

Program Notes

Suite for Sir Gawain and the Green Knight Elizabeth Raum (1945 –)

Elizabeth Raum's works have been heard throughout North America, Europe, South America, China, Japan, and Russia, and have been broadcast extensively on the CBC. She has also written for film and video and has won numerous awards for her scores in this genre. She has been commissioned by such prestigious organizations as the Winnipeg Ballet, the Calgary Philharmonic, Symphony Nova Scotia, the Nexus Percussion Ensemble, the Ottawa International Chamber Music Festival, and the St. Lawrence String Quartet. Ms. Raum is featured on a number of commercial CDs including "how bodies leave ecstatic marks", from which her "Dark Thoughts" was the winning entry for Best Classical Composition for the 2008 Western Music Award. In November 2010, Ms. Raum was awarded the Saskatchewan Order of Merit. She is also included in the New Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, the New Grove's Dictionary of Opera, and the New Grove's Dictionary of Women Composers along with numerous other publications.

The music for this suite is based on the epic medieval poem, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. The story opens in the Banquet Hall of King Arthur where all are making merry when suddenly the Green Knight, bathed in a glow of green light, makes his appearance. He challenges any of the Knights to a dangerous "game," and Sir Gawain, not wanting to appear a coward, takes him up on the challenge.

The second movement, Seduction, takes place after Gawain has found the Green Chapel, but has a few days left, so he becomes the guest of Lord Bercilak. His wife, Lady Bercilak, tries unsuccessfully to seduce Gawain who resists because it would not follow the moral code of a knight of King Arthur's Round Table.

The third movement, Hunt, is symbolic of the inner feelings of Gawain who, in spite of his resistance, is lustful for the Lady.

The fourth movement, Gawain's Dilemma, comes about because Lady Bercilak gives him a green garter which she says will protect him from harm. He accepts the garter, and although he has earlier made an agreement with Lord Bercilak that he will give him anything he obtains during the day at the castle, he refrains from handing over the green garter that he thinks will save his life. The dilemma is that he feels terribly guilty but he wants to live.

Soon after, he meets the Green knight who actually turns out to be Lord Bercilak! When he strikes his blow, he barely taps Gawain with his ax, merely nicking his neck and thus spares his life, but Gawain is shamed by his dishonesty in breaking his word by keeping the garter. The final scene is his return to King Arthur's court and the Banquet Hall.

Program notes provided by the composer.

"Notturmo" from String Quartet No. 2 in A Major (1881) Alexander Borodin (1833 – 1887)

Alexander Borodin was born on November 20, 1833 and died on February 27, 1887. He belongs to the famous group of Russian musicians called The Russian Five; the others in the group are Mily Balakirev,

Cesar Cui, Modest Mussorgsky and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Although Borodin was one of the important composers of the Romantic period, he was actually a chemist/physician by profession. He was born into a well to do family and had the opportunity to take piano lessons as a child. Borodin began teaching at the Academy of Medicine in 1862; at the same time when he decided to take composition lessons from Mily Balakirev. Borodin's major works include the opera Prince Igor, In the Steppes of Central Asia, three symphonies, numerous chamber and piano music.

Borodin's String Quartet No. 2 in D Major was written in 1881. It has four movements but it is the third movement "Notturmo" that gained the most popularity. This string quartet was written for his wife, Ekaterina, as an anniversary present. The main theme was later adapted into the famous Broadway musical Kismet as one of its numbers (And This Is My Beloved).

Cello Concerto in D Major, RV 404
Antonio Vivaldi (1678 – 1741)

Antonio Vivaldi, nicknamed "il prete rosso" (the red priest), was born on March 4, 1678 in Venice to Giovanni Battista Vivaldi, a professional violinist at the church of St. Mark's, and Camilla Calicchio. Although Antonio was a gifted violinist, he was actually ordained a priest in 1703. Unfortunately, he presided at very few masses due to his chronic asthma. Immediately after his ordination, Vivaldi was appointed maestro di violino at the Ospedale della Pietà, a girls' orphanage in Venice. In 1711, he was promoted to maestro de' concerti (music director); and in 1735, he became maestro di cappella. This was a position that he held between 1703 and 1738. During his lifetime, Vivaldi wrote more than 500 concerti, some 50 operas, numerous cantatas, trio sonatas, the Magnificat in G minor and his most famous choral work "Gloria".

Vivaldi has composed a total of 27 concertos for cello. This concerto was completed in 1715 and has three movements that follow the structure of the Italian concerto, i.e. Fast-Slow-Fast. The first and third movements are energetic and technically challenging. The second movement has a very lyrical solo melody and it is complimented with a "smooth" continuo line.

