

PROGRAM NOTES BY MARK ARNEST

ERIC EWAZEN: CHAMBER SYMPHONY

Overview: Eric Ewazen

Born: March 1, 1954:

Work Composed: 1985

Why It Matters: An exciting and approachable work by a major contemporary American composer



Eric Ewazen studied composition at the Eastman School of Music and The Juilliard School. An eclectic group of teachers include ultra-serialist Milton Babbitt, crossover composer Gunther Schuller, and neo-Romantic Joseph Schwantner, whose *September Canticle* and *Chasing Light* were featured on earlier Chamber Orchestra of the Strings programs this season. (It is Schwantner who has the strongest audible influence on Ewazen.) After completing his studies at Juilliard, Ewazen was hired as a faculty member and has remained there ever since. His music has been performed by orchestras and ensembles worldwide.

Ewazen is not afraid to be influenced by those around him. "When I compose I'm always listening to music by a lot of different composers," he told Bruce Duffie in a 1998 interview. "Composers of the past, composers around today, and world music. I try to keep an open mind about everything."

Some of these influences appear in the early Chamber Symphony. There are hints of Aaron Copland in its harmonic language, and even more hints of Igor Stravinsky, in the Petrushka-like chord progressions and in the sudden cuts from one texture to another.

The piece is very effectively scored. The sonic richness is partly due to the presence of more percussion than most works for chamber orchestra, and partly due to the very prominent piano part: Were it just a little larger and more virtuosic, Ewazen would have been forced to call his piece a concerto instead of a symphony.

The overall form is one of compression, with each movement shorter than the one before. The first movement proceeds in a series of waves, continually pressing forward, arriving, and jumping off in unexpected directions, with brief moments of repose interspersed in the hubub. The slow second movement is the work's heart; Ewazen has described it as "a peaceful, astral song." The finale is fast and exciting, pausing only once, two-thirds of the way through, to catch its breath for the thrilling finish.

Ewazen has written of the work: "My Chamber Symphony was composed in 1985 for the Fairfield Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Thomas Crawford, who commissioned the work. The wonderful pianist, Margaret Mills, first played the prominent piano part. The piano takes the role of the harpsichord in Baroque orchestral music. It is omnipresent – a resonant support for the numerous solo lines in the orchestra singing out above. The first movement is bold and dynamic, with awesome chords and dramatic gestures. There is a feeling of grandeur in this movement. The second movement alternates powerful string and percussion chords with quiet, peaceful woodwind melodies. The final movement is a roaring rondo, spinning its way towards a return to the grand gestures and themes of the first movement, making the entire work a large arch

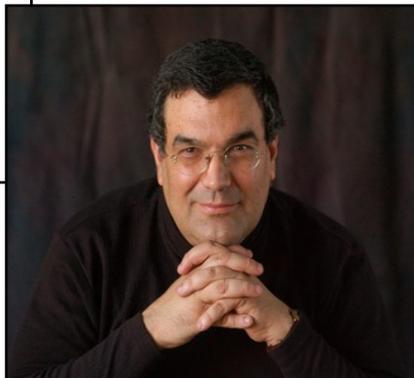
OFER BEN-AMOTS: CONCERTINO FOR CLARINET, GUITAR & ORCHESTRA "FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT"

Overview: Ofer Ben-Amots

Born: October 20, 1955

Work Composed: 2012

Why It Matters: A powerful recent work by a Colorado composer who may be better-known internationally than locally



Ofer Ben-Amots is a long-time member of Colorado College's music faculty whose work has been performed by many ensembles in the United States, Asia, and Europe. His teachers include Alberto Ginastera and George Crumb; like Ginastera's music, Ben-Amots's music combines sophistication with the emotional directness of folk music. The *Concertino* was originally composed for clarinet, mandolin and orchestra; the guitar part was created by one of today's soloists, Colin McAllister. Ben-Amots has written of this piece:

The three movements of *Concertino* represent three categories within the world of perceived Jewish sound and Jewish musical traditions: The first movement is based on the Hebrew biblical cantillation tradition; the second is representative of the Sephardic/Judeo-Spanish folksong (Ladino) styles; and the third is based on elements of the composite melos of the traditions of eastern European *Klezmorim*. Thus, the *Concertino* works as a kaleidoscope of Jewish musical experiences represented three distinct yet complementary traditions.

