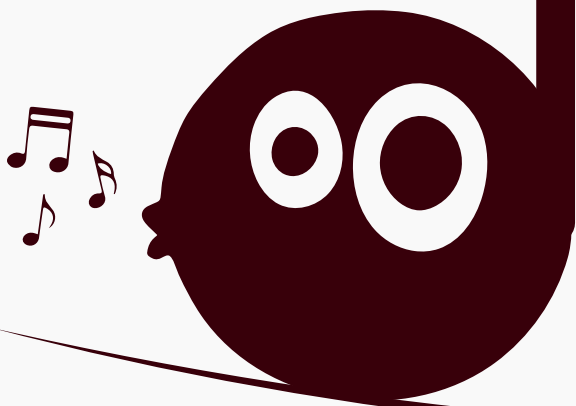


Octavio Más-Arocas, Music Director

SINGING & STRINGING

Saturday, April 15, 2023

7:30pm at Kaufman Auditorium



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Claudia Drosen

String players are listed alphabetically.

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Marquette Symphony Orchestra

Octavio Más-Arocas, Principal Conductor

presents

Singing and Stringing

Saturday, April 15, 2023 – 7:30 p.m.

Louis G. Kaufman Auditorium

Symphony No. 2 in B minor Alexander Borodin

I. Allegro moderato

II. Scherzo: Prestissimo; Allegretto

III. Andante

IV. Finale: Allegro

INTERMISSION

THE INTERMISSION WILL BE 15 MINUTES IN DURATION

Chichester Psalms* Leonard Bernstein

Movement 1. Psalm 108

Psalm 100

Movement 2. Psalm 23

Psalm 2

Movement 3. Psalm 131

Psalm 133

Nadia Finley, soprano

Anna Morozov, alto

Noah Guernsey, tenor

Dawson Del Preto, baritone

Jack Johnson, boy soprano

Toward the Unknown Region* Ralph Vaughan Williams

*with NMU University Choir and Arts Chorale



Afterglow immediately following the concert at Holiday Inn of Marquette

Octavio Más-Arocas, Musical Director

Octavio Más-Arocas is a versatile and dynamic conductor whose achievements demonstrate his talent and musicianship. Más-Arocas is the Director of Orchestras and Professor of Orchestral Conducting at Michigan State University College of Music, and serves as Music Director and Conductor of the Mansfield Symphony Orchestra in Ohio, Music Director and Conductor of the Marquette Symphony Orchestra in Michigan, Music Director and Conductor of the Clinton Symphony in New York, and Conductor-in-Residence at the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music in California.

Mr. Más-Arocas served as Principal Conductor of the Green Bay Symphony Orchestra, Wisconsin, and held the positions of Director of Orchestras and Professor of Orchestral Conducting at Ithaca College in New York, Director of Orchestral Studies and Opera Conductor at the Lawrence University Conservatory of Music in Wisconsin, Director of Orchestral Studies and Associate Professor of Conducting at the Baldwin Wallace University Conservatory of Music in Ohio, Director of Orchestras at the Interlochen Arts Academy in Michigan, Resident Conductor of the Sewanee Summer Music Festival in Tennessee, and Assistant conductor of the National Repertory Orchestra in Colorado. In 2013, simultaneously to his work with the Lawrence Symphony Orchestra, Mr. Más-Arocas was the Resident Conductor of the Unicamp Symphony Orchestra in Campinas, Brazil, where he also was a Visiting Professor of conducting at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas. Mr. Más-Arocas spends part of his summers in the Grand Traverse area, where he continues his association as conductor at the Interlochen Center for the Arts.

An award-winner conductor, Mr. Más-Arocas won the Robert J. Harth Conducting Prize at the Aspen Music Festival, the Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy Award, given by Kurt Masur, is the recipient of the Thelma A. Robinson Award from the Conductors Guild, a Prize Winner of the Third European Conductors Competition, and a winner of the National Youth Orchestra of Spain Conductors Competition. Mr. Más-Arocas was selected by the League of American Orchestras to conduct the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra in a showcase event during the League's National Conference in Dallas.

Chosen by Kurt Masur, Mr. Más-Arocas was awarded the prestigious Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy Scholarship. Consequently, he worked as Maestro Masur's assistant with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and the Helsinki Radio Orchestra, and made his German conducting debut with the Leipziger Symphonie-orchester. The offer came after Mr. Más-Arocas' New York debut concert sharing the podium with Maestro Masur and the Manhattan School of Music Symphony.



