The Eastman Wind Ensemble

Mark Davis Scatterday and Zachary Griffin
conductors

Wednesday, February 5, 2025
Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre
7:30 PM

EASTMAN
SCHOOL OF MUSIC
UNIVERSITY of ROCHESTER

~ PROGRAM ~
The Eastman Wind Ensemble
Mark Davis Scatterday and Zachary Griffin, *conductors*

Octandre (1923) — **Edgard Varèse** (1883-1965) — 7’
- Assez lent
- Très vif et nerveux
- Grave-Animé et jubilatoire

Interior (2006) — **Kristin Kuster** (b. 1973) — 12’

Sounds, Shapes, and Symbols (1977) — **Leslie Bassett** (1923-2016) — 12’
- I.
- II.
- III.
- IV.

Zachary Griffin, *conductor*

~ INTERMISSION ~

Symphony in B-Flat (1951) — **Paul Hindemith** (1895-1963) — 19’
- Moderately fast, with vigor
- Andante grazioso-Fast and gay
- Fugue, rather broad

~ PROGRAM NOTES ~

Octandre

Varèse often insisted that music is both a science and an art. With his ingeniously inventive orchestration in mind, through which he put many sounds into the world that had never existed before, perhaps he should have summed it up as "alchemy"; he certainly did love the symbolism of arcane religions. *Octandre* is a brilliant, purely technical study of the inexplicable abracadabra of sound that Carlos Chávez rightly called gold. With this accomplishment, Varèse moved significantly closer to his ideal of a purely material music of "spatial projection." But although *Octandre* could be by no other composer, it is unlike Varèse's other works in a couple of significant ways.

The piece is in three movements, labeled according to tempo - "Assez lent," "Très vif et nerveux," "Grave-Animé et jubilatoire". Each opens with a different instrument to announce its particular character - oboe, piccolo, and string bass - and is essentially a revisitation of the same structural concepts from a unique angle. More significant, however, is the absence of percussion, which usually forms the very core of his sound. Anyone familiar with his other pieces so feels the absence that their ears prick up every couple of beats expecting percussion noise, as if the violent drums are only waiting in ambush. By the time of *Octandre*, 1923, Varèse had already composed several pieces - *Amériques, Offrandes, Hyperprism* - that extensively used percussion. Sonic researcher that he was, he perhaps wanted to test his ability to work without his favorite tools and so, deliberately limited himself. He knew such an exercise could only increase his knowledge and bring him that much closer to realizing the mysterious, unheard-of music of his waking visions. And so it did.

Varèse did not, however, abandon his usual aesthetic in *Octandre:* the winds, brass, and double bass are conspicuously made to fill in, against their instrumental natures, for the absent percussion. They're often used only to articulate nervous rhythmic motifs that unexpectedly accumulate from solo passages into massive, weapon-like pounding in shattering, prismatic colors. Wherever somewhat extraneous melodic lines surface, usually in lonely solo passages, they get pureed before long in the blades of emphatic rhythm, especially in the clamor of the shimmering brass that comes in like the attacking sword of an imaginary sun god.

- **Donato Mancini**

Interior

Kristin Kuster's music has been described as colorful, unique, and as having an "inviting tart edge". *Interior* is her first work for wind ensemble and was commissioned by Michael Haithcock, Director of Bands Emeritus of the University of Michigan. Of her piece, Kuster writes:

> The music of *Interior* reflects ideas or thoughts that lie, occur, or function within limiting boundaries. Just as we project our imagination onto the architectural space in which we live in order to find solace in our environment, so we also ponder the thoughts and memories that decorate our lives. *Interior* is intended as a subtle window into the concealed nature of those thoughts and memories.

I would like to dedicate this performance of *Interior* to the memory of my grandfather, Thomas Miller, who passed away this weekend.

- **Zachary Griffin**

Sounds, Shapes, and Symbols

The Pulitzer Prize-winning American composer Leslie Bassett is best known for his long tenure as Professor of Composition and chair of the composition department at the University of Michigan. His music is evocative and gestural, characterized by unique and colorful orchestration, a sophisticated harmonic language, and an attention to craft and architecture.

Sounds, Shapes, and Symbols was written for and dedicated to H. Robert Reynolds and the Michigan Symphony Band in honor of the arrival of Reynolds to the University of Michigan as Director of Bands. Bassett found much of his inspiration from visual art and each of the untitled movements can be thought of as a different musical image. Describing himself as a pragmatic composer, Bassett stated that when composing he asked himself two questions: what just happened and what should happen next? As such, this work, along with most of Bassett's music, lacks a traditional form, but is rather unified with five musical gestures. All of the musical content comes from the continual unfolding and reworking of the rhythmic and pitch material of these gestures.

The work begins with an energetically bombastic fanfare before receding to a cool, jazz-like gesture stated by the saxophones and vibraphone. The movement comes to a close with an augmented statement of the opening gesture before ending in a dense, unresolved, and mysterious sound. The introspective second movement begins with dark five note chords and blooms into a contrapuntal woodwind texture. The movement boils over into a scream of sound before melting away into a kaleidoscopic ending of shifting colors. The third movement opens with an opaque screen of woodwind aleatory. Brasses attempt to puncture through this screen before receding. The veil is suddenly lifted in a crash and a true twelve tone row appears (unusual for Bassett who, though using serial techniques is integral to his language, prefers five and ten note constructions). The screen returns and the brasses, in a moment of terror, again struggle to break through. Finally, the brass come to the foreground in a section that is not dissimilar to a big band shout chorus. It is here that the movement, and perhaps the entire piece reaches its zenith. Dramatic twelve note clusters are presented, separated by silences, all behind a screen of woodwinds. More punctuations end the movement before the sound is vaporized into a fog of percussion aleatory. The final movement is a culmination of the previous three movements and is characterized by quickly shifting timbres and intricate counterpoint. The coda marches along and ends with a restatement of the opening gesture of movement two, this time presented triumphantly.

