

# Blue Notes

a concert event  
by Solano Winds  
Fri. Mar 13<sup>th</sup> 8PM

## PROGRAM NOTES

### The Blue and the Gray

Clare Grundman, one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most prolific and respected composers for band, earned his Bachelors and Masters degrees from The Ohio State University in the 1930s. He taught arranging, woodwinds and band at Ohio State before joining the U.S. Coast Guard during World War II.

"The Blue and the Gray" was written for the centennial observance of the American Civil War. All of the songs for the suite were composed and published during the war years with the exception of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic", which was copyrighted in 1857 and was first popular as "Say, Brothers, Will You Meet Us?". "The Battle Cry of Freedom" and "Marching Through Georgia" were popular in the North, while "Dixie", "The Bonnie Blue Flag," and "The Yellow Rose of Texas" were whistled, played, and sung by the Confederates. "Kingdom Coming," "Tenting Tonight," and "Aura Lee" were sung and loved by both sides.

### Blue Shades

In 1992 I composed a concerto for traditional jazz band and orchestra, "Playing With Fire", for the Jim Cullum Jazz Band and the San Antonio Symphony. That work was composed as a celebration of the traditional jazz music I heard so often while growing up near New Orleans.

I experienced tremendous joy during the creation of "Playing With Fire", and my love for early jazz is expressed in every bar of the concerto. However, after completing it I knew that the traditional jazz influences dominated the work, leaving little room for my own musical voice to come through. I felt a strong need to compose another work, one that would combine my love of early jazz with my own musical style.

Four years and several compositions later, I finally took the opportunity to realize that need by composing "Blue Shades". As its title suggests, the work alludes to the Blues, and a jazz feeling is prevalent – however, it is not literally a Blues piece. There is not a single 12-bar blues progression to be found, and except for a few isolated sections, the eighth-note is not swung.

The work, however, is heavily influenced by the Blues: "Blue notes" (flatted 3rds, 5ths, and 7ths) are used constantly; Blues harmonies, rhythms, and melodic idioms pervade the work; and many "shades of blue" are depicted, from bright blue, to dark, to dirty, to hot blue.

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At times, “Blue Shades” burlesques some of the clichés from the Big Band era, not as a mockery of those conventions, but as a tribute. A slow and quiet middle section recalls the atmosphere of a dark, smoky blues haunt. An extended clarinet solo played near the end recalls Benny Goodman’s hot playing style, and ushers in a series of “wailing” brass chords recalling the train whistle effects commonly used during that era.

“Blue Shades” was commissioned by a consortium of thirty university, community, and high school concert bands under the auspices of the Worldwide Concurrent Premieres and Commissioning Fund.

~Notes by the composer, Frank Ticheli

### **On the Beautiful Blue Danube**

Johann Strauss, Jr., was not permitted by his father, Johann the elder, to study music, and after receiving a basic general education, he became a bank clerk. His mother, however, had him take music lessons in secret, and after the parents separated, Johann took up the study of violin and theory in earnest. At the age of 19, he formed an orchestra and presented concerts which soon began to rival those of his more famous father.

Nineteenth-century Vienna, a wealthy, self-indulgent, and sensuous city, was ready for music by the Strausses. A saying by Charles Joseph, prince de Ligne, concerning the socially minded Congress of Vienna (1814-1815), “elle danse, mais elle ne marche pas -it dances, but never gets anything done,” was at least partly true. The music of the Strauss family is still heard in cities around the world.

Johann the younger became known as the “Waltz King” as a result of his numerous and popular waltz compositions. The best known of these include “Artist’s Life”, “Tales from the Vienna Woods”, “Wine, Women, and Song”, and “On the Beautiful Blue Danube”. In his later years he wrote operettas, one of the best known being “Die Fledermaus”.

~Notes from “Program Notes for Band” by Norman E. Smith

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## Basin Street Blues

Written by Spencer Williams in 1928 and recorded by Louis Armstrong in the same year, “Basin Street Blues” is a perennial Dixieland favorite. In addition to Armstrong, it has been recorded by The Mills Brothers, Dave Brubeck, Bing Crosby, Ella Fitzgerald, Miles Davis, Oscar Peterson, Liza Minnelli, David Sanborn, Glenn Miller, Dean Martin, Cab Calloway, Ray Charles, Harry Connick, Jr., and many, many more artists. The Canadian Brass recorded it on their album, “Basin Street”, and it is that arrangement by their gifted arranger Luther Henderson that the Solano Winds Brass Quintet performs tonight.

Written for Piccolo Trumpet, Bb Trumpet, Horn, Trombone, and Tuba, all five musicians get to start with their own turn at a solo cadenza to start the piece. The trombone then kicks off the melody, and after a few choruses of full Dixie flavor and a modulation up a perfect fourth, the arrangement ends with five in-time solos, one from each player, before a final four-bar coda.

## Blue Moon

The earliest recorded English use of the term “blue moon” was from a 1528 pamphlet attacking the English clergy, entitled “Rede Me and Be Not Wrothe” (“Read me and be not angry”): “Yf they say the mone is belewe / We must believe that it is true”. More contemporary uses refer to the second full moon in a month as a blue moon.

Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart presumably referred to the expression “once in a blue moon”, which means very rarely. The narrator in the song is relating a stroke of luck so unlikely that it must have taken place under a blue moon. It has been recorded by countless vocalists: Mel Tormé’s version in 1949 hit number 20 on the Billboard charts, where it lasted for five weeks.

