Madison Symphony Orchestra Program Notes
Overture Concert Organ Series No. 4
April 19, 2024
J. Michael Allsen

This innovative program brings together Greg Zelek and the Overture Concert Organ together with the UW-Madison Wind Ensemble, directed by Scott Teeple. They open by joining forces on a well-known excerpt from Wagner's *Lohengrin*. Mr. Zelek then plays a virtuoso solo work by Louis Vierne. The largest piece on the program is *Bells for Stokowski* by American composer Michael Daugherty: challenging and colorful music composed in 2001 for the centennial of the Philadelphia Orchestra. Some movie music is next, as saxophonist Andrew Macrossie and Zelek play the lyrical *Gabriel's Oboe* by Ennio Morricone, followed by an organ work, a flashy set of variations on *The Star-Spangled Banner* by 19th-century American composer Dudley Buck. To close, we have the stirring *Feierliche Einzug* (*Solemn Entry*) by Richard Strauss, and the fiery "battle music" from the end of Rossini's overture to *Guillaume Tell*.

Richard Wagner (1813-1882)
***Elsa's Procession to the Cathedral* from *Lohengrin* (arr. John R. Bourgeois)**

Lohengrin was based upon an anonymous medieval German epic and poems by the knight Wolfram von Eschenbach (d.1220). Richard Wagner conceived of the opera in 1845 while he was in the spa city of Marienbad, convalescing from a case of nervous exhaustion. (As conductor of the Dresden Opera, he had just staged the premiere of his *Tannhäuser*, which had met with a fairly disappointing response.) Wagner finished the opera in 1848, and presented a concert version of Act I in Dresden that year. But the planned premiere in Dresden never happened—Wagner took part in the abortive revolution in Dresden in 1848 and had to flee to Switzerland to avoid arrest. *Lohengrin* was finally produced at Weimar in 1850, under the direction of Franz Liszt.

Lohengrin centers on the passionate—and eventually tragic—love affair between Elsa, a disinherited princess, and a mysterious knight—later revealed as Lohengrin, the son of Parsifal, leader of the Knights of the Grail. Lohengrin appears to defend Elsa from a wrongful accusation of murder. She agrees to marry her champion, on the condition that she never ask his name or origin. Their wedding is a joyous event, but under a spell cast by the evil Ortrud, she eventually demands to know her husband's name. Only bad things can come of this, and Elsa eventually dies, leaving Lohengrin to leave in a boat drawn by a dove. One of the opera's grandest

moments is *Elsa's Procession to the Cathedral* from Act II—heard here in an arrangement for wind ensemble and organ by bandleader and arranger John R. Bourgeois, who joined the United States Marine Band in Washington, DC ("The President's Own") as a hornist in 1956, and was director of the Marine Band from 1979 until his retirement on 1996. Over 40 years, Col. Bourgeois performed for every American president from Eisenhower to Clinton. His arrangement of the unhurried wedding processional begins delicately in the woodwinds, and brasses are added gradually, with horns introducing a stately new motive. The organ is reserved for the stirring ending, where the brass hammer out the motive that Wagner uses to represent the "forbidden question"—foreshadowing the tragedy to come, in the midst of this grand celebration.

Louis Vierne (1870-1937)
***Carillon de Westminster*, Op. 54, No. 6**

Though he was born nearly blind, Louis Vierne was able to study at the Paris Conservatory, where he became one of Cesár Franck's disciples. At age 22, he became assistant organist to the distinguished Charles-Marie Widor at the Parisian church of Sainte-Supplice, and in 1900 Vierne became principal organist at Notre Dame Cathedral, a position he held until his death in 1937. The famed Aristide Cavaillé-Coll had rebuilt Notre Dame's organ in the 1860s, but it was in poor repair by the turn of the century, and Vierne worked throughout his career to support its renovation, even undertaking American tours to raise funds. Vierne was a fine composer and a phenomenal improviser, but his vision problems made getting his music down on paper increasingly difficult, and he would eventually write most of his works using Braille. Despite this, he published over 60 opus numbers during his lifetime—primarily organ and piano music, but also several choral and orchestral pieces.

His *Carillon de Westminster* ("Bells of Westminster") was published in 1927, as the last of six pieces in his third suite of "fantasies" for organ. The work is dedicated to Henry Willis, a member of a distinguished multigenerational family of English organ builders, who was then at work on a renovation of the great organ of Westminster Abbey. It is based upon the famous "Westminster chimes" played from the Westminster Palace clock tower. The piece begins quietly, with a delicate filigree woven around the four pitches of the chimes. Anyone who has ever been around an old chiming clock is used to hearing these four pitches in a familiar eight-note pattern, and while that pattern does appear a few times, Vierne also uses other patterns of the four pitches as well. As the piece nears its end, the texture becomes denser and more forceful.

