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It seems incredible today, but until after World War I, the subject of “American Music” was a nonstarter. American musicians, for the most part, but not all, considered themselves to be developing from the European music tradition. Music in America was a cultivation and continuation of what had been produced in Europe.

Tonight's program says, emphatically, “No!” Following the American scholars of music, Gilbert Chase and Richard Crawford, the Columbia Pro Cantare asserts that “the key to American music lies in the nature of American society.” You are invited to celebrate that nature and that society in the manifold expressions of music made in America by Americans. The music ranges from the 19th to the 21st century, and – as crafted by the composers – is unabashedly and recognizably AMERICAN.

TRISKELION

Jared Denhard (b.1960)

Anyone who has lived in the Baltimore-Columbia-Washington D.C. area needs little introduction to Jared Dedhard, who, born in this area, continues to cultivate the music of immigrant populations, particularly Celtic, but not limited to Europe. Dedhard exemplifies the role of the resident folk musician/troubador. Excelling in playing trombone, celtic harp, ukulele, and bagpipes, he – as resident troubador - is the one who picks up the current thoughts and hopes of a community and expresses them in music. He has more than 7 CDs to his credit in which listeners are invited to partake of his everexpanding vision. Tune in to his publishers' website: www.bakerartistsawards.org.

VARIATIONS on AMERICA

Charles Ives (1874-1954)

Originally written for organ, this set of variations is on a tune accompanying the words, “My country 'tis of thee” (or, for the British, “God save the King/Queen”). The tune first appeared in print in a German publication of 1744, and by 1830 was well known in the United States. Ives, himself an organist, composed the variations while still in his teens (c. 1891). The work reveals his penchant, even at an early age, for exploring polytonality (in the interludes) and free-ranging harmonies. Charles Ives' innumerable compositions: songs, choruses, chamber works, symphonies, have led many to call him a “true American original.”

THREE PRELUDES

George Gershwin (1898-1937)

- I. Allegro ben ritmato e deciso
- II. Andante con moto e poco rubato
- III. Allegro ben ritmato e deciso

Sometime in the early 1920s, George Gershwin, fresh from the triumphant first performances of *Rhapsody in Blue*, and his smash hit Broadway musical, *Lady Be Good!* began writing some piano preludes – exactly how many is a matter for debate because only these three were published. Gershwin performed some of them (among them at least two of these three) on December 4, 1926, at a concert given in the Roosevelt Hotel in New York City by the English-born contralto of Peruvian parents, Marguerite d'Alvarez. Gershwin was her accompanist, performing his own pieces as interludes.

Remembrances vary and are conflicting. An announcement appeared in the New York Times that "Mr. Gershwin is to play his "Six New Piano Preludes." But the music critic for the New York World, Samuel Chotzinoff, wrote this: "Mr. Gershwin played five new piano preludes for the first time, two of which are at least as fine as anything he has done in the idiom of American music ... " Which two these happened to be are not known, but we may assume that the three we know could deserve that description.

All three preludes are in a three-part form in which the third part returns to the musical material stated in the first part. The first Prelude is lively, with a five-note blues motive that announces the piece and returns at the end. Some have noted that the syncopated rhythms resemble the Brazilian baião. Prelude II was once referred to by Gershwin as "a sort of blue lullaby," structured over a moving jazz bass line. The melody line is evocative of *Rhapsody in Blue*, as well as several numbers in Gershwin's later opera, *Porgy and Bess*. In Prelude III, the rhythm is paramount, which may have led first listeners to call it "the Spanish" although to our contemporary ears there seems to be no direct Latin correlation. One music critic of the first performance describes a "Charleston for the left hand and a Spanish melody for the right." Another states that it "started on the docks of New Orleans, to find itself joyously footing it in Madrid."

SEVEN GHOSTS

Libby Larsen (b. 1950)

Libretto

I. Grace and Glory

[Phillis Wheatley (1753B1784) arrived in Boston in 1761 on the slave-trade schooner *Phillis*. She was purchased by Susanna Wheatley, wife of the wealthy merchant John Wheatley. Tutored in the Wheatley home, she rapidly became one of the great poets of her time. As such, Phillis was freed from slavery in 1773. She married John Peters and bore three children. In 1775, while traveling the East Coast marketing her poems, she met George Washington. The meeting occasioned this poem of entreaty and encouragement. It was published in both *The Pennsylvania Magazine* and *The Virginia Gazette*.]