"Soulmate" for Cello and String Orchestra
Ka – Nin Chan (1949 –)

Chan Ka Nin is a distinguished Canadian composer whose extensive repertoire draws on both East and West in its aesthetic outlook. Professor of Theory and Composition at the University of Toronto, he has written in most musical genres and received many national and international prizes, including two JUNO awards, the Jean A. Chalmers Award, the Béla Bartók International Composers' Competition in Hungary, and the Barlow International Competition in the United States. In 2001 he won the Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding Musical for his opera Iron Road, written with librettist Mark Brownell, depicting the 19th-century construction of the Canadian national railroad by Chinese migrant laborers.

Born and raised in Hong Kong, Mr. Chan holds twin undergraduate degrees in electrical engineering and music from the University of British Columbia, where he studied composition with Jean Coulthard. He subsequently received Master of Music and Doctor of Music degrees from Indiana University, where he studied with Bernhard Heiden.

Soulmate was originally the second movement of a string orchestra piece, Poetry on Ice, which was originally commissioned by the Ontario Arts Council for the 1995 Guelph Spring Festival in which the theme of the whole festival was dance. Soulmate describes the soulful connection between pair skaters. In this movement the strings played the theme in unison. Transcription to solo violin, viola, or cello was not difficult, although the end result was quite different. After the re-arrangement of this piece for solo string and string orchestra, the work took on a new dimension. It went from an intimate monologue to a musical dialogue between the passionate soloist and the sympathetic strings.

Program notes provided by the composer.

“Don Quixote” Suite (1761)
G. F. Telemann (1681 – 1767)

Georg Philipp Telemann was born in Magdeburg, Germany, and grew up in an upper-middle class family. But unfortunately, his mother was not very supportive of his desire to pursue a career as a musician /composer. He attended law school for a short period of time before he decided to fully dedicate his life to music. Telemann was considered to be the most prolific composer of all time with more than a thousand cantatas attributed to him. He was even more popular and in demand as a composer than his contemporary Johann Sebastian Bach during his lifetime.

Telemann taught himself how to play many different instruments such as the organ, violin, recorder and even the bass trombone. His major compositions include the popular Tafelmusik, Viola Concerto in G Major, numerous orchestral suites and concertos for various instruments.

The Don Quixote Suite is based on the adventures of Don Quixote, the main character in Miguel de Cervantes’ novel of the same name. The music begins with a French overture followed by a number of interesting encounters of Don Quixote. The second movement depicts his attack on the windmills which he thought they were giants. The next movement is about his encounter with a peasant girl whom he envisioned as a princess and fell hopelessly in love but was not reciprocated. Telemann also dedicated a movement to Sancho Panza (Don Quixote’s sidekick)’s mule followed by a movement about the galloping of the mule and his aging but loyal horse, Rosinate. The title of the final movement, Don Quixote’s At Rest, suggests a much relaxing tempo but instead, the music is very energetic which brings the entire piece to a dashing finish.

Serenade for Strings in E Minor, Op. 20
Sir Edward Elgar (1857 – 1934)

"Edward Elgar is the personification of the true English character in music
... a noble personality and a born aristocrat". (Jean Sibelius)

Even though Edward Elgar has written many symphonies, concertos, operas and chamber music, he is probably most recognized as the composer of Pomp and Circumstances Military March No. 1. It is often played at commencements and one of its themes “The Land of Hope and Glory” has also been recorded by many notable singers around the world. Other well-known compositions of Elgar include the Introduction and Allegro, Op. 47, a masterpiece in the string

orchestra repertoire, the “Enigma” Variations, the lovely Salut d’Amour for violin and piano, Cello Concerto in E Minor and his three symphonies.

Sir Edward Elgar was born in Lower Broadheath, Worcester, England. His father, William, was a piano tuner by trade and his mother, Ann, was very interested in the arts and encouraged all her children to take music lessons early in life. Elgar began taking piano and violin lessons at the age of eight. His father would sometimes bring him along on his jobs so as to provide his son an opportunity to show off his talents to important local officials. Elgar married Caroline Alice Roberts, one of his former students, in 1899 and had a daughter named Carice in 1890. He wrote little music after the death of his wife and died in 1934 of intestinal cancer. He was buried at St. Wulstan’s Church in Little Malvern, next to his beloved wife.

Elgar’s Serenade for Strings, Op. 20 was completed in May, 1892 and was dedicated to the philosopher W. H. Whitfield. It first performed in 1893 by the Worcester Ladies’ Orchestral Class conducted by Elgar himself. The music has three movements and the compositional quality is considered to be string writing at its finest by many; it is also the most performed work in all of Elgar’s compositions.

Program notes written by Eric D. Fahn ©