Solstice Program Notes February 24, 2023

Lee Hartman: Toccata and . . . (2021)

The Toccata and . . . has some of the traditional features of the toccata genre: brilliant virtuoso passagework, rapidly changing sections, and an exciting ending to the toccata section of the work. Distinctly twenty-first century elements are the heavy groove, wild vibrato and rips, and the sputtering return to the opening material to close the toccata. The ‘and’ of the title is the second section, not identified as a separate movement, but functioning as one. Where the toccata is edgy and at the extremes of loudness, the ‘and’ starts with a gentle, lovely filigree of soft eight notes decorated with roulades of embellishment in the flute. The bassoon takes over the roulades while the flute, oboe and horn sing a slow melody. The work ends with murmuring repletion of pitches in different rhythmic groups under a bel canto oboe melody, and a final return of the eight notes and their lovely roulade embellishment.

Amanda Harberg: Suite for Wind Quintet (2017)

A Wind Quintet and a Composer walk into a Bar . . .

Amanda Harberg’s Suite for Wind Quintet was commissioned by the Dorian Wind Quintet in 2017. The piece was a result of a conversation in a bar between Harberg, Dorian’s flutist Gretchen Pusch and Pusch’s husband Richard Bayles, on the occasion of Dorian’s clarinetist Ben Fingland’s 40th birthday party. A year and a half later, the Dorian Wind Quintet gave the world premiere of Harberg’s quintet at Bargemusic, and it has incorporated it into their repertoire ever since. Suite for Wind Quintet is in four movements – 1. Cantus, 2. Furlana, 3. Fantasia and 4. Cabaletta. The melodic material heard at the very opening of the piece can be heard recurring and transforming throughout the four movements, until it united triumphantly in the final coda with the theme of the concluding movement. The piece was inspired by the concept of placing Renaissance and Baroque-inspired dance suites into Harberg’s idiom as a 21st century composer. (From the composer’s website)

Francis Poulenc: Sextet for Winds and Piano (1932, rev. 1939)

Poulenc had an affinity for wind instruments from an early age. “I have always adored wind instruments, preferring them to strings, and this love developed independent of the tendencies of the era [c. 1915-1925]. Of course, *L’Histoire du Soldat* and Stravinsky’s solo clarinet pieces stimulated my taste for winds, but I had developed the taste as a child.” (Interviews with Claude Rostand). Poulenc’s love of winds coupled with his determination to have the piano as an equal in chamber music ensembles lead to the composition of the Sextet. The work was largely composed in 1932 and premiered in 1933 but received mixed reviews. Poulenc revised and published it in 1939. This places this work at the end of his first period of chamber music composition, which includes the *Rapsodie nègre* (1917), Sonata for Two Clarinets (1918), and the Trio for oboe, bassoon, and piano (1926).

Of the Sextet Poulenc wrote “This is chamber music of the most straightforward kind: an homage to the wind instruments which I have loved from the moment I began composing.” The first movement is ternary, with fast outer sections contrasted with a slow, sensuous interlude introduced by a bassoon cadenza. The movement ends with a coda “in which the horn is syncopatedly inebriated.” The Divertissement is also in ternary form, but in the other order, with a lyrical melody in the oboe opening the movement, a gay middle section, and a return of the lyrical melody, this time begun in the clarinet. The work finishes with a rondo serving forth sass in the upper woodwinds, lush melodies in the piano, and rude exclamations in the clarinet. The coda, introduced by the bassoon, suddenly halts the action, and brings the players together in a chant-like melody, alternatively dark and light.

-Program Notes by Shannon Scott