

# *Euphonium Unleashed*

## Program Notes by Jackson Harmeyer

The euphonium is a valved brass instrument with a resounding baritone to tenor range. It is similar in shape and tone to the larger tuba and is sometimes called the tenor tuba. The first euphoniums, like the first tubas, were developed in the early nineteenth century as replacements to the various sizes of the ophicleide. The euphonium and tuba had a significant advantage over the ophicleide: these newer instruments had valves which made them easier to play than the ophicleide which only had keys for pitch control. The Weimar bandmaster Ferdinand Sommer was the first soloist on the euphonium, and also often receives credit for having developed this instrument. His euphonium, however, was more likely created by Franz Bock of Vienna who did not patent the euphonium until 1844, a year after Sommer began gaining recognition as a euphonium player. Sommer won great acclaim for the euphonium when he played it for Queen Victoria at the London Great Exhibition of 1851. There he offered two names for the instrument – the *Sommerophone* and the *Euphonion* – but it was the latter name which stuck as anglicized to “euphonium.”

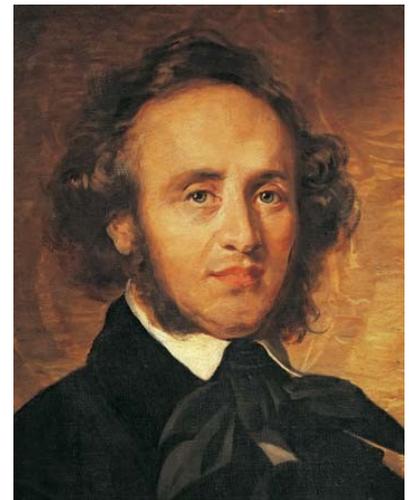
Within a few years, the euphonium had become the most important low brass instrument in wind bands. Numerous Russian concert and military bands utilized it in their ensembles as did those in Germany and Great Britain. In the United States, a special kind of euphonium emerged called the double-bell euphonium which had two bells – one which carried the standard euphonium sound and another which could give the impression of a trombone. This double-bell euphonium was even mentioned in the lyrics of “Seventy-Six Trombones,” the best-remembered song from the 1957 Broadway musical *The Music Man* by Meredith Wilson.

Although the euphonium quickly established itself as a valued member of the wind band, the instrument never did find a permanent place in the symphony orchestra. In the first century after its invention, only a handful of composers were willing to make room for the euphonium in their orchestral works. Even then, these occasional appearances usually came as brief solos, specifically designed to exploit the euphonium’s novel tone color. Richard Strauss, for example, included the euphonium in his tone poems *Don Quixote* and *Ein Heldenleben (The Hero’s Life)* as did Maurice Ravel in his orchestration of *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Gustav Holst also gave solo roles to the euphonium in both the *Mars* and *Jupiter* movements of his *Planets* suite. On the contrary, the largely forgotten British composer Havergal Brian assigned a more integral role to the euphonium in many of his thirty-two

symphonies: in his colossal First Symphony, subtitled *The Gothic*, Brian included parts for two euphoniums and two tubas; later symphonies also made fuller use of these low brass instruments.

Many players of the euphonium – familiar with the unique beauty and timbral range of their instrument – feel that the instrument’s full potential has yet to be unleashed. Masahito Kuroda has become a great advocate for the euphonium: in addition to spectral analyses of euphonium sound samples and his exploration into the instrument’s historical low brass relatives, Kuroda has also promoted music for multiple euphoniums. He has made arrangements of orchestral and chamber works for euphonium ensemble, either playing the multiple parts himself through recording technology or encouraging his talented students to join him for live performances. It is this latter approach which we encounter tonight at *Nachtmusik von BrainSurge*.

Tonight’s program begins with the hymn “God of Our Fathers.” This familiar tune was composed by **George W. Warren (1828-1902)**, a New York City organist, and dates to 1892 when it appeared in the revised Episcopal hymnal. Its text had been written in 1876 to celebrate the centennial of the Declaration of Independence and, likewise, the new melody was composed in honor of the centennial of the United States Constitution. The arrangement for four euphoniums heard tonight was created by William Ryden.



Felix Mendelssohn

We next hear a little-known piece by **Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)** – the second *Equale* for four trombones as arranged for euphonium ensemble by Carl Friedrich Wittmann and Himie Voxman. An *equale* is a piece in which all members of the ensemble are equal partners. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this title further

implied a composition of a solemn nature written for trombone quartet and to be performed at a state funeral. The three *Equali* for trombone quartet by Ludwig van Beethoven, for example, were arranged for male voices and performed at this composer's funeral in 1827. Mendelssohn's *Equali* are without opus numbers and their dates are unknown. The third of this set will also be heard later in tonight's program in an arrangement by C. F. Wittmann and Glen Smith.