In the last few years Mr. Más-Arocas has conducted orchestra across North and South America and Europe including the Filarmonica George Enescu in Romania, the Orquesta de Valencia and Granada City Orchestra in Spain, the Leipziger Symphonieorchester in Germany, the Orquestra Sinfônica da

Unicamp in Brazil, the Green Bay, Traverse City, Bluewater, Catskill, Clinton, Fort Worth, Spokane, Toledo, Phoenix, Memphis, Kansas City, and San Antonio Symphonies, the National Repertory Orchestra, the Manhattan School of Music Symphony, the orchestras of Viana do Castelo and Artave in Portugal, the Interlochen Philharmonic, the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México Philharmonic, the Rosario Symphony in Argentina, Kharkov Symphony in Ukraine, the National Youth Orchestras of Portugal and Spain, the Pescara Symphony in Italy, the Amsterdam Brass in the Netherlands, and the Ciudad Alcalá de Henares Symphony. In addition, Mr. Más-Arocas has served as assistant conductor at the Madrid Royal Opera House.

Mr. Más-Arocas was assistant conductor of the National Repertory Orchestra, which he conducted in subscription, family, and pops concerts. As the Resident Conductor at the Sewanee Summer Music Festival he conducted the Festival, Symphony, and Cumberland Orchestras. Other festival appearances include the Aspen Music Festival, the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, the Festival Internacional Carlos Gomes in Campinas, Brazil, the Interlochen Music Festival, the Bach Festival at Baldwin Wallace University, and the MidAmerican Center for Contemporary Music.

His ability to work, inspire, and transform young talents

—continued on page 5

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Dr. Erin Colwitz, Director
Jan Brodersen, Rehearsal Conductor
Theresa Camilli, accompanist
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Soprano

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Samantha Elder

Tenor

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Harrison Bouch
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Michael Buhler
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Dawson Del Preto
Kenneth Hickmott
Josh Sabin

Octavio Más-Arocas ——— *continued from page 4*

has led him to be a frequent guest conductor with prominent music education organizations and ensembles around the world. He has worked with the World Youth Symphony Orchestra, the national youth orchestras of Portugal and Spain, has conducted All-State Honor Orchestras, and has been in residence with university orchestras in Chicago, Cornell University, Portugal, and Brazil. Mr. Más-Arocas has lead tours with the National Youth Orchestra “Templarios” of Portugal, the Interlochen Symphony, the Baldwin Wallace Symphony, and toured Argentina with the Silleda Wind Symphony.

In demand as conducting teacher, Mr. Más-Arocas has taught workshops and masterclasses in the USA, Portugal, Brazil, and Spain and is currently on the faculty of two of the world most competitive conducting workshops, the Cabrillo Festival Conducting Workshop, which attracts the most talented conducting students from all around the world, and the Ithaca International Conducting Masterclass. He has taught at the Queens College Conducting Workshop in New York and leads the very selective graduate orchestral conducting program at Ithaca College.

Mr. Más-Arocas is an alumnus of the prestigious American Academy of Conducting at Aspen, where he studied with David Zinman. He completed doctoral studies and his main mentors include Kurt Masur, Harold Farberman, and Emily Freeman Brown.

NMU University Choir

Dr. Erin Colwitz, Director
Jan Brodersen, Rehearsal Conductor
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Corra Haen and Jessica Johnson, student conductors

Soprano

Emily Bonneville
Heide Gallagher
Jessica Johnson*
Aura Wahl-Piotrowski
Madison Barker-Balding
Abbi Bruhnke
Sophia Balzarini
Isabelle Goldammer
Samantha Elder
Stacy Jo Schiller
Jaymes Winn

Tenor

Noah Guernsey*
Darren Hicks
Zephyrus Choberka

Alto

Ava Fett
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Symphony No. 2 in B minor

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Scherzo: Prestissimo; Allegretto
- III. Andante
- IV. Finale: Allegro

Alexander Borodin
Born 1833—Died 1887



Alexander Borodin was born in St. Petersburg, Russia in 1883. His father was Prince Luka Gedvanishvili. In keeping with the common practice at the time, Borodin was registered as the lawful son of one of Prince Luka's serfs, Porfiry Borodin. Borodin was what some called a "weekend composer," a fact which he admitted himself without any hesitation. "I'm a composer in search of oblivion; I'm always slightly ashamed to admit I compose." So said one of the most brilliant Russian scientists of his generation, for whom composing was only a hobby. Welcome to the extraordinary world of genius melodist Alexander Borodin."

