Freimann 4 Notes 2021 – 2022

Fort Wayne Philharmonic

Wild Bird for Harp and Violin

R. Murray Schafer

(b. 1933, Sarnia, Ontario; d. 2021, Indian River, Ontario)

Canada's leading composer of the past several decades, R. Murray Schafer was a creative personality who defied pigeon-holing. Originally wishing to be a visual artist, he opted instead to become a musician, but one with wider-ranging interests than those of most classical musicians. A teacher, writer — his book *The Tuning of the World* has been very influential — and a prolific composer, he incorporated his passionate love of the outdoors into many of his compositions — including the duo for harp and violin *Wild Bird*, which we'll hear at this concert. In 1987, Schafer was awarded the first Glenn Gould Prize for his compositions and in 2009 received Canada's top arts honor, the Governor General's Performing Arts Award, for his lifetime achievements.

Schafer was particularly concerned about the damaging effects of noise on people, especially those living in what he called the "sonic sewers" of urban environments. In 1969, he founded the World Soundscape Project at British Columbia's Simon Fraser University "to find solutions for an ecologically balanced soundscape where the relationship between the human community and its sonic environment is in harmony." Explaining his

theories, Schafer said: “In a way, the world is a huge musical composition that’s going on all the time, with a beginning and, presumably, without an ending. We are the composers of this huge, miraculous composition that’s going on around us, and we can improve it or we can destroy it. We can add more noises or we can add more beautiful sounds.”

Many of Schafer’s compositions were written to be performed outdoors, like his opera *The Princess of the Stars* presented in Banff National Park, where the musicians gathered at a lake — some arriving by canoe —an hour before dawn. The sunrise and the awakening of the birds contributed key elements to the performance before an audience of 5,000. And the sounds of birds heard by Schafer outside his home in rural Indian River, Ontario, inspired *Wild Birds* (1997). It was written as a 50th birthday gift to the former concertmaster of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Jacques Israelievitch.

Violinist Amy Hillis comments about this radiant, charming work: “Schafer recreates nature’s sounds and atmosphere in *Wild Bird*. He uses dissonance (i.e.: the violin’s opening …) to represent bird squawks. Soaring melodies played in the violin’s highest register continue to mimic birdsong before they swoop down in a flurry of activity. The ending features … harmonics, which fade away just as a bird call becomes increasingly distant as it flies farther into the sky.”

Four Movements for Five Brass

Charles Collier Jones

(b. 1928, Boston, Massachusetts; d. 2013, Punta Gorda, Florida)

The next two works we'll hear are among the most popular pieces of the 20th century for the brass quintet of two trumpets, French horn, trombone, and tuba. A native of Massachusetts, trumpeter and composer Charles Collier Jones primarily earned his living as a commercial lobster fisherman off Gloucester, 35 miles northeast of Boston. Yet he had all the academic credentials for his creative work: a degree from Yale University, where he studied with Paul Hindemith, and a graduate degree at Brandeis University, where Leonard Bernstein was one of his teachers. When not on his lobster boat, Jones performed regularly with the local Cape Ann Symphony and the Cape Ann Brass Quintet, which he co-founded.

In 1957, Jones wrote *Four Movements for Five Brass*, which has been performed by brass players throughout the world and remains a classic of the brass repertoire. In four movements, it shows off brass sonorities to perfection and gives each player his due. Tongue in cheek, Jones titled the second movement "Pretentious," but this impressive slow movement with a livelier middle section doesn't deserve this putdown. The opening "Introduction and March" stresses the instruments' mellow blend, while the dancing "Waltz" and "Finale Allegro" exude joy and wit.

Scherzo

John Cheetham

(b. 1939, Taos, New Mexico; now living in Columbia, Missouri)

A trombone player and pianist, John Cheetham began his career as a jazz musician, but after studies at the University of New Mexico and a doctorate from the University of Minnesota transferred his allegiance to “legitimate music,” as he calls the classical field. For several decades, he was a professor of music theory and composition at the University of Missouri. Today he calls himself “an unapologetic conservative” “I’m not willing to give up melody,” he says. ”I still think a good tune goes a long way.”

