

Madison Symphony Orchestra Program Notes
November 17/18/19, 2017
Subscription Concert No.3
Michael Allsen

This program opens with the first of Copland's great "American" ballet scores, *Billy the Kid*, with its evocation of the Wild West, and a host of cowboy songs. Guitarist Sharon Isbin last played with the Madison Symphony Orchestra in 2003, when she played Rodrigo's Spanish-flavored *Concierto de Aranjuez*. She returns for the Rodrigo *Concierto* again at these concerts, but also presents a wonderfully eclectic new work written for her by Chris Brubeck. We return to Spain for the final work, Falla's *The Three-Cornered Hat*.

Aaron Copland (1900-1991)
Suite from *Billy the Kid*

Copland's ballet score Billy the Kid was written in 1938, and the ballet's first production was on October 16, 1938, in Chicago, though this was a two-piano version of the score. The full orchestral score was played in concert in New York City on May 24, 1939. The concert suite heard here was created in 1939, and was first played by the NBC Orchestra in a broadcast concert from Radio City Music Hall on November 9, 1940. The only previous appearance of this work at our subscription programs was in 1955. Duration 18:00.

Copland's most famous works are his great trilogy of ballets on American subjects: *Billy the Kid* (1938), *Rodeo* (1942), and *Appalachian Spring* (1944). In these ballets, Copland cultivated a sparse, sometimes austere style that seemed to echo the sound of the American wilderness. He sometimes made his musical nationality even more clear by quoting American folk material: the Shaker hymn *Simple Gifts* in the finale of his *Appalachian Spring*, or cowboy and fiddle tunes in *Billy the Kid* and *Rodeo*.

Billy the Kid, the first of this trio, was written in 1938, when Lincoln Kirstein, director of the Ballet Caravan (predecessor of today's New York City Ballet) approached Copland with a scenario for a ballet on the life of the legendary outlaw. The real Billy—Henry McCarty (1859-1881)—led a short, violent, and fairly inglorious life. He participated in the infamous Lincoln County War in New Mexico in 1878: a dispute between ranchers and local merchants that deteriorated into a series of revenge killings. McCarty, now calling himself William Bonney, then rode with an outlaw group of former ranch hands called the "Regulators." He

lived as a gunman and cattle rustler, surviving several brushes with the law, and escaping from jail at least three times before he was shot by Pat Garrett, a sheriff who had earlier befriended Billy in Lincoln County. Garrett later published a sensationalist biography of Billy the Kid, and through popular dime novels and a whole series of movies, Billy was transformed into one of the great antiheroes of the West.

Kirstein's version of the outlaw, choreographed by Eugene Loring, uses this romanticized Billy the Kid. While it was not as successful a ballet as *Rodeo* and *Appalachian Spring*, Copland's concert suite—including nearly all of the original music—was heard on Toscanini's popular NBC broadcasts, and was an immediate hit.

The Open Prairie is a calm introduction, setting the stage, with open fifths creating a sense of endless space as a calm melody winds its way through the instruments of the orchestra. The music grows more insistent until Copland introduces a forceful brass theme. In *Street in a Frontier Town*, Copland uses a whole series of cowboy tunes to create a picture of cowboys and their girlfriends, beginning with a jaunty piccolo solo ("Great Granddad"). This is followed by "I Was Walkin' One Mornin' for Pleasure" and "Goodbye Old Paint." There is a little conflict as a group of Mexican girls try to dance a *jarape*, the rhythm grating against "Come Wrangle Yer Bronco." A pair of trombones, playing the role of couple of fighting drunks, play "Git' Along Little Dogies." In the end Billy tries to step between them, when one of them accidentally shoots his mother—the slapstick playing the role of the gun. Billy stabs him and flees.

Card Game at Night subtly works "O Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie" into its calm texture, concluding with a beautiful trumpet solo. This mood is shattered by tense string chords and shattering gunshots from the bass drum. The *Gun Battle* that follows is dissonant and percussive, with savage punctuations by the bass trombone and bass drum. Billy is captured by Pat Garrett in this battle. The *Celebration Dance after Billy's Capture* is a bit cocky as the townspeople celebrate Garrett's triumph with a mocking dance...and perhaps just a bit too much liquor, as Copland's music combines two different keys at once. As it turns out their celebration is premature—Billy escapes into the desert and has a brief romantic interlude with his Mexican girlfriend. These sections were omitted from the *Suite*, but Copland later published the lovely *Waltz (Billy and His Sweetheart)* as a separate concert piece.

The brief *Billy's Death* brings the action to a close with surprisingly gentle music, a solo violin representing Billy's restless soul. *The Open Prairie Again* brings the music full circle with a triumphant version of the opening section.

