NELA Clarinet Trio

Scot Humes, Lawrence Gibbs, clarinets; Trevor Davis, bass clarinet

Program Notes by Jackson Harmeyer

The clarinet, an instrument beloved for its clear, beautiful tone, is one of only a handful of instruments to have achieved prominence in genres as diverse as classical music, wind band, jazz, klezmer, and even popular music. Cylindrical in shape, this single reed instrument comes in various sizes and tonalities, although the B-flat clarinet is by far the most commonly played today. Clarinets typically have two main registers: the lower *chalumeau* register with its warm tone and the upper *clarino* register which possesses a trumpet-like clarity.

The history of the modern clarinet can be traced to the beginning of the eighteenth century. Its invention is attributed to Johann Christoph Denner, a builder of woodwind instruments based in the German city of Nuremberg. The clarinet then underwent continual modifications, only coming into widespread use around mid-century. The Mannheim orchestra deserves much of the credit for popularizing the clarinet. After 1758, this leading orchestra employed two clarinetists, and, with these skilled musicians as the ready, the composers associated with Mannheim regularly included clarinet parts in their orchestral writing: they even wrote some of the earliest concerti for the instrument as evidenced by the series of ten clarinet concerti composed by Carl Stamitz.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

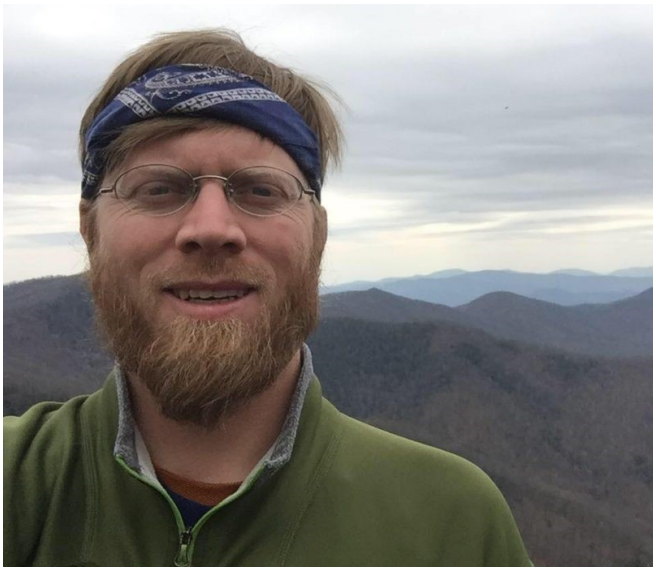
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, who had been impressed by the Mannheim clarinetists while visiting in 1778, began integrating the clarinet into his orchestral writing in the 1780s. His friendship with the clarinetists Anton Stadler and his younger brother Johann Stadler strengthened his appreciation for the clarinet, and it was for Anton that Mozart wrote his now-famous Clarinet Concerto in A major, K. 622. Anton favored the lower register of the clarinet, and often played on two related instruments, the basset-horn and basset clarinet, which extend the normal range of the clarinet down a major third. In fact, Mozart originally scored his Clarinet Concerto for one of these lower instruments and his *Five Divertimenti*, K. 439b (from which we hear the third divertimento tonight) were written for two clarinets and basset-horn.

Encouraged by the collaborations of Mozart and Stadler, instrument builders of the nineteenth century ensured that their clarinets sounded as strong and pure in their lower register as they did in the higher register, a persistent issue with earlier clarinets where the focus had been the upper register. Additional keys were likewise added to its construction to assist with fingering as solo works grew more virtuosic. The clarinet also became a regular member of the orchestra for the first time in the early nineteenth century, enriching many compositions by Beethoven, Schubert, and their contemporaries.

The bass clarinet, which sounds an octave below the standard B-flat clarinet, found its place in orchestral scoring only in the later nineteenth century. Its origins, nonetheless, can be traced to the same period of experimentation that saw the development of the basset horn a century earlier. Its first significant orchestral role was in Meyerbeer's opera *Les Huguenots* (1836). Not until several decades later though, with the compositions of Wagner, Mahler, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky, did the bass clarinet become a regular member of the orchestra.

Our program tonight begins with the familiar march tune, *Entry of the Gladiators* by Czech bandmaster and composer **Julius Fučík (1872-1916)**. Fučík studied composition with Antonín Dvořák at the Prague Conservatory and, after his studies had finished, he played bassoon with wind bands, orchestras, and even a chamber ensemble. In 1897, he became bandmaster of the 86th Austro-Hungarian Regiment, and, in his decade in this post, he composed *Entry of the Gladiators* as well as other marches and waltzes. This march, also issued as *Thunder and Blazes* by the American publishing house Carl Fischer, is known in popular culture for its connection to the circus, where it is often used to signal the entrance of clowns. Like several of the pieces which follow, *Entry of the Gladiators* has been arranged for clarinet trio by Michael Drapkin, a clarinetist and bass clarinetist known to musicians for his five volumes of repertoire excerpts for bass clarinet.

We next hear the Divertimento No. 3 from the *Five Divertimenti*, K. 439b by **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)**. Mozart and his contemporaries used the term "divertimento" to refer to a lighter piece which was often played as evening entertainment. Mozart wrote many divertimenti for groups of winds, although these five are distinguished by their instrumentation for two clarinets and basset-horn. The set was published posthumously in the nineteenth century, and for some time scholars doubted their authenticity. Each divertimento consists of five movements, organized in a symmetrical pattern with a central slow movement framed by a minuet to either side and again framed by a set of fast movements; typical of its era, the first fast movement of the pair is in sonata form while the last is in rondo form. The *Divertimenti* are notable for their playful references to other works by Mozart: the Third, for example, begins with a near quotation of the opening theme of *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*.



