

## Wind symphony finds wonder in works by women

By [Scott Hewitt](#), Columbian Arts & Features Reporter

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'Legends of American Band,' last fall's concert by the Southwest Washington Wind Symphony, featured the usual legendary suspects: Alfred Reed's "The Hounds of Spring," John Philip Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever."

After that concert, conductor Patrick Murphy decided to change directions. The upcoming concert by the Wind Symphony features all women composers. He said he was inspired — and a bit embarrassed — by some research done by the Wind Symphony's publicist, Colleen Chun, who crunched the numbers and found that a whopping 2 percent of the group's material over the past 12 seasons was composed by women.

Murphy, who teaches music and directs bands at the University of Portland, reviewed his own track record there and found it similarly skewed. "I'm on a campus that's 65 percent female and I'm close to 6 percent" in terms of selecting music by women. "Oh my goodness, I'm not promoting what I need to be promoting," he realized.

He added that he's got plenty of female flute students and conducting students — and yet, professional flautists and conductors in the classical music world are mostly men. "For whatever reason, there's still a big gender gap in classical music," said Murphy. "Who are the famous women composers? They're hard to name."

The good news, Murphy said, is that the younger world of "wind bands" is "more accessible to women composers" than the older, stuffer one of symphony orchestras. "We're always on the lookout for new repertoire, new stuff by living composers. We're much more in the now," he said — even if concert programming hasn't yet reflected that. Murphy went hunting for quality music by women and discovered "a wealth of great material, a lot of stuff I never heard before," he said.

### Fresh voices

You've heard of Bach, Mozart and Beethoven — all "dead white German men," Murphy said. Now, meet Giroux, Nishimura and Szymko.



Cait Nishimura

Julie Giroux "is the big name in terms of female composers" right now, Murphy said. "She's written a ton of great stuff," including symphonic and piano works as well as many soundtracks for movies and television.

"Kahn," one of two Giroux pieces in this concert, isn't a soundtrack but sure sounds like one, Murphy said; it's a dramatic and visual portrayal of the life of Mongolian warlord Genghis Kahn. "It really grabs you," he said.



Julie Giroux

"The most compelling" female composer Murphy knows is the youngest, he said: 25-year-old Cait Nishimura, based in Toronto and the recent winner of a prestigious national competition with her piece "Chasing Sunlight." "It's a cross section of urban and natural themes," said Murphy. "It's about driving west toward British Columbia and following the sun as you go. It's a beautiful piece."

Nishimura "writes with a fresh voice that doesn't sound like anybody else writing now," he said. "She's going to make it. I want her to meet my college students. I think they'll be very inspired by this young, minority woman writing music that is getting played."

[remainder of article describes Clark College winter choral concert]



# Backstage

## June 2018

### MUSIC IN THE LOBBY II: ABOVE AND BEYOND

**October 22, 2017:** Union High School Jazz Combo featuring Noah Hadfield (bass), Rashad Kabir (drums), and Chase Williams (trumpet), directed by Mr. Mark Claassen

**March 4, 2018:** Union High School Trombone duet (upper left) featuring Sean Grimm and Rhys Peerenboom, directed by Mr. Mark Claassen AND the Skyview High School Brass Ensemble (upper right) featuring Cameron Nielson, Nathan Greenwood, Mia Young, and Emmett Smith, directed by Mr. Tim Heichelheim

**May 20, 2018:** Southridge High School Saxophone quartet from Beaverton, Oregon (lower right) featuring Noah Lindsay, Will Greer, Sam Kwak, and Benson Truong AND Tuba soloist (lower left) River Edwards Robinson; both directed by Mr. Jared Sorum

If you arrived at an SWWS concert a bit early, you've experienced some of the exceptional high school ensembles showcased in the lobby. Hats off! to these student musicians who choose to extend above and beyond the typical school band class curriculum and commit to additional practice sessions and performances. We acknowledge your dedication to musical excellence, time management, and organizational skills that increase your future likelihood of success. Music education and music therapy studies from multiple universities have correlated formal music education in children with improved language skills, spatial-temporal skills needed to solve multi-step tasks, memory recall, and more.

Hats off! also to their parents who undoubtedly have been "band parents" for several years, rearranged their schedules, chaperoned events, and committed to driving their children to lessons, practices, and performances near and far. We empathize!

The audience members are the lucky beneficiaries of their combined commitment and we hope that there will always be student groups willing to share their special talents and exceptional musical moments with us.

## Southwest Washington Wind Symphony embraces the music of autumn - Symphony opens season of concerts based on paintings that you can bid on

By Scott Hewitt, Columbian Arts & Features Reporter

Published: October 20, 2018, 6:00 AM



How can a painting turn into music? And if it could, what would the painting on this page, "September Hut" by Sheep Jones, sound like? "It kind of confused me," admitted Patrick Murphy, conductor of the Southwest Washington Wind Symphony. "Every time I looked at this painting, I read it differently. One day it would seem dark and dreary. Another day it might be kind of uplifting." The center structure could be a little shack or a family home, he said; or it could be a schoolhouse, lonely and empty or busy and full. Also, what time of day is it in the painting? Murphy can't decide — but it seems like the red sky is "almost catching on fire," he said.

