

COLORADO COLLEGE



Summer
Music
festival

Program Notes
by
Michael Grace

FESTIVAL ARTISTS CONCERT

Monday June 23, 2025

7:00 PM

Packard Hall

Fun and Fanciful Shorts

Dance for flute, horn and piano

Eric Ewazen
(b. 1954)

Eric Ewazen, born in Cleveland, received his Bachelor of Music from the Eastman School of Music and both his master's and doctorate from The Juilliard School. He has studied with many of the most famous 20th-century American composers, including Milton Babbitt, Samuel Adler and Gunther Schuller. He has received many composition awards and prizes, and has been commissioned for works by soloists, chamber ensembles and orchestras in the US and overseas. Ewazen has been on the faculty of the Juilliard School since 1980.

Dance is actually the third movement of a three-movement work titled *Ballade, Pastorale and Dance*, originally composed for flute, horn and piano. As one might expect from a closing "finale," it is fast, flashy and exuberant. It opens with the flute producing fast little passages, but it soon shares these with the other instruments. The movement builds to an exciting climax that will leave many of the players and the audience breathless.

Incantation and Dance for oboe and piano

William Grant Still
(1895-1978)

William Grant Still was one of the most famous and successful African American composers in the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Perhaps his most celebrated work was his *Afro-American Symphony* which saw each movement adapting an element of classical European or American music, whether it was the blues, ragtime, or straightforward jazz. An "incantation" was often an other-worldly mystic work while the dance would be something like a charming European minuet! Still is already morphing or amalgamating different cultures.

The music of this work is brilliant. The *Incantation* begins by using a Dorian, or medieval mode, for its tonal structure whereas the *Dance* uses a more traditional European pentatonic scale. Yet after hearing most of the movement, we are comfortable with a kind of natural tonal unity or order. One may wonder how he learned to achieve this. Know that he was African American and would have learned jazz idioms naturally, and that he was also a student at the Oberlin College Conservatory where he would have studied medieval music modes!

Bach to Blues for solo double bass

Andante con moto

John Clayton

(b. 1952)

In the printed score of this work, John Clayton gives a brief description of his career to date. He was a “student of Ray Brown and already performing with Henry Mancini by the time he was nineteen. After studies at Indiana University, he toured with Count Basie and was appointed principal bass of the Amsterdam Philharmonic. In 1998, John was appointed artistic director of jazz at the Hollywood Bowl for the Los Angeles Philharmonic Association’s new initiative, with the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra as ensemble-in-residence.”

Of interest in his experience and training is that he has had extensive exposure to both the classical and jazz traditions. He has studied in a university context and played with some of the jazz greats. In *Bach to Blues* there are passages that almost sound like they could have been composed by Bach himself, and others that sound like the free improvisation of Count Basie on tour with a young protégé such as Charlie Mingus.

Quartet for Strings (in one movement), Op. 89

Grave

Amy Beach

(1867-1944)

Amy Beach was one of the most significant woman composers of all time in the United States. Born and raised in New England, she composed in most genres and, after her controlling husband died, developed a real career touring as a composer and virtuosic pianist. There were many critics who believed women could not compose original music, but she proved them wrong. After the first performance of her *Gaelic Symphony*, George Chadwick, the most prominent composer in the preeminent Boston group of musicians, went to Amy and invited her to go out and drink beer. “After all, Amy, you’re one of the boys now!”

Her String Quartet, Op. 89, was composed while she was head of the celebrated MacDowell Artist Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire. Yet it did not become famous until years later after it was performed frequently in Europe. Perhaps a key to its success is the way it amalgamates European style with Native American melodies. It contains three melodies from the Inuit tribe that settled in Alaska. These occur in the middle of the tripartite overall design of the work.

It opens with a series of slow-moving chords that are frequently dissonant and that establish a kind of tragic aura. Soon the viola brings in a distinct melody that is continued by the first violin. These are the strangely lyrical Inuit themes which provide the melodic content for most of the rest of the composition. The listener is brought into an aura of sound that is occasionally rhythmic and bright, with one full-fledged fugue. The work ends much like it began, with quiet, pensive, but also very internal meditative chords. If the listeners can let go, they will find themselves mesmerized in tranquility. Beach is a great composer.

