



Rudi E. Scheidt
School of Music

presents

AURORA AWAKES

featuring

THE UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS

Symphonic Band

William Plenk, conductor
Erin Duke and Wilker Augusto, guest conductors

DECEMBER 5, 2023 | 7:30 PM

SFPAC PLOUGH HALL

Rudi E. Scheidt School of Music
Kevin Sanders, Director
College of Communication and Fine Arts
Ryan Fisher, Interim Dean

PROGRAM

American Folk Rhapsody No. 1

Clare Grundman
(1913-1996)

Shenandoah Traditional

arr. by Omar Thomas (b. 1984)

Colorado Peaks

Dana Wilson
(b. 1946)

*When Jesus Wept
Prelude for Band*

William Schuman
(1910-1992)

Erin Duke, guest conductor*

Perseids

Alexandra Gardner
(b. 1967)

Wilker Augusto, guest conductor*

Aurora Awakes

John Mackey
(b. 1973)

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Wind Conducting

UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS SYMPHONIC BAND

WILLIAM PLENK, conductor

Flute

Miley Jaimez*
Ellie Pappas
Micayla Scott
Mercy Hammond
Jorge Roque
Ty Gross

Oboe

Micayla LeDuff*
Antoinette Conway

Bassoon

Johnathan Gomez*
Connor Lorino

Clarinet

Emily Ward*
Jordan Kyles
Onyinye Igboanugo
Eli Roy
Erin Moore
Jaylon Williams
Kameron Walker
Will Steen

Bass Clarinet

Gray Salameh

Alto Saxophone

Landon Riggins*
Paris McCann

Tenor Saxophone

Eli Wyatt

Baritone Saxophone

Mateo Navarro

Trumpet

Jaylen Thigpen*
Marshall Rambin
Charles Langston
Jacob Turner
Logan Pack
Tyler Pine

French Horn

Kelsey Pegues*
Elijah Evans
Breanne Tompkins
Wilker Augusto +

Trombone

Evan Green*
Thomas Stehlik
Constance Robinson
Josue Villa
Caleb Tosh

Bass Trombone

Val Huggins

Euphonium

Alfred Hernandez*
Ayden Bran
Sebastian Santos
Dontavius Howze
Terrion Freeman
Kathryn Dacus

Tuba

Gabrielle Ramsey*
Benjamin Shedd
Reagan Nunley
Lyle Stephens

Double Bass

Aniyya Dent

Piano

Carmen Lemos Gonzalez

Percussion

Colton Renfrow*
Jesse Wickman
Daniel Young
Mia Perez
Tyler Dailey
Mason Threlkeld
Kenneth Polk

PROGRAM NOTES

American Folk Rhapsody No. 1

Clare Grundman
(1913-1996)

This year marks the 110th anniversary of the birth of esteemed American composer and arranger Clare Grundman. Many know Grundman to be a standard in his arrangements and orchestrations of Leonard Bernstein's orchestral works. Still, in his own right, he was a prolific wind band composer in the mid-twentieth century. Grundman pursued education studies at Ohio State University, where he performed with the university bands on clarinet and saxophone. Post-graduation, Grundman became an instrumental music teacher but soon returned to his alma mater to study composition with world-renowned composer Paul Hindemith. He later became the assistant director of bands at Ohio State University, but left to serve his country in World War II as a chief musician in The United States Coast Guard band. After the war, Grundman focused on his compositions and received some of the highest awards in the band profession as well as for his work in radio, movies, television, ballet, and Broadway.

American Folk Rhapsody No. 1 was one of Grundman's first works following World War II. The first of four American Folk Rhapsodies features American classic folk songs: *On Top of Old Smokey*, *Shantyman's Life*, *Sourwood Mountain*, and *Sweet Betsy from Pike*. The work is dedicated to Manley R. Whitcomb and the Ohio State University Symphonic Band. Grundman shared in the score, "The material used consists of excellent songs of American folklore, and which have not received the attention they justly deserve."

Shenandoah Traditional

**Arranged by Omar Thomas
(b. 1984)**

Shenandoah is one of the most well-known and beloved Americana folk songs. Originally a river song detailing the lives and journeys of fur traders canoeing down the Missouri River, the symbolism of this culturally significant melody has been expanded to include its geographic namesake -- an area of the eastern United States that encompasses West Virginia and a good portion of the western part of Virginia -- and various parks, rivers, counties, and academic institutions found within.

