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# ST. OLAF ORCHESTRA

STEVEN AMUNDSON, *CONDUCTOR*

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FALL PERFORMANCE RECORDING



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BROADCAST: FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2020

*RECORDED: NOVEMBER 15, 2020*

*SKOGLUND AUDITORIUM*

# Program

## Serenade for Brass and Percussion

Jan Willem van Otterloo (1907–1978)

### I. *Marsch*

Dutch composer and conductor Willem van Otterloo began his career studying medicine, but later attended the Amsterdam Conservatory where studied cello under Orobio da Castro and composition with Sem Dresden. His composition career took off when his *Suite No. 3* was awarded a prize by the Concertgebouw Orchestra while he was a cellist in the Utrecht Municipal Orchestra. His conducting debut was with the Concertgebouw conducting his *Suite No. 3*, and he went on to conduct the Utrecht, Hague Resedentie Orchestra, and Sydney Philharmonic Orchestra.

*Serenade for Brass and Percussion* is loosely inspired by post-Romantic 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century wind serenades. The first movement is full of energy from the first note; dramatic chords in the low brass underscore a brilliant trumpet melody, introducing a snappy, rhythmic theme that drives the rest of the movement. Solo trumpets take over the melody while the rest of the section continues the march. The melodic line is passed throughout the ensemble, fluctuating in energy and drama until a final, celebratory chord closes out the movement.

## Three Latin American Sketches

Aaron Copland (1900–1990)

### II. *Paisaje Mexicano*

### III. *Danza de Jalisco*

While on a four-month visit to Mexico at the invitation of composer and conductor Carlos Chávez, Aaron Copland and Chávez paid a visit to *El Salón México*, a popular nightclub in the region. This nightclub visit inspired Copland to write a piece of the same name, and implanted in him a love of Latin American music that inspired many more compositions throughout his career. Following his four-month stay in 1932, Copland returned to Mexico several times, visited several Central American countries, and took another four-month visit to South America in 1947. His appreciation of Latin American music made him a champion for underrepresented folk musicians and Latin composers working in the United States.

*Three Latin American Sketches* is made up of three distinct movements, all inspired by Copland's travels. Gian Carlo Menotti, director of Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy, commissioned him in 1959 to write a short orchestral work. As Copland was in Acapulco at the time, he took inspiration from his surroundings and wrote *Paisaje Mexicano* ("Mexican Landscape"). However, he soon realized the movement was too short, and wrote *Danza de Jalisco* ("Dance of Jalisco"), which was performed instead of *Paisaje Mexicano* at the festival. The two pieces were performed together under the title *Two Mexican Pieces* at a private concert of the Pan-American Union in Washington, D.C. in 1965, with Copland himself conducting. After some revisions in 1967, conductor Andre Kostelanetz asked Copland to add a third piece. This final addition became *Estríbillo*, inspired by a popular Venezuelan song. Now titled *Three Latin American Sketches*, the work in its final form was premiered by Kostelanetz and the New York Philharmonic in June of 1972.

The second movement, *Paisaje Mexicano* ("Mexican Landscape"), is a perfect example of Copland's ability to evoke natural landscapes with flowing, graceful melodies, and features a variety of wind solos. *Danza de Jalisco* ("Dance of Jalisco"), referring to a state in western Mexico, takes on a more upbeat character, using shifting meters, colorful scalar melodies, and sizzling percussion to recreate traditional Mexican dance rhythms in a new and exciting way. Although Copland uses recognizable rhythms in all three movements, his inclusion of dissonance and irregular accents reflect his unique style at the end of his career.

## Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

Poet Stéphane Mallarmé wrote *L'après-midi d'un faune* ("The Afternoon of a Faun") in 1876. The poem tells the story of a mythical faun: a self-indulgent half goat, half man that pines after nymphs and frolics with the other forest creatures. When he came across it 10 years later, the poem stood out to Debussy as analogous to his musical style. Debussy described his inspiration as "a very free rendering of Stéphane Mallarmé's beautiful poem. It does not purport to contain everything that is in the poem. It is rather a succession of scenes in which the desires and dreams of the faun pass through in the heat of the afternoon. Then, tired of chasing the frightened nymphs and naiads, he gives in to intoxicating sleep." The piece was an instant success after its premiere in December 1894, and is the only work by Debussy to receive an encore at its premiere. The poet Mallarmé himself also praised the piece, saying it extended the emotion of his poem and gave it a warmer tone.

Debussy's interpretation in *Prelude to The Afternoon of a Faun* is as hazy and sensuous as the poem. It begins with an evanescent flute solo that appears out of the silence, representing the call of the faun's flute. The descending first six notes of the theme are re-harmonized and re-orchestrated several times throughout the work, floating effortlessly around the orchestra to a dream-like mood that had never been heard by audiences before. This style ultimately became a hallmark of Debussy, and this work is one of the earliest and most evocative examples of musical Impressionism. The middle of the work features sub-themes in the oboe and upper woodwinds, before the faun's theme returns to close out the movement.

