

COLORADO COLLEGE



Program Notes
by
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FESTIVAL ARTISTS CONCERT

Saturday, June 13, 2026

7:00 PM

Packard Hall

Overture to *Magic Flute* for brass quintet

W. A. Mozart
(1756-1791)
arr. John Wasson

Mozart finished his German opera, *The Magic Flute*, in 1791, the year of his death. The story is a mixture of the sublime and the silly. It is a parody of the then very serious cult of Freemasonry absorbed into what he referred to as his opera for kids. It is a work that can be experienced on many different levels and includes characters that range from manifestations of the most serious sort to the comic peasants. Mozart liked his opera overtures to forecast the moods of the drama and its characters. This overture accomplishes that task admirably.

It would be impossible to discuss the many different characters and events of the opera and to explain how each is represented in the music of the overture. It would be best to note just a few obvious features. For example, the opera has scenes in temples where the “high” characters express their virtuous thoughts. To foreshadow these themes in his overture, Mozart uses trombones which are otherwise virtually absent in his symphonic music. In fact, the music for this overture is as close as Mozart comes to a brass section in all his symphonic music. And we might note that this use of the brass instruments, which also open the overture with three famous chords, could have been the stimulus for this arrangement of the overture for brass quintet to start with.

Lest we put too much emphasis on the brass sound immediately after the curious opening chords, Mozart immediately shifts to a light, almost humorous, melody which might hint at the music of the more comic characters we are going to meet in the opera proper. Here Mozart foreshadows the characters of Papagena and Papageno, the charming and humorous peasant characters many will remember from their final duet, “Pa, pa, pa, pa, Papageno.” Without worrying about details, I would encourage the listeners to enjoy the musical characterizations and how Mozart weaves the inimitable melodies together.

Sarabande and Cortège

Henri Dutilleux
(1916-2013)

Henri Dutilleux is generally considered one of the leading French composers of the 20th century. Born into a very artistic family, he studied music at the Paris Conservatoire and eventually became a professor at his alma mater. His reputation took him around the world as a teacher, including at the celebrated Tanglewood Festival in Massachusetts. He composed extensively for symphony, chamber ensembles, and the stage.

During the occupation of Paris in World War II, Dutilleux worked first as a stretcher bearer and was then assigned as a *chef du chant* (singers' musical advisor) at the Paris Opera. These positions gave him time to compose and he was commissioned by the Conservatoire to write "test pieces" for various instruments. These works, required for competitions, were written to challenge the students on the idiomatic techniques of their particular instruments. It was for this purpose that he wrote the *Sarabande et Cortège* in 1942. It is curious that such a competition piece would be based on two movements which are both fairly solemn.

The *Sarabande*, a slow and majestic dance from the Baroque era, flows along in a triple meter and forces the bassoon to shape long, lyrical lines. The *Cortège*, a solemn procession often associated with funerals, is also slow in its basic tempo. However, Dutilleux subdivides the beat quite a lot for the bassoon resulting in some fast and flashy passages. In fact, at times the *Cortège* seems a little too sprightly—what with its trills, fast chords, and passage work toward the end—for a funeral. Instead of mourning the departed, perhaps we are celebrating some of the fun in his/her past life!

Suite for oboe and harp

Minuet: Moderato

Valse Miniature: Allegro grazioso

Jig: Allegro molto

William Alwyn
(1905-1985)

William Alwyn is an English musician whose relatively modest fame outside of England does not reflect the quality of his music. He had a rich career which included composing—over 70 film scores, 5 symphonies, 4 operas, and lots of chamber music—and playing flute and piccolo. He was principal flute in the London Symphony Orchestra and taught music at the Royal Conservatory of Music. He was also a distinguished poet and artist.

Alwyn's musical style was diverse. He wrote some music that was basically atonal and dissonant, devising his own version of Schönberg's 12-tone system. At other times, however, he wrote music that is listener-friendly with merely hints of dissonance. And this suite for harp and oboe falls into the latter category. It was written for Léon and Sidonie Goossens, a brother and sister oboist and harpist respectively. They were, in fact, siblings of the more famous Eugene Goossens, the second of three composer conductors of the same name! The Goossens clan was big in England, and Léon was for years considered the best oboist in the world.

The three movements of this suite are charming examples of dance types. The *Minuet* has the stately triple-time aura of the old court dance from 17th century France. Lasting less than 1 ½ minutes, the *Valse Miniature* is a mere whisp of a waltz. But it has the elegance we expect of this flowing and stately dance. The third movement is reminiscent of a jovial Irish jig. It is in the traditional 6-beat meter, and surrounds a slower middle section. The first and last dances are just slightly tinged with melancholy by being set in a minor key.

Midsummer Moon

Rebecca Clarke
(1886-1979)

Rebecca Clark led a most remarkable life, one of trial and tribulation, but also one with moments of remarkable accomplishment and success. She was born in England to a German mother and American father. After interrupted studies at the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal College of Music, she was banished from her home by a cruel father and wound up seeking musical employment as an accomplished violist, first in England and subsequently in the United States where her two brothers lived. Her early success as a composer was difficult to sustain, particularly in the U.S. where misogynistic attitudes, particularly toward women as composers, prevailed. She turned more and more to performing but never lost the spark of creativity that compelled her to produce new compositions. She deserves to be lauded as a champion of women in Western music history.