Chris Brubeck (b.1952)

Affinity: Concerto for Guitar and Orchestra

Brubeck completed this work in 2015, and it was premiered by the Maryland Symphony Orchestra with Ms. Isbin as soloist, on April 11, 2015. Duration 14:00.

One of the musically talented sons of the late Jazz pianist Dave Brubeck, Chris Brubeck has carved out a multifaceted career as a performer and composer. Renowned as both a trombonist and as a bassist, Brubeck began performing professionally in the early 1970s with his father, and has been touring ever since, today primarily with his trio Triple Play and with the Brubeck Brothers Quartet (including brother Dan on drums)—a wonderfully eclectic Jazz/Fusion ensemble that frequently combines elements of classical chamber music. All four of the Brubeck brothers (Chris, Dan, pianist Darius, and cellist Matt) assemble regularly for musical tributes to their father, who died in 2012. As a classical composer, Chris Brubeck has received major commissions for both orchestral and chamber works. His music is challenging but always approachable, and frequently channels a wide variety of influences: Jazz, Rock, Funk, and a host of world styles. He provides the following explanation of his 2015 guitar concerto, *Affinity*:

“I am very excited about the concerto I have written for guitar virtuoso Sharon Isbin. This new piece had a long gestation period. Sharon called me about a decade ago after seeing a PBS Broadcast of a piece I had written called *Interplay for Three Violins and Orchestra*. That work featured Classical, Jazz and Irish fiddle greats Nadja Salerno-Sonnenburg, Regina Carter, and Eileen Ivers, respectively. *Interplay* was a high-energy concerto that called for the exploration of multiple styles, a quality that was highly attractive to Sharon. She has toured and recorded with many great guitarists from different musical backgrounds and consequently has created interesting musical collaborations that delved into Jazz, Rock, Folk, Classical, and Brazilian genres to name a few. My eclectic background as a performer and composer served to provide Sharon with the wide-ranging musical influences she loves to explore. After our initial discussions, our busy road lives as touring musicians and my composition schedules created a hiatus of quite a few years. Then Sharon found an ‘angel’ (The Betsy Russell Fund for New Music) to

fund the piece and Sharon called me, we talked, and we agreed it was time to get together and make this concerto a reality.

“Sharon and I met and listened to my recent compositions and her more recent recordings to hear how we both had evolved over the last decade. Sharon wanted a new concerto that had a global approach to the guitar and wasn’t confined to one particular style. You will hear that desire realized in how I approached the creation of this new work, *Affinity: Concerto for Guitar and Orchestra*. I struggled to find a title we both liked and thankfully my wife, Tish, came up with this appropriate name. In plain English, Sharon and I share an affinity for embracing and exploring different musical styles. As I learned from watching the recent PBS special about Sharon’s remarkable career, she wanted to be a scientist as a young girl. With that in mind I wanted to include in these notes the scientific definition of affinity: an attraction or force between particles that causes them to combine.

“This is an appropriate description of the concerto as many genres are combined to create this 14-minute piece. There are no separate movements—instead there are simply flowing, contrasting musical areas that we chose to explore. This concerto jumps out of the starting gate with the energy of a downhill ski race. Sharon has great facility on her instrument and I wanted to feature her fingers flying from the first measure. After a few minutes the piece travels into an early Jazz style with syncopated rhythms that almost harken back to Ragtime. Then the music transforms into a romantic waltz with oceanic qualities. In the middle of this concerto there is a very heartfelt section that evolved from a suggestion by Sharon. She knew that my father had recently passed on and that he and I were very close and wrote a lot of music together over the years. She called me from New York and sensitively asked if there were any melodies my father had written that were particularly ‘guitaristic.’ She thought it would be wonderful to honor him by including some of his musical spirit in this piece. While speaking with Sharon, I was composing in the Connecticut studio where my father and I had created so much music together over the course of our lives. It was October and gazing out a window overlooking a stream surrounded by glorious old trees, I saw the wind spinning a few orange leaves off their branches and then they lazily circled down to the water. I told Sharon that I had just seen something that reminded me of a beautiful melody my father had written which described this time of year. A few days later I sent her the realization of this theme presented as a guitar feature enveloped by the string section. Midway through, there is a modulation while the guitar tunes its lowest string down to a low D which facilitates an even deeper and more soulful interpretation. I wanted to follow this *Andante* area by writing a completely contrasting section in a major key which I was imagining as a kind of

neo-Renaissance dance in 6/8. The music gracefully makes its way into more complicated time signatures alternating a bar of 7/8 with a bar of 3/4. A different groove is established with a new section in a fast 5/8 time signature that conveys the energy of a Brazilian samba. The guitar solo takes off over the propulsive rhythm and climaxes into a technically demanding cadenza. Percussion emerges from the guitar's final cadence and we are off to a Middle Eastern fantasy. The tempo accelerates and we land in a brief recapitulation and compressed version of the original theme. I felt it was appropriate to compose an ending that was filled with driving energy that would catapult us to the last chord."

