

MIDWEST PROGRAM NOTES– 2011 – CHICAGO BRASS BAND

COMPOSER BIOGRAPHIES



James Curnow was born in Port Huron, Michigan and raised in Royal Oak, Michigan where he received his initial musical training in the public schools and The Salvation Army Instrumental Programs in these cities. He lives in Nicholasville, Kentucky where he is president, composer, and educational consultant for Curnow Music Press, Inc. of Nicholasville, Kentucky, publishers of significant music for concert band and brass band. He also serves as Composer-in-residence (Emeritus) on the faculty of Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky, and is editor of all music publications for The Salvation Army in Atlanta, Georgia.

His formal training was received at Wayne State University, B.M. (Detroit, Michigan) and at Michigan State University, M.M (East Lansing, Michigan), where he was a euphonium student of Leonard Falcone, and a conducting student of Dr. Harry Begian. His studies in composition and arranging were with F. Maxwell Wood, James Gibb, Jere Hutchinson, and Irwin Fischer.

James Curnow has taught in all areas of instrumental music, both in the public schools (five years), and on the college and university level (thirty years). He is a member of several professional organizations, including the American Bandmasters Association, College Band Directors National Association, National Band Association and the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP). In 1980 he received the National Band Association's Citation of Excellence. In 1985, while a tenured Associate Professor at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, Mr. Curnow was honored as an outstanding faculty member. Among his most recent honors are inclusion in Who's Who in America, Who's Who in the South and Southwest, and Composer of the Year (1997) by the Kentucky Music Teachers Association and the National Music Teachers Association. He has received annual ASCAP standard awards since 1979.

As a conductor, composer and clinician, Curnow has traveled throughout the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan and Europe where his music has received wide acclaim. He has won several awards for band compositions including the ASBDA/Volkwein Composition Award in 1977 (Symphonic Triptych) and 1979 (Collage for Band), the ABA/Ostwald Award in 1980 (Mutanza) and 1984 (Symphonic Variants for Euphonium and Band), the 1985 Sixth International Competition of Original Compositions for Band (Australian Variants Suite), the 1994 Coup de Vents Composition Competition of Le Havre, France (Lochinvar), commission through recognition of the KMTNA 1997 (On Poems of John Keats for String Quart), and Second Place in the 2001 International Trumpet Guild Composition Competition (Three Episodes for Trumpet and Piano).

Curnow has been commissioned to write over two hundred works for concert band, brass band, orchestra, choir and various vocal and instrumental ensembles. His published works now number well over four hundred. His most recent commissions include the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra (Symphonic Variants for Euphonium and Orchestra), the United States Army Band (Pershing's Own, Washington, D.C.-Lochinvar, Symphonic Poem for Winds and Percussion), Roger Behrend and the DEG Music Products, Inc. and Willson Band Instrument Companies (Concerto for Euphonium and Orchestra), the Olympic Fanfare and Theme for the Olympic Flag (Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games, 1996), the Kentucky Music Teachers Association/National Music Teachers Association in 1997 (On Poems of John Keats for String Quartet,) the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Focus On Piano Literature 2000 (Three Episodes for Trumpet and Piano), Michigan State University Bands, John Whitwell, Director of Bands, (Ode And Epinicion), Dialogues for Saxophone Quartet, Winds and Percussion for the Capital Quartet of Washington, DC and the 2005 Falcone Festival Twentieth Anniversary honoring Mrs. (Beryl) Falcone (Fantasia di Falcone for Euphonium).

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Percy Eastman Fletcher, who was born in Derby on 12 December 1879 and died on 10 December 1932 at the early age of 52. He took lessons on violin, piano and organ, the former being his most important instrument. He made his living as a Musical Director in the London theatre world, fulfilling this position successively at the Prince of Wales, Savoy, Daly's, Drury Lane and from, 1915 until his death, His Majesty's Theatre. Soon after going to the latter he directed the very long running Chu Chin Chow and was in fact responsible for much of the orchestration of Frederick Norton's score. Fletcher then composed its successor Cairo, originally entitled Mecca and described as a 'mosaic in music and mime' which ran for 216 performances in 1921, and in 1925, brought out another musical comedy The Good Old Days.

