

SCHOOL OF MUSIC, THEATRE, AND DANCE



VIRTUOSO
SERIES CONCERT
JOHN
MCGUIRE

CSU FACULTY **HORN**

OCTOBER 18, 2021



Colorado State University

JOHN MCGUIRE, HORN
MONDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2021
ORGAN RECITAL HALL

EVENING: PONTE AL MARE, PISA FOR ALTO, HORN, & PIANO / TRACI MENDEL (B. 1964)

Nicole Asel-mezzo soprano; Tim Burns, piano

“APPEL INTERSTELLAIRE” FROM DES CANYONS AUX ÉTOILES / OLIVIER MESSIAEN (1908–1992)

SERENADE FOR TENOR, HORN, AND STRINGS, OP. 31 / BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913–1976)

- I. Prologue
- II. Pastoral
- III. Nocturne
- IV. Elegy
- V. Dirge
- VI. Hymn
- VII. Sonnet
- VIII. Epilogue

John Pierce-tenor; Time Burns, piano

THE ASCENSION FOR 6 HORNS / PAUL BASLER (B. 1963)

Sean Brennan, DeAunn Davis, Ayo Derbyshire, Colleen Perry Shaffer, David Smalley, Lauren Varley-horns
Matt Kasper-conductor

HARAMBEE / PAUL BASLER (B. 1963)

Sean Brennan, DeAunn Davis, Ayo Derbyshire, Colleen Perry Shaffer, David Smalley, Lauren Varley-horns
Matt Kasper-conductor

PROGRAM NOTES

Evening: Ponte Al Mare, Pisa for Alto, Horn, & Piano

Traci Mendel (b. 1964)

When Dr. John McGuire asked his good friend Traci Mendel, Professor of Music at Troy University in Alabama, about performing one of her works for his upcoming recital, she had no immediate suggestion. Following an urge to write, Dr. Mendel composed an original composition based on Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem ***Evening, Ponte Al Mare, Pisa***.

The sun is set; the swallows are asleep;
The bats are flitting fast in the gray air;
The slow soft toads out of damp corners creep,
And evening's breath, wandering here and there
Over the quivering surface of the stream,
Wakes not one ripple from its summer dream.

There is no dew on the dry grass to-night,
Nor damp within the shadow of the trees;
The wind is intermitting, dry, and light;
And in the inconstant motion of the breeze
The dust and straws are driven up and down,
And whirled about the pavement of the town.

Within the surface of the fleeting river
The wrinkled image of the city lay,
Immovably unquiet, and forever
It trembles, but it never fades away;
Go to the...
You, being changed, will find it then as now.

The chasm in which the sun has sunk is shut
There is no dew on the dry grass
By darkest barriers of cinereous cloud,
Like mountain over mountain huddled — but
Growing and moving upwards in a crowd,
And over it a space of watery blue,
Which the keen evening star is shining through.

Ponte al Mare translates directly from Italian to English as “Bridge to the Sea.” This poem is a textual visualization of one of the few bridges in Pisa, Tuscany that crosses the Arno River. Mendel’s process for composing this piece involved understanding and contextualizing the sounds and ambience described by the poet. Mendel explains, “I must first build a landscape in order to build a soundscape.” The composer begins by portraying details of the evening setting. Gradually her view becomes more encompassing and observant of the bigger picture. Mendel brings each natural reference to life as the flitting of the bats, the croaking of the toads, driven up dust and straws, and the moving-yet-quiet stream that appears throughout. Each musician represents a character. The piano fills the role of the external world, scenery, and landscape, beginning with an open feeling of timelessness. The voice functions as the internal world, bringing inflection to the piece. Not to be outdone, the French horn takes the role of the evening star, shining ever more brightly as the evening slowly becomes darker and darker.

— Notes by John Pirillo

**“Appel Interstellaire” from *Des Canyons aux Étoiles*
Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992)**

“Appel Interstellaire” (Interstellar Call) is a section taken from the middle movement of *Des Canyons aux Étoiles* (From the Canyons to the Stars). Scored for solo French horn, this is one of only two solo sections within the larger composition. Olivier Messiaen originally composed this movement as a tribute to French composer Jean-Pierre Guézec, who died in 1971, later adapting it for the larger work. There is a bit of controversy surrounding the composition, as Messiaen himself wished for the movement only to be played within *Des Canyons* and not programmed separately. However, the logistics of preparing instruments for the unusual ensemble used in the larger work would mean that this gem would rarely, if ever, be performed or heard.

