

American Brass Quintet Program Notes

11/10/2024 at 3:00 pm

Brandon Ridenour, trumpet

Peter Evans, trumpet*

Eric Reed, horn

Hillary Simms, trombone

John D. Rojak, bass trombone

(*Mr. Evans joins ABQ for this performance while Kevin Cobb is on leave)

Courtly Dances and Canzons William Brade (1560-1630)

William Brade is among a group of notable English musicians that worked in the German courts in the early decades of the 17th century. He was universally recognized as one of the finest early violinists and held numerous positions in Copenhagen, Berlin, Hamburg, Gottorp, and Halle between 1594 and 1630. He seems to have led a restless life, never staying with one post for more than several years, and was described in a letter to the Hamburg authorities from the Count Ernst III of Holstein-Schaumburg as that "mischievous, wanton, fellow" after a dispute over his salary. Brade had a strong influence on the German instrumental music of the period and after his death in 1630, eight funeral songs were published in his memory.

Between 1607 and 1621 Brade published several important collections of five and six part instrumental music. These collections are stylistically quite varied and include not only traditional German dances, but also "non-German" dances like the volta, maschera, and bransle, and the canzon, a popular piece of Italian origin. He incorporated a new type of voicing using two soprano parts -- unlike the dances of earlier composers like Anthony Holborne (1599) that use only one upper part (cantus). As was customary in the period, these pieces have no specified instrumentation, but were likely to have been played by a consort of viols, or winds and brass. The crisp articulation and homogeneous sound of modern brass, combined with appropriate ornamentation, make these pieces stylish and engaging in modern performance.

- *Raymond Mase*

Samsara by Anthony Barfield

In autumn of 2020 The Juilliard School once again offered to commission a new work for The American Brass Quintet for its 60th anniversary. This one was especially significant for ABQ, as Anthony Barfield had been a trombone student in the quintet's chamber music seminar at Juilliard before he embarked on his very successful career as a composer. The premiere was delayed by a pandemic, a bit of revising, playing injuries and a sudden unexpected change of personnel in the quintet. This led to an even greater anticipation of this piece. Knowing the composer since he was a first-year undergraduate was immensely gratifying as we added another excellent brass quintet to the chamber music repertoire. The premiere performance was dedicated to our beloved trombonist, Michael Powell, who was Anthony's private teacher for several years and was unable to join us due to medical reasons. The quintet is extremely grateful to the Juilliard School for this commission and support of new music.

- *John Rojak*

From the composer:

sam·sa·ra /səm'särə/ noun

HINDUISM • BUDDHISM the cycle of death and rebirth to which life in the material world is bound. The title, Samsāra, can be interpreted as “wandering” or “world,” but it also is a concept of rebirth; the “cyclical nature of all life, matter and existence.” As I started writing this piece during the winter of 2020, I would drive to my favorite place on earth, Sleepy Hollow in Tarrytown, New York. As I'd go for long walks in the woods to gain inspiration, there was one word that kept entering my mind...“Rebirth.”

During this time, as the events unfolded all over the world and close to home, this idea of Rebirth became a powerful message and my main source of inspiration. Samsāra refers to the belief that we all go through constant births and rebirths. It's about the fact that everything changes but yet everything remains the same.

- *Anthony Barfield*

Sacred Geometry by David Biedenbender

David Biedenbender (b. 1984, Waukesha, Wisconsin) is a composer, conductor, performer, educator, and interdisciplinary collaborator. He has written music for the concert stage as well as for dance and multimedia collaborations, and his work is often influenced by his diverse musical experiences in rock and jazz bands as an electric bassist, in wind, jazz, and New Orleans-style brass bands as a euphonium, bass trombone, and tuba player, and by his study of Indian Carnatic music. His creative interests include working with everyone from classically trained musicians to improvisers, acoustic chamber music to large ensembles, and interactive electronic interfaces to live brain data. In addition to composing, David is a dedicated teacher. He is Associate Professor of Composition in the College of Music at Michigan State University. His composition students have achieved regional and national recognition for their creative work, including numerous awards and acceptance into renowned summer music festivals and undergraduate and graduate composition programs.

He received the Doctor of Musical Arts and Master of Music degrees in composition from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor and the Bachelor of Music degree in composition and theory from Central Michigan University. His primary musical mentors include Evan Chambers, Kristin Kuster, Stephen Rush, Michael Daugherty, Bright Sheng, Christopher Lees, David R. Gillingham, José Luis-Maurtua, and John Williamson. He has also studied at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in Uppsala, Sweden with Anders Hillborg and Steven Stucky, the Aspen Music Festival and School with Syd Hodkinson, and in Mysore, India where he studied South Indian Carnatic music, focusing on the Mridangam with Vidwan G.S. Ramanujan.

Note by the composer:

Sacred Geometry is inspired by the work of Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí (1852–1926). Gaudí is best known for creating la Basílica de la Sagrada Família, a cathedral in Barcelona, Spain, which has been under construction since 1882. Gaudí integrated symbols of his faith into every detail of the Basílica, weaving them into complex geometric forms he studied in the natural

world, like hyperbolic paraboloids, hyperboloids, helicoids, and cones. He also utilized Trencadís, a form of mosaic art made by cementing together recycled shards of tile and chinaware, fashioning beautiful new things out of the broken and discarded. The inside of the cathedral mimics a forest, with tree-like columns and branches supporting hyperboloid vaults in spectacular fractals, evoking the infinite—connecting God and Creation. I think of this piece like a strange liturgy—or ritual—to meditate on this striking space, to contemplate Gaudí’s way of seeing the world, and, hopefully, to discover a similar sense of awe and wonder.