His creative activity was however by no means confined to the theatre. He was a relatively successful composer of ballads, choral music, organ music and suites for small orchestra.

In one respect at least he was a pioneer. Before 1913 brass band festival pieces were invariably operatic selections but in that year Irwell Springs Band won the National Championships at the Crystal Palace with Fletcher's specially commissioned tone poem Labour and Love - other classics specially commissioned as test pieces for the brass band medium were to follow in later years. Fletcher himself was asked again for the National Championships of 1926 and obliged with An Epic Symphony. It was revived as a test piece for the National Championships of 1938 and 1951 and as recently as 1976 in the Open Championship at Belle Vue, Manchester.

Sadly Fletcher's music is little known today (though Vanity Fair is making a comeback in a new wind ensemble transcription) with the lesser interest in light orchestral music, but Labour and Love and the Epic Symphony continue to receive performances as a reminder of Fletcher's finest work.

Philip Sparke was born in London and studied composition, trumpet and piano at the Royal College of Music, where he gained an ARCM.

It was at the College that his interest in bands arose. He played in the College wind orchestra and also formed a brass band among the students, writing several works for both ensembles.

At that time, his first published works appeared - Concert Prelude (brass band) and Gaudium (wind band). A growing interest in his music led to several commissions, his first major one being for the Centennial Brass Band Championships in New Zealand – The Land of the Long White Cloud.

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Further commissions followed from individual bands, various band associations and the BBC, for whom he three times won the EBU New Music for Band Competition (with Slipstream, Skyrider and Orient Express). He has written for brass band championships in New Zealand, Switzerland, Holland, Australia and the UK, including three times for the National Finals at the Royal Albert Hall, and his test pieces are constantly in use wherever brass bands can be found.

A close association with banding in Japan led to a commission (Celebration) from and eventual recording of his music with the Tokyo Kosei Wind Orchestra. This opened the door worldwide to his wind band music and led to several commissions, particularly from the United States. In 1996 the US Air Force Band commissioned and recorded Dance Movements, which won the prestigious Sudler Prize in 1997. In September 2000 he was awarded the Iles Medal of the Worshipful Company of Musicians for his services to brass bands. In 2005 Music of the Spheres won the National Band Association/William D. Revelli Memorial Band Composition Contest. In 2011 he received the BUMA International Brass Award for his contribution to brass music.

His conducting and adjudicating activities have taken him to most European countries, Scandinavia, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Canada and the USA. In May 2000, he took the major step of becoming a full-time composer by founding his own publishing company, Anglo Music Press. The company is devoted to publishing his brass band, concert band, fanfare band and instrumental publications as well as recordings dedicated to his latest works.

Peter Meechan, born January 29, 1980, in Nuneaton England, holds an undergraduate degree from the Royal Northern College of Music, a Master of Arts degree and a PhD (composition), both from the University of Salford. Currently, Peter is proud to hold the post of 'Musical Associate' with the prestigious Fodens Band, based in Sandbach, Cheshire.

The majority of his works have been written for wind and brass instruments, including solo unaccompanied works and compositions for chamber ensembles. His music for brass bands has been performed at festivals and contests across the globe, whilst his music for winds has been featured at festivals throughout Europe and North America, including the Midwest Clinic in Chicago and at the BASBWE International Wind Festival.

Peter's music has been extensively performed, recorded, broadcast and commissioned throughout the world by artists including: Bramwell Tovey, Spanish Brass, Fodens Band, Steven Mead, Black Dyke Band, Eastman Wind Ensemble, the RNCM Wind Orchestra, Kew Wind Orchestra, The Band of the Coldstream Guards, Bones Apart Trombone Quartet, Jens Lindemann, Rex Richardson, Jacques Mauger, Clark Rundell, as well as many leading university wind ensembles in the USA. There are currently over 40 commercial recordings of Meechan's music.

Works are published by G and M Brand, Prima Vista Musikk, Studio Music, and since 2006, his own publishing company, Peter Meechan Music.

