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Samuel Edwards, Senior Honors Recital French horn, piano, and composition

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Abstract

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This recital is a creative project exploring the roles of the composer and performer in creating an emotional, musical, human experience through the blending of French horn performance and programmatic composition. When the composer takes part in both the creation and presentation of music, he or she builds a stronger connection with the audience. The diversity of the styles and genres present is also enhanced, creating a new and exciting atmosphere of ever-changing material. Ultimately, the concert becomes an emotional learning experience that relies equally on the composer, performer, and listener to create trust and impart musical wisdom.

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Program Notes

Horn Concerto No. 1 in E-flat Major

Richard Strauss wrote his first horn concerto at the age of 18 in 1882-83. His father, Franz Strauss, was one of the leading horn players of the time and this led to Richard Strauss' exploration of the horn as a solo and orchestral instrument throughout his life. This piece is the most frequently performed horn concerto written in the 19th century. Its iconic melodies and variety emphasize many of the horn's strengths such as the horn's impressive range and its lyrical and technical capabilities. The original version, with the orchestra, was meant to be played on the natural, valveless horn which was still common at the time. However, the valved F double-horn was developed at the end of the 19th century and became the standard performance instrument. Strauss' father actually struggled with the piece, finding it be very tiring and the high B-flats too risky to perform in a concert. The concerto begins with a heroic theme based on rising and falling arpeggios that set the mood for the first movement. It is characterized by a noble, lyrical melody that emphasizes the horn's heroic expressiveness and then moves into a playful, technical passage that culminates with a triumphant ending. The first movement leads *attacca* into the reflective second movement which harbors a soft, sustained melody that exemplifies the horn's pure, delicate side. The march-like final movement returns to the heroic attitude of the first movement but with a technical fluidity that intensifies the high drama of the work. The *maestoso* at the end of the movement brings back the refined, regal attitude one last time before the movement concludes with a fast, flamboyant flourish.

Conversations of the Soul

I wanted to write a piece celebrating my grandfather and what he meant to me. I wrote *Conversations of the Soul* to capture the connection I had with my grandfather and to convey the compassion, resilience, and integrity he has passed on to me. No words can describe this, but I believe music can. I wrote *Conversations of the Soul* as a string quartet to convey a sonorous harmony that instills the solid foundation that my grandfather was in my life. The cello is the main solo instrument and provides both structure and expressiveness to the piece, just as my grandfather provided me with a moral center and the confidence to stand up for what I believe in. The viola is the second solo instrument of the piece and plays all the higher sounding melodic lines. It provides the singing lines that show my determination to celebrate and carry on my grandfather's legacy.

The piece begins with an unaccompanied cello solo. This solo is the main theme for the piece and comes back many times as it alternates with the viola solos. The two violins join the cello after its solo and support both the cello and viola throughout the piece with light, ethereal notes and motions that can be heard in the more rhythmical sections of the piece. This soothing violin texture represents my grandfather's spirituality and faith, which have always inspired me. The viola plays its solo which is resolute, heartfelt, and soars above the other instruments with its

own theme. Then, the violins stop playing as the cello and viola play a short duet together to convey the unspoken conversation the piece is titled after. All the instruments come back in and, led by the cello with its theme, play a chorale representing my grandfather's empowerment and resilience. This chorale plays through the dissonance of hardship and uncertainty to show the guiding light that my grandfather was in my life. The chorale ends with the viola supporting the rest of the ensemble with a single, unaccompanied note. This note bursts into the next section with the two violins playing their ethereal line, the cello providing the supporting foundation, and the viola playing its solo again. The cello then joins the viola and plays its solo one last time in its entirety. The violins drop out for the concluding section of the song, which just leaves the viola and cello. This represents my grandfather and I in mutual acceptance and understanding. The viola supports the cello as it begins its theme again. The cello finishes softly halfway through the phrase and the viola compassionately finishes the rest of the cello phrase by itself. But, right at the end, the cello returns to help play the final chords of the piece. This conveys how I have learned from my grandfather's example and will always keep those lessons of resilience, compassion, and integrity with me. Throughout the piece, the cello is always present, as it represents my grandfather's spirit that lives on in all who have known him. I like to think that even after the end, the cello never really stops playing. It continues to play on and I always feel that I can still hear it. My grandfather was a wonderful, loving person. I will let this music, his music, speak for me.

