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IMANI WINDS THE FRENCH CONNNECTION: TOUT LE MONDE

Wednesday, March 5, 2025

Virginia G. Piper Repertory Theater

*Presented as part of the Classical Music Inside Out series
Classical Music Inside Out Artistic Director – Zuill Bailey*

*Sponsored by:
Bill Passey and Maria Silva*

Brandon Patrick George, flute
Toyin Spellman-Diaz, oboe
Mark Dover, clarinet
Kevin Newton, French horn
Monica Ellis, bassoon

THE FRENCH CONNECTION:
Tout le monde

A Haitian Tale

Lina Mathon Blanchet
arr. Gil DeJean

Quintet No. 2 (1987)

Jean Francaix

- i. Preludio
- ii. Toccata
- iii. Scherzando
- iv. Andante
- v. Allegrissimo

La Nouvelle Orleans

Lalo Shifrin

INTERMISSION

Suite: Portraits of Josephine Baker

Valerie Coleman

- i. St. Louis 1920
- ii. Les Milandes
- iii. Paris 1925
- iv. Thank you Josephine

The Rite of Spring*

Igor Stravinsky
arr. Jonathan Russell

*Arrangement commissioned by Imani Winds. Premiered March 23, 2010.



Lina Mathon Blanchet (1903-1994)

Haitian Folk Tale

Lina Mathon Blanchet's life spanned almost the entire 20th century. A pianist, composer, dancer, and fearless supporter of traditional Haitian arts, Mathon Blanchet is largely responsible for the preservation of music and art of the voodoo culture of Haiti.

As a child she showed an unusual sensitivity to music, and her parents responded with lessons on the piano; at age 14, she was advanced enough to travel to Paris to study at the Ecole de Notre Dame de Sion. In 1921 she returned to Haiti and founded a conservatory in her home town of Port-au-Prince and used this platform to influence generations of Haitians artists and performers. Her fascination with the folk traditions of indigenous Haiti grew during the 1920s and 30s, and she began traveling to small hamlets in Haiti to transcribe traditional music and dance for her conservatory students to learn.

“Haitian Folk Tale” emerges from the melodies and rhythms she encountered on her field expeditions throughout Haiti. In the opening bars, a quote from a traditional tune is played by the French horn, and is answered sweetly by the flute, then oboe and clarinet join gently. Energetic music reminiscent of the merengue begins the second theme section and joyful dance alternates with the lyrical nostalgia of the opening section.

Jean Francaix [1912-1997]

Quintet No. 2 (notes by Helen Dawson)

Wind Quintet No.2 [1987]

I was somewhat nervous when the Aulos Wind Quintet asked me for a second quintet. Could I do it again? After all, being 75 is not the same as being 40.

–Jean Francaix

True as this may be, Francaix's Second Wind Quintet is as delightful and charming as the first Quintet, and indeed the Wind Quartet, his first piece for a wind ensemble written when he was twenty-two. The first movement of the Second Quintet, moving into the second section, displays an energy and franticness that certainly shows the Aulos Wind Quintet were justified in expecting another feat of compositional excellence. Like his previous compositions for wind ensembles, this quintet is a masterpiece of virtuosity and joy.

The opening begins with a rich, highly textured sound, melody upon counter melody, yet delicate and intricate, perfect music for a summer's day. The second half of the first movement is quick-paced, filled with movement at all levels of the instrumentation, a whirlwind of sound and kinetic energy. The second movement exhibits more contrast between rhythms, melodies and tones from the different instruments. The mood is one of bustle, the music moving forward, until we come to a melody that sounds almost lazy in contrast,



the indolent melody constantly being interrupted by faster, more energetic passages. The third movement opens tentatively, an exquisite melody is the main subject, coming forward again and again, soaring above the accompanying parts. The final movement couldn't be a greater contrast, not only quick paced, but mischievous and witty, requiring extraordinary dexterity from the musicians. The pace changes, led by the horn while the higher register instruments keep the pace alive, fluttering beneath the horn's sonorous notes, although the sense of being propelled forward returns as the music intensifies and ends in a final flourish. However old, Francaix never lost his ability to create music with a youthful lightness and energy. The conversational character of the melodies, and how the different parts interweave are an unfailing source of delight to audiences and performers, and one must assume for the composer himself. And if it's true that you are only as young as you feel, listeners could be forgiven for thinking that Francaix was a carefree twenty-two year old his whole life.

