



## 2010 SUMMER SOLSTICE FESTIVAL

JAZZ INFLECTIONS  
SATURDAY, JUNE 19, 2010  
8 PM

CONVOCATION HALL, UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

### PROGRAM NOTES BY DAVID BERG

**A pre-concert talk by Allan Gilliland begins at 7:15 PM.**

This evening's concert surveys a variety of works produced by classically trained composers who have plumbed the abundant depths of jazz, blues and African American musical traditions. In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Jazz Age left no composer untouched. Composers such as Stravinsky, Ravel and others continuing to the present, have responded to these popular musical idioms with boundless imagination.

**William Bolcom (b. 1938)** has been America's leading exponent of ragtime, composing ragtime works throughout the 1970s and even into the 1980s. He became interested in ragtime in 1967 and his work encouraged the work of others involved in the ragtime rediscovery. His ragtime compositions stand as elegant testimony to the inspiring grace and beauty of the classic rags, such as his **Graceful Ghost (1971)**, here arranged for violin and piano. The ghost of the ragtime music of the 1890s and early 20th century is present in this work, but it is imbued with a haunting quality, saturated with nostalgia for a lost musical tradition.

**Clarence Cameron White (1880-1960)** approached the spiritual and other Negro folk idioms as a compositional resource. One of the leading black violinists of his time, Clarence Cameron White began his musical studies in his early childhood, continuing his musical education at Howard University, Oberlin. **Levedance (1928)** is one of White's best-known works. This deceptively simple work is much more than a straightforward setting of a spiritual song. White frames the noble religious song with a jaunty, syncopated dance swirling around a "blue" third. After only a few phrases, this jubilant dance stands aside for the sober "Traditional Negro melody," as White has unpretentiously inscribed in the score. The melody comes from the spiritual, "Go Down Moses" (*Let my people go*).

**Robert Russell Bennett (1894-1981)** is best known as an arranger of Broadway musicals, scoring well over 300 musicals and movie scores. Bennett's name was associated with Ziegfeld, Kern, Gershwin, Berlin and Richard Rodgers. The "Broadway sound" from the middle third of this century owes much to Bennett's style of orchestration. **Hexapoda: Five Studies in Jitteroptera (1940)** owes its genesis to a conversation Bennett had with Louis Kaufman, who convinced Bennett that "the low down music of the day was worth saving by a serious-minded composer." Bennett immediately assembled these five jazzy vignettes. *Jitteroptera* owes its name to the acrobatic jitterbug. The first movement is a slow strutting number, intoned with the sultry glow of a jazz singer. In the second movement, the vigorous dancing begins. The third is a tender, romantic adagio. The fourth movement is the man's solo dance. The fifth movement closes the work with a final free-for-all.

**Darius Milhaud (1892-1974)** absorbed the popular music of his day in his work, producing vibrant renditions in his own voice. Examples include *Le boeuf sur le toit*, *Saudades do Brasil* (both inspired by Brazilian popular music) and this evening's work, **La création du monde, op. 81 (1923)** (influenced by Jazz). Milhaud had encountered Jazz bands in England in 1920 and also made a trip to the United States in 1922, where the enraptured composer attended many jazz orchestra performances. Upon returning to France, Milhaud was commissioned to write a ballet based on an African creation myth. Milhaud used his exposure to the new popular musical style to create "a work making wholesale use of the jazz style to convey a purely classical feeling."

Milhaud transcribed the music from this ballet in six movements into a concert arrangement for piano and string quartet. **Prélude** opens the work in a dark, murky atmosphere, with little jazzy motives interjected by the strings, energetically responding to the long melody in the piano. After a colossal crescendo, the jazzy motive comes to the foreground playing out the rest of the movement until it returns to its original somber mood and subsides. The cello launches the **Fugue** with a syncopated jazz subject. Joined by the viola and other strings, this fugal exercise remains in high gear until dramatically interrupted, as if to turn to the sudden appearance of the man and the woman for the **Romance**. The bluesy *Romance's* sensual song gently swings, at first on the piano. The **Scherzo** bops along with a bright, jazzy syncopation, returning to the opening, primal sounds as the work comes to a close.

**Paul Schoenfield (b. 1949)** shares with many American composers a penchant for making the most of all artistic resources, which make up the American musical tapestry. In the case of music, this means delving into the classical, folk, ethnic, Broadway and any other musical material to produce his own idiomatic and eclectic style. The idea for **Café Music (1986)** was born one evening while dining at a popular Minneapolis restaurant, which had a trio playing café music of the old Viennese style, tangos, and so forth. Schoenfield decided to create a three-movement, engaging composition based on lighter musical styles. *Café Music* reveals not only Schoenfield's appreciation of these various light music styles, but his ingenuity plays upon their contrasts and clever relationships. The music encompasses everything from tango to Chassidic melodies.

The first time **Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)** employed the style or genre of African-American music was in his **Sonata for violin and piano**, composed intermittently from 1923 to 1927. In a lecture he gave in 1928 at Rice University, Ravel admitted that he was attracted to the "emotional expression" in America's blues. While obviously sensitive to the emotional range of the blues, Ravel was also keenly aware of the clichés and limitations of the style and he employed the formulaic gestures in his own characteristic style.

The violin initiates the movement with an ostinato pizzicato delineating the harmony of the blues, much like the strumming of a guitar or banjo. The moment the piano enters, Ravel alerts the listener that this is no classic blues, but an intensely charged Ravel blues. Ravel makes the most of the violin's "nostalgico" melodic line, bending the pitch and the notes which make up the so-called "blues scale," much like a blues singer. Harmonically, the two instruments begin the work on different planes. The piano assumes the "pizzicato" chord from earlier, and the piano and the violin reconcile towards a tonal cadence, but only the violin alights on the tonic note. The piano accompaniment stiffens into an obstinate, march-like character while the violin restates the opening sentimental melody. At the close of this phrase, the piano introduces a second theme, much squarer than the voluptuous voice of the violin, but with a hint of flexibility in its slight syncopation. Gradually becoming more obsessive, the violin and piano rotate around versions of central motives, generating a profound climax.

**Suite from the Sound (2005)** for clarinet and string quartet by **Allan Gilliland (b. 1965)** was composed for this evening's clarinetist, James Campbell and the St. Lawrence String Quartet. The classically trained Gilliland also has extensive experience as a big band trumpeter. His **Suite from the Sound** (composed for the Parry Sound Festival) not only speaks through the idiom of jazz, but also taps into an often-overlooked dimension of jazz performance: improvisation. The walking bass, which dominates the first movement (**Parry's Ground**), is treated like a classical ground bass. In the middle section, strings and clarinet are given the opportunity to swing and shine with their own improvisation. The second movement, **Waltz for Mr. Evans**, is composed with the spirit of Canadian-born composer/arranger/band leader Gil Evans in the background. Tender harmonies and caressing strings lift the sweet and personal song of the clarinet. The final movement, **Flying Fingers**, begins with an allegro dance, but the performers let loose and their flying fingers transport this music to the clouds.