## Afro-American Symphony

William Grant Still (1895–1978)

### III. *Animato*

William Grant Still was born in Mississippi in 1895 and was raised in Arkansas. He was a gifted musician from childhood, taking formal violin lessons and teaching himself to play clarinet, saxophone, oboe, viola, cello, and double bass. Though he was clearly musically talented, Still's mother advised him to pursue medicine in college, as the opportunities for Black composers were still quite limited. Still took his mother's advice and attended Wilberforce University, but later dropped out because there was no opportunity to study music. Financed by a small inheritance from his father, Still continued his music education at Oberlin University Conservatory. Still's education in various musical styles influenced him throughout his career. He wrote jazz arrangements for Artie Shaw, Paul Whiteman, and W.C. Handy, and also was classically trained by George Whitefield Chadwick of the first New England School and the French-born modern composer Edgard Varèse.

Still's first major composition, *Afro-American Symphony*, highlights his ability to expertly blend jazz, blues, and spirituals with the classical style. Though the movements are named in the European style, Still's notebooks use alternate movement titles such as "Longing," "Sorrow," "Humor," and "Aspiration." By combining and balancing these musical styles, Still was able to tell the story of his life: the spirituals his grandmother used to sing to him, the influences of his mentor George Whitefield Chadwick, and the cultural celebration of the Harlem Renaissance. Still also used this symphony to celebrate genres that were not previously recognized. Though Gershwin had given jazz a place in the concert hall, blues was still not a respected genre at the time of *Afro-American Symphony's* composition, and was viewed as low class or vulgar music. By balancing European and African traditions, Still celebrated his musical upbringing while also introducing audiences to new sounds and styles previously unknown to classical music audiences.

## “Adagio” (Nimrod) from *Variations on an Original Theme*, Op. 36

Edward Elgar (1857–1934)

Edward Elgar was born into a musical family in 1857 in Worcester, England, where he spent much of his childhood. Despite his lack of formal music training, he absorbed all of the musical knowledge he could from his father and became a freelance musician at the age of 16. He eventually went on to become one of the most well-known European Romantic composers, whose varied works hold an invariable position in the standard repertoire.

One of his most famous works is *Variations on an Original Theme*, Op. 36. The concept of the piece, often called *Enigma Variations*, is one that has been studied and debated since its premiere. Elgar himself confirmed that the fourteen variations on his original theme are dedicated to fourteen of his close friends, with distinct ideas and themes woven through that not only portray the character of his friends, but which contain themes that may only be understood by their subjects. At the time of its debut, Elgar introduced the concept of the work with a veil of mystery and ambiguity:

It is true, that I have sketched for their amusement and mine, the idiosyncrasies of fourteen of my friends, not necessarily musicians; but this is a personal matter, and need not have been mentioned publicly. The variations should stand simply as a “piece” of music. The Enigma I will not explain — its dark saying must be left unguessed, and I warn you that the apparent connection between the variations and the theme is often of the slightest texture; further, through and over the whole set another and larger theme ‘goes’ but is not played ...

Of the 14 variations, the most famous and most performed is the ninth, entitled “Nimrod.” Written for Elgar’s close friend and musical inspiration August Jaeger, its wandering melodies are full of unmistakable adoration and passion. Though a devoted businessman by day, Jaeger was a musician to the core, and he was not only an inspiration to Elgar but to many prominent musicians at the time. The music evokes deep emotion from the first *pianissimo* notes in the strings, and grows with dynamic swells and melodic leaps. The music reaches a culmination of the increasingly passionate lines before coming full circle and dying down to the same pianissimo dynamic and sparse instrumentation that began the movement.

## Angels’ Dance

Steven Amundson (b. 1955)

Amundson shares some comments about his composition:

I composed *Angels’ Dance* soon after my beloved father passed away. Although I had composed a few small pieces, this was the first work I created for orchestra and I did so with the intent of honoring my dad, who was a very important and inspiring presence in my life.

With the exception of the middle section of the work, *Angels’ Dance* is in 7/8 time. This Christmas-themed work introduces a colorful texture in strings, harp, and percussion, followed by the lilting main theme in solo woodwinds. The horns present an elongated version of the well-known Christmas carol “Angels We Have Heard On High,” and a sequencing transition leads to a slow, prayerful section based on a rising interval of a ninth. The first section returns and the Christmas carol is repeated, this time in counterpoint with the main theme. An energetic coda highlighted by quick, scalar figures in the strings and a repeated brass statement of the first phrase of the carol brings the work to a festive conclusion.