Stephen Wood

The contemporary American composer **Stephen Wood (born 1977)** writes music which is deeply rooted in his love of nature. Based in Atlanta, he has travelled across the United States seeking inspiration from this country's most wild places. Through not only observation but also study and research of the places he visits, Wood hopes to raise awareness of these untouched expanses and help listeners to better connect with them. His clarinet trio *Drosera: the morning dew of the sun* was written in 2014 while Wood was composer-in-residence at Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, a protected area in southern Georgia and northern Florida. His piece reflects on an elusive carnivorous plant known as the spoon-leaved sundew (*Drosera spatulata*) found in the swamps of Okefenokee. Wood lends something human to this plant when he writes: "Hiding in the dark water, the Sundew makes her way unnoticed. Content, joyful, meek, dancing. A single voice floating, waiting to be noticed." We might hear this perceived innocence in the music. *Drosera* was composed as part of the Wilderness Act Performance Series, produced by Wood to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act. It was premiered on October 12, 2014 by Clarinets for Conservation.

Afterward follows the march *National Emblem* by American composer **Edwin Eugene Bagley (1857-1922)**, again in an arrangement by Michael Drapkin. Bagley, although self-taught as a musician, pursued a successful career first as a cornetist and later as a trombonist, playing with wind bands and opera companies in Boston and around New England. The skill he developed as a trombonist even allowed him to play with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. His march *National Emblem*, composed in 1902, remains a standard of the American march repertoire, often played by United States military bands on ceremonious occasions. It was a favorite of bandmaster John Philip Sousa and is well-known for its quotation of *The Star-Spangled Banner*.

Our next piece is an original work for clarinet trio by the French clarinetist and composer **Jacques-Jules Bouffil (1783-1868)**. Bouffil studied clarinet at the Paris Conservatoire with the eminent Jean-Xavier Lefèvre, winning first prize in 1806. He would later become a professor at the Conservatoire himself and, for two decades, play clarinet with the orchestra of the *Opéra-Comique*. He also performed as part of a celebrated wind quintet for several years. Bouffil's compositions, little-known today, are almost exclusively for the clarinet. His six clarinet trios are divided evenly between his Opus 7 and Opus 8. They represent a major contribution to the chamber literature for clarinet: true musical conversations, the trios make equal demands of each of their three players. George Wain, writing for *The Instrumentalist* has remarked, "These compositions require skill and musicianship. The music is contemporary and furnishes pleasant listening." Tonight we hear his Trio in C major, Op. 7 No. 1.

In November 1720, our next composer **George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)** assembled and published a set of eight suites for harpsichord, sometimes remembered as the "Eight Great Suites." As a young man, Handel was considered to be one of Europe's finest keyboardists. Indeed, much of the music contained in these suites was composed in the years prior to their publication for his own use as a performer. The suite we hear tonight was the fourth in this initial set of eight, identified in Handel's catalogue as HWV 429. It consists of five movements. The first movement, a fugal Allegro, is excluded in this arrangement by Arne Dich. The others include movements modeled on the Baroque dance genres of Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, and Gigue. Together these four movements follow a slow-fast-slow-fast pattern typical of Baroque-era instrumental suites. Handel's original suite in E minor is here transposed to D minor by Dich.

Jacques Offenbach

Closing our program is the Overture to *Orpheus in the Underworld*, an 1858 operetta by **Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880)**. Offenbach, originally a cellist and author of numerous works for one or more cellos, became in his later years the most renowned composer of French light opera. It has been said of Offenbach that "few composers have been so successful in the writing of witty music, music full of chuckles and ironic amusement." *Orpheus in the Underworld*, Offenbach's *succès de scandale*, presents a comedic retelling of the Orpheus legend from classical mythology in which the musician Orpheus descends to Hades to rescue his wife Eurydice. Its most famous music is the *Can-Can*, a dance associated with the high-kicking women of the French cabaret. The *Can-Can* is heard toward the end of the Overture after Offenbach has previewed other music of this operetta. This, our final piece tonight, is again heard in an arrangement by Michael Drapkin.

About Jackson. Jackson Harmeyer is a music scholar and composer based in Louisville, Kentucky. Jackson graduated *summa cum laude* from the Louisiana Scholars' College located in Natchitoches, Louisiana in May 2013 after completing his undergraduate thesis "Learning from the Past: The Influence of Johann Sebastian Bach upon the Soviet Composers." As series director of the successful Abendmusik Alexandria chamber music series from May 2014 to April 2016, Jackson played a vital role in the renewal of interest in chamber music across Central Louisiana. This interest has encouraged the creation of the annual Sugarmill Music Festival and the new series Nachtmusik von BrainSurge, both of which Jackson remains active in as concert annotator and creative consultant. He also blogs at MusicCentral where he shares concert experiences, gives listening recommendations, posts interviews with contemporary composers, and offers insights into his own compositions. As a composer, Jackson has worked to integrate the vocabulary and grammar of modern music into pieces which are not only innovative but also engaging to the general listener. In fall 2016, Jackson began graduate studies in musicology at the University of Louisville where he has recently been awarded the Gerhard Herz Scholarship in recognition of his accomplishments. His current research interests include French spectral music and the compositions of Kaija Saariaho. He also sings with the University of Louisville Chorus and participates in the School of Music Composition Seminar.

Read additional program notes by Jackson at www.JacksonHarmeyer.com.