

**William Schuman (1910-1992)**  
***New England Triptych* (1956)**

William Schuman is one of the preeminent American composers of the 20th Century. He was born in New York City and resided there until his death in 1992. He came to composition of "classical" music indirectly. Growing up, his passions were baseball and popular music of the time, including jazz and musical comedy. While he was studying business at New York University, he wrote several songs in collaboration with E. B. Marks, Jr., while also composing roughly 40 songs with lyricist Frank Loesser.

After attending his first professional symphony orchestra concert, he realized his ultimate ambition. He withdrew from NYU and started his counterpoint training with Charles Haubiel at The Juilliard School, orchestration with Adolf Schmid and harmony with Bernard Wagenaar, receiving his Bachelor of Science degree in Music Education in 1935.

Besides composition, Schuman was an educator, worked for the music publisher G. Schirmer as Director of Publications, eventually to become President of The Juilliard School in Manhattan. It was during this time at Juilliard that he was appointed to the Presidency of the under-construction Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, presiding over the opening of what was to become Avery Fisher Hall in 1962.

Andre Kostelanetz commissioned Schuman for an light orchestral work for the New York Philharmonic. For the commission, Schuman decided to approach the material of the Colonial composer William Billings (1746-1800), who was a self-taught composer of choral music and is largely regarded as the father of American choral music. Schuman admired Billings patriotic passion and had written an unpublished work in 1944: *A William Billings Overture*.

Schuman wrote the following about Billings and *New England Triptych*:

His works capture the spirit of sinewy ruggedness, deep religiosity, and patriotic fervor that we associate with the Revolutionary period in American history. I am not alone among American composers who feel a sense of identity with Billings, which accounts for my use of his music as a departure point. These three pieces are not a "fantasy" nor "variations" on themes of Billings, but rather a fusion of styles and musical language.

He chose three Billings' hymns for his "triptych" or 3-paned musical painting. *Be Glad then America* opens with a quiet timpani solo, followed by a somber introduction of the hymn. The words of the hymn are:

Yea, the Lord will answer  
And say unto his people — behold  
I will send you corn and wine and oil  
And ye shall be satisfied therewith.  
Be glad then, America,  
Shout and rejoice.  
Fear not O land,  
Be glad and rejoice.  
Halleluyah!

As the movement progresses, the hymn is continually transformed, including an extended timpani passage, ending the movement with a free adaptation of Billings' for

the "Halleluyah" section of the hymn and a final reference to the "Shout and Rejoice" section.

*When Jesus Wept* is based on the biblical passage John 11, when Jesus wept for Lazarus. The original Billings text reads, "When Jesus wept the falling tear / In mercy flowed beyond all bound." The entire movement is understated and reflective, opening with a lonely field drum and trumpet statement of the Billings hymn theme. As the movement progresses, a subdued intensity is maintained, ending with a dying field drum.

*Chester* was originally a church hymn that was co-opted by the Colonial forces as a rallying anthem and at the time was second only to *Yankee Doodle* in popularity. Schuman opens the movement with a chorale-like statement of the hymn, followed by a forceful march. The theme is transformed reflecting Schuman's contemporary musical character, leading to the final restatement of the march hymn with a percussion cadence leading to a dramatic finish.

Schuman also transcribed the work into the band arrangement that we are performing this afternoon. While he literally transcribed the first two movements, he used this as an opportunity to significantly expand and rework *Chester* so that it could stand alone as an overture for band.

**Eric Ewazen** (b. 1954)  
***Concerto for Bassoon and Wind Ensemble*** (2002)

Eric Ewazen is an American composer and teacher. Ewazen studied composition under Samuel Adler, Milton Babbitt, Gunther Schuller, Joseph Schwantner, Warren Benson, and Eugene Kurtz at the Eastman School of Music and The Juilliard School. He has been on the faculty of The Juilliard School since 1980, and has been a lecturer for the New York Philharmonic's Musical Encounters Series. He has also served on the faculties of the Hebrew Arts School and the Lincoln Center Institute.

Ewazen's *Concerto for Bassoon and Wind Ensemble* was premiered on April 14, 2002 at Florida State University by bassoonist Jeffrey Keesecker and the FSU Wind Orchestra. The European premiere of the *Concerto* took place in Jönköping, Sweden on July 1, 2003 (with the same performers) at the World Association of Symphonic Bands and Ensembles (WASBE) Conference. This afternoon, we are performing the final two movements.

Jason Caron writes:

The Ewazen Concerto for Bassoon and Wind Ensemble is atypical in two aspects: First, for the use of the bassoon as the solo voice (there are very few bassoon concertos in the orchestral repertoire, let alone in the wind band repertoire), and secondly, for its structure in four movements, which differs from the usual three movement form.

I fell in love with the third movement, *Largo*. It has a soulful, lyrical quality that seems to sing from a place of wisdom and self-reflection. There are some great moments in this movement in particular for the ensemble and for the solo brass voices, which I enjoy as much as the bassoon writing. The fourth movement, *Allegro molto*, has some high energy and dark drama, with a moment for the solo bassoon to play in trio with the two ensemble bassoonists. The short cadenza toys with the minor mode, and then the full ensemble returns for the warm and bright finish in E Major.