The first movement, titled *Les cieux et la terre* (The Heavens and the Earth), is contextually, rhythmically, and structurally based on the 148th Psalm. The Psalm is a passionate ode to the Creator and His divine manifestation through nature and human life across the universe. For the transformation of this psalmodic text into music I was concerned with two elements: first, the linguistic pulse of the ancient biblical Hebrew, which gives the music its ever-changing meters, energetic rhythms, and unrelenting drive. This results from the unique nature of the Hebrew language, which is rhythmically pungent, even percussive, and based on constant interchange between short and long syllables. Here is a rhythmic example of the opening verse:

The second element was the poetic concept presented in the text: the heavens vs. the earth, universe vs. the planet, heights vs. depths, and so on. The contrasting nature of these elements is described in the following verses:

"Hallelujah, Praise ye the LORD from the heavens; praise Him in the heights." (Psalm 148, verse 1)

"Praise the LORD from the earth, ye sea-monsters, and all deeps." (Psalm 148, verse 7)

Finally, like an awe-inspiring summary both Heaven and Earth join in praise together:

"Let them praise the name of the LORD, for His name alone is exalted; His glory is above the earth and heaven." (Psalm 148, verse 13)

The musical expression of these contrary elements is reflected in the use of high-range treble instruments (flutes, clarinet, trumpets, violins) versus low-range instruments (trombone, bassoons, cellos and basses.) Finally, the music is a mixture of a coronation fanfare and a wild improvisatory-like dance.

The second movement, *Une chanson oubliée* (A Forgotten Song), is a slow, lyrical dirge-like melody in a Sephardi Judeo-Spanish style. The harmony sits mostly on a single pedal tone, a continuous drone is played in the manner of an oud – a traditional pear-shaped Arabic lute. The solo clarinet imitates the soulful chant with rhythmically free ornamental patterns throughout.

The third and final movement, *La danse de lumière et de joie* (The Dance of Light and Joy), is a festive dance typical of those played by *Klezmorim* and written in a traditionally associative Bulgar rhythm. In this unique rhythmic pattern, the regular 8/8 meter is constantly divided into the irregular count of 3+3+2. In the middle of the movement the solo clarinet performs an improvisatory-like conversation with various instruments from within the orchestra. This musical dialogue allows for the presentation of several contrasting yet complementary instrumental characters.

JACQUES IBERT: CHANSONS DE DON QUICHOTTE

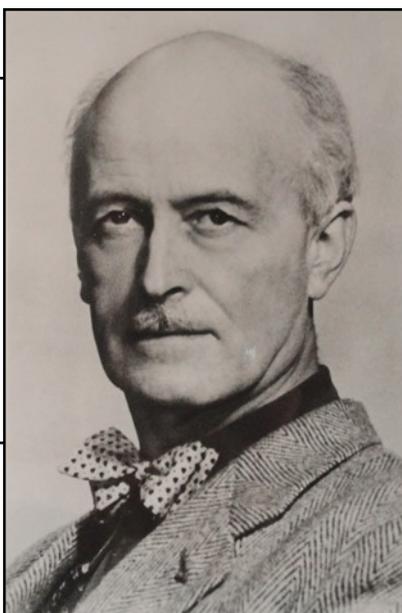
Overview: Jacques Ibert

Born: August 15, 1890, Paris, France

Died: February 5, 1962, Paris, France

Work Composed: 1932

Why It Matters: A charming and evocative work by a composer who has not received the recognition he deserves



Jacques Ibert (1890-1962) is one of music's true eclectics. The French composer's output ranges from the the exotic Impressionism of *Escales*, conjuring visions of pith-helmeted explorers, to the flippant Neoclassicism of the *Divertissement*, to the *Flute Concerto's* jazz-influenced finale.

Manuel Cervantes' *Don Quixote* has been the inspiration for many compositions, notably Richard Strauss's tone poem of the same name, Manuel de Falla's puppet opera, *El Retablo de Maese Pedro*, and several ballets. But no composer was more deeply influenced by Cervantes's novel than Ibert. In addition to these songs – composed for G.W. Pabst's 1933 film starring the legendary Russian bass Feodor Chaliapin – Ibert composed the 1935 choreographic poem *Le chevalier errant* for soloists, chorus, and orchestra, and the 1942 *Sarabande pour Dulcinée* for orchestra.