Parable VIII for Solo Horn

Vincent Ludwig Persichetti was an American composer, pianist, and teacher. He integrated many new ideas of 20th century music into his compositions such as polytonality and pandiatonicism, elements of which are present in his *Parable* for horn. This piece is another standard selection in the horn repertoire. Its technical language includes mixed meters, unorthodox intervals, and large leaps with lyrical phrases that require careful shaping. It is a part of a series of twenty-five parables that Persichetti wrote for different solo instruments. *Parable VIII* for Solo Horn is an unaccompanied piece, meaning the horn is the only instrument playing. Therefore, careful phrasing, timing, and use of silence is imperative to its performance as the horn player is the sole architect of its musical direction. As such, the performer has the most liberty on this piece, out of any other piece for horn in the program, for individual, artistic expression.

Evolutions

Although my main areas of musical involvement have been horn performance and composition, piano performance and improvisation have remained an important pursuit for me. *Evolutions* attempts to capture the pop, jazz, and cinematic influences that have permeated some of my work in composition. The piece is unique in that it has very little written musical notation guiding the performer. Instead, it is a series of harmonic suggestions and freely notated melodies with timings that guide the performer through a mostly improvised performance. The piece does visit several main key areas and styles including an F minor blues section, C minor mixed modulation

section, Db major lyrical section, and a C major pop progression. The improvised nature of the performance allows the performer to take an immense amount of liberty. My interpretation is characterized by a more textural, minimalist style alternating between thematic high points and sparse low points. This evolves through different harmonic areas with mainly arpeggiated and block chordal styles that emphasize the harmonic rhythm.

Divertimento for Horn and Piano

Jean Francaix was a French composer and pianist whose gifts were evident from an early age. He studied with many composers, the most prominent being Nadia Boulanger who encouraged Francaix to develop his own unique style. Drawing on influences from Ravel and Stravinsky, he was a neoclassicist who rejected atonality and many other newer styles of the 20th century. He was an extremely prolific composer, writing over 200 pieces over the course of his life. *Divertimento for Horn and Piano* is exemplary of Francaix's style, which is marked by lightness, wit, and a conversational interplay between voices. It provides a lighthearted contrast to the other selections on the program. The first movement is playful and quick, with a prevalence of short runs and accented leaps. Throughout the piece, accents and shifting dynamics constantly create variations in the recurring melodies, creating a constant expectation for rhythmic irregularity and melodic fragmentation. The second movement is a short lyrical section consisting of beautiful, lingering phrases that act as a respite from the first movement. The smooth slurred and legato figures and the contours of the melody contrast sharply with the other two energetic movements but still act as a logical transition. The third movement, a canzonetta, loosely reflects the lively 17th century Italian style from which it was named. The constantly shifting rhythms, harmonies, and registers make this movement exciting, although challenging, to play.

Never Forgotten

Never Forgotten has a dual meaning. This title represents the tone of the piece which is emphasized by the isolated piano phrases in natural minor that return over the course of the piece in varying forms, never quite forgotten. It is also a play on words. I drew some of my inspiration from Martin O'Donnell, who is an American composer active in the video game industry. One of his pieces from the *Halo* video game series soundtrack inspired *Never Forgotten*. One of the pieces in his same album is titled "Never Forget." My piece was through-composed with variations and ornamentations on the initial piano melody and harmonic progression by layering and adjusting the orchestration. The tension and release are terraced throughout the piece with different tone colors to support this structure. The brass harmony and melody serve as the foundation while the string countermelody supports it. The electric guitars provide a change in color while adding more forward momentum to the piece. The single repeated pitch on the piano helps give the piece more unity and moves it forward almost unceasingly. The piano is blended at varying levels throughout the piece with a distorted piano sound to create a more intense texture. The electronic effects were added while creating the melodic and harmonic phrases to supplement the instruments and generate a hybrid orchestral sound. Overall, this piece represents

my interest in electronic and hybrid music composition, especially as it pertains to film and video game trailer music.