**John Harbison** (b. 1938)  
***Three City Blocks*** (1991)

John Harbison was born in Orange, NJ, holds degrees from Harvard University and Princeton University and is Professor of Music at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The composer describes *Three City Blocks*:

Over the radio, in the early fifties, came sounds played by bands in hotels and ballrooms; now distant memories that seemed to a seventh-grade, small-town, late-night listener like the true pulse of giant imagined cities. Years later, these sounds - layered with real experience of some of their places of origin; magnified, distorted, idealized and destabilized- came into contact with other sounds, some of recent origin, and resulted in these celebratory, menacing, *Three City Blocks*, completed in the fall of 1991 at Nervi, near Genoa, on the Mediterranean coast of Italy.

*Three City Blocks* was commissioned by the wind ensembles of the New England Conservatory, the University of Cincinnati, Florida State University, Ohio State University, the University of Michigan, the University of Southern California, and The United States Air Force Band.

**Lewis J. Buckley** (1947)  
***Dances from a Different Village***

In the 1980s, I heard a wonderful performance by the Connecticut folk-dance band, A Different Village, performing the traditional dance music of Eastern Europe. Their artistry, energy, and effortless management of the mixed meter rhythms of the traditional folk dances stayed with me for years. Finally, thanks to a commission from the US Air Force Academy Band and Lt. Col. Steven Grimo, the opportunity came to write this piece.

The group, A Different Village, takes its name from an old joke among folk dancers; if a dancer misses a step or makes a mistake, he or she will often smile and say, "Well, I'm from a different village."

I loved the music, and I loved the story; and as I thought of the two at various times over the years, both the music and the imaginary "different village" slowly took shape in my mind. If you can picture a mystical, perhaps Brigadoonian village, lost in time and the mountains of a far-off country where all the dances are just a bit, well, different, then you have a grasp of the image I have carried around with me all these years.

I hope you enjoy hearing this music as much as I enjoyed writing it!

Note by L. J. Buckley

**James Beckel** (b. 1948)  
***The American Dream*** (1992)

James Beckel graduated from the Indiana University School of Music and has been the Principal Trombonist with the Indianapolis Symphony since 1969. He is also on the music faculty at DePauw University and the University of Indianapolis.

The work we are performing this afternoon is the last movement of a work for orchestra

entitled *Night Visions*, which is a 4 movement work depicting dreams. The first three movements are:

*Flying* - A young child's fantasy of flying.

*Gates of the Unknown* - An older child's fear of the unknown.

*Vision of a Lost Friend* - An adult realization of personal loss.

*The American Dream* is about accomplishments as reflected at the end of one's career. The composer incorporates the hymn *For the Beauty of the Earth* to pay homage to the wonderful natural resources of the United States.

*Night Visions* was commissioned for and dedicated to Mr. and Mrs. Charles O'Drobinak, as a gift from Price Waterhouse on Mr. O'Drobinak's retirement as Managing Partner for their Indianapolis office.

The band transcription that we are performing of *The American Dream* has been recorded by the United States Coast Guard Band under the baton of Commander Lewis J. Buckley. The Metropolitan Wind Symphony's latest CD, *Reflections*, includes James Beckel's "The Call and Awakening" from the *Glass Bead Game*, also under the baton of Maestro Buckley with Ian Smith, French Horn.

### **Gustav Holst (1874–1934)**

***First Suite in E-flat*** (1909, revised: 1984)

If you have been in regular attendance at the Metropolitan Wind Symphony's concerts over the past 6 years, you will have heard performances of the 4 pieces often known as "the cornerstones" of wind band repertoire: Ralph Vaughan Williams's *English Folk Song Suite*, Percy Grainger's *Lincolnshire Posy*, Gustav Holst's *2nd Suite in F for military band* and finally his *First Suite in E-flat* which we present this afternoon.

Holst was born in Gloucestershire, UK to a musical family and eventually settled on the trombone as his main instrument. He attended the Royal College of Music in London where he met his lifelong friend Vaughan Williams. Though their composition styles were very different, they both shared a passion for English folk song and they were avid proponents of each other's music.

Prior to the First Suite in E-flat of 1909, very little original music had been written for concert band. Most bands performed orchestral transcriptions of dubious quality. Ironically, Holst's two suites for band are of a handful of band works that have been transcribed for orchestra. The first movement, Chaconne, is actually a passacaglia; both terms refer to a Baroque musical form that consists of variations on a repeated harmonic progression or melodic line. The tubas and euphoniums introduce this melody and it continues to be passed throughout the ensemble. Toward the middle of the movement, it is even cast in inversion. The Intermezzo features a stately melody derived from the Chaconne presented in a unison trio of oboe, clarinet, and trumpet, and then a more lyrical variation in the clarinet and flute. Finally, the March is set into motion with a huge bass drum solo. A march theme is presented in the trumpets and brass, followed by a flowing trio in the woodwinds. Both are combined in a masterful and powerful climax.

*Notes by Gregory C. Depp*