

Xian Zhang Conducts Marsalis & Dvořák

ONE-MINUTE NOTES

Wynton Marsalis *Herald, Holler and Hallelujah* (World Premiere, New Jersey Symphony Co-Commission)

Jazz superstar Wynton Marsalis is equally at home in the worlds of big band jazz, bebop, gospel, Afro-Caribbean and classical music. Initially known as a virtuoso trumpeter, he has branched out to teaching and composition, promoting both jazz and classical music to audiences of all ages. Marsalis began recording his original compositions in the 1980s with his various jazz ensembles. Since the 1990s he has expanded his composition diaspora, writing—among other works—*The Octoroon Balls* for string quartet; ballet scores for choreographers Peter Martins, Twyla Tharp and Judith Jamison; a violin concerto for Nicola Benedetti, and four symphonies. His latest work is a Fanfare for Brass and Percussion, a co-commission from the New Jersey Symphony and the symphony orchestras of Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Baltimore, Milwaukee and Germany's WDR Symphonieorchester. The New Jersey Symphony is the lead commissioner, and this weekend's performances are the world premiere.

Joan Tower *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman No. 1*

In 1986, the Houston Symphony embarked on a new initiative in celebration of the sesquicentennial of Texas' Declaration of Independence. They dubbed it The Fanfare Project. In collaboration with its then-composer-in-residence Tobias Picker, the orchestra commissioned 21 composers to write fanfares. The list of contributors read like a who's who of American composers—but only included one woman: Joan Tower. She chose to model her Fanfare on Aaron Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man*, adopting the same instrumentation as Copland's, and crafting her theme with similar contours to his. Her goal was independent, however: she dedicated it "to women who take risks and who are adventurous." She has since written five additional fanfares, each one dedicated to a different woman.

Antonín Dvořák *Serenade for Wind Instruments in D Minor, Op. 44*

The unusual scoring of this work—pairs of oboes, clarinets, and bassoons, plus contrabassoon, three horns,

cello and double bass—emphasizes intimacy. The lovely colors of the woodwind instruments are enhanced by the warmth of lower strings. Dvořák took a nostalgic glance backward to the wind serenades of a century earlier. While the harmonic language of this cheerful serenade is entirely consistent with Dvořák’s other compositions in the 1870s, its spirit and form are strikingly akin to Mozart’s wind serenades from the late 18th century. Although Dvořák limits his serenade to four movements (classical-era serenades have as many as eight), three of them are dance movements.

Antonín Dvořák *Carnival Overture*, Op. 92

Eight of Dvořák’s nine symphonies precede the *Carnival Overture*. He developed a keen interest in programmatic music late in his career, delving into Bohemian folklore for subject matter. This overture, however, was one of a trio of concert overtures linked by a melody that Dvořák incorporated into each piece. (The other two are *Othello*, Op. 93, and *In Nature’s Realm*, Op. 91.) They were published simultaneously in Berlin in 1894, but *Carnival* has surpassed the other two in popularity. *Carnival* bursts with the giddy whirl of life lived to the fullest. Brilliant string and brass writing, compelling Bohemian dance rhythms, soaring themes and an overriding sense of well-being make this overture irresistible.

Aaron Copland *Lincoln Portrait*

In 1942, less than a year after the United States entered the war, conductor André Kostelanetz asked several American composers to write a piece celebrating a great American. Aaron Copland — who knew a thing or two about infusing music with the spirit of Americana — chose Abraham Lincoln. His *Lincoln Portrait* for narrator and orchestra draws on Lincoln’s writings and speeches, supplemented by a bit of biographical background. The work is exclusively orchestral for nearly half its length, but focuses on the narrator for the balance, with the orchestra receding to a supporting role. The American flavor is enhanced by quotations from a couple of popular songs, including “Camptown Races,” but it is the power of Lincoln’s oratory that carries the work.

Wynton Marsalis: *Herald, Holler and Hallelujah*
(World Premiere, New Jersey Symphony Co-Commission)

Wynton Marsalis

Born: October 18, 1961, in New Orleans, Louisiana

Composed: 2021

World Premiere: These performances are the world premiere.

Duration: 5 minutes

Instrumentation: six horns, four trumpets, three trombones, bass trombone, tuba, a large percussion complement requiring four players, and timpani.

Jazz superstar Wynton Marsalis is equally at home in the worlds of big band jazz, bebop, gospel, Afro-Caribbean and classical music. Initially known as a virtuoso trumpeter, he has branched out to teaching and composition, promoting both jazz and classical music to audiences of all ages. Marsalis began recording his original compositions in the 1980s with his various jazz ensembles. Since the 1990s he has expanded his composition diaspora, writing—among other works—*The Octoroon Balls* for string quartet; ballet scores for choreographers Peter Martins, Twyla Tharp and Judith Jamison; a violin concerto for Nicola Benedetti, and four symphonies. His latest work is a fanfare for brass and percussion, a co-commission from the New Jersey Symphony and the symphony orchestras of Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Baltimore, Milwaukee and Germany's WDR Symphonieorchester. The New Jersey Symphony is the lead commissioner, and this weekend's performances are the world premiere.

Joan Tower: *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman No. 1*

Joan Tower

Born: September 6, 1938, in New Rochelle, New York

Currently residing in Red Hook, New York

Composed: 1986

World Premiere: 1986 by the Houston Symphony in Houston, Texas.