Joaquin Rodrigo (1901-1999) **Concierto de Aranjuez for Guitar and Orchestra**

Rodrigo composed this work in 1939 for the guitarist Regino Sainz de la Maza, who played the first performance in 1940. Our previous performances of the Concierto de Aranjuez were in 1979 with Angel Romero, and in 2003 with Ms. Ibsen. Duration 23:00.

In a long multifaceted career, Joaquin Rodrigo worked as a pianist, music critic, university professor, radio executive, and as an activist for the Spanish National Organization for the Blind. (Rodrigo was almost completely blind from age three as a result of Diphtheria.) However, from the 1940s onwards he was also recognized as one of Spain's foremost composers. As a young man, he studied in Paris, the center of the *avant garde*, but Rodrigo described his own style as *neocasticista* (neo-traditional). His mature music was rooted in distinctly Spanish forms and rhythms, and he was particularly focused upon the guitar, the most prominent instrument of Spanish traditional music. His *Concierto de Aranjuez* was only the first of several orchestral works with solo guitar, guitar duo, or guitar quartet. He also composed a large number of important works for guitar alone.

The work's premiere in 1940 was very successful, and the *Concierto* has since become not only the most widely-performed concerto for guitar, but is probably one of the single most popular 20th-century concertos for *any* instrument. One measure of its popularity is the number of times it has been adapted for instruments other than guitar—most famously in Jazz trumpeter Miles Davis's landmark 1959 album *Sketches of Spain*. Following the *Concierto de Aranjuez*, Rodrigo went on to gain worldwide acclaim as a composer. He collected dozens of honors and awards, but one piece of recognition that came after his 90th birthday was particularly meaningful—in 1992 King Juan Carlos I conferred on the composer the hereditary title "Marquis of the Gardens of Aranjuez."

The inspiration for this work was the palace of Aranjuez, near Madrid. This magnificent 18th-century structure, modeled on Versailles, was the summer palace of the Bourbon kings of Spain, and is particularly famous for its 300 acres of formal gardens. Rodrigo wrote of the *Concierto de Aranjuez* that the work “...takes its name from the famous royal residence on the banks of the Tajo, not far from Madrid and the Andalusian highway, and in its notes one may fancy seeing the ghost of Goya, held in thrall by melancholy [and] in its themes there lingers the fragrance of magnolias, the singing of birds, and the gushing of fountains...”

If it was inspired by 18th-century architecture, Rodrigo also drew upon 18th-century musical forms. The opening movement (*Allegro con spirito*) has the same relatively simple alternation between solo and orchestral passages as in a Baroque concerto. The rhythmic texture is based upon the *fandango* and other traditional dances, characterized by a constant alternation between 6/8 and 3/4. The guitar’s part in this movement uses techniques borrowed from *flamenco* and other Spanish forms: *punteado* (picked ornamentation), *rasgueados* (strumming), and other flashy devices.

The *Adagio* begins with simple strumming from the guitar, accompanying a long English horn solo. The melody is based upon the *saeta*—an ancient Andalusian lament associated with Holy Week processions, and it unfolds languorously in a series of variations for guitar and other solo lines from the orchestra. Only near the end is there more agitated music, leading to a long cadenza and a hushed ending. Though Rodrigo seldom spoke of it, his friend Pepe Romero later revealed that this passionate movement—the longest of the *Concierto*—was an emotional response to the death of Rodrigo’s infant son.

Like the opening, the final movement (*Allegro gentile*) has a rather Baroque-sounding texture, and it has the same deliberately off-balance rhythmic feel, in this case shifting between 3/4 and 2/4. The main theme is juggled between soloist and orchestra, and is finally presented in a rather grand manner just before a surprisingly understated ending.

Manuel de Falla (1876-1946)

The Three-Cornered Hat

The first full-scale performance of this ballet took place at London’s Alhambra Theatre on July 22, 1919. The Madison Symphony Orchestra has previously

played selections from Falla's orchestral suites, but this is our first performance of the complete ballet. Duration 30:00.

