

# Primavera Winds

Kelsey Wright McDonald, flute. Luis Gallo Quintero, oboe.  
Samantha Morris, clarinet. Maria Carmona Ruiz, horn.  
Kristoff Hairr, bassoon.

## Program Notes by Jackson Harmeyer

There has long been an association between spring and woodwinds. Spring is the time of year when, after the chill of winter, people are able to return outside and enjoy the rebirth of nature. Wind instruments, many of which found their primary usage in outdoor settings prior to the nineteenth century, maintain this association with nature. Indeed, the flute has often been used to imitate birdsong. Think only as far as Vivaldi's celebrated flute concerto, *Il gardellino*, "the goldfinch," and you will hear birdsong, for its soloist stands in for the finch of the title. The horn, meanwhile, has retained its initial connection to hunting, another outdoors activity. *Primavera*, Italian for "spring," is not only the season shortly upon us—as we all know, in Louisiana, winter lasts only so long—but is also the name of the ensemble which performs for us tonight. Gathered by flutist Kelsey Wright McDonald, this wind quintet of faculty

and students from Northwestern State University shares with us music for winds, well-known and obscure.

The wind quintet emerged as an ensemble in the first decades of the nineteenth century. To some extent, it was an answer to the string quartet and the harmonic approach to writing pioneered by Haydn in which each member of the quartet participated equally, alternating between melodic and accompaniment roles. Prior to 1800, technical limitations to several wind instruments had hindered making such an innovation in wind writing, so that larger wind ensembles where doubling was possible were favored. As the necessary instrumental improvements were made, composers interested in writing for winds experimented with smaller ensembles, where the soloistic orientation of the string quartet could serve as an example. Finally, the composers Anton Reicha and Franz Danzi standardized the new ensemble of the wind quintet as consisting of flute, oboe, clarinet, French horn, and bassoon. Reicha, a friend of Beethoven who spent much of his career in Paris, published twenty-four wind quintets from 1817 to 1820 and, Danzi, a mentor to Weber, wrote his nine quintets in the succeeding years, from 1820 to 1824. With a few notable exceptions, like the piece heard tonight by Paul Taffanel, later nineteenth-century composers did not approach the wind quintet. Since the 1920s, however, when Paul Hindemith, Carl Nielsen, and Arnold Schoenberg each wrote wind quintets, the ensemble has become commonplace and much new music has been written.

Our program tonight opens with a short *Bourrée* for wind quintet by the Spanish composer **Blas Maria Colomer (1833-1917)**. Though born in Valencia, Colomer spent much of his life in France, studying piano at the Paris Conservatoire with Antoine François Marmontel. After his studies, Colomer remained in Paris where he taught piano and harmony. His largescale compositions include a symphony, two piano concerti, an opera, and other stage



Blas Maria  
Colomer

works. These works are almost entirely forgotten, however, and instead what reputation Colomer retains rests on the student pieces and other smaller chamber works he composed, like the *Bourrée* heard tonight. The bourrée was a French dance of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It had folk and courtly incarnations and, in a stylized form, it was also used in concert music. Bach, for example, includes bourrées in his orchestral suites as does Handel in his *Water Music*; they also appear in keyboard suites of that era. In its stylized form, the bourrée was a moderate to fast dance in duple meter, content or self-assured in mood. We observe these same traits in Colomer's *Bourrée*. Its form is ternary, with an A section in simple duple meter; the contrasting B section, with its darker, almost exotic feel, is in compound duple. Overall, the piece is stately yet playful—a little pompous even—and, in addition to the flute runs, the horn calls are also worth listening for.

Our next piece is not a wind quintet, but a wind trio by the German composer **Kaspar Kummer (1795-1870)**. Though obscure today, Kummer was well-known in his



**Paul  
Taffanel**

lifetime as both a flutist and composer, serving as principal flutist and *Kapellmeister* at the court of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha and with over 150 compositions to his name, including many which were published. His compositions tended to emphasize the wind instruments he knew best and, among these, are wind concerti, an array of chamber music for various ensembles, study pieces, and also arrangements of other composers' works. As a flutist, he opposed the new design devised by the German instrument builder, Theobald Boehm. Refined and advocated in France, this would become the standard

construction for flutes as of the late nineteenth century. Instead, Kummer preferred the older flute with its softer, more expressive sound. This resistance paired with his post at a ducal court rather than actively seeking middle-class patronage in a large urban area might have condemned his music to obscurity after his death.