As a young boy he was both an avid admirer of fine music and extremely interested in chemistry. By his teen years he played the piano, flute and cello, and marveled at the beauty of melody and rhythm. The year 1850 would bring his passion for the sciences to the forefront, as Borodin entered the Medico-Surgical Academy at St. Petersburg, where he studied anatomy, botany, chemistry, crystallography and zoology. Upon graduation he spent a year as house surgeon in a military hospital, followed by three years of more advanced scientific studies in western Europe.

In 1862, he became a professor at the Academy, and ten years later played a leading role in establishing medical courses for women. He then wrote an important textbook and it was Borodin the scientist rather than Borodin the musician who was honored by the Russian (Soviet) government. He would go on to spend the rest of his life lecturing and supervising student work.

But what of his music? Well, also in 1862, Borodin met with Balakirev, the leader of a group of nationalist composers who would later be known as "The Five"



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(Balakirev, Mussorgsky, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov and Cui). The twenty-nine-year-old studied with Balakirev and started to write his first symphony. Balakirev was able to help Borodin deal with his self-doubt and notions that his compositions were inconsequential. Later Borodin would go on to compose the short orchestral tone poem *On the Steppes of Central Asia* which he dedicated to Liszt.

In Germany in 1863, Borodin met a talented young pianist named Ekaterina Protopopova. Their friendship deepened into love on a trip to Baden-Baden where they were engaged and then married that same year. Their home life was full of chaos, but in a good way. They didn't adhere to set meals times, etc., and they had many uninvited guests. But Borodin remained happy and devoted to his wife, his home, and his joyous hobby, music composition.

Tchaikovsky wrote about Borodin (rather harshly) that he possessed "a very great talent, which however has come to nothing for the want of teaching and because blind fate has led him into the science laboratory instead of a vital musical existence." The only time Borodin could compose without interruption was

when he was too ill to give a lecture. So it was that his friends in the musical world jokingly wished him ill rather than well upon seeing him. The composer did in fact stay relatively healthy, so it is no mystery that his musical output was fairly slim. Borodin needed long periods of time to write his works, and that left both his last symphony and the opera *Prince Igor*, unfinished. Between them, Rimsky-Korsakov and Alexander Glazunov completed and orchestrated both those works.

There were those who thought Borodin was just a dabbling amateur, but many believed him to have been the most gifted and original of "The Five." Among his important chamber works are the *Piano Concerto in C minor*, and two string quartets, the second of which is famous for its beautiful Nocturne. His next major work was the popular and enduring *Symphony No. 2* which we will play for you tonight. But above all, the opera *Prince Igor* was his most substantial achievement. It stands as one of the most lasting monuments of nineteenth century Russian nationalism. One critic of his day wrote of Borodin: "Like that of Glinka, Borodin's music is epic in the broadest sense of the word...The principal stylistic features...are giant strength and



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breadth, colossal sweep, drive and dynamism combined with astonishing beauty, tenderness and depth of feeling.”

Sadly, just when Borodin had grown into a greatly respected figure, his health started to fail. He had heart attacks and a case of cholera which made him seriously ill. However, it was definitely in character that in late February 1887 he returned from an academic evening just in time to dress up for a fancy ball at the Academy. Decked out in a red shirt and high boots, Russia’s national garb, he joined the dancing in a fine, spirited mood and joked with fellow guests. But just after midnight, the composer suffered a sudden and massive heart attack, which this time proved to be fatal. He was 53. Just five months later, Ekaterina, bereft beyond consolation, also passed away. Borodin lies buried in the Alexander Nevsky Monastery in St. Petersburg alongside some of his greatest admirers and friends.

Borodin’s double life in Russia in the 19th century brought him great joy, even though he was challenged by circumstances that made the output of his endeavors relatively small. His work in both disciplines stands as irrefutably significant. In the field of music, he had

very little formal training, especially in composition. Borodin's *Symphony No. 2* took a very long time (seven years!) to complete, mainly because he was repeatedly interrupted by other compositions and his work in the laboratory. Even so, the work is regarded by many as his masterpiece. When he visited Liszt in Weimar in 1877 they together played the symphony in a piano arrangement for four-hands. Liszt had admired Borodin's music and was influential in getting the first performances of his symphonies outside of Russia. When Borodin told Liszt of his plans to revise the symphony, Liszt replied: "Heaven forbid! Do not touch it, alter nothing. Your modulations are neither extravagant nor faulty. Your artistic instinct is such that you need not fear to be original. Do not listen to those who would deter you from following your own way. You are on the right road. Similar advice was given to Mozart and to Beethoven, who wisely ignored it."