The first movement, Ripples, is quite simple—a chanted invocation in the trumpets with orchestrated reverberations evoking the large spaces inside the cathedral. There are also distant echoes of William Byrd’s setting of Ave Verum Corpus (1605) in this movement. My favorite moment of Byrd’s work is this surprising, fleeting dissonance, the result of a major chord in the upper voices against a weeping, descending minor melody in the bass, coinciding with the text Miserere—have mercy. It is bittersweet and broken. The second movement, Gaudí, is playful and whimsical, even irreverent. The Latin root of Gaudí is gaudere, which means “to rejoice” or “to take pleasure in.” Gaudí threaded the seemingly fantastical aspects of our world into dream-like designs and surreal structures that seem unnaturally natural, or naturally unnatural. Imagine stopping to marvel at some small, unusual flower like *Orchis italica* or hearing the peculiar call of a Brown Sicklebill or a Black-throated Loon. I think of this movement as a walk through a garden of strange delights.

A nautilus is a marine mollusk with a shell in the shape of a logarithmic spiral. As the nautilus grows, it lives in the outermost chamber of the shell, sealing off the previous chamber with a wall that prevents it from returning to its old home. As a symbol, it has many meanings and connections, but, for me, I find it to be a powerful metaphor: building anew while always leaving behind an artifact of the past—a stunningly beautiful one, in fact. The third movement, Nautilus, is built on a small, simple phrase that spins and rotates into longer and longer threads and swirling, circular harmonic progressions.

The final movement is called Helix. The helix also has many connections and connotations, appearing in everything from spiral staircases to seashells, forming the structure for the molecules from which life is built, and lying at the center of mathematical formulas that describe both infinitesimally small subatomic particles as well as the mechanics of the entire universe.

- *David Biederbender*

OSVALDO LACERDA: Fantasia e Rondó

Oswaldo Lacerda graduated from the Carlos Gomez Conservatory of Music in 1960 with studies in piano, harmony and composition with Camargo Guarnieri. In 1986, he received a Guggenheim Foundation grant to study in the U.S. for a year, where he studied composition with Vittorio Giannini and Aaron Copland. He was founder and Artistic Director of three musical societies in Sao Paulo, and has won many national composition prizes. Mr. Lacerda acknowledges the influence of the work of Brazilian musicologist Mario de Andrade. In addition, he shares a basic philosophy with Ralph Vaughan Williams; their music is written in a national idiom intended to be universally understood. Lacerda's music attempts to capture the essence

of Brazil's musical soul through the incorporation of its folk and popular music into his own. The composer has provided the following note:

"Since there are few brass ensembles in Brazil, there are very few original works of Brazilian composers for brass. This made me write the Fantasia e Rondo for brass quintet in 1977. It is scored for two trumpets, horn, tenor trombone and tuba (or bass trombone). "The Fantasia, as its name implies, has a very free form. There is a small first part, followed by a short fugato, begun by the bass trombone. There follows a sort of humorous central section, and the movement closes with a varied reexposition of the first part. The Rondo has five parts, following the scheme ABACA. It consists of a lively and continuous dialogue between all the instruments. In some parts of both movements, one can hear some of the ecclesiastical modes, in the way they appear in the Brazilian folk music.

A Murder of Crows by David Sampson

for Brass Quintet

Written for and dedicated to the American Brass Quintet (2024)

Crows are some of the smartest creatures in the animal kingdom. An article that appeared in the science journal PLOS ONE in July 2014 puts a comparison estimate on that brainpower: the authors concluded that crows are just as good at reasoning as a human seven-year-old child. Facts like these peaked my curiosity which encouraged my desire to illustrate these extraordinary birds in musical form. During my research, I learned that a group of crows is called a murder of crows and that most animals have descriptive group names. To expand on my original idea, I chose five different groups to create four movements for brass quintet: 1. A Murder of Crows 2. A Bask of Crocodiles 3. A Tower of Giraffes 4. A Shadow of Jaguars/A Romp of Otters. Each movement attempts to capture the environment of the animals along with a likely scenario. An example would be the 4th movement where two jaguars (shadow) are hunting a single otter along a river only to be challenged by a romp of otters. After both groups attack each other several times with the otters surprising the jaguars with their tenacity, the demoralized and outnumbered jaguars give up and slink away. Just in case you were concerned: no animals were harmed in the making of this music.

- *David Sampson.*

Program note for Book of Brass by Jennifer Higdon

A chance meeting with Dorothy and DuWayne Hansen in October of 2017 led to a personal introduction with the great American composer Jennifer Higdon. With that introduction, ABQ asked if there was a possibility of commissioning her for a quintet since it clearly fit into the part of ABQ's mission to gain works from the leading composers of our time. Jennifer kindly responded affirmatively although the piece would fall into her queue and possibly be written by 2024--seven years later. In 2020, however, we heard from Jennifer that she had composed faster than expected and could deliver a piece for a premiere in October 2022, two years earlier than expected. An inquiry from the Lyrebird Quintet from Melbourne, Australia allowed us to combine funding for a major piece as well as around the world premieres.

Book of Brass is written in 4 movements, or chapters, of which any number may be played together for performance. Ramp Up is a lively, spirited piece that stays busy from first note to last. Acrostic begins leisurely and, as one might gather from the title, becomes more complex and intricate until its satisfying ending. Glide & Fade is slow, meditative, and harmonically rich. The final chapter is Punch It Up, with a funky groove and high energy eliciting virtuosity from all voices.

The American Brass Quintet is grateful to the Hansens not only for a fortuitous introduction, but also for their generous funding to create this new landmark for brass chamber music.

- *John Rojak*