

Madison Symphony Orchestra Program Notes
September 20-21-22, 2024
99th Season / Subscription Program 1
J. Michael Allsen

This concert marks the reunion of friends. Our own Greg Zelek returns to the console of the Overture Concert Organ, playing one of the great works for organ and orchestra, Joseph Jongen's *Symphonie Concertante*. Cellist Tommy Mesa last performed with the MSO in November 2021, playing the Dvořák *Cello Concerto*. However, he has also appeared twice with *his* old friend, Greg Zelek, on our organ series programs. Here, he plays Tchaikovsky's *Variations on a Rocooco Theme*. Tchaikovsky revered Mozart, and this witty work is one in which he adopts a distinctly 18th-century style. Our opener is *Umoja* by composer Valerie Coleman. *Umoja*, the Swahili word for "unity" and the first principle of the African diaspora holiday Kwanzaa, began as a simple choral anthem for unity, but its composer has reworked it for several other ensembles, including the orchestral version heard here. The program closes with a suite from Manuel de Falla's colorful, Spanish-flavored ballet *The Three-Cornered Hat*.

Valerie Coleman's *Umoja* (Swahili for "unity") refers to the first principle of the African diaspora holiday of Kwanzaa. This orchestral work had its origins in a simple Kwanzaa song she wrote several years ago.

Valerie Coleman

Born: September 3, 1970, Louisville, Kentucky.

Umoja

- **Composed:** 2019.
- **Premiere:** September 24, 2019, by the Philadelphia Orchestra.
- **Previous MSO Performances:** This is our first performance of the work.
- **Duration:** 11:00.

Background

Valerie Coleman has an admirable double career: as one of America's leading flutists, and as an active and successful composer.

Composer and flutist Valerie Coleman first came to national prominence as the founder of the Imami Winds, a wind quintet founded in part with the ideal of

providing role models to younger African American performers in classical music (*Imami* is Swahili for “faith.”). She composed several works for this ensemble. She maintains a successful double career today. As a flutist, she plays as a soloist and chamber musician throughout North America and Europe, and recently, in August 2022, gave the premier of Jennifer Higdon’s *Flute Concerto: The Light We Can Hear* in August 2022. She is widely-performed as a composer, and widely-commissioned as well, with orchestral works written for the Orchestra of St. Luke’s and the Hartford Symphony Orchestra. Coleman has a particularly close relationship with the Philadelphia Orchestra, and has composed three works for that ensemble in the last few years, including the piece heard here. *Umoja*, her best-known work, has gone through many evolutions over the last two decades, and as Coleman explains, it was originally written as a simple Kwanzaa song:

“In its original form, *Umoja*, the Swahili word for ‘unity’ and the first principle of the African diaspora holiday Kwanzaa, was composed as a simple song for women’s choir. It embodied spend a sense of ‘tribal unity’ through the feel of a drum circle, the sharing of history through traditional ‘call and response’ form, and the repetition of a memorable sing-song melody.”

In 2001 she arranged *Umoja* for the Imami Winds “with the intent of providing an anthem celebrating the diverse heritages of the ensemble itself.” This was the first of many reimaginings of *Umoja* by Coleman for various ensembles, culminating in the orchestral version heard here, which was commissioned by the Philadelphia Orchestra. Coleman writes:

“This version honors the simple melody that ever was, but is now a full exploration into the meaning of freedom and unity. Now more than ever, *Umoja* has to ring as a strong and beautiful anthem for the world we live in today.”

What You’ll Hear

This stirring work traces an arc that begins in simplicity, moves through conflict, and ends brightly and hopefully.

Coleman provides the following comments on the music:

“Almost two decades after the original, the orchestral version brings an expansion and sophistication to the short and sweet melody, beginning with sustained ethereal passages that float and shift from a bowed vibraphone,

supporting the introduction of the melody by solo violin. Here the melody is sweetly sung in its simplest form with an earnest reminiscence of Appalachian style music. From there, the melody dances and weaves throughout the instrument families, interrupted by dissonant viewpoints led by the brass and percussion sections, which represent the clash of injustices, racism, and hate that threatens to gain a foothold in the world today. Spiky textures turn into an aggressive exchange between upper woodwinds and percussion, before a return to the melody as a gentle reminder of kindness and humanity. Through the brass-led ensemble tutti, the journey ends with a bold call of unity that harkens back to the original anthem.”

Belgian organ virtuoso Joseph Jongen completed this work in 1927: almost a century later, it stands as one of the 20th century’s most enduringly popular works for organ and orchestra

Joseph Jongen

Born: December 14, 1873, Liège, Belgium

Died: July 12, 1953, Sart-lez-Spa (near Liège), Belgium

Symphonie Concertante for Organ and Orchestra, Op.81

- **Composed:** 1926-27.
- **Premiere:** Jongen was the soloist in the first performance in Brussels, on February 11, 1928.
- **Previous MSO Performances:** Previous performances of this work have featured organists Thomas Trotter (2004: the formal dedication concert of the Overture Concert Organ) and Nathan Laube (2014).
- **Duration:** 35:00.