It consists of four movements and from the wild and furious outbursts of the opening movement, to the sensual quality of the Scherzo’s central trio section, this is Borodin in top form.

I. Allegro - The tonic note of B is heard straight-away



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in unison by the orchestra, with the strings continuing the powerful tune. The orchestra continues forcefully until it reaches a more lyrical tune. The first movement's form has caused much discussion in musicological circles, for while it resembles sonata form, Borodin weaves varied repeats (in key and modulation) of the main tune throughout the movement gives this movement a unique sound. The movement ends with a triple forte repetition of the opening theme.

II. Scherzo - Prestissimo - The second movement is written in the very odd time signature of 1/1. The movement contains odd-shaped 5-bar phrases alternating at times with 4-bar phrases.

This phrase structure combined with syncopated measures give the scherzo a tripping, comically stumbling quality. The gentle trio is in contrasting 6/4 time.

III. Andante - With all of Borodin's natural musicality of structure and form, it shouldn't be forgotten that perhaps his greatest gift was melodic in nature. This movement has some of the most beautiful music he ever wrote. It begins gently with harp and clarinet introduction and the horn enters with a gentle melody

that is continued by the clarinet accompanied by other winds. There is a middle section that contrasts strongly with the gentleness of the opening, after which the music slowly begins its descent to end as it began, softly and melodiously.

IV. Allegro - The third movement runs directly into the Finale. The form of the movement can be seen as a type of sonata/rondo form but many hear it as a collection of Russian dances held loosely together. The mood is festive and continues until the opening dance returns to give a rousing finish to the work. Whatever Borodin's technical limitations as a composer might have been, they fail to be revealed in this symphony. The power, the playfulness, the lyricism, and the liveliness incorporated into each of the movements make this opus one that is undeniably compelling and lasting in its appeal.

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*Chichester Psalms**

Movement 1. Psalm 108 (verse 2)
Psalm 100 (complete)
Movement 2. Psalm 23 (complete)
Psalm 2 (verses 1-4)
Movement 3. Psalm 131 (complete)
Psalm 133 (verse 1)

Leonard Bernstein
Born 1918—Died 1990

Nadia Finley, soprano
Anna Morozov, alto
Noah Guernsey, tenor
Dawson Del Preto, baritone
Jack Johnson, boy soprano



Brilliant pianist, conductor, writer, lecturer, classical composer, Broadway songwriter. All these terms combine in describing one amazing man—Leonard Bernstein. One of his friends noted “Lenny is doomed to success!” He was born Louis Bernstein in Lawrence, Massachusetts on August 25, 1918, to Russian-Jewish immigrants. He was already composing and conducting musical shows as a schoolboy. At 16, he decided to change his name to Leonard. His family relocated to Boston, where he studied at Harvard University. In 1939, he attended the Curtis Institute, and the following summer, at the Berkshire Music Festival, he met conductor/composer Serge Koussevitzky, who had the most profound influence upon Bernstein’s musical life.

Koussevitzky was so impressed with Bernstein that he recommended to conductor Artur Rodzinski that he employ Bernstein as his assistant conductor at the New York Philharmonic. So it was that Bernstein was thrown into the soup. With less than a day’s notice and no rehearsal at all, Bernstein filled in for the ailing Bruno Walter at Carnegie Hall and navigated the Philharmonic through a demanding program. The audience was thrilled and the New York Times ran a front-page article the next day praising Bernstein. His career took off quickly. In fact, during the next few years Bernstein had guest-conducted every major orchestra in the US. In 1958, he became music director of the New York Philharmonic. He also headed the

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orchestral and conducting departments at Tanglewood, teaching there for many years.

In 1964 Bernstein was given a sabbatical from the New York Philharmonic and he decided “to use that year only to compose...And I wrote a lot of music, twelve-tone music and avant-garde music of various kinds, and a lot of it was very good, and I threw it all away.” One of his intentions was to use this time to write a Broadway musical based on *The Skin of our Teeth* by Thornton Wilder, but this was not completed.

The many achievements of Bernstein’s multi-faceted career could have filled the lives of several average folks. Like Gershwin before him, as a composer, Bernstein was interested in blending symphonic music with jazz and the Broadway stage, but he called upon an even wider range of influences, namely that of Copland and Stravinsky. Bernstein was a controversial figure. His large works include the symphonies *Jeremiah* (1943), *Age of Anxiety* (1949), and *Kaddish* (1963). He received more praise for his Broadway musicals. The vivid *On the Town* (1944) and *Wonderful Town* (1952) were followed by *Candide* (1956). It is thought by many to be Bernstein’s most unique score. In ’57, *West Side Story* burst on the scene, and received international acclaim. Bernstein's music, with its strong contrasts of ferocity and gentleness makes this show one of the greatest of all time.