## St. Louis Blues March

W.C. Handy, the Father of the Blues, was born in Alabama in 1873. After experimenting with using his mother’s pots and pans (and anything else he could find) as percussion instruments, he fell in love with the sound of the cornet and bought one for a dollar. He learned to play it without any instruction, and at the age of 20 was a cornet soloist at the Chicago World’s Fair. He first heard the blues from an elderly man at a deserted railroad station, and was intrigued. He wrote his first blues, “Mr. Crump”, in 1909, and went on to compose over 150 other songs and arrangements (mostly blues). St. Louis Blues March, published in 1914, was his most famous and successful song, bringing in over \$25,000 in annual royalties forty years after its publication. Groups from Glenn Miller to the University of Michigan Marching Band made the piece a staple of their performances over the decades.

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## Rhapsody in Blue

On January 4, 1924, Ira Gershwin brought a brief item in the *New York Tribune* to the attention of his younger brother George. Its heading read, "Whiteman Judges Named. Committee Will Decide 'What Is American Music.'" According to the advertisement (purely a media ploy), Paul Whiteman had assembled an impressive group of musicians including Sergei Rachmaninoff and Jascha Heifetz to witness a concert of new American music. This concert was to be presented on the afternoon of February 12, just five weeks away. Included would be a "jazz concerto" on which George Gershwin was currently "at work". Busy with his show "Sweet Little Devil," Gershwin had not begun to compose such a concerto, though he and Whiteman had casually talked about his writing a special piece for the band. Gershwin began work on "Rhapsody in Blue" on Monday, January 7. Though a gifted melodist, he was ill-equipped to score the accompaniment. To assist him, Whiteman offered the services of his chief arranger, Ferde Grofé, who completed the score on February 4. The first of five rehearsals was held immediately, during which several modifications were made both to Gershwin's music and Grofé's arrangement. Most notable among these is the change in the opening clarinet solo. Gershwin had originally written a seventeen-note slur; however, Ross Gorman (Whiteman's lead reed player) improvised the signature clarinet "wail." According to contemporary reviews, the concert was rather dull, but "Rhapsody in Blue" was received enthusiastically by the audience, which included Jascha Heifetz, Victor Herbert, Fritz Kreisler, Sergei Rachmaninoff, John Philip Sousa, Leopold Stokowski and Igor Stravinsky. There were subsequent performances on March 7 and April 21, and a recording was made for Victor Records on June 10. A second recording was scheduled in 1927 during which Gershwin and Whiteman had strong disagreements. During those three years, Whiteman had made changes in the work with which Gershwin was dissatisfied. Their argument at the session resulted in Whiteman walking off the podium. The recording did take place with Gershwin performing the solo and the Whiteman Band playing the accompaniment, but Nathaniel Shilkret, Victor's director of light music, served as conductor.

In ensuing years, there were a number of versions of "Rhapsody in Blue" produced to satisfy public demand for as many accessible renditions as possible. As the work's popularity increased, the desire for a published large ensemble version led to Grofé's 1926 setting for theater orchestra. This was followed subsequently by an expansion of the theater orchestra for full symphony orchestra and a version for concert band (1938) both by Grofé as well.

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Not until 1987 was Grofé's 1924 arrangement for the Whiteman Band published (in facsimile). Since its availability, this first scoring has been performed regularly. However, in the sixty-three years between its premiere and publication, this version was all but abandoned. Whiteman himself did not adhere to this arrangement. As early as 1926, he began distorting the piece, which had become his signature tune. He kept adding instrumental parts to the first version as the instrumentation of his orchestra changed. More than ninety parts exist for the various instrumental combinations Whiteman had at any given time. While the first score is novel, it cannot be considered the definitive version of the work, anymore than Gershwin's two-piano manuscript. This manuscript was altered, presumably with the approval of the composer, by Grofé both melodically and harmonically. In fact, Grofé's 1924 score was never performed as written, even at the premiere. Gershwin most assuredly improvised sections of the piano cadenza, and the written ensemble accompaniment evolved through the five days of rehearsals. Grofé was a gifted arranger (later teaching orchestration at Juilliard) who commonly reduced existing orchestral scores for Whiteman's unique instrumentation. (In 1927 he adapted Gershwin's own scoring of "Concerto in F" for a Whiteman Band recording.)

As noted above, Grofé scored "Rhapsody in Blue" for concert band in 1928; however, this setting was flawed and somewhat unusable without considerable alteration. The primary problem lay in the absence of the solo piano! Eventually, an erratum was created and made available with the score indicating cuts and deletions in the band version to adapt for the addition of the original solo piano part. Also, unlike the scoring the symphony orchestra version in which chord tones were characteristically assigned to specific players or sections, these chord tones were voiced within individual sections, and thus no distinct timbre was afforded each.

The shortcomings of this extant concert band version have led to the creation of the current modern band edition, which may be performed by either concert band or wind ensemble (most effectively by the latter). The present edition preserves characteristic timbres and transparent qualities of the orchestral setting while texturally capturing – despite the absence of strings – its innate vertical densities. Gershwin's personal copy of Grofé's band setting have also been incorporated along with scoring options from the manuscripts of his theater orchestra and Whiteman Band versions (both also in the Library of Congress).