

# WIND ENSEMBLE PROGRAM NOTES

OCTOBER 10, 2023 7:30PM

[LIED.KU.EDU/LIVE](http://LIED.KU.EDU/LIVE)



The University of Kansas

*Little Threepenny Music* (1929/1975) ..... Kurt Weill (1900-1950)

First performed on August 31, 1928, Kurt Weill's *The Threepenny Opera* (Die Dreigroschenoper) was a "play with music" adapted by Bertolt Brecht from John Gay's eighteenth-century *The Beggar's Opera*. Eventually banned by the Nazi government, *The Threepenny Opera* tells the story of Macheath or "Mack the Knife," a murderer in Victorian London, and paints an unflattering portrait of 1920s German society. Brecht reveals the dregs of humanity – and casting a very wide net in the process – through an inspired political satire. Although the work was not expected to succeed, it proved to be the biggest theatrical success of the Weimar Republic, running for more than 350 performances over the next two years.

Commissioned by the famous German conductor Otto Klemperer, the suite *Little Threepenny Music* (Kleine Dreigroschenmusik) was first performed four months after the opera's premiere at the Berlin Opera Ball. The light melodies of the suite contrast sharply with the horrific lyrics sung in the original *Threepenny Opera*. As the original cast of this production consisted principally of actors rather than trained singers, it would seem likely that Weill added the music into this suite for musical, not commercial, reasons by which the art of his music could now be heard under conditions not possible in the theater.

- Program Note from Wind Band Repertory Project

*Carmina Burana* (1937/1967) ..... Carl Orff (1895-1982)  
arr. John Krance

Carl Orff's first stage work, *Carmina Burana*, was composed in 1935-1936 and premiered at the Frankfurt Opera in 1937; it became an outstanding success. Orff drew the inspiration for his grand vocal and orchestral work from 24 poems of the 200 found in the thirteenth century monastery of Benediktbeuern, near Munich in Bavaria, and published in 1847 under the title of *Carmina Burana*. "Carmina" is the plural of the Latin word "carmen" and in early time, carried the implication of student songs. "Burana" was the Latin name for the area we know today as Bavaria. Both sacred and secular, the texts are frank avowals of earthly pleasure: eating, dancing, drinking, gambling, and lovemaking. They proclaim the beauty of life and the glory of springtime. The music is simple in harmony and range, consistent with thirteenth century music, with a driving rhythm to which the listener instinctively responds. John Krance, who worked with Orff on this arrangement, has incorporated the vocal melodies into a setting entirely instrumental in structure.

- Program Note from Wind Band Repertory Project

*Chester, Overture for Band* (1778/1956) ..... William Schuman (1910-1992)

Originally composed as the third movement of his New England Triptych for orchestra, American composer William Schuman immediately transcribed and re-worked *Chester* for concert band. He added additional percussion and lengthened (and strengthened) the last portion of the work for better effect. Since its publication in 1956, *Chester, Overture for Band* has become a popular standard work for bands around the world.

This piece is based on a hymn tune composed by the early New England composer William Billings (1746-1800), first published in Boston as part of a collection called *The Hymn Master's Assistant* (1778.) *Chester* quickly became a popular marching song in the Continental Army during the American Revolution. It was often played on the march by the Continental Army's fifes and drums. The first stanza of the hymn tune aptly represents America's revolutionary mood of the time:

*Let tyrants shake their iron rod,  
And Slavery clank her gangling chains,  
We fear them not, We trust in God,  
New England's God forever reigns.*

- Program Note from James Barnes

# WIND ENSEMBLE PROGRAM NOTES

OCTOBER 10, 2023 7:30PM

[LIED.KU.EDU/LIVE](http://LIED.KU.EDU/LIVE)



The University of Kansas

*The White Peacock, op. 7, no. 1 (1915/1919/2001)*..... Charles T. Griffes (1884-1920)  
trans. Frank Erickson

It could be argued that, had Charles Tomlinson Griffes and George Gershwin both lived to be seventy years old, the entire direction of American serious music might have gone in an entirely different direction. Both men died very young --- Griffes at age 35 during the 1919-20 "Spanish influenza epidemic" and Gershwin at age 39 in 1937, suffering from a brain tumor. Here were two great American musical geniuses who both died long before they reached their creative prime.

These two New Yorkers came from very different backgrounds: Gershwin was a self-taught popular song writer from Brooklyn while Griffes (Elmira, NY) studied piano and composition at a conservatory in Germany. Gershwin based his music on Afro-American jazz rhythms and harmony. Griffes became fascinated with the music of the impressionist French masters, Debussy and Ravel, and the mystic Russian composer Alexander Scriabin.

Griffes' many works for voice, piano, chorus and orchestra are seldom performed today. *The White Peacock* remains his most famous work. Some have described this unique piece as the "American version of Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*."

*The White Peacock* is the first of a set of four pieces for solo piano called *Roman Sketches, opus 7*, which Griffes composed between 1912 and 1916. He orchestrated this movement in 1919, but he died before ever hearing it played.

*White Peacock* is a colorful, sensual, and rather mystical piece that effectively portrays the grace, beauty, and haunting dignity of these magnificent creatures. Inspiration for this work was a poem of the same title by the Scottish poet William Sharp (1855-1905.) Following is a short portion of the poem:

*Here as the breath, as the soul of this beauty  
Moveth in silence, and dreamlike, and slowly,  
White as a snowdrift in mountain valleys  
When softly upon it in the gold light lingers:  
Moves the White Peacock...*

- Program note from James Barnes

*Fantasy Variations on a Theme by Niccolò Paganini (1988)* ..... James Barnes (b. 1949)

Commissioned by Colonel John R. Bourgeois, *Fantasy Variations on a Theme by Niccolò Paganini* was premiered by the United States Marine Band at the 1988 MENC Convention in Indianapolis. Since its premiere, the Marine Band has performed the work hundreds of times, and the piece has been performed and recorded all over the world.

The set of twenty continuous variations is based on the famous theme of Paganini's *24th Caprice for solo violin*, the same theme used by Brahms and Rachmaninoff for their famous compositions, as well as by more contemporary composers such as Witold Lutoslawski and Boris Blacher.

*Fantasy Variations* uses variation form to showcase every solo instrument and/or every instrumental section of the modern wind band. In doing so, the composer's intention was to create a work that the Marine Band could play almost anywhere for any sort of audience; a piece full of energy, drama and yes, even a little humor.

- Program note from the composer, James Barnes