

The Winds of Shreveport

Sally Horak, flute · Theresa Zale Bridges, oboe · Jake Hale, clarinet
Thomas Hundemer, horn · Ann Shoemaker, bassoon

Program Notes by Jackson Harmeyer

Welcome to the Third Annual Sugarmill Music Festival! Our first concert this year features the Winds of Shreveport, a quintet gathered from our best wind players to the north. Their program consists entirely of twentieth-century repertoire, including pieces by Alexander Zemlinsky, Claude Debussy, and the increasingly popular Wind Quintet, Op. 10 of Pavel Haas. Then, to close the program, the Winds of Shreveport shall reprise a work written nearly thirty years ago by Thomas Hundemer, the ensemble's French hornist and one of our state's finest composers. Enjoy this, our festival's opening concert, and all eight of the concerts presented over the span of three days as part of our annual Sugarmill Music Festival.

The Austrian composer **Alexander Zemlinsky (1871-1942)** is best-remembered as a friend and mentor to Arnold Schoenberg: not only did Schoenberg marry Zemlinsky's sister Mathilde, Zemlinsky was also Schoenberg's only composition instructor and advised him on several of his early works. Zemlinsky, unlike Schoenberg, however, never abandoned the late Romantic idiom, and his music is more characteristic of Mahler than of Schoenberg or that of his pupils, Berg and Webern. Zemlinsky's career was spent mostly in opera, both as a composer of operas—of which he wrote eleven with varying degrees of success—and also as



Alexander Zemlinsky

an opera conductor. Otherwise, his *Lytic Symphony* has become well-known, as much for its own merit as for Berg's endearing quotation from it in his *Lytic Suite*. Although Zemlinsky found early success as a conductor in Vienna and Prague, various difficulties began to arise in the later 1920s. Things worsened in the 1930s with Hitler's rise to power, and, by 1938, he had left Europe to resettle in New York City. His jovial *Humoreske* for wind quintet was written the following year, ironically, among these difficult circumstances. It would be his final composition, for he suffered a debilitating stroke soon after its completion. It playfully echoes Mahler's Fourth Symphony and, more generally, the long-departed world of turn-of-the-twentieth-century Vienna.



Claude Debussy

Although **Claude Debussy (1862-1918)** is well-regarded for his use of wind instruments in orchestral and chamber settings, the French composer did not, in fact, write any music explicitly for wind quintet. Instead, it is an arrangement of three of his piano pieces made by Gordon Davies which represent Debussy on this evening's program. These consist of the *Sarabande* from *Pour le piano* as well as the *Menuet* and *Passepied* from *Suite bergamasque*. All three were written within around 1900, giving them a similar harmonic world, and each evokes a Baroque dance genre. These attributes, therefore, allow them to be satisfactorily grouped into a new suite for winds. Historically, the sarabande was typically a slow dance in triple meter. Those traits are preserved here where the dance is given a particularly stately treatment, sometimes with long pauses between phrases and also moments of emotional intensification. The menuet, a familiar dance from Classical-era symphonies and string quartets, was in the

Baroque era a moderately paced dance in triple meter. Debussy maintains these attributes, although some of the longer lyrical passages seem out of character for this genre. As we hear at the piece's beginning, other moments are almost tiptoed. The *passepied* was a faster version of the minuet, still in triple meter but with an insistent pulse. Debussy immediately establishes his pulse, through eighth notes in the bass, before a more flexible melody enters in the treble.

The Moravian composer **Pavel Haas (1899-1944)** is today regarded as the most important pupil of Leoš Janáček, the preeminent composer of such works as *Taras Bulba* and the opera *The Cunning Little Vixen*. Haas studied with Janáček at the Brno Conservatory from 1920 to 1922 and followed his example of creating a Moravian national idiom drawn from folksong as well as spoken language. Also like Janáček, Haas became a champion of stage music, creating music for various theater productions in the 1920s and later an opera, *The Charlatan*, which was staged in Brno in 1938. His early success as a composer was marked by his appointment as chairman of the Moravian Composers' Association in 1929 as successor to Janáček who had died the previous year. Surely, this was one of the highest honors a composer could receive in Czechoslovakia. Although his compositional aesthetic owes a certain debt to Janáček in its approach to folk sources, Haas moved beyond his teacher to incorporate rhythmic and harmonic traits of Western European Modernism as well as jazz. His own cultural identity as a Jew also encouraged Haas to incorporate elements of Jewish chant and synagogue traditions.



