



STUDENT, TEACHER, & MASTER:
THE LEGACY OF CLIFTON WILLIAMS

PROGRAM NOTES – MARCH 2023

CLIFTON WILLIAMS – MARCH 26, 1923 - FEBRUARY 12, 1976

Were it not for his tragically early passing at the age of 52, Clifton Williams would be celebrating his 100th birthday later this month. In spite of his short time with us, he made remarkable contributions to the wind band repertoire, and taught composition to several students who themselves have made significant marks in the same field.

James Clifton Williams, Jr., was born in Traskwood, Arkansas, on March 26, 1923. His father worked for the railroad until he lost his job in the depression of the early 1930s. The resulting problems led to the breakup of his parents' marriage, but "Jimmy" and his two sisters continued in school, and all three learned to play the piano. He learned to play an old mellophone (a marching band version of the French horn) in seventh grade, and the next year the family moved to Little Rock, Arkansas. He played in the well-known Little Rock High School Band and Orchestra, both conducted by L. Bruce Jones.

After graduation, Williams attended Louisiana Tech University for one year, then in 1942 joined the United States Army Air Corps (now the Air Force) as a bandsman. In the military, he played horn, was drum major for the marching band, and wrote compositions at every opportunity. After the war he enrolled at Louisiana State University, where he studied with Helen Gunderson and his band director was his former high school director, L. Bruce Jones. After graduation from LSU, he married Maxine Bardwell and adopted her two daughters. The young family moved to Rochester, New York, where Williams earned his MM degree at the Eastman School of Music in 1949. While at Eastman, he was greatly encouraged by Howard Hanson, the longtime Director of the Eastman School of Music, who counseled Williams toward the path of focusing his compositions on works for the wind band.

In 1949, Williams began a 17-year teaching period at the University of Texas in Austin. He played in the Austin Symphony for five seasons, and in the San Antonio Symphony, where he was a frequent guest conductor, for twelve seasons. At the University of Texas, he became friend and teacher to a number of talented young graduate students, including W. Francis McBeth, Lawrence Weiner, Robert Sheldon, and John Barnes Chance.

In 1956, the American Bandmasters Association created the Ostwald Award for composition. Williams won the inaugural award for his "Fanfare and Allegro," then won again the next year for "Symphonic Suite." He began to receive international acclaim for his compositions for wind band. In 1966, he accepted a position as chairman of the department of theory and composition at the University of Miami where he remained until he lost his battle with cancer in 1976. While at the University of Miami, he continued to add to his opus of outstanding works.



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Joe Daniels, who wrote a dissertation on Williams and his works, wrote “few people who knew Jim Williams were left untouched by his kindness, sense of humor, and warm personality.” On the day of his death, flags on the University of Miami campus were flown at half-staff, and a few days later a memorial service included a performance of “Trilogy from the Song of Solomon” for soprano and strings, a gift to his wife, Maxine, on their first wedding anniversary.

HOWARD HANSON – OCTOBER 28, 1896 - FEBRUARY 26, 1981

Howard Hanson was born in 1896 in Wahoo, Nebraska, the son of Swedish immigrants. He learned to play piano with his mother, began composing at age six, and later became an excellent cellist. He was one of the most important figures in the American music world, exerting influence as a composer, conductor, educator, and administrator. He studied at Luther College in Wahoo, the University of Nebraska, the Institute of Musical Arts (now known as Juilliard School of Music), and at Northwestern University, where he earned his Bachelor of Music degree in 1916.

At the age of 20, Hanson joined the faculty at College of the Pacific (COP) in San Jose, California (now University of the Pacific in Stockton). Three years later, he was named Dean of the Conservatory of Fine Arts at COP. In 1921, Hanson won the Prix de Rome and was the first composer to enter the American Academy in that city. Upon returning to the United States in 1924, George Eastman (of Kodak fame) recruited Hanson to become the first Director of the Eastman School of Music. While building the faculty at Eastman, Hanson reached out to Béla Bartók to teach composition at the school. Bartók did not believe that composition could be taught, so he declined and offered to instead teach piano. Hanson’s piano staff was complete, though, so Bartók was not invited to join the piano faculty. Hanson stayed in the position of Director at Eastman until his retirement forty years later.

Hanson wrote for a variety of media, and his orchestral work is frequently performed by major Symphony Orchestras around the world. His works for wind band are also considered staples of that repertoire.



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W. FRANCIS MCBETH – MARCH 9, 1933 - JANUARY 6, 2012

William Francis McBeth composed and conducted extensively in the areas of orchestral, chamber, and wind band music. He conducted all-state and honor bands in nearly every state as well as in Canada and Japan. Multiple Solano Winds members recall experiences with McBeth from their times with all-state or honor bands!

Born in Texas, McBeth earned his Bachelor of Music degree at Hardin-Simmons University, his Master of Music degree at the University of Texas, where he studied with Clifton Williams, and did doctoral work at the Eastman School of Music, where he studied with Howard Hanson. He enjoyed a long career teaching at Ouachita University in Arkansas, beginning in 1957 and including the positions of chairman of the department of theory-composition and resident composer. His many wind band compositions are enjoyed by bandmen and audiences alike as exciting, beautiful, and important works.