Michael Daugherty (b. 1954)
Bells for Stokowski

Iowa-born Michael Daugherty started his musical career as a pianist for a local television station and later played in a funk band with his brothers. He studied jazz piano at North Texas State University before turning to studies in composition at the Manhattan School of Music, IRCAM, and Yale University, and with György Ligeti in Hamburg. Daugherty currently teaches composition at the University of Michigan. His credits are impressive, including awards and fellowships from the Fulbright Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. One of the most frequently-commissioned American composers working today, his works have been commissioned and/or performed by groups such as the Kronos Quartet, the Netherlands Wind Ensemble, Summit Brass, and dozens of the world's great orchestras. Daugherty's eclectic music is rooted in American popular culture, and he has drawn inspiration from such widely diverse sources as Las Vegas lounge music (*Le Tombeau de Liberace*), American cultural icons (*Sing Sing: J. Edgar Hoover*, *Paul Robeson Told Me*, *Fifteen: Symphonic Fantasy on the Art of Andy Warhol*, and several works inspired by Elvis Presley), and even Superman™ comic books (the *Metropolis Symphony*).

His third symphony, *Philadelphia Stories*, was commissioned by the Philadelphia Orchestra in celebration of its centennial, and it was premiered in Philadelphia on November 15, 2001. Daugherty then received a commission from a consortium of universities to transform the symphony's third and largest movement, *Bells for Stokowski*, into a work for wind ensemble. This was first played by the University of Michigan Symphonic Band on October 2, 2002. The composer provides the following note:

> "*Bells for Stokowski* is a tribute to one of the most influential and controversial conductors of the 20th century. Born in London, Leopold Stokowski (1882-1977) began his career as an organist. Moving to America, Stokowski was fired from his organ post at St. Bartholomew's Church in New York in 1908, after he concluded a service with *Stars and Stripes Forever*. As maestro of the Philadelphia Orchestra (1912-36) he became known for his brilliant interpretations of classical music, his enthusiasm for new concert music, and for taking risks by constantly pushing the envelope of what was acceptable in the concert hall.
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> "In *Bells for Stokowski*, I imagine Stokowski in Philadelphia visiting the Liberty Bell at sunrise, and listening to all the bells of the city resonate. The composition begins with two percussionists, placed on opposite ends of

> the stage, performing stereophonically on identical ringing percussion instruments such as chimes, crotales, sleigh bells, bell trees, and various non-pitched metals. A saxophone quartet introduces an original theme that I have composed in the style of Bach. This baroque fantasy is modulated in my musical language through a series of tonal and atonal variations. Later in this composition I also introduce my own "transcription" of Bach's *C Major Prelude* from *The Well-Tempered Klavier*.
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> "In keeping with Stokowski's musical vision, I look simultaneously to the past and the future of American concert music. I utilize multiple musical canons, polyrhythms, and counterpoints to achieve a complex timbral layering throughout *Bells for Stokowski*. With unusual orchestrations and an alternation between chamber and tutti configurations, I recreate the musical effect of Stokowski's experimental seating rearrangements. In the coda I evoke the famous 'Stokowski sound,' by making the symphonic band resound like an enormous, rumbling Gothic organ."

This is challenging music, with constantly-changing tone colors and textures. The forward motion slows briefly in a central interlude when harp and double reeds introduce Daugherty's take on the well-known *C Major Prelude*. However, the furious intensity quickly returns in further variations, leading to a forceful final passage underlaid by the organ.

Ennio Morricone (1928-2020)
***Gabriel's Oboe* (adapted by Greg Zelek and Andrew Macrossie)**

The late Italian master Ennio Morricone wrote over 450 scores for television and film. He truly hit his stride as a film composer in the 1960s, working primarily with Italian directors, but also writing scores for Hollywood. Perhaps his best-known works are the scores he wrote for a series of groundbreaking Westerns in 1960s. These films, like *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1968), mostly directed by Italians and other Europeans, reworked the well-worn style of the Hollywood Western. Often known as "Spaghetti Westerns," they were much more grittily realistic and violent than their Hollywood predecessors. Like many film composers, Morricone was a musical chameleon, able to channel a huge variety of musical styles appropriate to the setting and action on the screen.

In 1986, Morricone scored *The Mission*, Roland Joffé's dark historical drama set in 18th-century Paraguay. His music for the film was nominated for an Academy Award, and won the Golden Globe for Best Score that year. In the film, Father Gabriel (Jeremy Irons) has been sent to the Paraguayan jungle to convert the local

Guaraní people to Catholicism, following an earlier attempt by a priest who had been killed by the Indians. He manages to earn the trust of the Guaraní not by preaching, but by playing his oboe for them. The film's main theme, ***Gabriel's Oboe***, was written for this dramatic moment: a long, expressive melody spun out over a simple background. It is heard here in an arrangement for solo alto(?) saxophone and organ.