Spoken:

SIR, I taken the freedom to address your Excellency in the enclosed poem, and entreat your acceptance, though I am not insensible of its inaccuracies. Your being appointed by the Grand Continental Congress to be Generalissimo of the armies of North America, together with the fame of your virtues, excite sensations not easy to suppress. Your generosity, therefore, I presume, will pardon the attempt. Wishing your Excellency all possible success in the great cause you are so generously engaged in, I am,

Your Excellency's most obedient humble servant,
PHILLIS WHEATLEY

Chorus:

Celestial choir! enthron'd in realms of light, Columbia's scenes of glorious toils I write.
While freedom's cause her anxious breast alarms, she flashes dreadful in refulgent arms.
See mother earth her offspring's fate bemoan, and nations gaze at scenes before unknown!

See the bright beams of heaven's revolving light involved in sorrows and the veil of night!

The goddess comes, she moves divinely fair, Olive and laurel binds her golden hair...
Muse! bow propitious while my pen relates how pour her armies through a thousand
gates:...

In bright array they seek the work of war, where high unfurl'd the ensign waves the air.
Shall I to Washington their praise recite?
Thee, first in place and honours, we demand the grace and glory of thy martial band....
Proceed, great chief, with virtue on thy side. Thy ev'ry action let the goddess guide.
A crown, a mansion, and a throne that shine, with gold unfading,
WASHINGTON! be thine.

II. Jenny Lind to Harriet Beecher Stowe

Chorus: "Home Sweet Home"

John Howard Payne (1791-1852)

Mid pleasures and palaces, wherever you may roam,
Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home.
A charm from the skies seems to hallow us there,
Which seek through the world, is ne'er met with elsewhere.

Solo Soprano:

MY DEAR MADAM, —Allow me to express my sincere thanks for your (very) kind letter... You must... know what a deep impression "Uncle Tom's Cabin" has made upon every heart that can feel for the dignity of human existence: so I with my miserable English would not even try to say a word... but I must thank you for the great joy I have felt over that book... I have the feeling about "Uncle Tom's Cabin" that great changes will take place by and by,...and that the writer of that book can fall asleep to-day...with the bright, sweet conscience of having been a strong means in the Creator's hand of...essential good... God bless and protect you and yours,...and certainly God's hand will remain with a blessing over your head...

Yours most truly,
JENNY GOLDSCHMIDT, NÉE JENNY LIND

III. Blinking Pluto

[At the age of twenty-four, Clyde William Thombaugh (1906–1996) discovered the planet Pluto at the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona. The only American to discover a major planet, Thombaugh was a self-taught astronomer; he grew up on a farm in Burdette, Kansas. Hired to facilitate the third and final search for "Planet X," Thombaugh devised his own methodology in which he studied and photographed 30,000–60,000 stars in a day's work. He discovered Pluto on 20 February 1930.]

Chorus:

A brilliant night, fair, with a light wind.
I work all night long in an unheated dome, in winter.

The objects drift from day to day.

Aquarius and Pisces to Aries;
Gemini and Taurus to Scorpius and Sagittarius.

Blinking, searching, Thirty thousand, Forty thousand, Fifty thousand,
Sixty thousand, One hundred thousand stars... each day... and more...

I work all night long in an unheated dome, in winter.
Centered on the starfield Delta Geminorium,
Blinking the east half-blinking—from the south end, Thirty thousand,
Forty thousand, Fifty thousand, Sixty thousand, One hundred thousand stars...

I spied an object popping in out.

That's it! That's it! THAT'S IT!

IV. Myself with Wings

[Grandson of the Swedish ex-patriot August Lindbergh (Ola Mansson) and son of Congressman Charles August Lindbergh, Charles Lindbergh (1902–1974) grew up on a farm in Little Falls, Minnesota and in Washington, DC. He bought his first barnstorming airplane in 1923 and flew night mail in 1925–26 during his army service. In 1927, Charles Lindbergh made the first nonstop flight from New York to Paris in the "Spirit of St. Louis," instantly becoming an international celebrity. He lived his life as an aviator, scientist, soldier, conservationist, and advisor to the government on industry and flight: his personal integrity impress all who worked with him in these areas.]

Chorus:

"I used to imagine myself with wings on which I could swoop down off our roof into the valley, soaring through the air from one river bank to another. Flying!"

V. United Hot Clubs of America

[In 1935, the United Hot Clubs of America was launched with six clubs to which musicians could belong for two dollars a year. In these clubs, musicians could jam anything, day or night. The six original clubs were: New York Hot Club, Yale Hot Club, Chicago Hot Club, Boston Hot Club, Cleveland Hot Club, and Los Angeles Hot Club.]

Speaker:

Following a tour of Europe in 1935, Louis Armstrong (1900–1971) had this to say:
"When we got back to London, I went over to have a look at Paris and take a little rest for a week before I had to get back home. I landed in New York the day President Roosevelt was elected, 2 November 1932. It had been a short trip but I got home thinking swing music was a lot more important than I knew before, and I guess maybe I was feeling a little important about my own playing, too—you know how you can get sometimes. Those high C's certainly did wow'em. Man!"

