

TWO RIVERS BRASS TRIO

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

Program Notes by Jackson Harmeyer

Tonight at Nachtmusik we hear the Two Rivers Brass Trio. This ensemble, made up of several of the region's finest brass players, takes its name from the rivers which define the places where its members live and work. Trumpeter Mike Scarlato and hornist Tom Hundemer are each based in Shreveport, located on the Red River, while trombonist Mark Thompson lives in Natchitoches on Cane River Lake—a former path of the same Red. The composers whose music they play are all, with one exception, American composers who were active in the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Although these composers were not the fierce Modernists we often associate with this era, they still achieved considerable acclaim, particularly within academic circles. Indeed, most held prestigious teaching posts, received commissions from universities, and participated in professional societies, and two of our composers were even nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. The exception, of course, is Johann Sebastian Bach, the German Baroque composer whose music, nevertheless, fits well alongside the works of these Americans: its intellectual gravity and its shunning of empty novelty in favor of real substance makes Bach's music an appropriate forerunner to the Americans whose music we also hear. Ultimately, this is music which our performers, themselves professors at Centenary College and Northwestern State University, know through their own academic connections and express well through their polished techniques.

The first composer whose music we hear is **William Schmidt (1926-2009)**, a Chicago-native who made his career in California and Colorado. Growing up, Schmidt learned saxophone, clarinet, and piano. Then, as a young man, he played in and arranged for military bands in World War II and Korea. By 1952, he was in Los Angeles studying at the University of Southern California with Ingolf Dahl. Due to his stints in the military, Schmidt was older and more entrepreneurial than most of his fellow students at USC, and he contracted Los Angeles's professional musicians, whether they were part of the LA Philharmonic

or one of the numerous Hollywood studio orchestras, to perform his works. He also founded his own publishing house to print, distribute, and record the works of him and his colleagues. In addition to many commissions, Schmidt's Double Concerto for trumpet, piano, and chamber orchestra was nominated for the 1981 Pulitzer Prize, and he received many awards from the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP). In 1987, he relocated to Greeley, Colorado where he built ties with the University of Northern Colorado and the Breckenridge Music Festival. His formative experiences as a saxophonist and band arranger meant that his compositional idiom was influenced by jazz. This comes across in the work we hear, *A-B-A²-C-US*, in its songful melodies, propulsive motives, and the improvisatory interplay between instruments. This piece is excerpted from Schmidt's suite, *The Brass Abacus* for trumpet, horn, and trombone, published in 1980. His catalog focuses on music for saxophone, brass, and woodwinds and numbers 160 original compositions and nearly five hundred arrangements.

The next piece which Two Rivers plays is the *Trio Italiano* by **Mary Jeanne van Appledorn (1927-2014)**. Van Appledorn was born in Holland, Michigan, a city rich in Dutch heritage, where her father was organist at a local church. She took piano lessons as a youth and then studied piano and music theory at the Eastman School where Alan Hovhaness and Bernard Rogers were her composition instructors. Ultimately, she would receive a PhD from Eastman after completing a dissertation on Claude Debussy's opera, *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Even before graduation, however, she began in 1950 a six-decade career at Texas Tech University in Lubbock where she was influential in building the music program into what it is today. While there, she was the recipient of several ASCAP awards as well as international prizes, and she also received commissions from the Music Teachers National Association, National Intercollegiate Bands, and Women Band Directors National Association. She additionally participated in professional societies in Texas and

composed pieces for local ensembles. Her aesthetic reveals the influence of jazz as well as an interest in timbre, and in 1982 she did postdoctoral work in computer-synthesized sound at MIT. She composed her *Trio Italiano* for trumpet, horn, and bass trombone in 1995, and the following year the work received the International Trumpet Guild Award. This suite is set in six short movements, each with a programmatic title in Italian. These titles are generic and suggest the type of music to be heard, rather than indicating stylized dances or set formal plans. *Intrada*, therefore, is more introductory in character while *Notturmo* is mysterious night music à la *Béla Bartók* and *Concertino* is technically demanding with impressive solo breaks.

Little must be said of our next composer, **Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)**, who is regarded as one of the great masters of Western music. Tonight we hear three canons from his *Goldberg Variations* in an arrangement for brass trio by **Arthur Frackenpohl (1924-2019)** who could, however, use some introduction. This esteemed American composer who died this June was Professor Emeritus at SUNY Potsdam's Crane School of Music where he had served on faculty since 1949. Frackenpohl was a student of Darius Milhaud and Nadia Boulanger, two the past century's most influential composition instructors. Then, after additionally completing a doctorate at McGill University, he was named full professor at the Crane School in 1961, teaching theory, composition, and class piano until his retirement in 1985. He received numerous awards from ASCAP, and, aside from his over four hundred original compositions, he is known for his textbook *Harmonization at the Piano* and his arrangements for the Canadian Brass. The canons which Two Rivers Brass plays tonight are taken from Frackenpohl's arrangement of the complete *Goldberg Variations* heard on an 1999 album by the Canadian Brass which won the Echo Music Prize. The *Goldberg Variations*, a late work by Bach, was published in 1741 and consists of thirty variations on an initial aria which repeats after the last variation. Of these thirty variations, nine are canons. A canon is a piece of music which instructs that successive voices repeat the material of the first voice at a specific time and pitch interval. The children's song, "Row, Row, Row Your Boat," when sung as a round, is an example of a canon in its simplest form. The three canons we hear tonight are spaced at the sixth, seventh, and fourth intervals, respectively.

Our program closes with *Voyage*, Op. 27 by **Robert Muczynski (1929-2010)**, an American composer of Polish descent. Muczynski made his career in academia, studying

and then teaching at DePaul University in Chicago in the late 1940s and early 1950s; chairing the piano department at Loras College in Iowa in the following years; and finally directing the composition program at University of Arizona from 1965 until his retirement in 1988. A noteworthy composer and pianist, his Concerto for alto saxophone and chamber orchestra was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in 1982. Among other honors received by Muczynski were two Ford Foundation fellowships and more than thirty ASCAP creative merit awards. Muczynski spoke proudly of the distance he kept from the avant-garde when he commented, "I'm not an innovator; I'm not a pioneer, a trailblazer, any of those things... For me it's the strength of the personality, something distinctive in that personality, and the ability of the composer to project that personality in such a vivid way in musical terms." He acknowledged Johannes Brahms and Francis Poulenc as composers who had taken similar stances, and he dismissed his contemporaries who he felt were too eager to attain novelty no matter the cost. The work we hear, *Voyage*, consists of seven short pieces for brass trio published by Schirmer in 1970. Its movements are titled only by their tempo markings and, while mostly tonal, have the same unexpected turns we expect from Poulenc's compositions. Some have a jazziness about them while others possess the angularity of medieval and Renaissance brass fanfares.

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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 following 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 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, acting as Director of

Scholarship of the annual Sugarmill Music Festival. The 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.