His Trio in F major, Op. 32 for flute, clarinet, and bassoon is tinged with this same conservatism. Composed in the 1820s, at times, it sounds as if it could have been written several decades earlier. Most noticeably, the flute tends to predominate while the clarinet echoes its melodies and the bassoon often stands-in as harmonic support, playing the standard accompaniment figures of the late eighteenth century. The hierarchy, moreover, is that of a Baroque trio sonata and not the balanced texture of the mature string quartet or wind quintet. None of this, of course, detracts from the enjoyability of the music, but, in a century which increasingly favored democratization in chamber music, this older approach likely affected the continued marketability of this music as the nineteenth century progressed. Certainly, the ornamented flute lines, which remind this listener of Quantz almost a century earlier, can be a selling point today as this music is gradually rediscovered. In three movements, the Trio applies a standard fast-slow-fast pattern. Its first movement, marked *Allegro*, follows Classical sonata principle with its first theme coming after an introduction. The lyrical second movement, *Allegretto grazioso*, still places much of its melodic material with the flute, but there are at least a few moments where the clarinet and bassoon capture our attention. The third movement, *Rondo. Allegretto*, has the playful, hunting atmosphere, reminiscent of the chase, that one can also hear in wind concerti by Mozart and Weber.

The French flutist, pedagogue, and composer **Paul Taffanel (1844-1908)** is often regarded as the father of the modern French school of flute playing. With his teacher, Louis Dorus, he was one of the primary advocates for the Boehm flute which has become the standard concert flute. With his pupil, Philippe Gaubert, he wrote the *Méthode complète de flûte* which, likewise, is still taught today. Taffanel also pushed for flute repertoire which was more subtle and refined than many of the virtuosic showpieces that dominated before him. In his hands, the flute was shown to be an expressive and colorful soloist. Though Tchaikovsky never completed the flute concerto he had planned for Taffanel, the great French composers of the era, including Saint-Saëns, Fauré, and Debussy, were inspired by his playing and drawn to the flute. Taffanel not only performed and arranged existing works by these composers and others, he also commissioned new works. Likewise, he helped revive interest in earlier flute music by Bach and Rameau. In

addition to being an internationally touring soloist, Taffanel also founded in 1879 the *Société de Musique de Chambre pour Instruments à Vent*, creating a new demand for chamber music for wind instruments. He would direct this society for fifteen years until, in the 1890s, he both became conductor of the Paris Opéra, giving the French premieres of major operas by Verdi and Wagner, and professor of flute at the Paris Conservatoire. In each of these many fields, Taffanel's influence has been immense and lasting.

Taffanel composed his Wind Quintet in G minor in 1876 as his submission for a competition hosted by the *Société des compositeurs de musique*. It won him the gold medal and three hundred francs. The quintet is dedicated to Henri Reber—Taffanel's composition professor—who himself had been a student of Reicha. This lineage might have contributed to Taffanel's writing of a wind quintet at a time when very few composers were doing so, but, as a flutist with an interest in chamber music, it is also conceivable that Taffanel arrived at the genre entirely on his own. In any case, the Quintet was finally premiered six years later at Taffanel's own *Société* on May 13, 1882. The work is set in three movements in a fast-slow-fast pattern. Its first movement, marked *Allegro con moto*, is in sonata form. Here, Taffanel takes advantage of the different, colorful possibilities which make up the wind quintet. Though Taffanel was a flutist, the flute does not dominate the texture. The clarinet and bassoon, unexpectedly, open the piece and, even within the exposition, the oboe and clarinet receive extensive solos, not to mention the shorter exchanges between instruments. The horn and bassoon have their own solo moments after the development begins. In addition to the solos, the pairings of twos and threes are also enjoyable to listen for, especially when the clarinet and bassoon pairing from the opening returns. The writing is largely chromatic, as typical of the late nineteenth century, whereas the highly coloristic approach is more characteristically French.