SYMPHONIC SUITE – III. MARCH

Clifton Williams won the American Bandmasters Association's Ostwald Award for "Symphonic Suite" in 1957. The third of five movements, the "March" is marked *allegro vivo* and is based on a short fanfare-like motif heard at the beginning. After many repetitions it works up to a fine climax for full band at the end.

DIES NATALIS

"Dies Natalis", for band, is in the form of an introduction, chorale, five variations and finale, based on the ancient and beautiful Lutheran Christmas chorale-tune, celebrating the birth of Christ. It was performed for the first time in the Eastman Theatre, April 7, 1972 by the Eastman Wind Ensemble, under the direction of Donald Hunsberger for the 50th birthday of the Eastman School of Music.

Howard Hanson had the following to say about the chorale-tune:

"I used to sing it as a boy in the Swedish Lutheran Church of Wahoo, Nebraska. This chorale has, without doubt, been the greatest single musical influence in my life as a composer. Traces of the chorale appear in my early orchestral work, 'Lux Aeterna,' and in sections of my opera, 'Merry Mount.' The chorale form has also influenced my 'Chorale and Alleluia' for band and my fourth and fifth symphonies for orchestra."

Bill Doherty first performed this beautiful work as a member of the trumpet section in the University of California Concert Band in 1977.



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TRILOGY FOR BAND

“Trilogy for Band” was commissioned by the North Little Rock (Arkansas) High School Band, and was composed as nearly as possible according to suggestions from the band members who actually raised much of the commission fee themselves. A unique royalty-split allows the band’s commissioning fund to be somewhat self-perpetuating.

As its title suggests, the work is in three movements of contrasting moods. It opens with a declamatory fanfare based upon a four-note motive which re-occurs in each movement. Elegy is a quiet, introspective mood, lyrical in nature and which employs unusual lower woodwind colorings. Quickstep is a cheerful “hill-billy” march, equipped with two different endings so that it can serve as the finale to the suite or be used separately as a march.

“Trilogy for Band” was composed in 1962 by Clifton Williams and was first performed by the North Little Rock High School Band on its spring concert of that year.

THE SINFONIANS

This work was commissioned by Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia Fraternity of America. It was the first in a series of instrumental pieces to be commissioned by the Sinfonians and was dedicated to Archie N. Jones, former president of the fraternity and later director of that organization’s foundation. Clifton Williams conducted the first performance of “The Sinfonians” at the fraternity’s national convention in Cincinnati, Ohio, in July 1960. The march opens with an extended fanfare introduction before the horns state the familiar Sinfonian theme: “Hail Sinfonia! Come, brothers, hail!” The melody is then completed, embellished, and extended in the style of the composer. In a 1982 survey, “The Sinfonians” received more votes than any of Williams’ other works.

THIS LAND OF EL DORADO

“This Land of El Dorado” was commissioned by the Omicron Pi chapter of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia and the Beta Alpha chapter of Mu Phi Epsilon in celebration of the career of Benton Minor at California State University, Fullerton. Mr. Minor was Director of Bands and Chairman of the Department of Music for many years. The piece was premiered in August of 1992 at California State University, Fullerton, with the composer, W. Francis McBeth, conducting. Since Mr. Minor is a native Californian (the Golden State), the title is directed to him and his state, El Dorado being the mythical city of Gold. This land of El Dorado (Eldorado) is the last line of Edgar Allan Poe’s poem, “Eldorado.”



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SYMPHONIC DANCE NO. 1 – “COMANCHE RITUAL”

“Symphonic Dance No. 1 – ‘Comanche Ritual’” is one of a group of five originally commissioned by the Minnie Stevens Piper Foundation commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the San Antonio Symphony Orchestra, which first performed the entire set of dances on January 30, 1965 under the baton of the composer, Clifton Williams. He transcribed Dances 2, “The Maskers,” 3, “Fiesta,” and 5 for symphonic band, although only 2 and 3 were published initially. W. Francis McBeth provided the first band transcription for Symphonic Dance No. 1. Each dance represents a culture which at a given historical time occupied the San Antonio area.

The fierce Comanches, who had driven the Apaches from the High Plains, were themselves defeated by the Texas Rangers after the “Council House Fight” in San Antonio in March of 1840.

SYMPHONIC DANCE NO. 2 – “THE MASKERS”

In refashioning the dances for symphonic band, composer Clifton Williams achieves a new dimension of sound and color while adding fresh excitement to contemporary band literature. “The Maskers” is programmatic only in that the listener’s imagination may conjure up visions of colorfully costumed dancers at a masked ball.

SYMPHONIC DANCE NO. 3 – “FIESTA”

“Fiesta” depicts the pageantry of Latin-American celebrations – street bands, bullfights, and bright costumes – the colorful legacy of a proud people. The band version was premiered at the American Bandmasters Association convention in Miami, Florida, March 4, 1967, by the University of Miami’s “Band of the Hour” under composer Clifton Williams’ direction.