Still, Bernstein had his greatest impact as a conductor. In the US and across the pond, his dynamic personality and strong, expressive manner at the baton brought about a frenzy of excitement rivaled only by mega-stars like the Beatles. It is generally agreed that his readings of 20th century American scores showed a passion and clout rarely approached by those of his colleagues. He would continue to tour the world for decades to come. In August of 1990, despite health problems, Bernstein returned to Tanglewood for a concert. He had first conducted a professional orchestra there in 1940, and this performance, 50 years later, was to be his last. He died in New York, on October 14, 1990, of a heart attack brought on by emphysema and other complications.

During Bernstein’s eleven years as Director of the New York Phil, he composed very little—His *Kaddish*, *Symphony No. 3* in 1963 and *Chichester Psalms* in 1965. In December of 1963, he received a letter from

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the Very Reverend Walter Hussey, Dean of the Chichester Cathedral in Sussex, England, asking him to compose a work for the cathedral's annual Grand Music Festival which included three cathedrals—Winchester, Salisbury and Chichester, a collaboration dating from the 17th century. He wrote: "The Chichester Organist and Choirmaster, John Birch, and I, are very anxious to have written some piece of music which the combined choirs could sing at the Festival to be held in Chichester in August 1965, and we wondered if you would be willing to write something for us. I do realize how enormously busy you are, but if you could manage to do this we should be tremendously honored and grateful. The sort of thing that we had in mind was perhaps, say, a setting of the Psalm 2, or some part of it, either unaccompanied or accompanied by orchestra or organ, or both. I only mention this to give you some idea as to what was in our minds."

The timing was good, and this request was not accidental. Dr. Hussey had been encouraged to get in touch with Bernstein by a physician-friend they had in common, Dr. Cyril Solomon (the work's dedicatee) who knew that Bernstein was planning a period of time just to compose. Once the commission was accepted, Dr. Hussey told Bernstein of a first rate string orchestra in London, as he said it was not really possible to have a full symphony orchestra for reasons of space and expense and the fact that the combined strength of the three Cathedral Choirs is about 70-75 boys and men. He added "I hope you will feel quite free to write as you wish and will in no way feel inhibited by the circumstances. I think many of us would be very delighted if there was a hint of *West Side Story* about the music."

Needless to say, Bernstein provided the Drs. with just what they ordered. The world premiere of the work took place in the Philharmonic Hall, New York on July 15, 1965, with the composer conducting, boy alto John Bogart and the Camerata Singers, followed by the performance at Chichester on July 31, 1965, conducted by the cathedral's Organist and Master of the Choristers, John Birch. Bernstein described the result thusly: "What I came out with at the end of the year was a piece called *Chichester Psalms* which is simple and tonal and tuneful and as pure B-flat as any piece you can think of... Because that was what I honestly wished to write."



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enough. We want something else which
can hardly be put into words — to be united
with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to
receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it,
to become part of it."*

— C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

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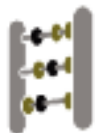
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The New York Times quoted Bernstein's witty synopsis:

“For hours on end, I brooded and mused
On materiae musicae, used and abused
On aspects of unconventionality
Over the death in our time of tonality...
Pieces for nattering, clucking sopranos
With squadrons of vibraphones, fleets of pianos
Played with forearms, the fists and the palms
And then I came up with the Chichester Psalms.
These psalms are a simple and modest affair
Tonal and tuneful and somewhat square
Certain to sicken a stout John Cager
With its tonics and triads in E flat major
But there it stands- the result of my pondering
Two long months of avant-garde wandering
My youngest child, old-fashioned and sweet
And he stands on his own two tonal feet.”

Each of the three movements involves a Hebrew text derived from two psalms—one in its entirety one selectively—which support each other's ideas or provide contrast: Psalms 100 (complete) and 108 (fragmentary) in the first movement, Psalms 23 (complete) and 2 (fragmentary) in the second, and Psalms 131 (complete) and 133 (fragmentary) in the third.

Philosophically, *Chichester Psalms* reflects on man's closeness to God. At first this 18 minute work was written for an all-male chorus, but would later be changed to mixed chorus. The language used is Hebrew, and Bernstein noted that he “could only think of these Psalms in the original Hebrew.” Each movement presents one full Psalm and an extract from another, the smaller quote, Bernstein explained, “included a complementary psalm by way of contrast or amplification.”

