

## FREIMANN 2 – A Closer Look

Wednesday, January 24, 2024 – History Center

Sunday, January 28, 2024 – Rhinehart Hall

Our second Freimann concert explores rarely-heard chamber music, concluding with the Op. 1 String Quintet by British composer and suffragette Dame Ethel Smyth. The first half features works from the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, opening with a world premiere of MuroLibes, a suite of Japanese and Greek folk songs, followed by Alvin Etler's Sonata for Bassoon and Piano.

I composed the MuroLibes Suite while the Philharmonic was on furlough during the COVID pandemic. It is dedicated to husband and wife Akira Murotani and Alexandra Tsilibes—hence the work's title—and I will join them in presenting the premier performance. Akira and Alex have contributed wonderfully to the Philharmonic and the Fort Wayne community for over two decades, and this Suite is a tribute to their gifts as well as their combined heritage of traditional music. The ensemble of trumpet, violin and bass is typical for an ad hoc folk group.

Alternating nationalities, the Suite opens with “Akatonbo” (Japanese for “Red Dragonfly”), a nostalgic song sung in the Autumn. The initial Greek song is “Poios Moro Mou Poios” (“Who, my baby, who?”), a jaunty tune sung by a spurned lover. Next is “Toshima Jinku,” a fisherman's prayer for a good catch with the melody played on the bass. “Misirlou,” originally from Asia Minor, presents music about an Egyptian girl, filled with Near Eastern rhythm and tonality. “Fuji-san” pays homage to Japan's revered largest mountain. “Pera Stous, Pera Kampous” translates as “Through the hills and fields.” A traditional song from Rhodes, it sings of a young woman leaving romance to join a nunnery. The Suite concludes with probably the most recognizable folk songs of these two traditions: “Sakura” (Song of the Cherry Blossoms), and “Sirtaki,” based on a dance from Crete and made famous by Anthony Quinn's portrayal in “Zorba the Greek.”

Next we hear the Sonata for Bassoon and Piano by Alvin Etler (1913 – 1973). A student of Paul Hindemith and influenced by Bartok, Copland and progressive jazz, Etler began his career as an oboist with the Indianapolis Symphony. Later on he concentrated on composing and over the course of several decades taught composition at Cornell, the University of Illinois, Yale and Smith College. He has composed dozens of orchestral and choral works but is best known for his many chamber music offerings which tend to favor the woodwinds as could be expected from his years of performing.

The Bassoon Sonata was written in 1951 and provides an in-depth exploration of this versatile instrument. While the bassoon is most often heard playing a supportive bass line, there are many familiar solo passages in the orchestral and ensemble literature. But in the context of this leading role paired only with the piano, the wide tonal range and variety of techniques possible on the instrument are fully in evidence. In true duet fashion, the pianist is called upon for many virtuoso moments as well.

The Sonata begins with an atmospheric movement marked “Moderately Slow,” fully demonstrating the three-octave-plus range of the bassoon and highlighting its expressive capability. In contrast, the second movement is marked “Fast,” an intricate interplay between the two instruments. Next follows a quiet, reflective and at times mournful movement marked simply “Slow.” Etler brings the piece to a close with the scurrying, adventurous “Fast.”

This “Exotic Discoveries” concert ends with another premiere, the Op. 1 String Quintet in E major, written in 1883 by Dame Ethel Smyth. Smyth (1858 – 1944) was the first British composer to be honored with damehood and was active for many decades both as a composer and leading figure in the women’s suffrage movement. Her early studies were at the Leipzig Conservatory with Carl Reinecke. While in Leipzig she met Dvořák, Grieg and Tchaikovsky. She later continued her studies privately with Heinrich von Herzogenberg, who introduced her to Clara Schumann and Brahms. Reflecting this influence, her music is an ideal choice for our theme of “Brahms and the Romantic Spirit.” She produced many compositions, including several dozen songs, works for piano and organ, chamber music, choral and orchestral pieces and half a dozen operas.

Smyth’s String Quintet Op.1 is in the bright key of E major, adding a second cello to the string quartet, which provides the supporting voice and allows the first cello a more melodic role. The Quintet opens with a sunny “Allegro con brio,” presenting the main theme in various guises until boldly stated by all five players. After a few surprising harmonic shifts, transitional material appears beginning with dotted rhythms. This leads into a secondary theme, similar in character to the first. The two melodies are alternately developed throughout the remainder of the movement, exploring sometimes distant tonalities and sprinkled with playful pizzicato passages. The second movement, “Andantino poco allegretto,” opens with the viola and first cello singing the E minor melody over repeated plucked chords. This texture is broadened to include all voices and leads directly into the “Scherzo: Allegro vivace,” with the viola and first cello again leading the charge. After a solemn, heartfelt “Adagio con moto” the jaunty “Allegro molto” reintroduces all five players in turn and brings the work to a joyful conclusion.

FREIMANN 2 – At A Glance

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Adrian Mann – MuroLibes (2021)

- Suite of Japanese and Greek Folk Songs
- Written for Akira Murotani and Alexandra Tsilibes
- Premiered on this concert by Akira, Alex and Adrian

Alvin Etler – Sonata for Bassoon and Piano

- Written in 1951
- Etler was a student of Paul Hindemith and taught at Cornell, Yale and U. of Ill.
- Explores the wide range and expressive qualities of the Bassoon

Ethel Smyth – String Quintet in E major, Op. 1

- First woman composer to be granted damehood
- Wrote many songs, piano, chamber, orchestral and operatic works
- Was friends with Clara Schumann, Brahms and Arthur Sullivan