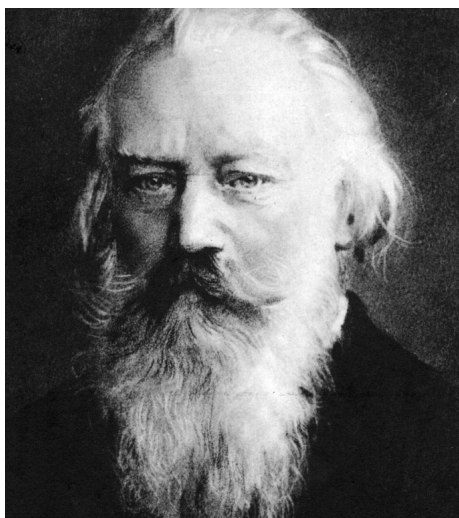


# Music for Brass Trio

Michael Scarlato, trumpet • Thomas Hundemer, French horn  
J. Mark Thompson, trombone

## Program Notes by Jackson Harmeyer



Johannes Brahms

Tonight's program begins with two chorale preludes by **Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)** as arranged for brass trio by Thomas Hundemer. These chorale preludes are drawn from his Opus 122 set of eleven preludes for organ each based on verses of Lutheran hymn tunes. Composed in 1896, the chorale preludes are among his final works and were not published

within his lifetime; instead, they were published posthumously in 1902. Brahms was by 1896 well-aware of his mortality, and the texts of several of the chorales he adapted deal with the approach of death. As Ann Bond has commented, "the chorale prelude may have struck Brahms as an extremely appropriate outlet at this time: it offered him an objective, historical, and comfortingly stable form in which to express his ambivalent thoughts about death." We first hear No. 7 of the set, *O Gott, du frommer Gott* ("Oh God, you righteous God." Like its text which asks the Almighty to grant the believer a healthy body and an unbroken soul among other things, the music also implores desperately as it swiftly moves through repeated motives which gain strength with each restatement. The other prelude we hear – No. 5 *Schmücke dich, O liebe Seele* ("Adorn yourself, Oh dear soul") – concerns itself with the transfer of the soul from Earth to Heaven. This prelude is serene by contrast and exemplifies well-constructed counterpoint.

The music of American composer **Walter Ross (born 1936)** has been heard in more than forty countries. Raised in Nebraska, Ross learned French horn as a child and was playing professionally by the age of seventeen. His studies took him to Cornell University where his composition instructors included Karel Husa and Robert Palmer. Ross began teaching at the University of Virginia in 1967 and remained there throughout his career, being named professor emeritus upon his retirement in 2003. Ross writes music with both the performer and listener in mind, emphasizing brilliant orchestration and rhythmic excitement. His experience playing horn and flute has allowed him to write most

comfortably for brass and woodwind instruments; several of his concerti for these instruments have been commercially recorded and released on disc. His composition *Shapes of Klee* (1995) is a set of five miniature tone poems which recreate paintings by the artist Paul Klee. *Shapes of Klee* is the fourth trio for trumpet, horn, and trombone composed by Ross, the others having been written in the mid-1980s. Ross describes *Shapes of Klee* as Neo-Classical in spirit, and this can be heard in its angular rhythms, playful wit, and modal underpinning. A score and cassette recording of *Shapes of Klee* has been given to the *Zentrum Paul Klee*, an art museum honoring Klee in Bern, Switzerland.

The life and career of American composer, educator, and trumpeter **Fisher Tull (1934-1994)** revolved around the state of Texas. Born in Waco, Tull received each his bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees from the University of North Texas in Denton where he studied composition with Samuel Adler. He joined the music faculty of Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas in 1957 and, upon receiving his doctorate in 1965, he was appointed chair of the music department; he held this position until 1982. As a young man, Tull specialized in jazz, performing with jazz bands and arranging jazz tunes. He later confessed that, at the age of twenty-nine when he shifted his focus to classical music, he was at first hesitant to step out of jazz in which he considered himself "fluent" and into the world of what he called "legitimate music." Beethoven and Stravinsky became his heroes as he delved into reproductions of their sketchbooks; he considered many of his works informed by their tradition. His Trio for trumpet, horn, and trombone which we hear tonight was composed in 1967, shortly after receiving his doctorate. It is one of only a handful of works by Tull which was left unpublished, meaning that performances of this gem are rare and no commercial recordings are currently available.



