With this piece, I wanted to pay homage to a composer who has influenced me in a huge way since my childhood, Joe Hisaishi. Mr. Hisaishi is a Japanese film composer born in 1950 who has over 100 film scores and solo albums to his name. Dubbed “the John Williams of Japan” by Pitchfork in 2017, he has won the Japanese Academy Award for Best Music seven times.

In this piece, I wanted to use his colors and his palette to paint a picture of intensity, beauty, and adventure. The name of the piece is also an homage to one of his works, Dragonboy. Using his palette, I illustrate the journey of a dragonfly. From the beginning of the piece, there is an explosion of color and energy - representing the world of the dragonfly - and from there it is a journey of flight and peril for the small creature of the sky.

-Program note by composer

Following in the footsteps of Patrick Gilmore, Sousa became a popular figure at Manhattan Beach, the famous New York summer resort. In 1894, one of his most lavish medals was presented to him by the proprietor, Austin Corbin, and other shareholders. The previous season, Sousa had dedicated this march to Corbin, and one of his manuscripts is inscribed to him.

Sousa once told a reporter that Manhattan Beach had been derived from an earlier composition, probably “The Phoenix March” (1875). Manhattan Beach became a staple of bands all over the world, but the Sousa Band performed it differently by playing the trio and last section as a short descriptive piece. In the trio, soft clarinet arpeggios suggest the rolling ocean waves as one strolls along the beach. A band is then heard in the distance. It grows louder and then fades away as the stroller continues along the beach.

-Program note by Paul E. Bierley and published by the U.S. Marine Band

One Life Beautiful - the title itself is a double entendre. In one sense, referring to Heather Cramer Reu, the person this work is dedicated to, and her one life beautifully lived. In another sense, it is a direct observation, concluding that having only one life is what makes life so sacred and so very precious. This is an impressionistic work musically describing that condition. Shakespeare's 'Sweet Sorrow', the frailty and strength of life. The meaning of what it is to truly live One Life Beautiful.

-Program note by composer


I. “Hermes”: God Messenger of the Borders
II. “Artemisa”: Goddess of Nature and Wild Animals
IX. “Ares and Atenea”: Gods of War

“Olympus of the Gods” is a suite divided in 10 movements, each one of them representing one of the twelve deities in Olympus. The suite begins with a strong thunder sound, which represents the power and strength of the great god Zeus, father of gods. This thunder sound will be the connecting thread between movements, and it will be heard each time that Zeus introduces a different god in Olympus.

I. “Hermes”: The messenger of the gods across all frontiers. Very lively and fast music represents an agile and energetic god, very cunning. He is able to travel around earth without any trouble, disguising himself amongst other travellers, shepherds, traders, burglars, and other mortals without raising any suspicion.

II. “Artemis”: The goddess of nature and wild animals. This movement, composed as a dance form, describes the goddess Artemis surrounded by live nature, birds, and vegetation covering the surface of earth beyond where the eye reaches. The animals graze and run around freely amidst a clear and bright sky. Artemis dances and runs in this beautifully depicted scenery, carrying her bow and arrows and hunting down the wild animals.

IX. “Ares and Athena”: Gods of War. Ares and Athena travel together, riding in their chariot pulled by four immortal bulls with gold flanges and breathing fire. They are equipped with helmets, shields, and spears. Coming from afar, they march towards war and destruction, a ferocious massacre of blood and fire.

-Program notes by composer

For more information about Blue Valley North High School Bands, please visit:

https://bvnband.org/
Dancing Fire (2016) ................................................................. Kevin Day (b. 1996)
Daniel J. Freeman, guest conductor

“When I was writing *Dancing Fire*, I wanted to write a piece for my high school band program and its directors for the great pieces we played, the fun times we had, and the excitement our bands created at our concerts. The picture I had in my head before I began writing was a group of people surrounding a large bonfire during the night. These people began dancing around the fire, having fun, singing songs, and ultimately, celebrating life.

Once I had that picture in my head, along with the constant repeating motif that eventually became the melody for the entire piece, the rest of the work fit together nicely, and in two weeks it was done. The composition brings this mental picture I had to life in a fun and energetic way with dance-like percussion and a constant groove, as well as its contagious melody, a mysterious soprano sax solo, and a climactic ending.

This was written in dedication to the Arlington High School Band Program in Arlington, Texas, and to my former band directors, Michael Hejny, Nathan Burum, and Nathan Hervey.”

