

# METAMORPHOSIS QUINTET

Zendra J. White, flute. Jose Gabriel Velazquez Avila, violin.  
Sinae Baek, violin. Cesia Corrales, viola. Alonso Restrepo, cello.

Program Notes by Jackson Harmeyer

The third day of our Fourth Annual festival begins with a performance by the Metamorphosis Quintet. This ensemble, for the atypical combination of flute and string quartet, draws on the talents of local musicians who live and work in Alexandria, Pineville, and Natchitoches, but whose places of origin are far and wide. Flutist Zendra J. White is a native of Abbeville in south Louisiana, but she has spent much of her career in Mexico. She and her husband, violinist Jose Gabriel Velazquez Avila, a native of Mexico's Yucatán region, met while performing together in the *Orquesta Sinfónica de Yucatán*. Violinist Sinae Baek, meanwhile, is a native of Seoul, South Korea, while violist Cesia Corrales hails from San Pedro Sula, Honduras and cellist Alonso Restrepo is from Cartagena, Colombia. All five of these musicians now call central Louisiana home, and their contributions to musical life here have been innumerable: they play with the Rapides Symphony Orchestra; several are music teachers in Alexandria-Pineville; and others are students at Northwestern State University in Natchitoches. For them, music has been transformative, bringing each of their lives into contact with our own; they have also transformed our lives through the music they create. They have earned their name, the Metamorphosis Quintet.

The program that this international group of musicians shares with us this afternoon includes four pieces as diverse in their origins as the musicians who play them. These works are *Elpénor*, Op. 59 by the French composer Albert Roussel whose music spans impressionism and neo-Classicism; the Theme and Variations, Op. 80 by American Romantic Amy Beach whose music offers a female perspective to a musical canon still dominated by men; *Khachkar* by contemporary composer Jeff Manookian; and the Concerto for three flutes, *Una historia de amor*, by the ensemble's violinist, Gabriel Velazquez. This last work, originally written for Zendra White to perform with string orchestra, is given its world premiere in this new version for flute and string quintet this afternoon at the Sugarmill Music Festival. I had the chance to discuss this piece with

Gabriel and Zendra prior to our concert, and my interview with them can be found in your booklet following these notes. Enjoy this truly special concert, featuring musicians and music of diverse cultures!

Alongside Maurice Ravel, the lesser-known **Albert Roussel (1869-1937)** was the other major French composer of the generation after Claude Debussy but before *Les Six*. In his music, we can also detect the traits associated with impressionism, though his break with this aesthetic after World War I was more decisive than that of Ravel. Like other composers active in France during the interwar years, he turned to neo-Classicism, producing major works like his ballet *Bacchus et Ariane* and his Third and Fourth Symphonies. Most impressive in Roussel's later style is his counterpoint: often multiple ideas occur simultaneously and can be perceived independently owing to the clarity of line Roussel maintains as well as their rhythmic vibrancy. This comes in sharp contrast to the clouded textures of his impressionistic earlier works, though they, of course, have their own merits. *Elpénor*, Op. 59 for flute and string quartet was composed in 1937, shortly before Roussel's death in August of that year. Also called *La flûte de Circe*, this work tells of the Greek mythological character, Elpenor, who fought in the Trojan War and then accompanied Odysseus on his long journey home. Elpenor, however, never made it back to Ithaca: on the island of Circe, he got drunk, spent the night sleeping on a roof, and the next morning—forgetting where he was—slipped and fell to his death. When Odysseus failed to locate his corpse and give him a proper burial, Elpenor appeared to him in Hades and demanded he return to Circe's island to bury him properly. The music Roussel composed was meant to accompany a radio play by Joseph Weterings; though it finally premiered in this form in 1947, today the music is more commonly heard apart from the spoken narrative. The piece is in four short movements, each with its own depictive character. Especially in the faster movements, Roussel's distinctive contrapuntal layering can be heard.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, there have been numerous women composers who have achieved phenomenal success, equaling that of any man in their field and surpassing a great many. Certainly, we can look to Europeans like Kaija Saariaho and Sofia Gubaidulina for examples, but we can also call to mind many incredible female composers in our own country, such as Joan Tower and Julia Wolfe. Before the twentieth century, however, we would be hard-pressed to find female composers, who not only peak our interest retrospectively, but who were also highly-regarded for their compositions within their own eras. The American composer **Amy Beach (1867-1944)** was among the first women to gain recognition for her compositions to the extent that our contemporary female composers have. This achievement did not come without struggle for, as in the all too unfortunate cases of Fanny Hensel and Clara Schumann, she too was discouraged from a life dedicated to music. Only at Beach's own insistence did her mother, an amateur pianist, give her young daughter lessons. Her parents though refused to send her to Europe for conservatory training as was then the practice for young American men who displayed an aptitude for music. In Boston, local piano teachers were engaged, so that she nevertheless, as an adolescent, made successful concerto appearances with the renowned Boston Symphony Orchestra as conducted by Wilhelm Gericke. She had little composition training and, when she asked her ally Gericke for recommendations, his advice was an independent study of the European masters. This she accomplished prodigiously, relishing in their scores for the next ten years as she taught herself the formal and harmonic principles of composition as well as counterpoint and orchestration.

