

# SYMPHONIC BAND PROGRAM NOTES

NOVEMBER 20, 2023 7:30PM

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The University of Kansas

## *Rapid Unscheduled Disassembly*..... Peter Van Zandt Lane

I first heard the term “rapid unscheduled disassembly” when it was used as a euphemism to describe the explosion of SpaceX’s unmanned Starship rocket four minutes into its test launch on April 20, 2023. I admit, my first thought was “that would make for a great title for a piece!” and the phrase appears to date back several decades. Like many ordinary people watching the stream of the launch with my kids, I was baffled when the engineers in the control room began to cheer after the rocket exploded! Ultimately, the probability of failure was high, the explosion was likely result, and the celebration of the explosion was an outward celebration of failure as an opportunity to learn. As an educator, I am often encouraging students to take risks in how they approach creative projects, even if it means the final product may seem like a “failure” to them. We learn so much more by going out on a limb than working towards safe or predictable results. And so, this piece is a celebration of spectacular failure.

The piece is entirely focused on one theme, which is repeated throughout the piece as an ascending fanfare, only to crash and burn. After each “failure” of flight, the theme is deconstructed, reversed, and re-built in different ways. Ultimately, the theme achieves its successful flight, soaring as a prolation canon (laying both slow and fast versions of the theme at once).

- *Program Note from the composer*

## *Greensleeves*.....Traditional, arr. Alfred Reed

It is generally agreed that the melody we know as Greensleeves is probably the second oldest piece of secular music in our Western culture, its origins having been traced back to about 1360. While we are not certain this was the original title, it is known that in the latter 14th century, English ladies wore gowns with great billowing sleeves, and the lyrics that have come down to us speak of a lover's lament over his lady's cruel treatment of him by a lady clad in a dress of green sleeves.

By the time of William Shakespeare, this song had already become a classic and he made use of it in two of his plays, most notably in the Merry Wives of Windsor. Over 300 years later, the English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams used this melody as an intermezzo between two acts of his opera Sir John in Love, which was based on the same play. Since then, the tune has been adapted as the basis for at least one Christmas carol (What Child Is This?), and several popular songs, and even by the Swingle Singers on one of their albums. In addition, it has been performed instrumentally by groups of all sizes and styles from full symphony orchestra to small jazz and rock groups.

- *Program Note from score*

## *Four Scottish Dances*..... Malcolm Arnold, trans. John P. Paynter

These dances were composed early in 1957 and are dedicated to the BBC Light Music Festival. They are all based on original melodies but one, the melody of which is composed by Robert Burns.

The first dance is in the style of a slow strathspey -- a slow Scottish dance in 4/4 meter -- with many dotted notes, frequently in the inverted arrangement of the "Scottish snap." The name was derived from the strath valley of Spey. The second, a lively reel, begins in the key of E-flat and rises a semi-tone each time it is played until the bassoon plays it, at a greatly reduced speed, in the key of G. The final statement of the dance is at the original speed in the home key of E-flat. The third dance is in the style of a Hebridean song and attempts to give an impression of the sea and mountain scenery on a calm summer's day in the Hebrides. The last dance is a lively fling, which makes a great deal of use of the open string pitches of the violin (saxophones in the band edition).

- *Program Note from the composer.*