- Program note by composer


“This piece is a celebration of the bravery of trans women, and in particular Marsha "Pay It No Mind" Johnson. Marsha is credited with being one of the instigators of the famous Stonewall uprising of June 28, 1969 -- one of the pivotal events of the LGBTQ liberation movement of the 20th century -- which is commemorated annually during the worldwide Gay Pride celebrations. Existing as a trans woman, especially a trans woman of color, and daring to live authentically, creating space for oneself in a transphobic world, is one of the bravest acts I can imagine. Over 20 trans women were murdered in the United States in 2018 alone. There is no demographic more deserving and, frankly, long overdue for highlighted heroism and bravery. The disco vibe in the latter half of the piece is meant to honor club culture, a sacred space held amongst LGBTQ persons in which to love, live, mourn, heal, strategize, connect, disconnect, and dance in defiance of those outside forces who would seek to do LGBTQ persons harm simply for daring to exist and take up space.

We pump our fists to honor the life, heroism, activism, and bravery of Marsha P. Johnson, to honor the legacy of the Stonewall revolution, to honor the memory of the trans lives violently ended due to fear and hatred, and in honor of trans women worldwide who continue to exist unapologetically and who demand to be seen.

This piece was commissioned by the Desert Winds Freedom Band, under the direction of Dean McDowell, to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Stonewall uprising.”

- Program Note by composer
Infinity (2020)..................................................................................Katahj Copely (b. 1998)

Shooting stars, asteroids, and the movement of the heavenly bodies in the night sky have always fascinated humans.

With Infinity I wanted to create the sense of shooting stars flying through the infinite playground known as space. As the piece begins, the world of space is filled with stars running through the skies. The shooting stars go through many different scenarios both dark and light until finally at the end of the piece the stars – with their bright colors and lights – flash across the sky with spectacular grandeur.

- Program Note by composer

Danza Capriccio (1991)................................................................. Ron Nelson (b. 1929)

Vince Gnojek, saxophone
Sharon Toulouse, guest conductor

As a graduate of the Eastman School of Music, Ron Nelson studied composition with Howard Hanson and Bernard Rogers. He also attended the Paris Conservatory on a Fulbright Scholarship where he studied with Tony Aubin. Nelson was on faculty at Brown University for almost forty years until he retired in 1993. Nelson has been an integral part of the wind band realm as he has contributed over twenty compositions for this specific medium.

Tenth Regiment (1895)................................................................. R. B. Hall (1858-1907)

Martin J. Bergee, guest conductor

Hall dedicated this march (title Death or Glory in Europe) to the Tenth Regiment Band of Albany, New York. He had been invited in the summer of 1900 to rebuild the band – described by the National Guard Unit's commanding officer, Col. Raymond L. Fitch, as "musically bankrupt" – and in a year's time the group was proficient enough to be invited to participate in the Pan-American Exposition at Buffalo, New York. Twenty-two of the finest bands in the nation (including those directed by John Philip Sousa, Patrick Conway, J.M. Missud, T.P. Brooke, and John Slatter of Toronto, Canada) provided continuous music for the exposition visitors. Hall's pride in the progress made by the Tenth Regiment Band is reflected in this composition.

-Program note from "Program notes for band" by Norman Smith
First Suite in Eb (1909)................................................................. Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

Martin J. Bergee, guest conductor

There are three movements in the suite: Chaconne, Intermezzo, and March. Holst writes, “As each movement is founded on the same phrase, it is requested that the suite be played right through without a break.” Indeed, the first three notes of the Chaconne are Eb, F and C, and the first three notes of the melody when it first appears in the Intermezzo are Eb, F, and C. In the third movement, March, Holst inverts the motive: The first note heard in the brilliant opening brass medley is an Eb, but instead of rising, it descends to a D, and then a G; the exact opposite of the first two movements.

The Chaconne begins with a ground bass reminiscent of those written by Henry Purcell or William Byrd. It is performed by tuba, euphonium and string bass and is repeated throughout the ensemble sixteen full times as varying instrumental textures and variations of the theme are layered within it. Following a delicately scored chamber setting of the theme, the music steadily builds to a brilliant Eb Major chord that concludes the movement.

The Intermezzo is light and brisk, and features soloistic passages for the cornet, oboe and clarinet. Holst prominently displays the agility and sensitivity of the wind band through transparent textures and passages where the melody and accompaniment are woven into a variety of instrumental settings.

The March begins suddenly. It consists of two themes, the first of which, performed by brass choir and percussion, is a march light in character. The second theme is dominated by the woodwinds and is composed of a long, lyrical line reminiscent of the original Chaconne melody. The movement concludes with both themes intertwining as the band crescendos to a climax.”

- Program Note by Esmaeil Khalili

For more information about The University Kansas Bands, please visit: https://music.ku.edu/band