**from *Songs America Loves to Sing*
for flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano**

John Harbison
(b. 1938)

Amazing Grace

Will the Circle be Unbroken?

Aura Lee

Ain't Goin' to Study War No More

This wordy title perhaps says it all. These four movements are arrangements of songs we all know (or at least knew). In an extensive interview about this work, Harbison discussed how he picked the songs he did and how the lyrics of the original songs influenced the instrumental chamber music. Incidentally, he originally set ten songs of which we will hear four. Note that his colorful selection of instruments gave him a wide range of tone colors and idiomatic sound techniques. Think of these colors as you listen to these charming arrangements of pieces you love to sing.

The first song, "Amazing Grace," opens with a languid solo for the clarinet. The clarinet retains prominence throughout this well-known hymn. The second song is a folk classic, "Will the Circle be Unbroken?", about a young person watching his mother's coffin being taken to her grave. The third piece in this collection is "Aura Lee." That is the original title for Elvis Presley's heart-throbbing "Love Me Tender," here set with little staccato chords in all the instruments accompanying the melody. The last song in this set, "Ain't Goin' to Study War No More," was originally a spiritual from the early 19th century, well-known in its original folk version, "Down By Riverside." At some point, most likely in the early 60's, it was given fresh anti-war lyrics and became known by its new refrain "ain't gonna study war no more." The music for Harbison's arrangement of this song is the richest, often calling for the entire ensemble.

***Tango for Gabriela* for violin and brass ensemble**

Robert Aldridge
(b. 1954)
arr. Ivaylo Hristov

Robert Aldridge is a U.S. composer, professor, and former Director of Music at the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University. He has composed more than eighty works including operas, symphonies, ballets and all sorts of chamber music. His compositions have been performed by prestigious artists in the United States, Europe, and Japan. Perhaps his most famous work is an opera setting of Sinclair Lewis' 1927 novel *Elmer Gantry*.

The work we will hear tonight has a curious background. It was composed as a piece for solo violin and often considered a violin concerto. But it was arranged later for violin solo and large brass ensemble of nine instruments. The solo violin is set off not only by being the only string instrument, but also by being especially difficult in the spirit of a concerto soloist. The violin must play in a wide range and often difficult tempos and meter.

Trio for clarinet, cello and piano

Allegro

Andante

Allegroissimo

Nino Rota
(1911-1979)

Nino Rota was an Italian composer who was best known for his prolific work in film. He completed at least 150 film scores between the mid-1930s and his death in 1979. And these were not pot boilers; he worked with the best producers and directors, including Visconti and Zeffirelli, and he won an Academy Award for the score of *The Godfather Part II* with Francis Ford Coppola. He was, without question, one of the most worthy film composers of the 20th century.

So, we might ask ourselves if he rose to that height in the world of chamber music. And in honesty, we would likely have to say, “not quite.” But he brought something special to chamber music and that was a sense of style, of novel character, musical facility, and often the spirit of fun. When you listen to this trio, just try to enjoy.

The first movement, *Allegro*, has a lively and energetic mood. A spritely melody is passed around among the three instruments as if they are enjoying it for themselves. The second movement, *Andante*, could hardly be more different; it is introspective and lyrical. The third movement, marked *Allegroissimo* (very, very fast), simply takes off into a world of playful fun. Be ready for the final cadence.

UPCOMING SUMMER MUSIC FESTIVAL EVENTS

www.coloradocollege.edu/musicfestival

Music at Midday

12:15 p.m. June 25, June 26, June 27, Packard Hall, free

Music and Art Talk

1:30 p.m. June 25, Fine Arts Center Agents of Care Hall, free

Festival Artists Pre-Concert Recital

5:45 p.m. June 26, Packard Hall, free

Festival Artists Concert

7 p.m. June 26, Packard Hall, ticketed event

Festival Orchestra Concert

Scott Yoo, *conducting*

7:00 p.m. June 17, Celeste Theatre, ticketed event

Pre-Concert Lecture with Michael Grace begins at 5:45 p.m. in the CAC Screening Room