Pavel Haas

Tragically, the promising career that awaited Haas was cut short when in 1941 he was arrested by the Nazi regime and deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp. This camp, located some sixty kilometers north of Prague, was designated as a "Jewish settlement," and, as part of the propaganda machine, it was presented to the outside world as a utopian community created specifically to house European Jews. There, Jewish culture could flourish apart from the "mainstream." Haas, although virtually paralyzed by illness upon his arrival, ultimately did create two of his best-known works at Theresienstadt, the *Study for Strings* and *Four Songs on Chinese Poetry*, before he was again relocated to Auschwitz and murdered in the gas chambers. Like his compatriot Erwin Schulhoff (whose Duo for violin and cello Lin He and Daniel Cassin played at February's *Nachtmusik*), Pavel Haas was a composer never allowed to realize his full potential as the victim of a deadly political climate.

The Wind Quintet, Op. 10 was composed in 1929 and premiered in Brno by the Moravian Wind Quintet on March 24, 1930. It was the first work by Haas to find international acclaim. The Quintet is in four movements, each given a programmatic title as well as a tempo marking. In the first movement, titled *Preludio. Andante, ma vivace*, we hear the influence of Janáček through its reiteration of short motivic cells that transfer between instruments. These motives are often quite rhythmic, and, depending on their length, can either serve as an accompaniment part or form into a longer melodic line. The oboe carries the first, probing melody which it soon passes around to other instruments; the

flute dominates the texture later. The chromatic lines, which are somewhat off-kilter if not overwhelmingly dissonant, lend the harmonies a Stravinskian sound. The second movement, *Pregghiera. Misterioso e triste*, is more soloistic, reminding some listeners of Jewish tabernacle singing. The solo flute initiates the movement, playing nearly five measures before other instruments enter. Its solo continues beyond that, dropping out in time for the oboe to echo with its own solo. The clarinet is next and retains the melody much longer than either of its two predecessors. After further exchanges, the flute and horn break into a nice duet toward the middle of the movement. The bassoon finally gets a brief chance to contribute, but much of the rest of the movement is led by either the oboe, horn, or horn and flute in alternation. The entire movement is of a mournful, lamenting character.

The third movement, *Ballo eccentrico. Ritmo marcato*, is highly-rhythmic. Its accented, eighth-note pulse is generated initially by the bassoon, recalling the sound world of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. Building on the pulsing bassoon motive, the E-flat clarinet and soon after the piccolo enter with melodic variations on this same pulsing figure. Later, the horn takes over with a demanding line in its upper register. Between the odd timbral palette this all creates and the sometimes chaotic exchanges between instruments, the movement gains a jazzy feel, not unexpected for an adventurous composer working in the 1920s. The movement concludes, or at least collapses, with some final clowning around. The fourth movement, *Epilogo. Maestoso*, is the saddest and the strangest of the group. Whereas the third clearly favored a higher register, the fourth seems weighed-down with the horn and bassoon often dominating the texture. Their insistent, marching rhythms keep the

music moving, although it seems compelled—not encouraged—to do so. The harmonies now seem medieval, and some writers have suggested a chorale tune honoring Wenceslas, the patron saint of Czechoslovakia, as the basis of this movement. Haas later added the note to his manuscript, “The bird flew up to the sun; he flew and flew without reaching his goal.” This program seems at least partially plausible, for despite the weightiness of the movement, whenever the flute returns, it grows higher in pitch. The trills toward the end are also suggestive of birdsong. A sudden change of mode though comes at the movement’s end, one which finally allows the work to conclude on a major chord, as if the bird has, in fact, reached the sun.

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About Jackson. Jackson Harmeyer is a graduate student pursuing his master’s degree in musicology at the University of Louisville where, in April 2017, he was awarded the Gerhard Herz Music History Scholarship. Previously, Jackson graduated *summa cum laude* from the Louisiana Scholars’ College in Natchitoches, Louisiana following the completion of his undergraduate thesis, “Learning from the Past: The Influence of Johann Sebastian Bach upon the Soviet Composers.” From 2014 to 2016, Jackson served as director of the successful chamber music series, Abendmusik Alexandria, and since that time has remained concert annotator for presenters of classical music across Louisiana. His current research interests include French spectral music and the compositions of Kaija Saariaho. He recently shared this research in March 2018 at the American Musicological

Society South-Central Chapter’s annual meeting in Asheville, North Carolina. Also a composer, Jackson has worked to integrate the vocabulary and grammar of modern music into compositions which are not only innovative but also engaging to the general listener. His compositions have been performed at the Sugarmill Music Festival and New Music on the Bayou.

Read additional program notes by Jackson at www.JacksonHarmeyer.com.