Chanson du départ

Ce château neuf, ce nouvel édifice
Tout enrichi de marbre et de porphyre,
Qu'amour bâtit château de son empire,
Où tout le ciel a mis son artifice,
Est un rempart, un fort contre vice,
Où la vertu maîtresse se retire,
Que l'œil regarde, et que l'esprit admire,
Forçant les cœurs à lui faire service.
C'est un château, fait de telle sorte
Que nul ne peut approcher de la porte
Si des grands Rois il n'a sauvé sa race,
Victorieux, vaillant et amoureux.
Nul chevalier, tant soit aventureux,
Sans être tel ne peut gagner la place.

(Pierre de Ronsard)

Chanson à Dulcinée

Un an me dure la journée
Si je ne vois ma Dulcinée.
Mais, Amour a peint son visage,
Afin d'adoucir ma langueur,
Dans la fontaine et le nuage,
Dans chaque aurore et chaque fleur.
Un an me dure la journée
Si je ne vois ma Dulcinée.
Toujours proche et toujours lointaine,
Étoile de mes longs chemins.
Le vent m'apporte son haleine
Quand il passe sur les jasmins.
Un an me dure la journée
Si je ne vois ma Dulcinée.

Pabst's first choice as composer was Maurice Ravel. However, Ravel's declining health prevented him from meeting the deadline, and Ibert was hired as a replacement. (Ravel eventually completed three songs, published as *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*. It was his last composition. He also sued the filmmakers, to no avail.)

Like Ravel's songs, Ibert's have an archaic tinge. In the first, *Don Quixote* mistakes a stable for a sumptuous castle. The second and third songs both praise his beloved Dulcinea; in the final song, *Don Quixote* asks Sancho Panza not to mourn his death, for Quixote is destined for immortality. In its original setting, the song accompanies the movie's most famous image: From the flames of *Don Quixote's* burning library emerges the novel that will indeed make him immortal.

Song of the departure

This new castle, this new edifice,
Enriched with marble and porphyry
That love built to guard his empire
To which all heaven has lent its skill,
Is a rampart, a stronghold against evil,
Where Mistress Virtue can take refuge,
Whom the eye observes and the spirit admires,
Compelling hearts to pay her homage.
This castle is fashioned in such a way
That no one can approach its gate,
Unless he is descended from great Kings,
With victory, valor, and love.
No knight, however bold,
Without such merit, can enter here.

Song for Dulcinea

A day seems like a year
If I do not see my Dulcinea.
But to sweeten my languishing,
Love has painted her face,
In fountains and clouds,
In every dawn and every flower.
A day seems like a year
If I do not see my Dulcinea.
Ever near and ever far,
Star of my weary journeying,
Her breath is brought me on the breeze,
As it passes over jasmine flowers.
A day seems like a year
If I do not see my Dulcinea.

Chanson du Duc

Je veux chanter ici la Dame de mes songes
Qui m'exalte au dessus de ce siècle de boue
Son cœur de diamant est vierge de mensonges
La rose s'obscurcit au regard de sa joue

Pour Elle, j'ai tenté les hautes aventures
Mon bras a délivré la princesse en servage
J'ai vaincu l'Enchanteur, confondu les parjures parjures
Et ployé l'univers à lui rendre hommage.

Dame par qui je vais, seul dessus cette terre,
Qui ne soit prisonnier de la fausse apparence
Je soutiens contre tout Chevalier téméraire
Votre éclat non pareil et votre précellence.

Chanson de la mort

Ne pleure pas Sancho, ne pleure pas, mon bon.
Ton maître n'est pas mort.
Il n'est pas loin de toi.
Il vit dans une île heureuse
Où tout est pur et sans mensonges.
Dans l'île enfin trouvée où tu viendras un jour.
Dans l'île désirée, O mon ami Sancho!
Les livres sont brûlés et font un tas de cendres.
Si tous les livres m'ont tué
Il suffit d'un pour que je vie
Fantôme dans la vie, et réel dans la mort.
Tel est l'étrange sort du pauvre Don Quichotte.