The second movement, *Andante*, is free-flowing and endearing. It begins with an extensive horn solo, played *cantabile*, before variants on this theme are introduced successively by the other instruments. What begins soulfully, ends quite playfully. The third movement, *Vivace*, has the character of the tarantella, a quick-paced folkdance from southern Italy. The tarantella became a genre of concert music in the mid-nineteenth century thanks to descriptions of its frenzied enthusiasm in the literary works of Goethe and Rilke. Composers like Chopin, Liszt, and Gottschalk wrote tarantellas for piano that were virtuoso showpieces, while Mendelssohn used its elements to evoke Italy in the fourth movement of his *Italian Symphony* (though the movement is titled after another Italian folkdance, the saltarello). In 1857, a young Saint-Saëns also



Carl  
Nielsen

composed a Tarantella for flute, clarinet, and piano with which Taffanel might have been familiar. The tarantella is conjured in Taffanel's third movement through its use of compound duple meter, its fast tempo, tight phrase structure, the soaring instrumental runs, quick exchanges, and continually shifting dynamics. It is also worth paying attention to the pairing of instruments as well as the way Taffanel alters his dynamics by adding and subtracting instruments.

We close tonight's program with the first movement of the Wind Quintet, Op. 43 by the Danish composer, **Carl Nielsen (1865-1931)**. Nielsen's Quintet, one of the defining works of the genre and one of his late masterpieces, was composed in spring 1922 as a diversion from the demanding Fifth Symphony. The preceding decade had been one of crisis for Nielsen, between he and his wife's separation and the economic hardships World War I brought to Denmark, despite that the small country had remained neutral. These exterior circumstances hastened an already emerging creative crisis which can be clearly heard in the anger of the Fourth Symphony and the uncertainty of the Fifth, though these are among his greatest works. The Wind Quintet, then, marks a turning point in which Nielsen cut away much of the late Romantic excess from his idiom and kept only the essentials. The results can also be heard in his Sixth Symphony, subtitled the *Sinfonia semplice*, and the concerti for flute and clarinet. Nielsen's late style has often been likened to the contemporaneous Neo-Classicism of Stravinsky and, undoubtedly, Nielsen drew at least some of his inspiration

from Classical models by Mozart and Haydn. Rather than a specific Stravinskian influence, however, Nielsen's aesthetic shift more accurately reflects the general pairing down and reevaluation of musical materials heard in the post-war idioms of composers as diverse as Ravel, Hindemith, Schoenberg, and Webern as well as Stravinsky himself.

The direct inspiration for Nielsen's Quintet was the Copenhagen Wind Quintet who would give the work's premiere on October 9, 1922. Nielsen had apparently overheard their sometimes heated conversation during a rehearsal of Mozart's *Sinfonia concertante* which has solos for four of the five instruments of a wind quintet. Nielsen imagined what a musical conversation between these wind players—one voiced through their instruments—might sound like. In the first movement, marked *Allegro ben marcato*, the bassoon opens with a suggestion which is then chattily answered by the other members of the quintet. The conversation is mostly genial in the first movement, though the *staccato* sixteenth notes show some frustration and, occasionally, an instrument will get locked onto an idea which no one else stops to acknowledge. Especially toward the movement's end, however, there are moments which are significantly less friendly: in one memorable instance, the other four instruments finally lose their temper and shout at the insistent bassoon. The later movements also include severe disagreements, but overall the Quintet closes in resolution between its members. Inspired by the success of the Wind Quintet, Nielsen set out to write one concerto for each member of the Copenhagen Quintet in which he would investigate the personalities and musical personas of the players further. Unfortunately, Nielsen completed only the first two concerti of the intended five, the concerti for flute and clarinet, before his untimely death.

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**About Jackson.** Jackson Harmeyer is a master's candidate in musicology at the University of Louisville where he has been awarded the Gerhard Herz Music History Scholarship. His current research focuses on French spectral music and the compositions of Kaija

Saariaho, exploring the aesthetic ramifications of timbre, harmony, and melody in this new music. He has recently shared this research at the American Musicological Society South-Central Chapter's annual meetings in Sewanee, TN and Asheville, NC and also at the University of Tennessee Contemporary Music Festival in Knoxville, TN. Previously, Jackson graduated *summa cum laude* from the Louisiana Scholars' College in Natchitoches, LA following the completion of his undergraduate thesis, "Learning from the Past: The Influence of Johann Sebastian Bach upon the Soviet Composers." Then, from 2014 to 2016, Jackson served as director of the successful chamber music series, Abendmusik Alexandria. Since that time, he has remained a concert annotator and organizer, co-directing the Sugarmill Music Festival and the series Nachtmusik Alexandria. Aside from his studies, he is a composer, choral singer, and award-winning photographer.

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