

# Winds of Time

Program Notes by Sanford Dole

Tonight we welcome brass and percussion players from the California Symphony, continuing a relationship which began when the orchestra invited us to perform with them last spring in Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* and the world premiere of Kevin Beavers' *Songs from the Discovery*. We are proud, too, to showcase the skills of pianist T. Paul Rosas, our rehearsal accompanist. It is a joy to collaborate with such fine musicians on a festive program of large-scale works.

To open the show, we offer music by the composer I think of as the “go-to” guy when combining brass and chorus. **Giovanni Gabrieli** is also known for how he exploited the architecture and acoustics of St. Mark's Basilica in Venice, where he was music director for 26 years. His *Magnificat a 12* on tonight's program is a classic example of *cori spezzati*, or divided choirs, in this instance three choirs, which would have been distributed around the basilica in various balconies.

As was the practice for festivals in Gabrieli's day, certain parts have brass players doubling voices, and others are played solely on instruments. Gabrieli marked the middle choir as *cappella* to indicate that this choir should be singers only but did not specify which parts in the other two choirs should be vocal or instrumental. I have opted to give the four parts of the lowest choir, the one on your right, to our second altos, the horn, and the two trombones and to have the three trumpets double our sopranos in the upper choir on the left. Enjoy the spatial effects as the music moves back and forth among the three groups.

The *Mass, Opus 91*, of Oakland composer **William Ludtke** is a work closely associated with our own choir. It began life as a *Missa Brevis* in 1986 when Cantabile was known as the Baroque Choral Guild, with Robert Geary directing. Ludtke composed the piece for a competition that the Guild used to hold annually and dedicated it to the memory of Daryl Wagner, who sang in another chorus led by Geary. The premiere proved so popular with both chorus and audience that three years later the Guild commissioned Ludtke to expand the work for our tenth anniversary concerts.

I find it fitting to bring this exciting piece back for a repeat hearing now in order to feature a fine local composer, to celebrate the end of my fifth season with Cantabile—can you believe it?—and also to honor the traditions of our organization as it begins its second quarter-century.

A *missa brevis* omits the Credo, the longest text in the ordinary of the mass, perhaps to limit the duration of the service or simply to avoid setting the words of the Creed, “I believe ...,” when, in fact, the composer does not. At any rate, when Ludtke expanded the 1986 *Missa Brevis*, he did not add a Credo but opted instead to set a short text from the Requiem Mass as well as a 17th-century poem and a Biblical text that make more explicit the memorial aspect of the piece. The composer has employed a variety of styles, everything from a chorale in relatively traditional harmonies to a chromatic, almost twelve-tone Pie Jesu. This fascinating hybrid works well on its own terms, always keeping the listener engaged.

When casting about for a chorus and brass piece to round out the program, I came across *Seven Ghosts* by **Libby Larsen** and found it satisfying on many levels. First, I am pleased to present a work by this highly acclaimed composer, a leading figure in her generation—she's 54—whom *USA Today* has described as “the only English-speaking composer since Benjamin Britten who matches great verse with fine music so intelligently and expressively.” There is also special gratification in programming the music of a woman composer. Finally, the piece represents America. The composer is herself an American, born in Delaware and now based in Minnesota, and her music speaks in a language that we all understand, freely co-opting American popular musical styles as well as quoting outright from familiar tunes. As an artist and a composer myself, I am always looking for ways to express who I am as an American, and *Seven Ghosts* is Americana at its best, illustrating the diversity that has made this country great with a diverse array of Americans and a diverse collection of texts: freed slave Phillis Wheatley's poem in praise of founding father George Washington, a letter from

Swedish soprano Jenny Lind to the abolitionist author Harriet Beecher Stowe, the poetic musings of self-taught astronomer Clyde Tombaugh about his discovery of Pluto, an evocation of the ordinary boy in the all-American hero Charles Lindbergh, and the ebullient scat singing of Louis Armstrong.

As we conclude our season with a bang, I hope you enjoy these works for brass and chorus. Surely the Larsen will get you thinking about your plans for the Fourth of July and a summer vacation.

I assure you there is much to look forward to after the summer as well. We have an exciting set of programs planned for next season, and this fall we will release our first commercial CD, *The Seasons of Christmas*. You will be able to take care of some holiday shopping at our November concerts. This beautiful recording of music for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany would make a fine gift for anyone who loves music.

Thanks for sharing this evening with us. Peace!

### Notes on Libby Larsen's Seven Ghosts

Grace and Glory

Phillis Wheatley to George Washington

The spoken text is a letter Wheatley (1753–1784) wrote to Washington (1732–1799) in 1775, and the sung text is from the poem she enclosed, “To His Excellency, General Washington.” The first significant African American poet, Wheatley was freed at age 20 by the Bostonian family who had educated her.

Jenny Lind to Harriet Beecher Stowe

The text is from “Home, Sweet Home,” which Lind (1820–1887) often sang during her American tour, and from a letter she wrote to Stowe (1811–1896) in 1852. In gratitude for a gift of tickets to the farewell concert of Lind's tour, Stowe had sent her a copy of the newly published novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Blinking Pluto

Clyde Tombaugh

Tombaugh (1906–1997) discovered the planet Pluto in February 1930, working at Lowell Observatory in Arizona. His year-long search employed pairs of photographs taken a few days apart and a device that made any objects changing position relative to the stars appear to blink.

Myself with Wings

Charles Lindbergh

The text is the inscription on a statue of Lindbergh (1902–1974) at the Minnesota State Capitol depicting him at 25, when he made the first non-stop flight from New York to Paris, and as a Minnesota farm boy imitating an airplane flying over the upper Mississippi. Another casting is at Lindbergh Field, San Diego.

United Hot Clubs of America

Louis Armstrong

The spoken text is from the 1936 autobiography by Armstrong (1900–1971) *Swing That Music*, in a chapter about the founding of the United Hot Clubs of America in cities across the nation. They were modeled on jazz clubs he had seen in Britain and France where musicians could gather for jam sessions.