously injured by cannons and rockets. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*

--Wm. E. Runyan
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