Chorus:

"Basin Street Blues,"
"Lady Be Good,"
"Tiger Rag,"
"Clair de Lune,"
"Brahms: Piano Serenade in A-flat major,"
"When the Saints Go Marching In."

THREE SONGS ARRANGED FOR CHORUS

Stephen Collins Foster (1826-1864)

Ring the Banjo – arr. by Robert DeCormier
Jeanie With the Light Brown Hair – arr. by Gail Kubik
Oh! Susanna – arr. by Alice Parker and Robert Shaw

The three songs represent two of the three genres in which Stephen Foster wrote: the sentimental, genteel, parlor ballad (Jeanie...) and the "Ethiopian" minstrel show songs (Ring... and Oh! Susanna). Both of these genres show the musical influences from his childhood and early youth. Deciding to become a professional (parlor) songwriter, Foster also continued to establish connections with the growing blackface minstrel entertainment, notably through E.P. Christy (of Christy's Minstrels). Because of his ambivalence about having his name associated with "Ethiopian songs," as Foster put it, he let Christy put his own name on the title page of what was to become one of the most famous songs Foster ever wrote, "Old Folks at Home." As he collected no royalties and died in penury, Foster lived to regret his choice.

"Ring the Banjo" was published in April 1851, a lively, catchy song that was not particularly popular until long after Foster's death. Although written before ragtime music, the melody achieves a syncopated rhythm reminiscent of banjo plucking by placing the long melody notes "off the beat." The arrangement uses modern American English and not the "negro dialect" that Foster used.

The ballad, "Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair" was written for his wife during a time of trial separation (1854). The original title was "Jennie..." - an elision of her name: Jane Denny McDowell. Foster often told her that it was her hair he had first fallen in love with (it was auburn).

"Oh! Susanna," written for a minstrel show around 1848, was an immediate hit. It became the anthem of the "forty-niners" on their way to California and was played and sung everywhere. Thanks to movies, beginning with the earliest silent films which were accompanied by piano players, the song is always associated with the gold rush and the settling of the West. The arrangement partially reproduces Foster's use of "negro dialect."

All four song arrangers are, in themselves, famous American composers and arrangers.

OLD AMERICAN SONGS ARRANGED FOR CHORUS

Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

Simple Gifts – transcribed for chorus by Irving Fine
At the River – arr. by R. Wildung-White
Zion's Walls – arr. by Glenn Koponen

Composer, conductor, writer, pianist, teacher – Aaron Copland, almost from the beginning, intended to create and to support a distinctively American music. His sense of nationalism and

love of democracy fueled his determination to communicate with as large an audience as possible. By the time his career had ended, “American music” had become globally recognized, recognizable, and respected.

It was Nadia Boulanger, his teacher in Paris, who encouraged him to explore the music of the American “common man” which he did – in a way that fully integrated its melodic curves, rhythmic patterns, and harmonic idioms into a creative fusion that continues to sound “classical” but with a distinctly “American sound,” as Copland would have put it.

“Simple Gifts,” a Shaker hymn, was first used by Copland as a theme and variations in the ballet, *Appalachian Spring*, written for Martha Graham and her company in 1944 and subsequently incorporated into a concert suite from that ballet. Copland later re-set it for solo voice and piano in Volume I of *Old American Songs* (1950), but this time using a syncopated accompaniment that has been kept by Irving Fine, himself a significant American composer, conductor and teacher.

Volume II of *Old American Songs* (1952) gave us two more pieces. Robert Lowry wrote “Shall We Gather At the River?” while he was the pastor of a Baptist church in Brooklyn. In his own words: “It was a time when an epidemic was sweeping through the city... All around friends and acquaintances were passing away to the spirit land in large numbers. The question began to arise... 'Shall we meet again ... at the river of life?' Seating myself at the organ simply to give vent to the pent up emotions of the heart, the words and music of the hymn began to flow out, as if by inspiration.” The jauntness of the hymn, published in 1865, widely circulated and sung to the present time, reveals the composer's bent toward the style of the cheerful Sunday School hymn. Copland was able to capture a sense of the tragedy that lurked in the hymn's background as well as the stubborn hope of faith in his accompaniment, which the arranger has kept.

“Zion's Walls” is a type of lively camp-meeting (religious revival) song included in the widelyinfluential Christian hymn and song collection, *The Social Harp* (1855), compiled and edited by John Gordon McCurry. In a gently-rocking 9/8 meter that Copland has advised “with a moderate swing,” the words, melody and rhythm have the effect of gathering all together in one immense family of joy. Again, the accompaniment is Copland's, anchoring the movement of the voices with low pedal chords.