Back in May of 2018, after hearing a really lovely duo arrangement of *Shenandoah* while adjudicating a music competition in Minneapolis, I asked myself, after hearing so many versions of this iconic and historic song, how would I set it differently? I thought about it and thought about it and thought about it, and before I realized it, I had composed and assembled just about all of this arrangement in my head by assigning bass notes to the melody and filling in the harmony in my head afterwards. I would intermittently check myself on the piano to make sure what I was imagining worked, and ended up changing almost nothing at all from what I'd heard in my mind's ear.

This arrangement recalls the beauty of Shenandoah Valley, not bathed in golden sunlight, but blanketed by low-hanging clouds and experiencing intermittent periods of heavy rainfall (created with a combination of percussion textures, generated both on instruments and from the body). There are a few musical moments where the sun attempts to pierce through the clouds, but ultimately the rains win out. This arrangement of *Shenandoah* is at times mysterious, somewhat ominous, constantly introspective, and deeply soulful.

- *Program notes by the composer*

Colorado Peaks

Dana Wilson
(b. 1946)

A piece about the struggles and inner growth over a hike through the Rocky Mountains, Dana Wilson creates a highly rhythmic, quasi-jazz-like experience through his work *Colorado Peaks*. The work has recurring thematic material but never in a set formal structure, just as mountain tops aren't bound to a pattern, although they always rise and fall. Wilson creates two distinct sections in *Colorado Peaks*: a crisp sense of hiking and the broad reach of the distant mountains and a tranquil introspective section, indicative of all such hiking journeys as metaphors for a greater journey beyond the current struggles.

Regarding *Colorado Peaks*, Wilson states:

"Because this piece was commissioned by an ensemble in Colorado, I wanted the piece to make some reference to the awe-inspiring Colorado Rockies. The work is not, however, a depiction of their majesty. Instead it suggests a person's relation to them via a rugged and persistent climb."

Dr. Dana Wilson, currently on the composition faculty at Ithaca College, has many commissions, grants, and prizes to his credit. His previous work for wind ensemble, *Piece of Mind*, won the Sousa Foundation's 1988 Sudler International Wind Band Composition Competition and the 1988 American Bandmasters Association/Ostwald Prize. He is co-author of *Contemporary Choral Arranging*, published by Prentice-Hall, and has written articles on diverse musical subjects.

When Jesus Wept
Prelude for Band

William Schuman
(1910-1992)

New York-born composer William Schuman was a champion of composing for most if not all, musical genres. His unique musical personality, stemming from his studies on violin and banjo, defines each of his works as quintessentially Schuman. Early on, he was known for incorporating American jazz and folk music into his works, while later, he included mass amounts of dissonances and polytonality. His developments in music led to Schuman receiving the first-ever Pulitzer Prize in music in 1943.

Originally part of a three-movement work entitled *New England Triptych: Three Pieces for Orchestra after William Billings*, *When Jesus Wept* uses Billings' hymn as the centerpiece of a moving work through luxurious textures countered by a wistful trio of field drum, euphonium, and trumpet. Schuman wrote the following program note:

"William Billings (1746-1800) is a major figure in the history of American music. The works of this dynamic composer capture the spirit of sinewy ruggedness, deep religiosity, and patriotic fervor that we associate with the Revolutionary period. Despite the undeniable crudities and technical shortcomings of his music, its appeal even today is forceful and moving. I am not alone among American composers who feel an identity with Billings, and it is this sense of identity that accounts for my use of his music as a point of departure. *New England Triptych* does not constitute a fantasy on themes of Billings, nor variations on his themes, but rather a fusion of styles and musical language."

*When Jesus wept, the falling tear
in mercy flowed beyond all bound;
when Jesus mourned, a trembling fear
seized all the guilty world around.*

Perseids

Alexandra Gardner
(b. 1967)

The Perseids are a meteor shower visible in the Northern Hemisphere during the months of July and August. Each year at that time, the earth passes through a cloud of debris left from the Comet Swift-Tuttle, creating a prolific display of natural fireworks as the rubble enters the earth's atmosphere and burns through the sky. For the past several years, a group of friends and I have taken a summertime trip to Ocracoke Island in North Carolina, where we spend hours every night watching this natural display of fireworks from a crow's nest deck. Far from city lights, it is possible to see deeply into the night sky, which is punctuated by "shooting stars" from every direction.