(2-4: Alexandre Arnoux)

Song of the Duke

I wish now to praise the lady of my dreams,
Who lifts me above this squalid age.
Her diamond heart is devoid of deceit,
The rose grows dim beside her cheeks.
For her I've embarked on great adventures: Princesses in thrall I've
freed with my arm,
I've vanquished sorcerers, confounded
perjurers,
And compelled the universe to pay her homage. Lady, for whom I
travel this earth alone,
Who is not deceived by false pretenses,
Against any rash knight I shall uphold
Your peerless beauty and perfection.

Song of death

Weep not, Sancho,
Weep not, good fellow,
Your master is not dead,
He is not far from you,
He lives on a happy isle,
Where all is pure and truthful,
On this isle that he has finally found,
Where you shall also come one day,
on this longed-for isle,
oh Sancho, my friend.

Books have been burnt
To a heap of ashes.
If all those books have caused my death,
It will take but one to make me live;
A phantom in life
And real in death.
Such is the strange fate
Of poor Don Quixote. Ah!

ROBERT SCHUMANN: OVERTURE, SCHERZO & FINALE, OP. 52

Overview: Robert Schumann

Born: June 8, 1810, Zwickau, Germany

Died: July 29, 1856, Endenich, Germany

Work Composed: 1841

Why It Matters: A seldom-heard piece from one of the creative peaks of Schumann's life



It's generally dangerous to conflate a composer's personal and creative lives. Beethoven, for instance, wrote his despairing Heiligenstadt Testament at the same time he was composing his sunny Symphony No. 2. But in the case of Schumann, personal life and creative life are often inseparable.

His creative output in the 1830s – Schumann's 20s – is dominated by piano music, embodying his love for pianist Clara Wieck. In 1840, as the couple overcomes the final obstacles to their marriage, Schumann is inspired to compose a vast number of lieder, sometimes two or three in a day. And in 1841, the newlywed Schumann turns to the orchestra – encouraged by Clara, who had written to him in 1839, "Dear Robert, don't take it amiss if I tell you that I've been seized by the desire to encourage you to write for orchestra. Your imagination and your spirit are too great for the weak piano."

Schumann did nothing by half measures, and his first orchestral pieces poured out of him in a torrent that matched the previous year's lieder. He sketched his First Symphony in four days in January; that summer and fall he would compose the piece that in revised form we know as the Fourth Symphony. In between he would compose the Overture, Scherzo & Finale, in three days in April. Schumann had trouble classifying this piece, referring to it as a suite, a symphonette, and a symphony before deciding on a title.

The overture is sunny and pleasant. It's in sonata form, but Schumann minimizes sonata-form drama by omitting the usual central development section. Like many other works from this period of Schumann's life, it begins with a rhythmically indistinct motto theme that generates other themes in the work. This motto has two parts: The first part leaps upwards before ending with its opening two notes in reverse order; the second part is an energetic upbeat followed by a descending arpeggio. (The first part is closely related to the motto with which Schumann opens his 1843 oratorio *Das Paradies und die Peri*.) This motto, however, is used loosely – its relation to the main theme is real but sub-

tle, and it's most recognizable in transitions and as accompaniments. The second theme is rhythmically related to the first, but more lyrical in nature. In the coda – instantly recognizable through its new tempo – Schumann cleverly mixes elements of the previous themes, and foreshadows the theme of the following scherzo.

The scherzo's rhythm recalls the scurrying finale of *Kreisleriana*. The trio is so lovely that Schumann is compelled to repeat it near the end of the piece; and the coda refers back to the first movement.

The joyous finale threatens to become a fugue, but never does, despite lots of thematic imitation. It's a full sonata form in which the central development section is based on the closing theme, seeming like the last guest at the party who refuses to leave. The recapitulation is more adventurous than most Schumann recapitulations, with a good deal of additional development, and he prolongs the tension by presenting much of the material in the "wrong" key; the home key triumphs only in the coda.

The piece has never been common on concert programs, which Schumann scholar John Daverio ascribes to its mix of simplicity and sophistication. But it's extremely appealing.