The Last of His Kind

The Last of His Kind for Brass Quintet is a programmatic piece based on the story of *Ishi*, the last known member of the Native American Yahi people and the last uncontacted person in the United States. Ishi (1861 –1916) was from the present-day state of California in the United States. The rest of the Yahi were killed in the California genocide in the 19th century. Ishi lived most of his life isolated from modern American culture. In 1911, aged 50, he emerged near the foothills of Lassen Peak in Northern California. *Ishi*, which means "man" in the Yana language, is an adopted name. The anthropologist Alfred Kroeber gave him this name because in the Yahi culture, tradition demanded that he not speak his own name until formally introduced by another Yahi. When asked his name, he said: "I have none, because there were no people to name me," meaning that there were no other Yahi left to speak his name on his behalf.

As my compositions are often guided by an external thematic narrative and, with this piece, I wanted to take the opportunity to create a multi-movement composition to express the story of *Ishi*. I do not presume to be able to perfectly reflect his story and cultural legacy through my music. However, I do try to reimagine what it would be like to be the last one of your beliefs, traditions, language, and culture and be completely alone before having to adapt to a completely new way of life. I take this to a dramatic level through the stages of *survival*, *loss*, *realization*, *acceptance*, *change*, and *new beginnings* which are treated as the various musical sections in this composition. Each movement represents two of these themes.

The first movement, *Survival, Loss*, is characterized by constantly shifting meters, rhythmic figures and harmonies. The phrases played by each instrument clash together, creating harsh dissonances that attempt to convey confusion and survival. The middle section is a more stable canon that tries to convey a sense of loss. The euphonium begins the canon softly and each instrument joins in succession playing the same theme that builds on and harmonizes with itself. This represents intense, compounding loss. The canon culminates in a short chorale in which all the instruments come together before descending into the French horn's quick eighth note murmurings. This leads to the return of the frantic nature of the beginning of the movement which is now echoed by the euphonium playing fragments of the *lost* theme. The end of the movement brings back a subdued fragment of the *loss* theme echoed with muted trumpet and horn.

The second movement is a slow, dissonant, textural transfiguration of harmonies that slowly gain an identifiable form through fragmented melodic lines. It is characterized by disjointed leaps, voice crossings, and an ambiguous key that represent a full realization of cultural loss. The movement gains form and structure over time. At the very end the tuba, euphonium, and horn construct a major chord representing acceptance. This movement is supposed to elicit the process

of dealing with pain and grief in an effort to reach acceptance. The feeling of the movement is chaotic and slow with a sonic intensity that washes over the listeners with a fragile grace.

The final movement, *Change, New Beginnings*, begins similarly to the second movement but is in a consistent meter and has a clear harmonic rhythm and structure. The trumpet and tuba play a solemn, reflective theme before entering the next section led by the trumpet's fast, insistent eighth notes. This second section of the movement forgoes functional harmonies to move through chords by descending half steps while the repeating eighth notes skip around to different instruments. It culminates with a whole tone scale that moves up through the ensemble and a short chorale. These fast and unexpected harmonic changes invoke an era of change that part of the movement is named after. A duet between the second trumpet and tuba takes over and quotes the canon from the first movement before being replaced by an exciting, lyrical section. This is the only section that is grounded firmly in major in the entire piece. It represents an arrival at a new life and beginning in the story with soaring solos from the first trumpet and horn that end with a triumphant chorale. The very last section of the piece is a simple harmonic pattern led by an endearing solo in the euphonium. The piece ends with echoes of the solo in the horn becoming more and more distant, as if Ishi has finally found peace.