Movement One opens with a choral-orchestral introduction, marked *Maestoso ma energico*, circulating around a five note motif. “Awake, psaltery and harp! I will arouse the dawn!” from Psalm 57 raises the curtain. The main body of the movement focuses on Psalm 100, presented in a jaunty 7/4 meter, with the rhythmic punch and spirit of Copland, using wide melodic intervals and animating the message to “make a joyful noise unto the Lord all ye lands.” The music is peppy, accessible, and even uses bongo drums!

In the second movement, a boy soprano soloist sings



The 2023 Beethoven and Banjos festival brings together Evan Premo, Mary Bonhag, Laurel Premo, Bridge Hill Kennedy, John Taylor Ward, Adam Jacob Simon, Clay Zeller-Townson, Emi Ferguson and Paul Holmes Morton to create and present a program called *Holy Manna*. This program invites the audience into the practice of Sacred Harp (“shape note”) singing through listening and participation in this music’s tradition of communal singing and through reflections on its history and resonance in the contemporary world. *The Sacred Harp* is a collection of hundreds of years of American hymnody (the tradition of hymn composition and performance). Its songs include some the oldest American compositions dating from the mid-1700s up to the 1980s. The *Holy Manna* program will present reflections on the different threads of music history that come together in *The Sacred Harp*. The 2023 Beethoven and Banjos roster of musicians and singers will deliver moving renditions of Sacred Harp and early music. For more information visit: www.beethovenandbanjos.org

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the famous 23rd Psalm to a harp accompaniment, just as the original psalmist presumably would have done. Bernstein also sanctioned that this vocal part, with its bluesy overtones, might be sung by a countertenor. The women's chorus takes up the thread but is interrupted by the savage male chorus (this is the Psalm 2/*West Side Story* section which inquires "Why do the nations rage?" The women's chorus and the boy soloist return with their placid melody as the men recede into the distance, though the violent underpinnings still get the last word, and the turbulence remains a strong memory.

Movement three begins in a spirit of rugged Americanism against which is juxtaposed a somber allusion (in the deep strings) to "Tonight" from *West Side Story*. This orchestral prelude gives way to a song of comfort and tenderness, its warm embrace unrolling leisurely in unusual 10/4 meter. As it approaches its end, the a cappella chorus sings a hushed chorale giving thanks for peace and unity, with the orchestra adding its gentle voice at the very conclusion with a quietly symphonic Amen.

*with NMU University Choir and Arts Chorale

*Toward the Unknown Region**

Ralph Vaughan Williams
Born 1872—Died 1958



Celebrated English composer Ralph (pronounced "Rafe"—"any other pronunciation used to infuriate him") Vaughan Williams was born several years after the Civil War in 1872 in Down Ampney, England, and lived until two years before the Beatles were formed. He composed actively for seven decades through two devastating world wars, the reigns of six monarchs, and mind-boggling social and technological change. Through all his life's ups and downs, he became the musical heart of an entire nation in a way that very few composers have before or since. He is noted for music of great expressiveness and strength. Remaining true to the challenge of one of his early mentors, Hubert Parry, to "write choral music as befits an Englishman and a democrat," Vaughan Williams devoted his talents in equal measure to the urban concert hall and the rural choral festival, to both new forms

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of mass media and the ageless surroundings of the parish church. His works are at once quite varied and instantly recognizable, unique and yet universal.

Later in his life, Vaughan Williams reflected that he was born with “a very small silver spoon in my mouth.” He was thinking of his privileged social standing (in a nation obsessed with class differences) and about his own self-doubts, sometimes echoed by music critics of his time, about his musical talents.

Although many of his ancestors were lawyers, his father chose the church and was the Vicar of Down Ampney. His father passed away when Vaughan Williams was only two years old, and his mother took him to live in her family home. The family were upper-class intellectuals—his mother was an heiress of the famed Wedgwood ceramics fortune, and a niece of Charles Darwin—who valued culture, of which music was an essential component. His aunt taught him the piano (he was quoted as saying “I never could play.”) Violin lessons followed and he liked those better, however, he was much more enamored with the viola, which he began at age 15. It was not easy for him since he had no musical background in his family, nor was he a child prodigy. Instead, his gifts took their time to slowly unfold and his love for music was the catalyst for his willingness to put great effort into cultivating them.