- **Zachary Griffin**

Symphony in B-Flat

Perhaps the only surprise greater than Paul Hindemith's agreement to guest conduct the United States Army Band in 1951 was his decision to "write a little something" for the occasion. The "little something," his *Symphony in B-flat*, was composed in less than a month and finished only days before its premiere. Although the concert band/wind ensemble has enjoyed the attention of major composers in the latter half of the twentieth century, this was not the case when Hindemith was invited to guest conduct the U.S. Army Band. When asked by a New York Times reporter why he decided to write this work, Hindemith provided the following brief but telling reply: "No literature for band, so I wrote some." There was, of course, plenty of music for the concert band in 1951, but not much in terms of what Hindemith meant by "literature;" serious, thoughtful, and carefully composed original music for the medium. With the composition and premiere of the *Symphony in B-flat*, Hindemith emphatically demonstrated that the concert band/wind ensemble is a medium worthy of consideration by major composers.

Hindemith was serving on the faculty of Yale University in New Haven, Conn., at the time of U.S. Army Band Commander Captain Hugh Curry's invitation, having relocated to the United States after being discredited and threatened by the Nazi regime. He fled Germany for Switzerland in 1938, eventually finding his way to America in 1940. After a variety of guest lecture positions, the composer was appointed a full-time member of Yale's faculty in 1941, a position he would hold until 1953. Although Hindemith was already considered the leading German composer of his generation, he was also a dedicated pedagogue who was more than qualified to offer expert instruction in composition, traditional harmony, and the history of music theory. He was a demanding teacher who had high expectations of his composition students, and this often resulted in tense relationships. In spite of his reputation as a difficult mentor, he attracted talented students such as Samuel Adler, Alvin Etler, Lukas Foss, Ulysses Kay, and Norman Dello Joio.

Though many twentieth century composers have incorporated and synthesized various elements of earlier music into their own compositions, Hindemith's ability to combine baroque counterpoint, classical form, romantic dramatic sensibility, and twentieth century harmony is unique and unparalleled. He was an unapologetic academic who was fascinated with technique, and this aspect of his mind is evident in the manner in which he extensively develops motives and cleverly combines seemingly disparate ideas. However, Hindemith's unique sense of drama and humor also permeates his works, and it is often the manner in which Hindemith gives voice to this non-academic side of his musical personality that makes his music so distinctive and unique.

From the opening moments of the *Symphony in B-flat*, which feature a pervasive five note motive buried in the bass instruments, the shrill scrim of twittering woodwinds, and a teutonically menacing theme in the trumpets and cornets, it is clear that this work has no precedent in band music. While there are brief moments of respite in the first movement, there is a relentless sense of momentum and agitation that constantly pushes this music forward until Hindemith finally releases his grip. The second movement provides a stark contrast to the first with a lyrical duet between cornet and alto saxophone. This theme is simultaneously beautiful and sinister, evocative of a 1920s cabaret in Berlin. The relative tranquility of this moment is disrupted by a maniacally frantic and, at times, humorous scherzo that is eventually woven together with the opening cabaret melody in a fashion typical of the composer. It is Hindemith the academic who is firmly in control at the beginning of the third movement's fugue, but it is Hindemith the dramatist who unquestionably takes the reins to end the symphony-in one of the most hair-raising conclusions in all wind music.

- **Michael J. Colburn, ed. St. Pierre**

~ PERSONNEL ~

The Eastman Wind Ensemble

Flute
Ivy Lee
Alex Lehmann*
Katherine Marx
Ray Zheng

Oboe
Lewis Painter
Lauren Smith
Josh So*

Clarinet
Eric Butler
Barak Dosunmu
Lauren Enos
James Julian*
Harrison Kim
Eliza Reimold

Bassoon
Noah Eastman*
Aaron Lukenbill
Emmalee Odom

Saxophone
Isaac Boone
Tim Coene
Darryl Leung
Austin Shilling

Horn
Amelia Caruk
Morgan Chalmers
Nathan Howton
Nicole Keller
Mary Kimble
Aby Stumpf
Danica Tuohy*
Claire Zhao

Trumpet
Daniel Adamczyk*
Derek Gong
Jarett Jean Jacques
Trevor King
Norah Krantz
Kirk Morrison
Yue Zhang

Trombone
Talia Berenbaum
Darren Brady
Jacob Ellgass
RJ James*
Ethan Pound
Gabriel Williams

Euphonium
Jack Altenbach
Nathanael Kumar

Tuba
Addie Canning
Andrew Sieradzki

Double Bass
Greg Galand*
Izzy Williams

Timpani
Daniel Davis
Irene Yang

Percussion
Olly Bangia
Jake Kundu
Lexi Kunz
Cass Lo
Seth Tupy
Ruyi Yuan

Keyboard
Veniamin Blokh

Harp
Lindsay Haukom

* Varèse

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