

PROGRAM NOTES

MAY 2016 – We March!

Symphonic Concert March

Little is known about composer Giose Bonelli, but arranger Nicholas D. Falcone was an Italian immigrant who became Director of the famed University of Michigan Band in 1927. Falcone brought this operatic concert march in Italian style to the wind band repertoire. The flowing melodies, contrapuntal technique, and contrasting rhythms reappear throughout the work. The melodies are fashioned after the vocal virtuosos of the opera world, with soloistic flair and much dynamic contrast. The opening grandioso melody makes a dramatic return at the end of the piece.

Valdres (Norwegian March)

Valdres is a region of Norway between Oslo and Bergen. It is one of the most famous legacies of the composing career of Johannes Hanssen (1874 – 1967), one of Norway's most active and influential bandmasters, composers and teachers in the first half of the 20th century. Hanssen played in a military band in Oslo as a young boy and was the bandmaster of the Oslo Military Band from 1926 to 1934 and again from 1945 to 1946.

The opening measures of "Valdres" feature the signature fanfare for the Valdres Battalion. The fanfare is based on an ancient melody formerly played on the lur – a straight wooden trumpet. The trio of the march is based on a Hardanger fiddle tune and a pentatonic folk tune above a drone bass. The march made its premiere in 1941 with the composer playing the baritone horn.

A Slavic Farewell (Farewell to a Slavonic Woman)

This classic Slavic march was originally called "Farewell to a Slavonic Woman," and since its premier during World War I, it has become the best-known, best-loved march in Russia and in the surrounding independent states of the former Soviet Union.

Vasilij Ivanovitz Agapkin was born in Sjatjerovo in 1884. According to legend, the inspiration for this march came from Agapkin having seen newsreels of the Balkan War. During this conflict, Russian and Slavic forces fought together, and reportedly the newsreels contained poignant footage of Slavic soldiers parting with their wives and families. The march became popular in World War I, during which time Agapkin served as the musical director of the Tjekan 7, a forerunner of the KGB.

Symphony on Themes of John Philip Sousa

Composer Ira Hearshen received his Bachelor of Music degree in applied theory and composition from Wayne State University. In 1972, he moved to Los Angeles to study orchestration at the Grove School of Music under the tutelage of the film composer, Albert Harris. He also studied counterpoint under Allyn Ferguson. Hearshen has many arrangements to

his credit including the Detroit Symphony Pine Knob Summer Series, the Summer Pops Series for John Denver with various symphonies, the Jacksonville (FL) Symphony, and the Air Combat Heritage Band. He is currently one of the most sought-after orchestrators in Hollywood. His orchestrations include music for the television series Beauty and the Beast, the Broadway show Into the Light and feature films Guarding Tess, Big Business, and The Three Musketeers.

NOTE FROM THE COMPOSER:

Stirred and fascinated by the music of John Philip Sousa since childhood, I still get a chill upon hearing the piccolo obbligato in the trio of “The Stars and Stripes Forever.” While the thought of transforming popular march music into a legitimate piece for concert stage had a lot of intellectual appeal, I figured that any attempt I made to pay homage to Sousa would be misunderstood. But artistic challenge won out and I started working on what was to become the second movement of the symphony in the winter of 1990-91.

I began this piece by taking the “trio” theme from the march, “The Thunderer,” slowing it down to a tempo of 48 beats per minute and casting it in the style of the Finale of Mahler’s third symphony.

From the audience reaction to the first performance of [after] “The Thunderer,” I knew I was involved with something unusual in the realm of band music. The weight of the piece and its 8-minute time performance meant that the idea of a light concert suite of 4 to 6 movements as originally commissioned was out of the question. It was at this time I realized that I had the beginning of a full-scale symphony in both length and depth.

I began to envision this work as a four movement symphony classically constructed. It would have a first movement written in “sonata-allegro” form, a slow movement, a scherzo, and a finale. Each of the four sections would be based on a different Sousa march and the outer movements must be at least twice as long as the internal two so that the work would have integrity of true symphonic form.

There are two other problems that had to be solved: each movement had to be playable as a separate piece, and there needed to be some unifying melodic material that could bring four different Sousa marches together. I found the solution in Sousa’s scores. There was a four note melodic fragment common to virtually every tune I wanted to use, the same four notes that begin the “Dies Irae” portion of the Catholic Mass. The intervals are a minor 2nd down, and minor 2nd up, followed by a minor 3rd down. In the key of C major or A minor these notes would be C-B-C-A. This melodic motive occurs in the trios of both “Hands Across the Sea” and “Washington Post” as well as in the introduction to “Fairest of the Fair.” In fact, these are the first four notes one hears in “The Stars and Stripes Forever.”

I used this 4-note Sousa “signature” to introduce and end the symphony, in the construction of the scherzo, and to create the finale. The coda of the last movement became extended as a

prologue to the entire symphony preceding the first movement. Thus, the symphony became a cyclical work unified in its construction, with each movement playable as a separate entity.

Sousa's melodies are all strong and of a wide variety of architectural styles. They range from complex ("Hands Across the Sea"), to simple ("Washington Post"), and all are stirring, intense, and above all, really fun to listen to. This is what makes Sousa's music "classic." I hope listeners have as much of an adventure listening to this as I did putting it together.

~Ira Hearshen