

SOLANO WINDS – MARCH 11, 2016 – WE PLAY!
PROGRAM NOTES

Pique Dame (The Queen of Spades) Overture

Franz von Suppé was a 19th century composer who wrote more than sixty comic operas. He is best remembered for his overtures “Light Cavalry”, “Morning, Noon, and Night in Vienna”, “Poet and Peasant”, and “Pique Dame”. In 1862, having achieved status as the most prominent Viennese composer of operettas, he wrote “The Fortune Teller”, loosely based on a story by Alexander Pushkin. The operetta was a flop, but von Suppé went back to work to revise the material. He lengthened the operetta into two acts, and expanded the story to include a ghost, enchantment, sudden death, and betting on card games. He also renamed the operetta “Pique Dame (The Queen of Spades). Its premiere in Graz in 1864 went so well that it opened in Vienna in 1865. While the operetta is rarely performed today, the overture enjoys continued success.

The overture opens with a quiet, delicate theme followed by a sudden blast of sound from the low brass section. The theme returns, but now as an accompaniment to a more flowing, lyrical melody. A raucous galop follows, alternating between a nimble flight of upper woodwinds and an aggressive full band section. This transitions into a slower duet for two flutes in the Viennese style, followed by a wonderful coda section that builds to an exciting climax at the end of the piece.

Divertimento for Band

Vincent Persichetti was one of America’s most respected 20th century composers. Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1915, he was a conductor, teacher, scholar, and composer for a variety of media. He composed 16 major concert works for band. “Divertimento” is one of his lightest and most entertaining works. It was written in a log cabin in Kansas in 1949 and premiered in New York City’s Central Park on June 16, 1950 under Persichetti’s baton. Thirty years later, in a letter to Frederick Fennell, Persichetti wrote, “ ‘Divertimento’ was completed in 1950. I was writing a piece in which the brasses were tossing the woodwinds about while the timpani were commenting. I began to realize that the strings were not going to enter. I guess when strings do not enter into such a combination, one calls the medium ‘Band.’ The word ‘Band’ has always sounded good to me...” The work was Persichetti’s first for band and is still one of his most popular compositions.

Altered Perceptions – A Rhapsody for Flute

Note from the composer:

Altered Perception is my attempt at showcasing the flute. I’ve always been fascinated with its versatility. From delicate passages to the most intricate and rapid arpeggios or scales; warm and low notes to high piercing ones; its ability is limitless. It can evoke the most passionate and heart wrenching emotions as well as frantic and grating ones. It’s my hope that I’ve captured some of the essence of this wonderful instrument.

In this piece, the flute is depicted as a talented dancer with very little self esteem attending her first dance audition. Her nerves get the best of her. Focus is not on her list as she watches other dancers perfect various dance movements. Being filled with dread as she approaches the judges is an understatement. She performs the required dances and occasionally captures glances of the judge's random looks and quiet whispers to one another. Taking her bow, she tells herself that the audition was a disaster.

Waiting for the result, she thinks of all the trials and tribulation that led her to the audition. Countless hours in the dance studio, practicing the same movements repeatedly to the point of exhaustion, losing time with friends and family which eventually lead to the audition of a lifetime. Yet she wonders if it's enough.

One of the judges comes out the room and posts a piece of paper on the wall. The results are in. She slowly makes her way to see the result. To her surprise, many of the dancers she thought were amazing were walking out dejected and disappointed for not making the list.

She on other hand.....made it. Her altered perception of her herself and others did not hinder the outcome of her success. Or did it?

A Tribute to Harry James

Next week, the jazz world celebrates the 100th birthday of Harry James, a trumpet playing big band leader born on March 15, 1916 in Albany, Georgia. He not only led his big band in the 1930's and 1940's (and was active with his band until his death in 1983), but was very influential for other trumpet players of his time. His technical proficiency and superior tone were the hallmarks of his band's sound. Harry James gave the first big break of Frank Sinatra's young career when he signed Sinatra to a one year contract. Buddy Rich later played drums in James' band. When Glenn Miller joined the U.S. Army in 1942, James' band replaced Miller's on a radio program sponsored by Chesterfield Cigarettes. He later appeared in a number of Hollywood movies.

Tonight's medley of hits from the Harry James band includes Ciribiribin, The Mole, You Made Me Love You, Trumpet Blues, and Cantabile.

Elves on Mount Tomba (Dream Sleep)

Note from the composer:

As a composer, I have been interested in what I would call fantasy composition. During an outing last summer, I was investigating the beautiful country in the Sierra above Quincy, California. My wife and I share a passion for the great outdoors. On one of our trips into the back-country, we explored the area around Mt. Tomba. From a very small town called Slote, California, you can see the beauty of this uniquely shaped mountain. As I was viewing the beautiful site, I turned to my wife and said, "I wonder if there are any elves living on Mt. Tomba." At that point, my creativity as a composer was sparked.

I immediately began to sketch for this concert band composition. In my mind, I began to formulate the story that was about to unfold musically. I have longed for a subject for this musical fantasy, and my vision of the elves has now come to fruition. The piece is programmatic and allows the listener to think about the little ones and their ritual. In the story, the elves awaken from a deep sleep, realizing that their mission is to climb to the top and rejoice in their celebration of life as they know it.

