

COLORADO COLLEGE



Summer
Music
festival

Program Notes
by
Michael Grace

FESTIVAL ARTISTS CONCERT

June 9, 2022

7:30 PM

Packard Hall

Quintetto Concertante

Allegro

Slow

Vivo

Václav Nelhýbel
(1919-1996)

Václav Nelhýbel was born in Czechoslovakia in 1919. After studying in Prague and in Freiburg, Germany, he wound up in the United States in 1957. Centered in New York, he had several university teaching and composing appointments, ending up at the University of Scranton in Pennsylvania where he remained for the rest of his career.

His corpus of compositions represents a wide variety of genres, ranging from operas, to ballets, symphonies and concert band works (by far the most prolific), and all sorts of chamber ensembles. He was a composer of many talents. His *Quintetto Concertante*, composed in 1959, is written for trumpet, trombone, violin, xylophone and piano. This odd combination of instruments must have appealed to his love of tone color and variety of sound production. This fun composition is based on the interplay of string, brass and percussive sounds.

The first movement, *Allegro*, finds all five instruments in an excited dialogue with one another. As the great German writer Goethe once said, chamber music should be like a conversation between intelligent interlocutors, and that spirit prevails here. One can hear the expressive identity of each of the partners. The second movement, *Slow*, is led by the violin with the others in more responsive roles. The third movement, *Vivo*, returns to the conversational spirit of the first. We might note that Nelhýbel was known for writing music for young players. This work, however, is demanding enough of each participant that it is clear he was writing for experienced professional musicians.

David Sampson (b. 1951, Charlottesville, Virginia) has emerged as one of the truly unique voices of his generation. In listing his accomplishments, Wikipedia notes the following: "Sampson received a B.A. in music from the Curtis Institute of Music, where he studied trumpet with Gilbert Johnson. He continued his studies with Donald Lybbert in composition at Hunter College, earning an M.F.A. in composition, followed by a D.M.A. at the Manhattan School of Music, where he studied composition with John Corigliano and trumpet with Robert Nagel and Raymond Mase. He also attended the Ecole d'Art Americaines at Fontainebleau as a composition student of Robert Levin. Additionally, he has studied with Karel Husa and Henri Dutilleux in composition and Gerard Schwarz on trumpet." This is a most impressive resume for a composer and trumpeter. It is also noteworthy that he has received numerous prestigious awards, including grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, American Academy of Arts and Letters, Chamber Music America, Barlow Endowment, New Jersey State Council on the Arts, Jerome Foundation, Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, and the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. He has also held some important professional positions, including Composer-in-Residence with the Colonial Symphony Orchestra for an extended period from 1998 through 2007.

I had the good fortune to talk with David Sampson about 19. He explained in detail the profound meaning of the composition for him. It was created in 2020, the year when the world was suffering from the rapid spread of Covid-19. As he put it, "we felt vulnerable," not knowing how or when this pandemic would ever end. And he noted how aware he was of the rapidly rising numbers of people dying in inadequate hospital facilities.

He describes the composition in three sections. The first represents the inescapable feeling of dread. There was a stultifying fear of not knowing what could be happening. This is expressed in long-held, slow-moving, dissonant chords. After a few minutes of this, the second part emerges with faster more aggressive ascending melodic lines that express the feelings of terror that were gripping much of the population. Those who caught Covid-19 felt a sense of suffocation, a panic feeling of losing one's breath. The third section, which begins a few minutes later, expresses sorrow. The tempo slows down, reminding the listener of the slow chords at the beginning of the work, only now there are also long heart-felt solos.

Fully aware of the morbid mood of this composition, David felt like a captive of the "Pandemic" Era. And, when he received a commission for a new composition in 2020, he felt compelled to express this pessimism in his music.

Red Clay and Mississippi Delta

Valerie Coleman
(b. 1970)

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

Red Clay and Mississippi Delta was published in 2015. In Coleman's words, it "is a light scherzo work for wind quintet that references my family's background of living in Mississippi. From the juke joints and casino boats that line the Mississippi river, to the skin tone of my relatives from the area: a dark skin that looks like it came directly from the red clay. The solo lines are instilled with personality, meant to capture the listener's attention as they wail with 'bluesy' riffs that are accompanied ('comped') by the rest of the ensemble. The result is a virtuosic chamber work that merges classical technique and orchestration with the blues dialect and charm of the south."

Listening to this work is a treat. It opens with many solo lines for each of the winds that are very individualistic and often rather difficult to play. They sound like distinct voices each with its own character, some rhythmically jerky, some more lyrical and smooth, some more narrative. The clarinet leads off with others responding briefly. At times the conversation gets animated and heated, like they can't listen patiently to each other!

About halfway through, all the players seem to join each other in a more jazzy, or bluesy style. Maybe these relatives begin to sense each other's feelings and their common background. At the end, we can feel a real family unity. We are fortunate the Coleman described just how this work expresses so personally her family background.

Piano Quintet in A Major, Op. 81

Allegro, ma non tanto

Dumka. Andante con; Un pochettino più mosso

Scherzo (Furiant). Molto vivace

Finale. Allegro

Antonín Dvořák
(1841-1904)

If one visits the national cemetery in Prague and judges the importance of those buried there by the size and ostentation of the monuments, one would surely assume that Antonín Dvořák had achieved the stature of national hero by the time of his death. And indeed, this is not far from true. It is curious, however, that his music

nearly always has universal appeal even though it is often in a style and character that it is idiomatically Czechoslovakian. The Piano Quintet in A Major is no exception. This work, often considered among his brightest, happiest, and most listenable compositions, bristles with musical variety. Lyrical and sentimental melodies, brisk fugues and other contrapuntal passages, and charming Czech national melodies and dances all make this quintet exceptionally popular and a pleasure to hear.

The first movement, *Allegro ma non troppo*, opens disarmingly with the main theme quietly in the cello, but this theme is shortly presented in many different guises as the melodic crux of the movement and later developed in a contrapuntal manner reminiscent of Beethoven. A second theme, in a distant C-sharp minor, is of a more noble Slavic character.

The second movement is a *Dumka*, one of Dvořák's favorite Czech genres. The *Dumka* is a slow elegy, usually given to sudden changes of mood. The movement opens with a truly elegiac theme heard primarily in the viola, and then proceeds to alternate this theme with two others. The first of these is a little faster, *Un pochettino più mosso*, the second a much faster *vivace* which unfolds fugally in the strings. For the formally curious, the overall form of the movement is a nice symmetrical ABACABA, with A standing for the *Dumka* and B and C the faster interludes.

The third movement, *Scherzo - Molto vivace*, is actually a Czech dance known as the *Furiant*. This is essentially a very fast waltz (or perhaps minuet) with a slower traditional trio in between the two statements of the *Furiant*. The finale, *Allegro con brio*, although not based on any traditional Czech form or actual melody, sounds thoroughly nationalistic throughout. The main theme is rhythmically exhilarating and recurs several times, notably in the middle in a wild fugue. And after a penultimate passage of relative clam, this same theme, coaxed out of the group by the piano, finally brings the movement to a close that is positively jubilant.

Upcoming Summer Music Festival Events

coloradocollege.edu/musicfestival

Outdoor Festival Celebration

7 p.m. Saturday, June 11, Tava Quad, free

Festival Artists Concert

2:30 p.m. Sunday, June 12, Packard Hall

Ticketed event

Festival Orchestra Concert

7:30 p.m. Tuesday, June 14, Celeste Theatre

Pre-Concert Lecture: 6:15 p.m. CAC Screening Room

Ticketed event



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