Though he has written works for a variety of media, Cheetham specializes in compositions for brass instruments. He wrote *Scherzo* for brass quintet in 1963, and it was an instant hit and remains so today. As he said, “a good tune goes a long way,” and this brief single-movement piece boasts two of them: the trumpets’ sassily upbeat opening theme and later the horn’s lyrically swaying melody.

String Quartet No. 1 in C minor, Op. 51
Johannes Brahms
(b. 1833, Hamburg, Germany; d. 1897, Vienna, Austria)

Composing symphonies and string quartets was the ultimate challenge for Johannes Brahms, for whom the dark shadow of Beethoven — a consummate master of both genres — loomed as an intimidating obstacle. In 1872, he exploded at the conductor Hermann Levi, famously saying: “I shall never write a symphony! You can’t have any idea what it’s like always to hear such a giant marching behind you!” His First Symphony, a

formidable work in C minor (one of Beethoven's favorite keys), finally arrived four years later when he was 43.

The struggle to create a string quartet that met his lofty standards was equally arduous. Brahms estimated that he wrote 20 quartets and then threw them away before producing his first two published quartets during a summer spent by the Starnberg Lake outside Munich in 1873. That same summer, he also wrote his beloved and much lighter *Variations on a Theme by Haydn*.

Given its first public performance on December 11th in Vienna, the First String Quartet in C minor — the same key as the tempestuous First Symphony — was never to be as popular as the Haydn Variations. For it was a product of the intellect rather than the heart, constructed with "remorseless logic" (Malcolm MacDonald) and tightly spun from cell-like motives, rather than sweeping melodies, which bound all four movements together. Its contrapuntal writing for the four instruments was dense and intricate, and its harmonies so advanced that Arnold Schoenberg of twelve-tone fame loved them and dubbed the composer "Brahms the Modernist."

The sonata-form **first movement** lays down a template for how the quartet will be constructed. Over a tremolo in the other instruments, the first violin gradually ascends propelled by crisp dotted rhythms, its volume moving from soft to loud as it reaches a dramatic high-altitude finish. The elements of this theme will provide material for the entire work to come. A gentler, lyrical companion theme for the two violins immediately provides contrast as Brahms abruptly shifts the key several miles away from C minor to F minor. It announces that his harmonic strategies will be daringly free throughout.

The development section begins quietly and pensively, but is soon infiltrated and energized by those opening dotted rhythms. It also roves over many keys, adding to its growing turbulence. Once again, everything quiets down for the recapitulation of the opening theme. The final coda seems to be rushing toward a big ending, but at the last moment Brahms lets the air out of the balloon for quiet close in C Major.

The first movement's opening motto theme returns with its dotted rhythms for the **second-movement *Romanze*** in A-flat Major, but what a different mood they convey now in this *Poco Adagio* tempo! And Brahms has put a lid on how high these notes can rise, trapping them in a low range. The mood is consoling and nostalgic. In the movement's second section, the drooping, halting phrases of the violin's new theme drive the music into deeper melancholy. The first section's consoling theme returns again, this time with the addition of the first violin's countermelody shimmering above. The close of this lovely movement combines both themes.

Rather than a lively scherzo, Brahms chose for his **third movement** the kind of moderate-tempo intermezzo he often used for middle movements. In F minor, the main section features a strange duo theme for violin and viola, in which the viola rhythmically contradicts the steady patterns of the violin. Cross rhythms like this will abound in this mysterious, unsettling music. And soon the dotted-rhythm motive will make an appearance again. Shifting to a brighter F Major and a slightly quicker tempo, the middle section is a charming dance — the quartet's happiest music — and merrily accented with pizzicato plucking.

The ascending dotted-rhythm motto theme makes a bold reappearance to launch the **finale**, which possesses much the same urgent energy as the first movement. This energy builds a surging movement in which fragments of earlier themes mix contrapuntally, and the prevailing tonal instability takes very little notice of the C-minor home key. At the end, Brahms drives his players harder still with a breakneck increase in tempo, which closes in three fierce chords affirming C minor.