American arts patron Alice Tully commissioned Messiaen to compose *Des Canyons aux Étoiles* to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the U.S. Declaration of Independence. While preparing the piece in 1972, Messiaen visited Utah, where he was inspired by Bryce Canyon and its vivid colors; Messiaen was known to have synesthesia, a neurological trait that allowed him to “hear” these colors. The movements surrounding “Appel Interstellaire” feature unique instrumentations that represent the landscape, such as a wind machine and Messiaen’s own invented instrument, the Geophone, a pellet-filled drum.

“Appel Interstellaire” itself is quite unique, featuring a range of extended techniques for the performer such as flutter-tonguing, closed notes, glissandi, and half-valved trills. Messiaen, who famously incorporated birdsong into several of his works, was similarly inspired here. These techniques are used to imitate the calls of two birds during the movement: the Chinese

thrush and the canyon wren. Throughout this solo Messiaen paints a picture of Bryce Canyon that is both natural and spiritual, ending with the horn line “calling” up to the nighttime stars and beyond to paradise.

— notes by Nick Dubin

Serenade for Tenor, Horn, and Strings, Op. 31
Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)

British composer Benjamin Britten wrote the song cycle *Serenade for Tenor, Horn, and Strings* in 1943 at the request of Dennis Brain, a member of the Royal Air Force band and orchestra and one of the top horn players in Britain at the time. Britten collaborated closely with him during the compositional process. The composer wrote, “his help was invaluable in writing the work; but he was always most cautious in advising any alterations. Passages which seemed impossible even for his prodigious gifts were practised over and over again before any modifications were suggested, such was his respect for a composer’s ideas.”

The *Serenade* sets six poems by English authors, each on the subject of nighttime. The poets Britten chose represent a wide chronological span, from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries. In selecting them, Britten took advice from Edward Sackville-West, a British music critic and novelist; Britten dedicated the work to him. Sackville-West wrote of the *Serenade*: “The subject is Night and its prestigia [conjuring tricks]: the lengthening shadow, the distant bugle at sunset, the Baroque panoply of the starry sky, the heavy angels of sleep; but also the cloak of evil—the worm in the heart of the rose, the sense of sin in the heart of man. The whole sequence forms an Elegy or Nocturnal...the thoughts and images suitable to evening.” The horn and singer are equal partners in this song cycle. Dennis Brain served as horn soloist and Britten’s partner Peter Pears was the tenor soloist at the premiere. Britten composed most of the work at his country house in Suffolk while recovering from a severe case of measles and while also working on his masterwork opera *Peter Grimes*. Both the prologue and epilogue of *Serenade* are performed by solo horn and in these movements, Britten instructs the player to use only notes from the horn’s natural harmonic series. This lends these bookending movements a distinctive character, as some of the harmonics sound sharp or flat to the ear. The epilogue is meant to be played from afar, with the performer off-stage.

— notes by Nick Dubin

1. Prologue (solo horn)

2. Pastoral, a setting of “The Evening Quatrains” by Charles Cotton (1630–1687)

The day's grown old; the fainting sun
Has but a little way to run,
And yet his steeds, with all his skill,
Scarce lug the chariot down the hill.

The shadows now so long do grow,
That brambles like tall cedars show;
Molehills seem mountains, and the ant
Appears a monstrous elephant.

A very little, little flock
Shades thrice the ground that it would stock;
Whilst the small stripling following them
Appears a mighty Polypheme.

And now on benches all are sat,
In the cool air to sit and chat,
Till Phoebus, dipping in the West,
Shall lead the world the way to rest.

3. Nocturne, a setting of “Blow, bugle, blow” by Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892)

The splendour falls on castle walls
And snowy summits old in story:
The long light shakes across the lakes,
And the wild cataract leaps in glory:

Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
Bugle blow; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O hark, O hear, how thin and clear,
And thinner, clearer, farther going!
O sweet and far from cliff and scar
The horns of Elfland faintly blowing!

Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying:

Bugle, blow; answer, echoes, answer, dying, dying, dying.

O love, they die in yon rich sky,
They faint on hill or field or river:
Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
And grow for ever and for ever.

Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying;
And answer, echoes, answer, dying, dying, dying.

4. Elegy, a setting of “The Sick Rose” by William Blake (1757–1827)

O Rose, thou art sick;
The invisible worm
That flies in the night,
In the howling storm,

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy;
And his dark, secret love
Does thy life destroy.

5. Dirge, a setting of the anonymous “Lyke-Wake Dirge” (15th century)

This ae nighte, this ae nighte,
Every nighte and alle,
Fire and fleet and candle-lighte,
And Christe receive thy saule.