Fisher Tull

French composer **Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)** wrote his Sonata for horn, trumpet, and trombone in 1922 at a time when he was seen as a radical and musical troublemaker.



**Francis Poulenc**

Satie and Igor Stravinsky were both major influences for the young Poulenc, and we hear their absurdist wit in the Sonata: the trumpet tune which opens the first movement marked *Allegro moderato* initially gives the impression of a cheerful folksong before it comes crashing-down thanks to three dissonant chords. Wrong notes continue to plague the first movement as if they were mistakes committed by provincial amateurs; everyday gestures like downward runs are also taken to the extreme and exaggerated. The tender melody of the second movement *Andante* also seems sullied with amateurism as the trumpeter, overcome by emotion, takes his notes just a few steps too high from their intended trajectory. In the third movement *Rondeau*, each musician seems to have his own idea for where to take the melody, so that all three plow through similar material with little sense of cohesion.

American composer **Allan Blank (1925-2013)** was born in New York and spent much of his career on the East Coast. Blank studied violin as a child and, while in high school, he became interested in composition and conducting. Over the course of a decade, his studies took him from Juilliard to Washington Square College, University of Minnesota, and finally the University of Iowa. His teaching career also included frequent moves, until arriving at Virginia Commonwealth University in 1978 where he taught and directed the New Music Ensemble until 1996. Blank composed over a hundred pieces and won prestigious awards including the National Endowment for the Arts Composers' Grant and first prize in the George Eastman Competition. Among his compositions, his four operas mix comedy with surreal settings and include *The Magic Bonbons* adapted from writings by L. Frank Baum. He was also commissioned by the Virginia Shakespeare Festival at Williamsburg to write incidental music for *Measure for Measure*. Blank composed his Trio for trumpet, horn, and trombone in 1975. His chamber music has been praised for its soloistic writing in which each instrument maintains a distinct voice within the collective texture of the ensemble.

The final piece on tonight's concert is by **David Sampson (born 1951)**, an American composer based in New Jersey. His studies at the Curtis Institute, Manhattan School of Music, and *Ecoles d'Art Americaines* allowed him to learn from several of our era's leading composers, including Karel

Only two years earlier, he and his circle of composer friends had been dubbed *Les Six* by the music critic Henri Collet – a title given to these six young composers who wished to free French music from the taint of German Romanticism by looking to everyday stimuli ranging from urban life and machines to jazz and the circus. Poulenc dedicated his Sonata to Raymonde Linossier, a close friend of his who he confessed, following her death in 1930, was the only woman he had ever wished to marry. Erik

Husa, John Corigliano, and Henri Dutilleux. Sampson is quickly establishing a formidable reputation of his own with major commissions and grants from the National Symphony Orchestra, National Endowment for the Arts, American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the International Trumpet Guild. Works of his have been premiered at prestigious venues including Carnegie Hall and the Aspen Music Festival, and by leading ensembles like the American Brass Quintet and Chicago Chamber Musicians. His *Duncan Trio* which concludes tonight's program was written in 2002 on commission by Dorothy Duncan in honor of the fiftieth birthday of her brother, trumpeter James Duncan. The piece is set in three movements which each have a descriptive title, including *Reflection*, *Solemn Hymn*, and *Crooked Dance*. At the opening of the piece, Sampson uses mutes for trumpet and trombone to expand the timbral possibilities available to the instruments. In the second movement, he substitutes flugelhorn for trumpet to bring even more color into his palette.



**David Sampson**

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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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