Peter Meechan lives in Manchester, UK, with his wife Julie.

Sir Malcolm Arnold was a prolific and popular English tonal composer. He acknowledged Hector Berlioz as an influence, and several commentators have drawn a comparison with Jean Sibelius.

Malcolm began playing the trumpet at the age of 12 after hearing Louis Armstrong play. Five years later he won a scholarship to the Royal College of Music. Here he studied composition with Gordon Jacob and the trumpet with Ernest Hall. In 1941 he joined the London Philharmonic Orchestra as second trumpet and became principal trumpet in 1943. He became a full-time composer in 1948.

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His works are particularly popular with youth and amateur orchestras because of their ease, and because of the accessibility of his unique style, which combines the musical elements of classical, jazz, popular and folk. He wrote a huge body of music, including a large quantity of music for less popular instruments, and nine symphonies, seven ballets, two operas, one musical, over twenty concertos, two string quartets, and music for brass-band and wind-band. He also wrote 132 film scores. In October of each year there is an annual Malcolm Arnold Festival in his birthplace Northampton.

His awards are impressive: Bard of the Cornish Gorseth, seven Honorary Doctorates of Music, Fellow of the Royal College of Music, the Ivor Novello Award, the Wavendon Award, a knighthood, Fellow of the British Academy of Composers and Songwriters, Incorporated Society of Musicians' Distinguished Musician Award, Freedom of Northampton award. He said that music is "a social act of communication among people, a gesture of friendship, the strongest there is".

Simon Dobson grew up in Cornwall in a 'banding' family, his sister playing trombone and his father conducting several local bands. He started his musical career initially playing cornet with Lostwithiel brass '88, then at the age of eleven he moved to Bodmin Town Band. At sixteen, Simon won the Brass Section of the Cornwall Young Composer Competition and quickly followed this with his first commission, a march written for Bugle Silver Band as part of the BBC Music Live festival.

In his mid-teens Simon studied composition at Launceston College under Robert Strike before being awarded a scholarship to study composition under Timothy Salter at the Royal College of Music in London. He soon involved himself with the College's brass band as a player and composer and conducted several of his compositions in college concerts. His first major London commission was offered whilst still in his first year – the London Philharmonic Orchestra asked him to write a concert fanfare, which was given its world premiere at a packed concert at the Royal Festival Hall. Soon after this Simon was commissioned to write for the resident college ensemble Brass 10, the work Three Scenes for Brass received a live performance on BBC Radio 3 to critical acclaim.

A commission from Peter Bassano, the director of the RCM's brass band, was for a piece to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the death of Benjamin Britten. Simon's work entitled Four Sketches: a Homage to Britten was given its world premiere at the famous Charter House School in Surrey and then its second performance the day after at the Royal College of Music. Following on from its success, Simon entered the work for the 2002 European Brass Band Composers Competition held in the Palais'd'Beaux Arts, Brussels where adjudicators Philip Sparke, Tom Brevik and Jan van der Roost awarded him the title European Composer of the Year. The Leyland Band has recorded the work on the CD The Alchemist's Journal. 2002 culminated in Simon being voted Brass Band Newcomer of the Year by the brass band internet site 4barsrest.

Simon was commissioned to write the test piece for the regional competitions for the fourth section of the 2003 National Brass Band Championships. The work, entitled Lydian Pictures (published by Kirklees Music) was a popular choice for these lower section brass bands was used again for the third section at the West of England Bandsman's Festival in June 2004. Following on from this success, the world famous Brighouse&Rastrick Band asked Simon to write a challenging piece for them culminating in Taliesen and the Cauldron, which will be published by Faber Music in 2005.

On the 8th July, Simon conducted Zone One Brass, a brass band made up of students from the Royal College of Music, at Buckingham Palace where they had been invited to play for the Queen and 8,000 guests of the Royal Society of Arts on the occasion of their 250th anniversary.

In 2005, his latest brass band work, Lyonesse, was performed as the test piece for the Finals of the National Youth Brass Band Championships, which was held in Manchester in April 2005.