When he was coming of age, Britain was a leading world power and an intellectual force, though, strangely, second-rate musically. Purcell was the last great English composer, and he lived in the mid-1600s. Handel and Mendelssohn, although adopted by the English court and people as their own, were Europeans. Opera was exclusively German and Italian. The late Victorian composers were determined to create an “English” music, and this goal consumed Vaughan Williams. Not only was he determined to be an “English” composer, but he was also the picture of a perfect English gentleman, always dressed in tweeds and exuding an air of thoughtful reserve. He studied music at the Royal Conservatory and at Trinity College, Cambridge. Early in his career, he edited a hymnbook, published in 1906. It became the official English Hymnal, and its universal use in Church of England services made him a major influence on the British psyche.

Interestingly, Vaughan Williams’ dedication to hymnody had little to do with conventional religious faith. He was a convinced atheist at school, he only later slid into what he called “cheerful agnosticism” and never thought of himself as a professing Christian. Rather, his attraction to this music was brought about by the opportunity it gave him to further his English agenda. Concerned that English composers were partially responsible for what he referred to as the “languishing and sentimental hymn tunes” of the Victorian Period, Vaughan Williams sought to replace them with music he considered “vigorous and bright.”

As Dvořák and Bartók had done with ancestral music work in Europe, Vaughan Williams researched and collected English folk songs. Many of these were the melodic seeds for the hymns he wrote and for his early compositions. Rather than follow the avant-garde composers like Schönberg into the atonal world, he sought out ancient Greek musical modes—music he believed would sound more English than continental. His desire to participate in the creation of “English” music linked him to the small but growing group of British composers trying to rid themselves of the Teutonic and Italian influences that ruled Western music. Through his social connections, his perseverance, and the steadfast cultivation of his talent, Vaughan Williams became a leader in this cause.

Despite these achievements, he was not confident of his own musical abilities. Determined to do anything that would improve his skills, even at 37 and well established as a composer, Vaughan Williams looked for teachers who could help him with his compositional style. With the self-deprecation which was typical of him, Vaughan Williams described his own music as “lumpy and stodgy” and spoke as critics did about his rhythms as awkward and his orchestrations as amateurish. So, he reached out to Maurice Ravel in France for aid, and it was under Ravel’s wing that he finally released his own sound.

It was extremely important to Vaughan Williams that music be for everybody. He was concerned that industrialization might cause the country’s songs to be lost and that is why he acted with great passion to preserve these treasures (over 800 folksongs) for future generations to enjoy. He was also among the best-known British symphonists, noted for his very wide range of

moods, from stormy and impassioned to tranquil, from mysterious to exuberant. He composed music for almost every combination, from choral and orchestral works to songs, chamber music, film scores, and pieces for less popular instruments such as saxophone, harmonica and tuba. His *Third Symphony* includes a wordless soprano part and his *Eighth* a battery of gongs and bells. He was one of the few major composers to write a tuba concerto, a romance for harmonica, and a suite for four-part recorder ensemble. Some of his most notable works include the opera, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the *G Minor String Quartet*, *On Wenlock Edge*, *Dona Nobis Pacem*, a cycle on settings of six poems from A.E. Housman's collection, *A Shropshire Lad*, and his first great masterpiece, *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* for strings.

Since Vaughan Williams concentrated on making music more accessible, by way of folk songs and his compilation of a new English Hymnal that brought music to local church congregations, *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* wasn't written until he was 38 years old. In some ways, this pursuit kept him from writing his own music, and he said himself, "I wonder[ed] then if I was wasting my time. But he later went on to add "I know now that two years of close association with some of the best (as well as some of the worst) tunes in the world was a better musical education than any amount of sonatas and fugues."

He enjoyed working with enthusiastic, arts-minded men and women "whose voices were [often] not equal to their zeal," and from them he drew major life lessons as well as beautiful results. In the words of one of his singers, "he draws out of you what you know isn't there." In his preface to *English Music* Vaughan Williams argued powerfully that "if we want to find the groundwork of our English culture we must look below the surface—not to the grand events chronicled in the newspapers but to the unobtrusive quartet parties which meet week after week to play or sing in their own houses, to the village choral societies whose members trudge miles through rain or snow to work steadily for a concert or competition in some ghastly parish room with a cracked piano and a smelly oil lamp."

The composer's 1921 marriage was a solid match of upstanding British families and accommodating temperaments. But when his wife Adeline became crippled

with arthritis, the two led increasingly separate lives. The death of his closest colleague, Gustav Holst in 1934 also increased his sense of isolation and loneliness. Vaughan Williams came to feel that he had dried up musically. But he was wrong. He forged ahead and was inspired by the emotions and horrors of war as he aged, as is evidenced in his *Pastoral Symphony*.