Dudley Buck (1839-1909)
Concert Variations on "The Star-Spangled Banner"

Though his name is rarely heard today, Dudley Buck was among America's most prominent musicians in the late 19th century. Born in Hartford, Connecticut, he attended Trinity College in Hartford. Like most American classical musicians at the time, he moved to Europe to complete his musical training, studying in Leipzig, Dresden and Paris. Returning to America in 1862, Buck began a successful career as an organist, composer, and writer on musical topics. He toured extensively, and held positions in Chicago and Boston, before settling in Brooklyn, where he held the prestigious post of music director at Trinity Church for nearly 25 years. Buck was successful as a composer, writing a pair of operas, a symphony, several oratorios and cantatas, organ works, and a large number of pieces for church choirs. But his most popular pieces were a series of grand patriotic works, beginning in 1866 with *Concert Variations on "The Star-Spangled Banner"* for organ. In 1876, he wrote a huge cantata, *The Centennial Meditation for Columbia*, for the U.S. Centennial celebrations held in Philadelphia on July 4. He followed that with another cantata, *Columbus* (1877) and his most often-played orchestra work, the *Festival Overture on the American National Air*.

In 1866, when Buck composed his *Concert Variations*, *The Star-Spangled Banner* was not yet America's official national anthem—that didn't happen until 1931. But by the time of the Civil War, it was already recognized as our most important patriotic song. Buck begins by laying out the theme a straightforward way, though with a few unexpected harmonic twists. He follows with four variations: the first dominated by a winding pedal line, the second transforming the melody into a dancing triplet line, and the third a fierce pedal solo. The fourth variation is a rather spooky minor-key version with startlingly chromatic harmonies. Buck wraps up with a grand fugal transformation of the theme and a forceful final version of the *Banner*.

Richard Strauss (1864-1949)
***Feierlicher Einzug* (arr. Max Reger/Johannes Koch)**

The Knights of Saint John were founded as a knightly order in Jerusalem in the 11th century, during the First Crusade. Also known as the Knights Hospitaller, they erected a hospital in Jerusalem, and eventually built hospitals across Europe. Like their more famous cohorts, the
Knights Templar, the Hospitallers were also an elite fighting force, and their stronghold on the island of Rhodes in the eastern Mediterranean withstood attacks from the Ottoman Turks until the early 16th century. Relocating to Malta, they continued to defy the Turks, but in 1798 they were finally defeated by Napoleon. Thereafter, the Knights of Saint John concentrated on their original purpose, giving aid to the poor and sick. By 1909, when the Knights commissioned Richard Strauss to write a work for one of their induction ceremonies, the organization was a fraternal order widely respected for charitable work. The full title of the work Strauss wrote for them is *Feierlicher Einzug der Ritter des Johanniter-Ordens* (*Solemn Entry of the Knights of the Order of Saint John*). This short but thrilling piece was Strauss's only work for brass ensemble, scored originally for 15(!) trumpets, four horns, four trombones two tubas, and timpani. A few years later, organist and composer Max Reger published a version for solo organ. In 1976, Johannes Koch built upon Reger's arrangement to create the now-fairly-standard version heard tonight: for four trumpets, four trombones, two tubas, timpani, and organ. The piece opens with a fanfare figure that descends from the high brass to involve the full ensemble. The middle section is based upon a pair of dignified processional themes, before the fanfare returns in a stirring, *fortissimo* ending.

Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868)
Overture to "Guillaume Tell"

Just whether or not there was a real William Tell is uncertain, but Switzerland's greatest folk hero was mentioned in writing for the first time in the 15th century. By that time, most of his legend was complete: Tell was a 14th-century Swiss crossbowman who was forced to shoot an apple from his son's head as punishment for disrespecting the tyrannical governor. He later led a revolution against the Hapsburgs who had conquered his homeland. Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* is based upon an 1804 play by Friedrich Schiller, where the Swiss hero became a more universal Romantic hero and a symbol of freedom from oppression.

By the time he completed *Guillaume Tell* in 1829, Rossini was, without a doubt, the most popular opera composer in Europe. But for a whole host of reasons—personal, medical, and political—he retired from opera composition after *Guillaume Tell*, very nearly his final large-scale work. (Only the grand sacred *Stabat Mater* of 1841 was yet to come, though in the last few years of his life, he returned to composition, producing over a hundred small pieces he referred to as the "sins of my old age.") *Guillaume Tell* was something new for the great master of Italian comic opera—a Romantic grand opera, set in the *French* style. Though he had written several earlier serious operas, *William Tell* is unique in the depth of its characters and the grandeur of its plot. It is also Rossini's longest work: if performed without cuts—as it almost never is today—it lasts over four hours! Its first production in Paris was a success every bit as huge as the opera itself.

The overtures to Rossini's operas are unfailingly good music, and many have survived as concert works, some after their operas have been forgotten. Like its opera, the overture to *William Tell* is longer and more profound than its predecessors: more like a programmatic symphonic poem than the usual brilliant and breezy opener—though at this program, we're going to cut to the chase…literally! The pastoral calm is shattered by a trumpet call, and busy, galloping music. Rossini's intent was to show the summoning of the Swiss people to rise up against tyranny, and their eventual victory…but this music also has connections (for those of us of a certain age...) to another great freedom fighter of radio and television!

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