I am very fortunate to be a part of the Solano Winds and appreciate their willingness and cooperation of the band in realizing my musical ideas. I wish to thank each and every player and Mr. Doherty for encouraging in-house compositions. It is an honor to be a part of this community band. I'm sure the elves would be happy, too!

The Elephant and the Fly

From the circumstances of his birth – born in Paris on Valentine's Day, 1842 – one might conclude that Henri Kling was the ultimate romanticist. In reality, his musical output took many forms. He was a prolific composer, a scholarly writer of books and articles on a variety of musical subjects, and a Professor at the Geneva Conservatoire for 53 years. Most of all, though, he was a performer on the Horn. He published his own horn method, along with numerous etudes, arrangements, and editions of the horn literature. At age nineteen, he left Paris to become solo hornist at the Grand Theatre and the Concert Classiques in Geneva.

“The Elephant and the Fly” presents perhaps the most unlikely duet combination in the wind band – piccolo and tuba. The solo instruments enter after an introduction with their own recitative lines, followed by a tuba melody with piccolo obbligato. Then, the “elephant” and the “fly” join together as they nimbly navigate a quick waltz to a stunning conclusion.

Romanza (from Horn Concerto No. 3, K. 447)

“Romanza” is the second movement of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's famous Horn Concerto No. 3 in Eb, K.447. Mozart composed the concerto in 1783 for Ignaz Leutbeb, the exceptionally talented Austrian horn player. The second movement is perhaps the earliest written part in ABACA-coda form.

The horn, in Mozart's time, was comparatively new to the orchestra, having been developed as a hunting horn. Unlike today's instrument, it was without valves, and key changes had to be effected through the exchange of “crooks” – short, curved pipes which lengthened the tube of the horn, lowering its pitch and providing different sets of harmonics. Pitch could be “trued up” by stopping the bell to one degree or another with the hand. The introduction of valves removed the awkward necessity of the crooks, but players still stick their hands in the instrument to vary the timbre as well as alter the pitch.

Notes adapted from the Manchester Symphony Orchestra

Lassus Trombone – De Cullud Valet to Miss Trombone

Henry Fillmore was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1881. His father, James Henry Fillmore, Sr. was a partner in the Fillmore Brothers religious music publishing business. His father loved to hear him sing, and young Henry soon learned to play the piano, flute, violin and guitar with great ease. He was most enamored with the slide trombone, an instrument his father considered too evil for any righteous person to play. His mother, however, believed that playing the trombone might keep Henry out of mischief (she was partly correct), so she secretly saved enough money to buy him a second hand instrument. In addition to playing, he wrote much of his own music. Eventually, he would compose over 250 pieces and arrange over 750 others. After attending the College of Music of Cincinnati, he worked in his father's publishing firm, was associated with five different circus shows, and was a showman supreme as conductor of his own band. Later in life, he assisted with the University of Miami Band, and with establishing 32 high school music programs in Florida.

Fillmore's trombone smears (a very specialized genre of music) often included subtitles which were in the minstrel-vaudeville idiom of the time. They were also influenced by his Grandmother McKrell's former slave, Sarah, a jolly soul who sang catchy old spirituals while she worked. "Lassus Trombone" was John Philip Sousa's favorite smear. He programmed the tune on every concert of one of his final tours. It was also Fillmore's favorite. In 1949, Fillmore, dressed in his customary white suit and wielding a huge baton, conducted a line of trombonists stretching across a football field playing his "Lassus Trombone". The sheet music arrangement has sold over two million copies.

Irish Tune from County Derry

Percy Grainger was an unorthodox person and a musical genius. The story of his first thirty years could have been the plot for a 19th century opera. In 1914, at the age of 32, he emigrated to America from Australia. At the outbreak of World War I, he enlisted as a U.S. Army bandsman, expanding his virtuoso piano talents to most of the wind and percussion instruments, particularly the saxophone. He composed, set, arranged, and edited over 400 works, and if all of the versions of these works are counted the number exceeds 1,000. He was pioneering the collection of folk music at the same time as Bartok, and much of his music comes from this heritage.

This work is based on a tune collected by a Miss J. Ross of New Town, Limavady, County Derry, Ireland, and published in "The Petrie Collection of Ancient Music of Ireland" in 1885. Grainger's setting was written in 1909 and was dedicated to the memory of Edward Grieg. In 1906, Grainger's playing at the age of 24 had so impressed Grieg that he was invited to the composer's home in Norway. During the summer of 1907 they rehearsed Grieg's "Concerto", but the Nordic composer died before the performance. Grainger rescored "Irish Tune" for wind band while teaching at the U.S. Army Band School. The perfect melody and rich sonorities are quintessential Grainger characteristics.

Shepherd's Hey

The air on which "Shepherd's Hey" is based was collected by Cecil J. Sharpe. In some agricultural district in England teams of "Morris Men", decked out with jingling bells and other finery, can still be seen dancing to such traditional tunes as "Shepherd's Hey," which are play on the fiddle or on the "pipe and tabor" (a sort of fife and drum).