*Angels’ Dance* was composed in 1995 and premiered by the St. Olaf Orchestra in December of that year. It has been performed by the Atlanta Symphony, BBC Concerto Orchestra, Chicago Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, Dallas Symphony, Detroit Symphony, Kansas City Symphony, Milwaukee Symphony, Nashville Symphony, Oregon Symphony, St. Louis Symphony, and the Toronto Symphony, among many others. It has been recorded by both the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra and the Houston Symphony.

—Program notes by Penelope Musto '21

# St. Olaf Orchestra

Steven Amundson, *conductor*

## VIOLIN 1

- Grace Alexander, *Santa Monica, Calif.*
- Renee Audette, *Baltimore, Md.*
- Owen Cromwell, *Mukilteo, Wash.*
- Louis Dhoore, *Boise, Idaho*
- Emma Dougherty, *Alma, Mich.*

- †† Jessica Folson, *Grand Forks, N.D.*
- Meredith Maloley, *Omaha, Neb.*
- Phoebe Olszewski, *Escondido, Calif.*
- Holly Petersen, *Holland, Mich.*
- Grace Pugh, *Lincoln, Neb.*

- Anna Raphael, *Bloomington, Ind.*
- Annika Seager, *Minnetonka, Minn.*

- †† Olivia Skaja, *Deer River, Minn.*
- Kalli Sobania, *Little Falls, Minn.*
- Lauren Williams, *Tampa, Fla.*
- Rachel Wyffels, *Plymouth, Minn.*

## VIOLIN 2

Erica Anderson, *Duluth, Minn.*

- \*\*§ Clara Brown, *Indianapolis, Ind.*
- Max Clifford, *Golden Valley, Minn.*
- Caleb Kaestner, *Salem, Ore.*
- Addie Jo Lambrecht, *Neenah, Wis.*
- Maria Landherr, *Lake Elmo, Minn.*
- Ann Li, *Olympia, Wash.*

- \* Katie Marshall, *Horseheads, N.Y.*
- Phoebe Olszewski, *Escondido, Calif.*
- Elyssa Post, *Lincoln, Neb.*
- Emma Rosen, *Carson City, Nev.*
- Eli Schrubbe, *Andover, Minn.*
- Sophia Singleton, *Houston, Texas*
- Maxwell Voda, *Minneapolis, Minn.*
- Veronica White, *Dallas, Texas*

## VIOLA

Louis Dhoore, *Boise, Idaho*

- \* Brita Gallagher, *Dresser, Wis.*
- Tristan Hall, *Littleton, Colo.*
- Jens Lange, *Albert Lea, Minn.*

- \* Katie Marshall, *Horseheads, N.Y.*
- \* Shaelyn Muldowney, *Eden Prairie, Minn.*
- Holly Petersen, *Holland, Mich.*
- Samantha Rehorst, *Colorado Springs, Colo.*

Hayden Reid, *Spokane, Wash.*

- \*\* Andy Sprinkle, *University Park, Md.*

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Connor Smith, *assistant director of music organizations for audience development*  
Sarah Gingerich '11, *coordinator of music organizations*  
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- Hayley Currin, *Colorado Springs, Colo.*

Sydney Monge, *Minnetonka, Minn.*

- Meghan Mullins, *Libertyville, Ill.*
- Zellie Owen, *Pasadena, Calif.*
- Henry Paton, *Duluth, Minn.*
- Amelia Podolny, *St. Paul, Minn.*
- \*\* Anna Seppa, *Spokane, Wash.*

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- \*\* Grayson Broesch, *Omaha, Neb.*
- Emily Dresbach, *Lincoln, Neb.*

- \*\* Beatrice Hammel, *Omaha, Neb.*
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- Davis Moore, *Worthington, Minn.*

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- \*\*§ Lauren Flaten, *Roseville, Minn.*

- Emmie Head, *Sammamish, Wash.*
- Venus Su, *Taipei, Taiwan*

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- \*\* Grace Keller, *Plymouth, Minn.*
- \*\* Colin Lang, *Boxborough, Mass.*
- ◇ Lauren Vilendrer, *Shoreview, Minn.*

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- \*\* Hannah Cabasco, *Walla Walla, Wash.*
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- Molly Schuster, *Batavia, Ill.*
- \*\* Amanda Staab, *Littleton, Colo.*

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- \*\* Annie Amen, *Edina, Minn.*
- Eric Holdhusen, *Whitefish, Mont.*
- \*\* Nathan Lyle, *Shakopee, Minn.*
- Luke Sargent, *San Diego, Calif.*

## TROMBONE

- \*\* Neil Hutcheon, *Essex Junction, Vt.*
- \*\* Christopher Schulte, *Plymouth, Minn.*

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- ^\*\* Megan Hoffhines, *Wilmette, Ill.*
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Cheryl Bristol, *academic administrative assistant – music*

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