Manuel de Falla's ballet *El sombrero de tres picos* (*The Three-Cornered Hat*), like many of the great ballet scores of Stravinsky, Ravel, and Prokofiev, was the result of a commission by impresario Serge Diaghilev for his famous Ballets Russe. Diaghilev originally approached Falla in 1915 with a plan for turning the composer's *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* into a ballet. Falla refused to allow this—one of the few times Diaghilev was turned down by a composer!—but he did promise a ballet score based upon Pedro de Alarcón's 1874 novel *El corregidor y la molinera* (*The Corregidor and the Miller's Wife*). Falla was at first thwarted by a troublesome clause in Alarcón's will, but he was eventually granted permission to use the story, and set to work on the score. With the limitations imposed by the first world war, it was impossible for Diaghilev to mount a full-scale ballet production, but he did produce a preliminary version—as a mime set to music—in Madrid in 1917. This early version had been scored for a chamber orchestra, but with the end of the war in sight, Diaghilev insisted upon a full orchestral score. The premiere of the full ballet featured choreography by Diaghilev's protégé Léonide Massine and sets and costumes by Picasso.

The ballet is in two scenes, with Alarcón's farcical story set as a series of traditional Spanish dances. The ballet begins with a brief *Introduction*—a ferocious fanfare for timpani, trumpet, and castanets punctuated by shouts of “¡Olé!” A mezzo-soprano sings a folk tune, warning the wives of the town to lock their doors...as the devil could awaken at any time. Part I opens with an episode titled *Afternoon*—another bold trumpet fanfare, and then more languid music with flashes of humor that sets the scene. In the first scene, the Miller's wife eludes his embraces and flirts with the old Corregidor, a local magistrate who wears a three-cornered hat as his badge of office. The Corregidor sneaks back later and hides, watching the Miller's wife dance a *fandango* (*The Dance of the Miller's Wife*). This is sensuous, dramatic music based upon the *flamenco* dance—you can imagine the stomping feet, and flirtatiously whirling skirts. The Corregidor reveals himself, and in the guise of comical solo bassoon, he attempts to dance a *minuet* with her—she pretends to be flattered, dancing a more graceful version of the same music. She flirts even more outrageously in the next sequence (*The Grapes*) offering him grapes and then flitting away, until the clumsy Corregidor finally trips and falls on his face. He stomps off furiously, and the Miller, who has seen the whole thing, emerges from hiding and completes the *fandango* with his wife.

After a short pause, Part II begins at a feast given by the Miller and his wife. *The Neighbors' Dance* is a languorous *seguidilla*, a couples' contradance that includes some of the sexier moves from the *fandango*. (The *seguidilla* was one of the dances condemned by the Church in Spain as too lascivious for proper young women!) *The Miller's Dance* is a *farucca*, a form that was typically danced by a solo man as a display of virility and physical prowess. (Falla added this dance to the ballet at the last minute, at Diaghilev's insistence—as a showpiece for Massine.) It begins with a pair of thoroughly macho flourishes from the horn and English horn and continues in a series of dramatically rhythmic phrases, leading to a furious ending. The Corregidor's bodyguard bursts in and arrests the Miller on a trumped-up charge. The mezzo appears again: now to warn the husbands of the town to lock their doors...as the devil is already awake. She ends her song with the song of the cuckoo, mocking cuckolded husbands everywhere. The Corregidor—again as a bassoon—returns in the middle of the night to chase the Miller's wife (*The Corregidor's Dance*) but, while in hot pursuit, he falls into the millpond. He hangs his wet clothes on a chair and falls asleep. The Miller, who has escaped, returns, and seeing the clothes, he believes his wife has been unfaithful. He steals the Corregidor's clothes, and goes off to seduce the Corregidor's wife. The Corregidor awakes, and is forced to put on the Miller's clothes—just in time to be arrested by his own men, who are looking for the escaped Miller. A crowd gathers, and the Miller returns to dance a mocking *chufra* around the Corregidor, just before the old man is dragged away. The ballet closes with the entire ensemble in the *Final Dance*, a *jota* with a lively cross-rhythm throughout. The music is alternately light-hearted and dramatic, but in the end brings this set to a joyful conclusion.

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Complete program notes for the 2017-18 season are available at www.madisonsymphony.org.

Voices heard in the *Introduction*

¡Olé! ¡Olé! ¡Olé! ¡Olé!...

Olé! Olé! Olé! Olé!...

*Casadita, casadita,
¡cierra con tranca la puerta!
Que aunque el diablo esté dormido,
¡a lo mejor se despierta!*

Little wife, little wife
be sure to lock your door!
For even if the devil is asleep
he can awaken when you least expect it!

Voice heard after *The Miller's Dance*

*Por la noche canta el cuco
advirtiéndolo a los casados
que corran bien los cerrojos
¡que el diablo está desvelado!
Por la noche canta el cuco...
¡Cucú! ¡Cucú! ¡Cucó!*

Through the night the cuckoo sings
warning husbands
to set the locks firmly,
for the devil is awake!
Through the night the cuckoo sings...
Cuckoo! Cuckoo! Cuckoo!