Lalo Schifrin

La Nouvelle Orleans

Born June 21, 1932 in Buenos Aires, Argentina

The son of a professional violinist, Lalo Schifrin studied piano as a boy and graduated from the University of Buenos Aires. He then went to Paris, where he studied with Charles Koechlin, attended

Messiaen's lectures, and played jazz piano in clubs at night. From Paris he went to New York, where he performed with Dizzie Gillespie for several years before moving to Hollywood in 1963. Over the last forty years Schifrin has composed in a number of genres, though he may be most familiar to general audiences for his film scores: he wrote the music for the television shows *The Man from UNCLE* and *Mission Impossible*, and he also wrote the score for the film *Bullitt*.

Schifrin wrote *La Nouvelle Orleans*, for woodwind quintet, in 1987. The music evokes its title, specifically by way of a traditional New Orleans funeral, followed by music one would hear in a "2nd line". The piece is quite clearly a reflection of Schifrin's background as a jazz musician, yet contemporary composer. The uneven rhythmic gait of the beginning leads to long solos for all the instruments. The music gathers more energy, and the final section turns into a jazzy romp. Beginning slowly, this gradually accelerates into music of real verve, making the big band conclusion all the more effective.

Valerie Coleman (b. 1970)

Suite: Portraits of Josephine (notes by Karissa Krenz)

Josephine Baker was more than just the woman whose body emulated "Le Jazz Hot." She was more than the comedic temptress who wowed audiences in Europe as a chanteuse and dancer from

the mid-1920s until her death in 1975. Josephine Baker was an amazingly prescient, progressive thinker whose dedication to racial and religious equality motivated her to break barriers, aid the French resistance during World War II, and fight for civil rights across the globe.

Imani Winds created a biographical, evening length, multimedia program in honor of her centennial, comprised of original and arranged music by two of Imani's members, Valerie Coleman and Jeff Scott, with guest percussionist, dancer and singer, as well as a film component.

Valerie Coleman's musical memoir, *Portraits of Josephine Baker*, represents the behind-the-scenes woman. The suite (shortened from the original full length production that included eight movements) is in four movements, and begins with a representation of her youth, with "Ol' St. Louis."

"Paris 1925" represents Josephine's entrée into stardom! "I wanted to create a lively piece that showed the enthusiasm that Josephine had for Paris, and the daring life of extravagance that she led," says Coleman. With a clarinet solo dedicated to clarinetist Sidney Bechet and the rhythms of "The Charleston" (which Josephine danced), Coleman offers a musical window into the immense joy Josephine felt at the acceptance and success she had in Paris.

"Les Milandes" is a tone poem symbolizing another of Josephine's

great passions—the home in which her “Rainbow Tribe” could live together and prove to the world that race and religion did not matter. She had dreamed of the chateau (named Les Milandes) as the perfect realization of her ideals, and she wanted to found a school there that promoted tolerance and equality. But in spite of Josephine’s continued success as a performer, she couldn’t pay the tax debt on the property. She put up an incredible fight, but lost Les Milandes in 1968.

The final part of Coleman’s work, “*Thank You Josephine*,” is an arrangement of Josephine’s most famous song, “*J’ai Deux Amours*” (I have two loves), and represents her amazing, generous spirit. She often said that she had two loves, her country and Paris, but she had two lives as well: vivacious performer and dedicated human being. Josephine Baker was truly a remarkable individual, and the world is a much better place having had her in it.

Igor Stravinsky arr. Jonathan Russell

The Rite of Spring

Born 17 June 1882

Died 6 April 1971

The Rite of Spring is one of the most revered pieces within the pantheon of contemporary classical music, since its sorted premiere on May 29, 1913. Although it was originally a ballet, this tour-de-



force masterpiece has become a staple of the orchestral repertoire. The first note sets the stage, with a haunting bassoon solo, opening the door to visions of a pagan ritual in which a young girl dances herself to death.

The piece is divided into two parts that include intense and famously complex, multi-meter rhythms, coupled with completely innovative uses of harmony and orchestration. Also Stravinsky is masterful with his use of stark dissonances at one point and the most serene melodic phrases at another.

The Rite of Spring was tastefully excerpted and arranged by Jonathan Russell, a London based composer and clarinetist. The beauty of this arrangement is that although it reduces a 100+ piece orchestra to a wind quintet, it completely captures the essence of the selected sections while still fulfilling the meaning of the entire of piece. The writing is already so exceptionally executed, that the piece is capable of being arranged for a small ensemble with careful placement of voices and pairings of instruments within the quintet, which Mr. Russell achieves.

All of the intricate and beautiful elements that lovers of the piece look for are well within this arrangement and it is a hardy addition to the wind quintet repertoire.