Things changed markedly in Vaughan Williams' life when, at the age of 65, he met Ursula Wood, then 27 and the wife of a soldier. She had written a creation involving dance, song and acting, with elaborate stage designs and wanted him to set it to music. She became his companion and after her husband passed, Vaughan Williams asked Ursula to live in their home. They married in 1953 when she was 41 and he was 80.

Still active in the summer of 1958, Vaughan Williams was readying his *Ninth Symphony* for performance. But on the evening of August 26th, he passed away in his sleep at the age of 86. At a crowded memorial service, his ashes were interred near the burial plots of composers Henry Purcell and Charles Villier Stanford in the north choir aisle of Westminster Abbey.

Vaughan Williams' extensive legacy included his music of course, but also his humane spirit, and the major role he played in freeing England from what many thought of as the past centuries' doldrums. Although during his long life he grew in self-confidence, that feeling of the "very small silver spoon" never quite left him. To his credit, he transformed this self-doubt into a life-long devotion to self-improvement. He always seemed to know that his genius could go as far as his own determined efforts could take him.

This evening the MSO, the NMU University Choir and the Arts Chorale bring you Vaughan Williams' *Toward the Unknown Region*, for chorus and orchestra. As the 19th century gave way to the 20th, the work of the American poet Walt Whitman seemed to many to capture the essence of the new age, introducing an upbeat vision of a world inspired by human and scientific endeavor, and the spirit of adventure. Vaughan Williams was introduced to the poetry of Whitman by his fellow student, Bertrand Russell, while an undergraduate at Cambridge in the 1890s. He had already produced some songs to Whitman texts when in 1903 he began to think about writing something on an alto-

gether larger scale. One of these projects was to become the *Sea Symphony*, the great choral and orchestral work which, more than any other, put Vaughan Williams firmly on the musical map in 1909.

Two years earlier, *Towards the Unknown Region*, a much shorter piece based on a text in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* in 1905-1906, enjoyed its première on October 10, 1907, in Leeds.

It made an immediate impression on the public and the critics, and identified Vaughan Williams as a new and important voice in English music. The work was his first major choral piece (he calls it a 'Song' for chorus and orchestra) and in spite of its intermittent Wagnerian echoes (Wagner was an influence that he did want to get over), its obvious inspirational qualities and technical know-how in terms of handling massed voices, made it a success at first, and one that endures. In his unmistakable way, Vaughan Williams marries music and text, and perfectly captures Whitman's noble, humanistic desires.

Toward the Unknown Region parallels the emotional progression of Whitman's visionary text from apprehensive uncertainty to spiritual enlightenment in words that are "non-religious but ethically aspiring," according to English musicologist Diana McVeagh. The opening stanzas of the text are cloaked in the modal harmonies in which Vaughan Williams had been immersed while researching British folk music during the preceding three years, mixed with a certain amount of Romantic chromaticism. For the closing verse — Then we burst forth, we float — Vaughan Williams provided a broad, striding melody that brings the work to a fervently confident close.

Here is the text by Walt Whitman:

Darest thou now, O soul,
Walk out with me toward the unknown region,
Where neither ground is for the feet
nor any path to follow?
No map there, nor guide,
Nor voice sounding, nor touch of human hand,
Nor face with blooming flesh,
nor lips, nor eyes, are in that land.
I know it not, O soul,
Nor dost thou, all is a blank before us,

All waits undream'd of in that region,
that inaccessible land.
Till when the ties loosen,
All but the ties eternal, Time and Space,
Nor darkness, gravitation, sense,
nor any bounds bounding us.
Then we burst forth, we float,
In Time and Space O soul, prepared for them;
Equal, equipt at last,
(O joy! O fruit of all!) them to fulfill O soul.

The spirit of adventure is always keen in Vaughan Williams; but after the great outburst at 'Nor any bounds bounding us' the words seem buoyed up on, bowled on by, wave after wave of musical excitement and elation. The great choreographer Agnes de Mille, describing an altogether different medium, nonetheless invoked an emotion which distills the spirit of *Toward the Unknown Region* to perfection: "To take the air. To challenge space. To move into space with patterns of shining splendour. To be at once stronger and freer than at any other time in life. To lift up the heart ..."

Toward the Unknown Region was the work of a comparatively young man. But the music, no less than the text, has a transcendent timelessness that relates to any, and every, period in life.

*with the NMU University Choir and Arts Chorale

—Program Notes by Claudia Drosen

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