The Wind Symphony is getting ready for a whole season of translating artistic images and vibrant colors into music. Murphy has programmed an entire autumn-themed Sunday concert for the 55-member band based on Jones' painting, and he'll continue that practice with other paintings for the next two Wind Symphony concerts, set for March 3 and May 19.

Meanwhile, art lovers who attend Sunday's concert will be able to bid on "September Hut," plus approximately 10 more paintings by contemporary American artists — including Keith Lindberg, Carole Watanabe, and Marianne Kolb — in a silent auction. Proceeds will support the Wind Symphony. If you're interested, don't forget to show up early so you have time to peruse the artworks and make your bids before the music starts at 3 p.m.

### Donation collection

The paintings were donated to the symphony by a pair of local art collectors, Grace Teigen and Gene Wigglesworth, who were profiled in this newspaper a few years ago as they pursued the dream of a new Vancouver art museum where their holdings could be exhibited. But that has never come to pass, and now — even as their own collection keeps growing — the couple and their nonprofit Give Art Foundation have been brokering art donations between other parties. "We are approached by people whose art collections need a home as their owners transition to smaller homes," Teigen said by email. "We try to find the 'highest and best use' for a work or works of art. Sometimes it's a museum, sometimes an institution like a school or hospital, and other times an auction of sorts." She said the donors of "September Hut" were music lovers, so the Wind Symphony seemed "an especially good fit." ("Our own collection remains intact; it grows in fact," Teigen added. "But we've had no luck finding a suitable place to take it.")

It was a Wind Symphony board member who hatched the idea of building concert programs around the paintings, according to organization president Peter Boulé. Boulé invited Murphy over to check out all the artworks donated by Give Art and see what he thought — and that's when Murphy found himself intrigued by "September Hut."

## **Ambiguous, inspiring**

Because it's a little weird and ambiguous, "September Hut" wasn't Murphy's immediate favorite among the donated paintings. But that's also why he eventually chose it as the inspiration for a whole concert program: its ambiguity drew him in. "The more time you spend with it, the more you read into it on a personal level," Murphy said. He even avoided learning the painting's title for as long as possible, he added, because he didn't want that to limit his diverse reactions; when he takes his students in an Introduction to Fine Arts class at the University of Portland to visit the Portland Art Museum, he added, their task is the same: to take in the most modern and strange of artworks without looking at their titles. "I want to know your reactions, I want to know what you feel without the artist telling you how to feel. That's what's most important," Murphy said.

But for this event, Murphy has handled the initial interpreting himself. The more he studied "September Hut," he said, the more he discovered highlights and made musical connections. The idea of a family home reminded Murphy of "Shortcut Home," a cheerful, jazzy piece by Dana Wilson; the idea of a little red schoolhouse evoked "The Little Red Schoolhouse," a complex collection of young personalities by William Grant Still, whom Murphy called an underappreciated African-American composer; and the dying corn stalks and lurid palate made him think of autumn and death, so he selected "Autumn Air" by Nicole Piunno, "Scarecrow Overture" by Joseph Turrin and "Under the Willow," a Civil War lament by Julie Giroux.

"I see some desolation in the painting ... and I can imagine this being a lone shack standing in the midst" of a scorched battlefield, Murphy said. And, for that burning red sky, his choice was easy: "Night on Fire," an urgently sizzling piece by John Mackey. "For a lot of people, it's easier to identify with the visual than it is to listen and interpret a piece of music," Murphy said. "We don't usually put those together, but in these concerts we will."

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# Backstage

March 2019

"We keep moving forward, opening new doors, and doing new things, because we're curious and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths."

—Walt Disney

New projects by the Southwest Washington Wind Symphony during the 2018-2019 season:

### ART AUCTION

Fundraising is tough, period. This season we were privileged and grateful to have original oil paintings contributed by The Give Art Foundation available for silent auction during the concerts with all proceeds going to the wind symphony (examples above). The foundation was started and is managed by Grace Teigen and Gene Wigglesworth (below), local philanthropic art collectors. Its mission is to place visual art where it will do the most good.



The foundation has contributed art to the Portland Art Museum, Washington State University, and the Gay Men's Chorus. It also has provided art supplies to elementary and high school programs.

Gene is also a T-shirt designer, famous for that "Vancouver (not B.C.), Washington

(not D.C.) ..." shirt that we still see around town. Check it out in this New York Times feature:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/06/us/06vancouver.html>

Many thanks are also due to Pete & Jan Boulé for organizing the auction, Loren Hascall for transporting the art, Karin Rivera (District Art Coordinator) for lending supplies for the display, and Sandi Green and Pam & Jim Phillips for helping usher and coordinate the art auction.

