

WIND ENSEMBLE PROGRAM NOTES

APRIL 16, 2024 7:30PM

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The University of Kansas

Rivers (2023)Isabella P. Morrill (b. 2003)

Rivers tells the story of the mystical River of Life found in the Biblical passage of Ezekiel 47. The river flows from the stony steps of the temple all the way to the Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth, where it restores the salty, dead land into a place of vibrant life. The farther the river flows, the deeper the waters become. Everywhere the river goes, it brings dead things to life and causes trees to grow - trees whose leaves are used to heal the sick and the broken. The river ultimately is a symbol of hope, healing, and restoration for a broken, hurting world.

In composing *Rivers*, Morrill wanted to capture the different depths and motions of the river as it journeys to the Dead Sea, using bright sonic colors and continuous energy to do so.

This piece is dedicated to the victims of the Russo-Ukrainian War.

- Program notes from score

Ecstatic Waters (2008)Steven Bryant (b. 1972)

Ecstatic Waters is music of dialectical tension – a juxtaposition of contradictory or opposing musical and extra-musical elements and an attempt to resolve them. The five connected movements hint at a narrative that touches upon naiveté, divination, fanaticism, post-human possibilities, anarchy, order, and the Jungian collective unconscious. Or, as I have described it more colloquially: W.B. Yeats meets Ray Kurzweil in the Matrix.

The overall title, as well as *Ceremony of Innocence* and *Spiritus Mundi* are taken from poetry of Yeats (“News for the Delphic Oracle,” and “The Second Coming”), and his personal, idiosyncratic mythology and symbolism of spiraling chaos and looming apocalypse figured prominently in the genesis of the work. Yet in a nod to the piece’s structural reality – as a hybrid of electronics and living players – *Ecstatic Waters* also references the confrontation of unruly humanity with the order of the machine, as well as the potential of a post-human synthesis, in ways inspired by Kurzweil.

The first movement, *Ceremony of Innocence*, begins as a pure expression of exuberant joy in unapologetic Bb Major in the Celesta and Vibraphone. The movement grows in momentum, becoming perhaps too exuberant – the initial simplicity evolves into a full-throated brashness bordering on dangerous arrogance and naiveté, though it retreats from the brink and ends by returning to the opening innocence.

In movement II, *Augurs*, the unsustainable nature of the previous *Ceremony* becomes apparent, as the relentless tonic of Bb in the crystal water glasses slowly diffuses into a microtonal cluster, aided and abetted by the trumpets. Chorale-like fragments appear, foretelling the wrathful self-righteousness of movement III. The movement grows inexorably, spiraling wider and wider, like Yeat’s gyre, until “the center cannot hold,” and it erupts with supreme force into *The Generous Wrath of Simple Men*.

Movement III is deceptive, musically contradicting what one might expect of its title. While it erupts at the outset with overwhelming wrath, it quickly collapses into a relentless rhythm of simmering 16th notes. Lyric lines and pyramids unfold around this, interrupted briefly by the forceful anger of a chorale, almost as if trying to drown out and deny anything but its own existence. A moment of delicate lucidity arrives amidst this back-and-forth struggle, but the chorale ultimately dominates, subsuming everything, spiraling out of control, and exploding.

The Loving Machinery of Justice brings machine-like clarity and judgment. Subtle, internal gyrations between atonality and tonality underpin the dialogue between lyric melody (solo Clarinet and Oboe) and mechanized accompaniment (Bassoons). An emphatic resolution in Ab minor concludes the movement, floating seamlessly into the epilogue, *Spiritus Mundi*. Reprising music from movement I, this short meditative movement reconciles and releases the earlier excesses.

- Program notes by composer.

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Symphony No. 4 (1993)..... David Maslanka (1943-2017)

The sources that give rise to a piece of music are many and deep. It is possible to describe the technical aspects of a work – its construction principles, its orchestration – but nearly impossible to write of its soul nature except through hints and suggestions.

The roots of Symphony No. 4 are many. The central driving force is the spontaneous rise of the impulse to shout for the joy of life. I feel it is the powerful voice of the Earth that comes to me from my adopted western Montana, and the high plains and mountains of central Idaho. My personal experience of the voice is one of being helpless and torn open by the power of the thing that wants to be expressed – the welling-up shout that cannot be denied. I am set a quiver and am forced to shout and sing. The response in the voice of the Earth is the answering shout of thanksgiving, and the shout of praise.

Out of this, the hymn tune Old Hundred, several other hymn tunes (the Bach chorales Only Trust in God to Guide You and Christ Who Makes Us Holy), and original melodies which are hymn-like in nature, form the backbone of Symphony No. 4.

To explain the presence of these hymns, at least in part, and to hint at the life of the Symphony, I must say something about my long-time fascination with Abraham Lincoln. From Carl Sandburg's monumental Abraham Lincoln, I offer two quotes. The first is a description of Lincoln in death by his close friend David R. Locke:

I saw him, or what was mortal of him, in his coffin. The face had an expression of absolute content, or relief, at throwing off a burden such as few men have been called on to bear – a burden which few men could have borne. I have seen the same expression on his living face only a few times, when after a great calamity he had come to great victory. It was the look of a worn man suddenly relieved. Wilkes Booth did Abraham Lincoln the greatest service man could possibly do for him – he gave him peace.

The second, referring to the passage through the country from Washington D.C. to Springfield, Illinois of the coffin bearing Lincoln's body:

To the rotunda of Ohio's capitol, on a mound of green moss dotted with white flowers, rested the coffin on April 28, while 8,000 persons passed by each hour from 9:30 in the morning till four in the afternoon. In the changing red-gold of a rolling prairie sunset, to the slow exultation of brasses rendering Old Hundred, and the muffled boom of minute guns, the coffin was carried out of the rotunda and taken to the funeral train.

For me, Lincoln's life and death are as critical today as they were more than a century ago. He remains a model for this age. Lincoln maintained in his person the tremendous struggle of opposites raging in the country in his time. He was inwardly open to the boiling chaos, out of which he forged the framework of a new unifying idea. It wore him down and killed him, as it wore and killed the hundreds of thousands of soldiers in the civil war, as it has continued to wear and kill by the millions up to the present day. Confirmed in the world by Lincoln was the unshakable idea of the unity of the human race, and by extension the unity of all life, and by further extension, the unity of all life with all matter, with all energy, and with the silent and seemingly empty and unfathomable mystery of our origins.

Out of chaos and the fierce joining of opposite comes new life and hope. From this impulse I used Old Hundred, known as the Doxology – a hymn of praise to God; Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow; Gloria in excelsis Deo – the mid-sixteenth century setting of Psalm 100. Psalm 100 reads in part:

¹ Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands.

² Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing.

⁴ Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

I have used Christian Symbols because they are my cultural heritage, but I have tried to move through them to a depth of universal humanness, to an awareness that is not defined by religious label. My impulse through this music is to speak to the fundamental human issues of transformation and re-birth in this chaotic time.

- Program notes by composer.