When thou from hence away art past,
Every nighte and alle,
To Whinnymuir thou com'st at last;
And Christe receive thy saule.

If ever thou gav'st hos'n and shoon,
Every nighte and alle,
Sit thee down and put them on;
And Christe receive thy saule.

If hos'n and shoon thou ne'er gav'st nane

Every nighte and alle,
The whinnes sall prick thee to the bare bane;
And Christe receive thy saule.

From Whinnymuir when thou may'st pass,
Every nighte and alle,
To Brig o' Dread thou com'st at last;
And Christe receive thy saule.

From Brig o' Dread when thou may'st pass,
Every nighte and alle,
To Purgatory fire thou com'st at last;
And Christe receive thy saule.

If ever thou gav'st meat or drink,
Every nighte and alle,
The fire sall never make thee shrink;
And Christe receive thy saule.

If meat or drink thou ne'er gav'st nane,
Every nighte and alle,
The fire will burn thee to the bare bane;
And Christe receive thy saule.

This ae nighte, this ae nighte,
Every nighte and alle,
Fire and fleet and candle-lighte,
And Christe receive thy saule.

6. Hymn, a setting of “Hymn to Diana” by Ben Jonson (1572–1637)

Queen and huntress, chaste and fair,
Now the sun is laid to sleep,
Seated in thy silver chair,
State in wonted manner keep:
Hesperus entreats thy light,
Goddess excellently bright.

Earth, let not thy envious shade
Dare itself to interpose;

Cynthia's shining orb was made
Heav'n to clear when day did close:
Bless us then with wishèd sight,
Goddess excellently bright.

Lay thy bow of pearl apart,
And thy crystal shining quiver;
Give unto the flying hart
Space to breathe, how short so-ever:
Thou that mak'st a day of night,
Goddess excellently bright.

7. Sonnet, a setting of “To Sleep” by John Keats (1795–1821)

O soft embalmer of the still midnight,
Shutting with careful fingers and benign
Our gloom-pleas'd eyes, embower'd from the light,
Enshaded in forgetfulness divine:

O soothest Sleep! if so it please thee, close
In midst of this thine hymn my willing eyes,
Or wait the “Amen” ere thy poppy throws
Around my bed its lulling charities.

Then save me, or the passèd day will shine
Upon my pillow, breeding many woes,
Save me from curious Conscience, that still lords

Its strength for darkness, burrowing like a mole;
Turn the key deftly in the oilèd wards,
And seal the hushèd Casket of my Soul.

8. Epilogue (solo horn – off stage)

The Ascension for 6 Horns

Harambee for 5 Horns

Paul Basler (b. 1963)

Paul Basler's horn ensemble pieces *The Ascension* and *Harambee* were composed for Charles Snead and the University of Alabama Horn Choir, inspired by their wonderful musicianship and friendship. *The Ascension* was originally composed in the spring of 1990, but underwent a complete revision in January 1997. The composer explains, "The piece is a sort of personal manifesto on matters spiritual as well as physical." He sees the whole work as a journey towards "enlightenment." Notable aspects of the composition include rhythmic patterns surrounding melodic fragments, upward leaping gestures, and an actively rushing tempo which smoothly transitions into a slower and more pensive style and tempo. *Harambee* (pronounced: "hah-Rahm-bay") translates from Kiswahili as "all put together" or "collective effort." "Harambee" has been the national motto of Kenya since the country gained independence from British colonialists in 1963. The term has taken on a seemingly religious aspect and conjures images of charitable sacrifice in the guise of physical or monetary assistance. This work is based on call and response, a musical form originating from Sub-Saharan African cultures: two solo horns function as the leaders (callers), while the other three players respond. Basler claims to have used no intentional folk material while writing this piece. However, he also notes that "it is filled with images and sounds of Kenyan melody and rhythm."

Basler, an award-winning composer, is currently Professor of Music at the University of Florida. His creative activities have taken him to such diverse locations as Nairobi, Kenya and the Dominican Republic and he has received American Cultural Affairs Specialists Grants from the U.S. Department of State. His works have been performed internationally with enthusiastic acclaim. The *New York Times* describes his music as "virtuosic and highly athletic."

— Notes by John Pirillo



FOR A COMPLETE LIST OF
SCHOOL OF MUSIC, THEATRE, AND DANCE EVENTS

PLEASE VISIT:
WWW.CSUARTSTICKETS.COM



UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR THE ARTS **SEASON SPONSOR**