In the years around 1924 she wrote some diminutive works for piano and violin including *Lullaby*, *Chinese Puzzle*, and *Midsummer Moon*. Of these, the first two are very short while the third is a bit more developed. Her innovative style is difficult to define in a few words, but one commentator attempted to sum it up as follows:

“She knew all the English composers of note plus many of the foreign ones as well, including Bloch, Ravel, Bartok, Prokofiev and Stravinsky. It’s therefore not surprising that her music sounds so international. Her music is in fact a highly personal fusion of Debussy impressionism, Blochian ardour, with melodic elements occasionally derived from English folk song.”

Midsummer Moon, written for violin and piano, was dedicated to Hungarian violinist Adila Fachiri. It is a roughly six-minute fantasy characterized by a hazy, dreamlike quality. It is an atmospheric impressionist work whose rich harmonies give the listener an inspired image of a hazy midsummer moon.

From *Portraits of Langston*

Prelude: *Helen Keller*
Le Grand Duc Mambo
Silver Rain
Jazz Band in a Parisian Cabaret

Valerie Coleman
(b. 1970)

Valerie Coleman is an American composer and flutist. Among her many accomplishments, she is well known for her contributions to wind chamber music and for founding Imani Winds, an outstanding woodwind quintet. This ensemble has released a number of albums, one of which was nominated for a Grammy Award for Best Classical Crossover Album in 2005.

Portraits of Langston is a series of short movements for flute, clarinet, and piano, each based on a poem or prose literary text by the celebrated African American poet and champion of the “Harlem Renaissance” Langston Hughes. Each poem will be recited before we hear the composition. The first, titled Prelude: *Helen Keller*, is a kind of homage to the incredible accomplishments of this most famous blind and deaf young person. The opening clarinet solo is like a ray of light coming to Keller.

The second movement, *Le Grand Duc Mambo*, comes from a passage in Hughes’ autobiography—*The Big Sea*—and refers to a celebrated jazz cabaret in the Montmartre

district of Paris where Hughes worked as a youth. His time spent listening to expatriate Black jazz bands in Parisian cabarets inspired his pioneering fusion of jazz rhythms with written verse. His description of the scene at Le Grand Duc is too long to print in this program, but will be read aloud at the concert.

The third movement, *Silver Rain*, was dedicated to the life of a friend of Hughes who struggled with cancer. This piece opens with a high hymn-like melody for solo piano which soon metamorphoses into a melancholic duet for the flute and clarinet. The “silver rain” metaphor of the title might be heard in the fluid descending lines that characterize much of the music.

The last movement, *Jazz Band in a Parisian Cabaret*, opens with an instruction to the players, “with a brisk stride piano feel.” Stride piano is a jazz style in which the left hand plays solid chords with a strong beat while the right hand goes all over the place! The “stride piano” feeling in this movement, especially after a slow middle section, brings the movement to an exciting climax. A new element of color is achieved by occasionally having the flute play piccolo.

Octet in E Major, Op. 32

Adagio; Allegro

Menuetto: Allegro

Andante con variazioni: Tema di Händel

Finale: Allegretto

Louis Spohr
(1784-1859)

Louis Spohr was well known in his time. He composed many works, including 9 symphonies, 8 violin concertos, 36 string quartets and 11 operas, among others. He was in considerable demand as a composer—a virtual “household name.” After his death, however, he pretty much slipped into relative obscurity and never recouped his former fame. History seems to have been a harsh judge in his case, for his music has serious artistic merit. It forms a bridge between the classical works of Haydn and Mozart, and the early romantic works of the “Schu” guys, Schubert and Schumann. He was, in addition, a close friend of Beethoven, perhaps the most prominent composer to bridge the classical-romantic divide.

His Octet in E Major is a terrific example of this “bridge” designation. On the surface it has the appearance of a classical work with four movements—including the ubiquitous minuet and the theretofore much-appreciated theme and variations. And the movements are generally in classical forms like the sonata. Finally, they have a classical spirit resulting from traditional melodies and harmonies. In short, like the music of Mozart and Haydn, they are listener friendly. At the same time, they often seem to move our feelings in a more romantic way by the colorful and unusual instrumentation such as the inclusion of clarinet and two French horns and two violas that create thick textures and lush colors.

The first movement opens with a slow introduction, *Adagio*, followed by a relatively fast *Allegro*. The second movement, labeled *Menuetto*, is fast and light, more like what the romantic composers called a *scherzo*. The third movement, the theme and variations, is based on a melody by the great Baroque composer, George Handel. Handel was immensely popular in England at the time, and since this octet was originally written for England, the selection of this melody was apt and very pleasing to audiences. The last movement, *Allegretto*, is an appealing rondo form with a main melody that is repeated numerous times to give a sense of unity. There are lots of virtuoso passages for the various instruments.