I am fascinated by the idea of the sky as time machine -- that most of what we are seeing is infinitely old, because the light from those stars has been traveling for eons. By the time it reaches our eyes, the star may have transformed completely, or it might not exist at all. Perhaps this is why the fleeting sight of a meteor feels like a special event: it is science of the present moment.

The music of *Perseids* draws upon experiences of those nighttime sky-watching sessions -- the glowing band of the Milky Way, pulsing satellites moving quickly across the sky, constellations, and layers of clouds, and of course, plenty of shooting stars. Beginning with slow, overlapping layers of sound underneath a melody that works its way through the wind instruments, the music gradually coalesces into a vigorous, celebratory verse-chorus song structure.

- Program notes by composer

Aurora Awakes

John Mackey
(b. 1973)

*Aurora now had left her saffron bed,
And beams of early light the heav'ns o'erspread,
When, from a tow'r, the queen, with wakeful eyes,
Saw day point upward from the rosy skies.*

Virgil, *The Aeneid*, Book IV, Lines 584-587

Aurora – the Roman goddess of the dawn – is a mythological figure frequently associated with beauty and light. Also known as Eos (her Greek analogue), Aurora would rise each morning and stream across the sky, heralding the coming of her brother Sol, the sun. Though she is herself among the lesser deities of Roman and Greek mythologies, her cultural influence has persevered, most notably in the naming of the vibrant flashes of light that occur in Arctic and Antarctic regions – the Aurora Borealis and Aurora Australis.

John Mackey's *Aurora Awakes* is, thus, a piece about the heralding of the coming of light. Built in two substantial sections, the piece moves over a place of remarkable stillness to an unbridled explosion of energy – from darkness to light, placid grey to startling rainbows of color.

Though Mackey is known to use stylistic imitation, it is less common for him to utilize outright quotation. As such, the presence of two more-or-less direct quotations of other musical compositions is particularly noteworthy in *Aurora Awakes*. The first, which appears at the beginning of the second section, is an ostinato based on the familiar guitar introduction to U2's *Where The Streets Have No Name*.

The other quotation is a sly reference to Gustav Holst's *First Suite in E-flat for Military Band*. The brilliant E-flat chord that closes the *Chaconne* of that work is orchestrated (nearly) identically as the final sonority of *Aurora Awakes* – producing an unmistakably vibrant timbre that won't be missed by aficionados of the repertoire. This same effect was, somewhat ironically, suggested by Mackey for the ending of composer Jonathan Newman's *My Hands Are a City*. Mackey adds an even brighter element, however, by including instruments not in Holst's original.

- Program notes by Jake Wallace via the composer

MUSIC BIOGRAPHIES

WILLIAM PLENK, director

William Plenk has been on the faculty of the Rudi E. Scheidt School of Music at the University of Memphis since Fall 2017. Serving as Associate Director of Bands and Director of Athletic Bands, Dr. Plenk oversees the Mighty Sound of the South, University of Memphis Pep Band, Symphonic Band, and teaches Marching Band Techniques as well as other courses within the School of Music.

Outside of the University of Memphis, Dr. Plenk is highly active as a clinician and adjudicator. He has worked with concert bands and marching bands from across the United States, Singapore, and Japan, including a three-season tenure with the Tenrikyo Aimachi Marching Band from Nagoya, Japan, the eight-time All Japan National Champion. He has served on the staff of several drum and bugle corps including The Academy, The Cadets, Boston Crusaders, and Phantom Regiment.

Dr. Plenk previously served for six years as Associate Director of Bands and Director of Athletic Bands at the University of Nevada, Reno, developing the athletic band program into one of the most respected in the region. He received his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in conducting from the University of California, Los Angeles, where he was Conductor of the UCLA Symphonic Band, Associate Conductor of the UCLA Wind Ensemble, and Associate Conductor of the UCLA Brass Ensemble. He also received a Master of Music degree in tuba performance from UCLA, and a Bachelor of Music degree in tuba performance from Ithaca College.

Dr. Plenk holds memberships in the College Band Directors National Association, College Music Society, National Association for Music Education, and is an honorary member of Phi Mu Alpha, and the national band fraternity Kappa Kappa Psi.