Background

Written initially for the gigantic Wanamaker organ in Philadelphia, this work was actually premiered in Brussels.

The Belgian composer, organist, and pianist Joseph Jongen was born in Liège and spent most of his career in his homeland. After some early study in Germany, he settled in Brussels, eventually becoming the director of the conservatory there. Jongen was a fine pianist and one of the great organists in an era of great organists. His compositional style was eclectic, drawing on the influences of his teachers D’Indy and Strauss, but also on the music of Debussy and Stravinsky, on Walloon

folk music and Gregorian chant. Though he composed prolifically in all genres but opera, in particular producing a large body of excellent chamber music, Jongen is best remembered as a composer of works for organ.

His most popular work, the *Symphonie Concertante*, was commissioned by the Philadelphia department store magnate Rodman Wanamaker. The Wanamaker organ is an enormous instrument of some 400 ranks that was installed in the grand court of Wanamaker's store in 1911. (The instrument—considered by many to be the largest in the world—is still played twice a day in the building's grand central court.) The organ was being refurbished and the original plan was for Jongen to travel to Philadelphia to play the premiere in early 1928. The *Symphonie*—Jongen once referred to it as “that unfortunate work”—ran into non-musical obstacles almost immediately after it was finished in August 1927, however. Jongen's father died that fall, and he threw his travel plans aside; then word arrived that work on the Wanamaker organ was proceeding slower than expected, and that his performance would have to be postponed until late 1928. Jongen received permission to go ahead with a premiere in Brussels, however. In March 1928, Rodman Wanamaker died unexpectedly, and in the end, the planned Philadelphia performance never took place. Despite its beginnings, the *Symphonie* quickly caught on as Jongen and others performed it across Europe and the United States. It remains one of the finest and most often-played 20th-century works for organ and orchestra.

What You'll Hear

This work has the outlines of a classical Symphony, and the organ and orchestra are equal partners in working out its themes. It is laid out in four movements:

- A forceful *Allegro*.
- A scherzo that alternates an offbeat dance with a slower, more fervent chorale.
- A long, impressionistic third movement.
- A bold and forceful closing *Toccata*

The *Symphonie* is a work that calls for a large, brawny organ—it was, after all, written with the titanic Wanamaker in mind—that can stand up to a large, thickly-scored orchestra. The great Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe, after hearing the Brussels premiere, wrote an enthusiastic letter to his friend Jongen, but questioned the way he had billed it, as a “Symphony with organ”:

“...the title ‘Symphony with organ’ lends itself to misconception. Wouldn't ‘Symphony for orchestra and organ’ seem better and more accurate? ... The words ‘with organ’ are understood to mean sustaining, reinforcing,

changing; that is not the role you assign to the King of Instruments and its abundant resources here; this role is not limited or restricted, it is free; it is clearly a *second orchestra* that enriches the first, proposing ideas, developing them or commenting upon them; the sound of the organ sometimes predominates, is never subservient, infusing a delicate virtuosity, which unlike the genre-concerto, charms and awakens the interest...”

Jongen settled on “Symphonie Concertante” which implies just this sort of equal partnership. The opening movement (*Allegro molto moderato*) begins with a restless fugal figure in the orchestra that leads to the organ’s first massive entrance. The movement continues as a conversation between a pair of giants: sometimes alternating themes, sometimes combining them. The ending is surprisingly understated, closing with a quiet chord and pedal note. The second movement begins as a scherzo (*Divertimento: Molto vivo*) that opens with a quick, and oddly-accented (it is in 7/4) dance for organ. This alternates with slower, more expressive *Religioso* music throughout. In the third and longest movement (*Molto lento: Lento misterioso*), Jongen said that he wanted to “organ and orchestra to realize the best union possible” and he clearly achieves this in the close interplay of instrumental colors. It begins with sinuous lines in solo woodwinds, and moves in an impressionistic calm throughout. Even in a great central passage for full orchestra he maintains a kind of transparent watercolor quality that probably led one of the early critics to describe this movement as “seraphic and luminous.” The finale (*Toccata (Moto perpetuo): Allegro moderato*) is a brilliant showpiece for *both* orchestras, with unceasing right-hand figuration in the organ carrying the movement through a series of ever broader climaxes. This perpetual motion stops only at the very end, in a forceful coda.

Tchaikovsky channeled his admiration for Mozart into this showpiece for cello and orchestra.

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Born: May 7, 1840, Votkinsk, Russia.

Died: November 6, 1893, St. Petersburg, Russia.

Variations on a Rococo Theme for Cello and Orchestra, Op.33

- **Composed:** 1876.
- **Premiere:** It was written for the cellist Wilhelm Fitzenhagen, who played the premiere in Moscow on November 30, 1877.