Her marriage at age eighteen to Dr. H.H.A. Beach, a surgeon slightly older than her father, temporarily curtailed her promising career as a pianist but also allowed her compositional endeavors to flourish. He insisted she was not to be traipsing around like Clara Schumann, going from recital to recital, but could give one modest recital annually, if the proceeds were donated to charity. He encouraged her to compose instead, though with the stipulation that she publish her works under his name as "Mrs. H.H.A. Beach." She complied and, in the following years, created some of her best works, including the Mass in E major, Op. 5; *Gaelic Symphony* in E minor, Op. 32; Piano Concerto in C minor, Op. 45; and Piano Quintet in F minor, Op. 67. These were introduced by the leading American ensembles of their day, including the Boston Symphony, Boston Handel and Haydn Society, and the Kneisel String Quartet. After her husband's death in 1910 and her mother's a year later, Beach, however, set-off for Europe determined to both reignite

her aborted career as a pianist and promote herself as a composer. Her Symphony and Concerto were soon heard across Germany where they were received favorably. Indeed, for a short time, she was lauded as the most successful American composer of either sex. With the outbreak of World War I, she returned home to the United States, no less determined to pursue her dual career. Her aesthetic, tied to nineteenth-century Romanticism if still highly original its approach, soon felt dated with the advent of Aaron Copland, George Gershwin, Ruth Crawford Seeger, and the rest. In their ascendancy, her accomplishments were neglected as were her compositions, but since the 1990s there has been renewed interest in her music. The majority of her compositions have now been recorded, and many are studied and performed regularly.

Her Theme and Variations, Op. 80 for flute and string quartet was composed in 1916 and published four years later. It was a commission by the San Francisco Chamber Music Society—further evidence to the wide acclaim her music had found—and premiered on the West Coast on September 28, 1916. Its theme is taken from Beach's partsong, *An Indian Lullaby*, Op. 57 No. 3, which she had composed two decades prior in 1895. The strings introduce the theme alone in a section marked *Lento di molto, sempre espressivo*. This placid opening sets the mood well for the flute's entrance which happens at the outset of the first variation, marked *L'istesso tempo*. The flute enters alone in a flowing manner reminiscent of a cadenza, suggesting a non-Western scale through its ascents and descents. The second variation, marked *Allegro giusto*, begins with a quick imitative texture in the strings which the flute also soon joins. The third variation switches into triple meter for a sickly waltz with the peculiar tempo marking *Andantino con morbidezza (quasi Valzer lento)*. The fourth variation, initiated by the viola, is reminiscent of the second with its quick imitative tempo, marked *Presto leggiero*, though it might be described as more toccata-like than the second. The fifth variation, marked *Largo di molto, con grand espressione* begins with the solo cello playing an ascending chromatic line. As this idea is expanded, it becomes a duet between the cello and flute before other instruments begin taking up its aspects too. By far the longest variation, this is the emotional core of the piece. There follow brief sojourns to earlier material before the sixth variation, marked *Allegro giocoso*, enters as a five-voice fugue. A reiteration of the theme, this time including the participation of the flute, concludes the piece.

The music of **Jeff Manookian (born 1953)** stands at an interesting cultural crossroads. Manookian was born and

raised in Salt Lake City, Utah and is a practicing Mormon. Since 2007, however, and his appointment as director of Argentina's *Orquesta de la Provincia de Tucumán*, he has lived in this south American country, composing works which express his admiration for Hispanic culture. Manookian is also of Armenian descent and has written numerous compositions tied to this heritage, including the work we hear this afternoon, *Khachkar*. In medieval Armenia, a khachkar was a memorial stone carved with a cross and possibly other Christian imagery. They often appear in cemeteries where they function as tombstones, but their usage is not exclusive to cemeteries either. Since 2010, the surviving khachkars have gained protected status from UNESCO. Today they are as much a national symbol as a Christian symbol. Manookian composed his *Khachkar* for alto flute and strings in 2002; it was then premiered on June 1 of that year by flutist Laurel Ann Maurer and the Nachtmusik Chamber Orchestra in Salt Lake City. Maurer has been a frequent collaborator of Manookian, performing and recording much of his music for flute. His *Khachkar* is built on two Armenian religious melodies, "About the Bird" and "You are a Chinar Tree." These hymns are framed within original material of a folk-like character. The solo flute begins the piece through a cadenza marked *Andante appassionato*. This first section remains rhapsodic even after the strings enter. A second section, marked *l'istesso tempo*, is more driven and demands more participation from the strings.

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**About Jackson.** Jackson Harmeyer graduated with his Master of Music in Music History and Literature from the University of Louisville in May 2019 upon the completion of his thesis, "Liminal Aesthetics: Perspectives on Harmony and Timbre in the Music of Olivier Messiaen, Tristan Murail, and Kaija Saariaho." He has shared this pioneering research through presentations given at the American Musicological Society South-Central Chapter's annual meetings in Asheville, NC and Sewanee, TN and at the University of Tennessee Contemporary Music Festival in Knoxville, TN. During his studies in Louisville, he was the recipient of the Gerhard Herz Music History Scholarship and was employed at the Dwight D. Anderson Memorial Music Library where he did archival work for the unique Grawemeyer Collection which houses scores, recordings, and documentation for over five thousand entries by the world's leading contemporary composers. Previously, Jackson graduated *summa cum laude* from the Louisiana Scholars' College in Natchitoches, LA. Then, from 2014 to 2016, Jackson served as director of the successful chamber music series,

Abendmusik Alexandria. He has remained a concert annotator and organizer, co-directing the annual Sugarmill Music Festival. The scholarly writings he has produced for this festival have even attracted the attention of the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities. Aside from his studies, he is a composer, choral singer, and award-winning nature photographer.

Read additional program notes by Jackson at [www.JacksonHarmeyer.com](http://www.JacksonHarmeyer.com).