### CONDUCTING VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

The business world has used computer-based videoconferencing for several years to allow people from around the world (or across town) to meet and share images and documents without having to be in the same conference room. Nowadays, videoconferencing is also being used in music education.

Reliably transmitting music with its tone and timbre qualities requires more complex software than transmitting speech. While the details of data transmission are beyond the scope of this newsletter, a successful music videoconference requires software customized for transmitting music and a reliable internet connection with adequate security and higher bandwidth to transmit the audio and video signals. Also required are high quality microphone(s) on the transmitting side, high quality headphones or

speakers on the receiving end, and adequate processing speed in the computers. Here are just a few examples of how this technology could be used:

- One-to-one private instruction (vocal, instrumental)
- Remote expert evaluating a group's performance
- Remote teacher evaluating a local teacher's technique
- Remote real-time audition

See the accompanying Columbian news article from May 17, 2019 for more details. Pictured below are Sam Ormson at the podium with the microphone behind him and Gerard Morris connected remotely from Tacoma during a recent rehearsal.



## Long Distance Maestro:

From Tacoma, conductor lends expertise to Southwest Washington Wind Symphony

By Scott Hewitt, Columbian Arts & Features Reporter.

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It's not unusual for an orchestra to work with two different conductors while preparing a concert. The rehearsal conductor drills the nuts and bolts; the performance conductor can arrive later, listen with bigger ears and think less about mechanics and more about overall artistic vision. "If you stick with one coach or one conductor for too long, you might get too comfortable," said Peter Boulé, president and saxophonist with the 55-member Southwest Washington Wind Symphony. "When you bring in a new person who has fresh, different ideas, it brings new energy and new focus."

What is unusual is a conductor working closely with an orchestra, live and in real time, from 140 miles away. That's the distance from Mountain View High School in Vancouver, where music teacher Sam Ormson started rehearsing the group, to the Tacoma home of University of Puget Sound associate professor of music Gerard Morris. Morris has been consulting and critiquing the group remotely — and will take over as performance conductor, in person, during a free concert set for 3 p.m. Sunday at Union High School.

Bringing the conductors and players together has been JamKazam, software designed to let musicians enjoy high-quality sound while collaborating over the internet. During a recent rehearsal, Ormson stood at the podium while the face of Morris floated on a screen above him. If that seemed a little weird at first, it quickly turned businesslike. The two conductors had a lot of material to review. "Nobody has done this before, that we know of," Ormson said. "It's a journey through technology, and it's real-world relevant."

Sixty percent of the players in the Southwest Washington Wind Symphony are teachers who earn continuing-education credit for participating in the group; experimenting with technology like this is an "outstanding educational experience for them and something they might be able to use with their students," Boulé said. "The next time you do a clinic session, before you take your group to a festival, you can get another set of ears."

Internet communication is also a great way to connect with talents who would otherwise be out of reach, Ormson added: "How else do you get a great composer or conductor to work with your group if they live someplace like New York City?" Or even Tacoma. "Without this we'd never be able to have Gerard, because he couldn't drive down here for weeks in a row," Boulé said. The first attempt to rehearse remotely was via video-conferencing program Skype — but "I couldn't hear anything," Morris quickly discovered. Skype is optimized for voice conversations; the volume and dynamic range of orchestra sound just didn't come through. JamKazam turned out to be the solution, but Morris said the information technology experts on his campus were worried about security, so they set him up with the Ethernet cable he needed at home. "I don't feel any lack of intimacy," Morris said of his distance-consulting experience. "Just the opposite, this connects you even more and makes the world even smaller."

## Technology for life

Ironically enough, the theme for this technology-driven concert is "Songs of Life," and it features favorites

by Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, Jake Runestad and William Grant Still. Still (1895-1978) was a fascinating and prolific figure in American musical history: He's considered the first major classical African-American composer, and was the first American to have an original opera performed by the New York City Opera and broadcast on national television. The Southwest Washington Wind Symphony will play Still's best-known work, his Symphony No. 1, the so-called "Afro-American Symphony" (1931), which includes the familiar rhythms and chord progressions of the blues.

Jake Runestad is a contemporary composer based in Minnesota, where mountains are few and far between, but his new piece "Rivers of Air" was inspired by hiking in Washington's Mount Rainier National Park. "Visions of expansive mountain ranges from thousands of feet in the air, the rushing Nisqually River and the profound sacredness of old growth trees guided me as I wrote," Runestad has written. "In an age when humans seem to be continuously separating ourselves from the earth and from each other, (John) Muir's words remind us to listen deeply to all that is around us; and in that listening, we too can see (and hear) our own rivers of air."

You might think that classical musicians and technology geeks don't overlap much — and you'd mostly be right, Boulé said. But Morris asserted that there shouldn't be any conflict. "People who aren't thinking about technology aren't doing the future of our art form any service," he said. "The technology is here. It's our job as human beings to figure out how we're going to use it."