- **Previous MSO Performances:** Our only previous performance of this work was in 1945, featuring MSO cellist Mildred Stanke.
- **Duration:** 35:00.

Background

This work was written for his Moscow conservatory colleague Wilhelm Fitzenhagen, who then made several changes that composer had not authorized before it was published.

Tchaikovsky revered Mozart above all other composers, and adapted Mozart's style in a few of his works: both his *Mozartiana Suite* and *Rococo Variations* are works that are "Mozartean" in conception, though the melodies and texture are clearly Tchaikovsky's own. He turned to Mozart's music for solace during dark times. At one point he wrote to a friend: "Do you know that when I play Mozart, I feel brighter and younger—almost a youth?" And he seems to have needed that solace in the mid 1870s. He had been awarded a teaching position at the Moscow Conservatory in 1866, and taught there for a decade. Tchaikovsky's years in Moscow were often hectic and difficult, and he constantly complained about the lack of time to compose. Despite its drawbacks, the teaching position also allowed him to make contacts with all of Russia's finest musicians, and he still managed to be tremendously productive during this time.

The *Rococo Variations* were among the last works he wrote during his Moscow years, composed at the request of cellist Wilhelm Fitzenhagen, one of Tchaikovsky's colleagues at the Conservatory. The work was immediately successful, performed on tour by Fitzenhagen, and praised by Franz Liszt and others. To Tchaikovsky's chagrin, Fitzenhagen presented a thoroughly re-arranged and heavily edited version to a publisher without his permission. Though he was apparently angry at these unauthorized changes, Tchaikovsky eventually went along with the publication, and this remains the version most often played today—perhaps a bit more romantic in style than Tchaikovsky intended, but still a work that retains the straightforward good humor of the late 18th century.

What You'll Hear

The "Mozartean" theme is expanded in seven variations, culminating with a showy virtuoso conclusion.

After a brief introduction, the solo cello presents a genial theme that will provide the basis for seven variations. The theme and most of the variations are concluded

with a brief woodwind passage. Tchaikovsky's elaborations of the theme range from straight decorations of the melody (Variations 1-2) to lush and lyrical (Variation 3) to jolly (Variation 5) to mock-tragic (Variation 6). The capstone, Variation 7, is a blazingly fast virtuoso passage for cello.

This colorful work by Spanish composer Manuel de Falla is inspired by the music and culture of his native region, Andalusia.

Manuel de Falla

Born: November 23, 1876 Cádiz, Spain.

Died: November 14, 1946, Alta Gracia, Argentina.

Suite No.2 from "The Three-Cornered Hat"

- **Composed:** 1916-17.
- **Premiere:** The first full-scale performance of this ballet took place at London's Alhambra Theatre on July 22, 1919. The orchestral suites heard here were published in 1921.
- **Previous MSO Performances:** We have performed both the *Suite No.2* (2008) and the complete ballet score (2017).
- **Duration:** 12:00.

Background

This ballet score was one of several great early 20th century masterworks commissioned by Serge Diaghilev for his Ballets Russe.

Manuel de Falla's ballet *El sombrero de tres picos*, 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 company. 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*). Alarcón had died in 1891, and 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 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 immediate success of this performance led Falla to extract two orchestral suites from the ballet score.

What You'll Hear

Each of the three movements in the *Suite No. 2* are based upon an Andalusian dance, in the *Neighbors' Dance*, a slow and sexy *seguidilla*, and in *The Miller's Dance*, a swaggering *farucca*, chock full of toxic masculinity! The *Final Dance* is an energetic *jota*.

The ballet is in two scenes, with Alarcón's farcical story set as a series of traditional Andalusian dances. The two suites draw on the main musical episodes of these two scenes, and are presented in the order of the original ballet score. The ballet opens with a 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*. In the next sequence Corregidor reveals himself, and 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 final sequence 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.

The *Suite No. 2* is drawn from the second scene, 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 original 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 Corregidor returns in the middle of the night to chase the Miller's wife, 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 *chufleta* 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 2023-24 season are available at www.madisonsymphony.org.

Program page info:

Aaron Copland (1900-1990)
Suite from "Appalachian Spring"

George Gershwin (1898-1937)
Rhapsody in Blue

Mr. Wilson

INTERMISSION [Please confirm!]

John Adams (b. 1937)
The Chairman Dances (Foxtrot for Orchestra)

Howard Hanson (1896-1981)
Symphony No. 2, Op. 30, "Romantic"

Adagio—Allegro
Andante con tenderezza
Allegro con brio

Photo suggestions/captions:

Copland

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aaron-Copland>

Gershwin

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Gershwin#/media/File:George_Gershwin_1937.jpg

Adams

<https://www.earbox.com/john-adams-photos/#!https://www.earbox.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/DSC038722.jpg>

Hanson

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Howard_Hanson#/media/File:Howard_Hanson_conducting.jpg