**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**

Next follows a selection by **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)** from his *Five Divertimenti* for two clarinets and basset horn, K. 439b. Specifically, we hear the *Allegro* of the first divertimento of this set as arranged by Dr. Kuroda. The term "divertimento" was often used by Mozart and his Classical-era contemporaries to refer to a lighter piece, often played as evening entertainment.

Musicologists suspect that Mozart wrote his *Five Divertimenti* for

this purpose in the early 1780s, further suggesting that they could have been heard as background music at the masonic gatherings Mozart frequented. The basset horn is an instrument belonging to the clarinet family, slightly larger in size and lower in pitch than the familiar B-flat clarinet; both the clarinet and basset horn were developed in the eighteenth century and were becoming quite popular by Mozart's day.

Afterwards we hear the aria "Where'er You Walk" from the 1744 oratorio *Semele* by **George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)**. The English libretto by William Congreve is after the Roman poet Ovid's famed *Metamorphoses* which retells the myths of ancient Greece and Rome. This famous tenor aria is sung by Jupiter as he reassures Semele – the daughter of the King of Thebes who will soon marry the Prince of Boeotia and move to his homeland – that her new surroundings will be like a paradise. Jupiter makes Semele such promises as "Where'er you walk, cool gales shall fan the glade" and "Trees, where you sit, shall crowd into a shade." This song, full of beautiful sonorities, is heard tonight in an arrangement by Walter Beeler.

The following piece by American composer **Arthur Frackenpohl (born 1924)** is one of two works featured on tonight's program originally conceived for euphonium ensemble. Now in his nineties, Frackenpohl in younger days studied at Eastman and also took private lessons with Darius Milhaud and Nadia Boulanger – two of the twentieth century's most renowned composition instructors. Since 1985, he has been Professor Emeritus of SUNY Potsdam's Crane School of Music. In addition to his over four hundred original compositions, his arrangements have been featured

on many recordings by the Canadian Brass. His 1994 composition *R3E2* – in its title a parody of the beloved droid R2-D2 of the *Star Wars* universe – is set in three movements, each beginning with the letter "r," and for two euphoniums. The first movement is inspired by the Latin dance known as the *Rumba*; the second movement *Refrain* is slow and lyrical; and the third movement *Romp* has echoes of ragtime.

After our second Mendelssohn selection, we move onto an arrangement of a work by **Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)**. Haydn's Trio No. 70 for baryton, viola, and cello is tonight heard in an arrangement for euphoniums by Paul Droste who was Professor of Euphonium and Director of the Marching Band at The Ohio State University. The baryton is a bass string instrument which is both bowed like the members of the violin family and plucked like a guitar. Haydn's patron Prince Nicolaus Esterházy acquired his first baryton no later than 1765 from which point until 1778, he constantly demanded new works from Haydn for this peculiar instrument for himself to play. There survive 123 trios for baryton, viola, and cello by Haydn as well as numerous solos, duos, quintets, octets, concerti, and even a cantata with *obligato* baryton! To appease his patron's insatiable desire for new music, Haydn also recruited colleagues and pupils to write works for the baryton. Prince Nicolaus was a fair barytonist but no great soloist on the instrument: Haydn, therefore, stuck to a few safe keys and kept works short, so not to overburden or expose the shortcomings of his Prince. The Trio played tonight – like the majority of the baryton trios – is in three brief movements.

The final composition heard tonight is by Japanese composer **Yasuhide Ito (born 1960)** and is the other original for euphonium ensemble besides Frackenpohl's *R3E2*. Called *Euphoniums Parfait*, this 2003 suite for four euphoniums is cast in four movements, three of which are named after deserts. The suite begins with *Fruits Parfait* followed by *Milonga di Malone*, *Ciocolate d'amore*, and *Gelato con caffe*. The second movement *Milonga* is the one which does

not correspond to a real-world dessert. Instead, this movement offers a heartening tribute to Argentine tango composer Astor Piazzolla. This movement with its tango feel is not really alone, however, as the others also exhibit their own dance flavors – from the jazzy swing of the first movement to the waltz-inflected third and the breezy fourth. Ito is known particularly for his more than ninety wind band scores; he has also



**Yasuhide Ito**

composed several chamber works including one or more euphoniums as well as a concerto for solo euphonium with wind band.

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Jackson Harmeyer is a composer, music scholar, and advocate of music. 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, he has worked to integrate a modern vocabulary into established classical forms in ways that 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 also sings with the University Chorus and participates in the School of Music Composition Seminar.

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