New Jersey Symphony Premiere: These performances are the New Jersey Symphony premiere.

Duration: 3 minutes

Instrumentation: three trumpets, four horns, two trombones, bass trombone, timpani and a full percussion battery comprised of high, medium and low cymbals; high and medium gongs; snare drum; medium and large bass drums; triangle; tam-tam; temple blocks and tom-toms.

Composed in 1986 as part of the Houston Symphony's Fanfare Project, Joan Tower's *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman* has been successful enough to have spawned five additional fanfares between 1989 and 2016. Collectively, they comprise a 25-minute work, but each may be performed individually. Tower's first *Fanfare*, with its titular allusion to Copland's famous *Fanfare for the Common Man*, is both a tribute to that incomparable work and a salute to women who take risks and are adventuresome. Tower's instrumentation is identical to that of its Copland model, and she acknowledges a kinship in the themes. While fanfares by

definition are brief and introductory to larger ceremonial events, even this glimpse of Tower's music gives us a strong sense of her imagination and musical personality.

One of the liveliest voices in American music, Tower has written almost exclusively instrumental music, for ensembles of all sizes. Energy and rhythmic variety have characterized her compositions throughout her distinguished career. An accomplished pianist, she was a founding member of the new music ensemble Da Capo Chamber Players for many years. She broke a glass ceiling for female composers in 1990 when she won the Grawemeyer Award for her orchestral score *Silver Ladders* (1987). *Musical America* named her Composer of the Year in 2020. Tower has taught at Bard College in New York State since 1972.

Antonín Dvořák: Serenade for Wind Instruments in D Minor, Op. 44

Antonín Dvořák

Born: September 8, 1841, in Mühllausen, Bohemia

Died: May 1, 1904, in Prague, Czechoslovakia

Composed: 1878

World Premiere: November 17, 1878, in Prague. The composer conducted members of the Provisional Theatre Orchestra.

New Jersey Symphony Premiere: 1989–90 season. Hugh Wolff conducted.

Duration: 24 minutes

Instrumentation: two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, three horns, cello and double bass.

The unusual scoring of this work—pairs of oboes, clarinets and bassoons, plus contrabassoon, three horns, cello and double bass—emphasizes intimacy. The lovely colors of the woodwind instruments are enhanced by the warmth of lower strings. Dvořák took a nostalgic glance backward to the wind serenades of a century earlier. He composed this cheerful serenade in 1878, and while its harmonic language is entirely consistent with other contemporary compositions by the Czech master, its spirit and form are strikingly akin to the Mozart wind serenades of the late 18th century.

Although Dvořák limits his serenade to four movements (classical-era serenades have as many as eight), three of them are dance movements.

Among this piece's early fans was Johannes Brahms, who wrote with enthusiasm to his friend the violinist Joseph Joachim: "A more lovely, refreshing impression of real, rich and charming creative talent you can't easily have. ... I think it must be a pleasure for the wind players."

Brahms also wrote to his publisher, Fritz Simrock, praising Dvořák's serenade in terms so persuasive that Simrock published the Czech composer's piece as Op. 44. The Brahms/Simrock connection proved to be a significant boost to Dvořák's reputation outside Bohemia. Simrock was to be his principal publisher for the rest of his life.

The serenade opens with a perky march that sounds a bit like a minor-mode version of Elsa’s bridal march from Wagner’s *Lohengrin* (popularly known as “Here Comes the Bride.” the rising fourth motive actually recurs in all four movements, subtly unifying the music.) Dvořák’s march is a quaint reminder of the 18th-century custom of announcing the musicians’ arrival at an outdoor entertainment event. The music is upbeat, demonstrating that minor tonalities do not necessarily mean sad music. The second movement is marked *Menuetto*, but it is really a *sousedská* (“neighbors’ dance”)—a Czech dance in slow triple time that Dvořák also used in his *Czech Suite*, Op. 39. Its middle section is a lively presto. A slow movement follows, more a romantic intermezzo than a dance. Folk dance rhythms return in vigorous and high style for the cheery finale. Toward the end, the composer quotes from the opening march, neatly tying together his musical ideas.

Unpretentious and high-spirited, the serenade is one of Dvořák’s most attractive small-scale orchestral works.

Antonín Dvořák: *Carnival Overture*, Op. 92

Antonín Dvořák

Born: September 8, 1841, in Mühldorf, Bohemia

Died: May 1, 1904, in Prague, Czechoslovakia

Composed: 1891

World Premiere: April 1892 in Prague. The composer conducted.

New Jersey Symphony Premiere: 1977–78 season. Karl Haas conducted.

Duration: 10 minutes

Instrumentation: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, two trombones, bass trombone, tuba, harp, timpani, cymbals, tambourine, triangle and strings.

Nature, Life and Love—that is the title Dvořák initially planned for a series of three concert overtures he composed in 1891 and 1892. Perhaps because Simrock published them with separate opus numbers, *In Nature’s Realm*, Op. 91; *Carnival*, Op. 92; and *Othello* (after Shakespeare), Op. 93, are all known individually and are rarely heard together as the composer intended them. Dvořák biographer Schönzeler calls the triptych “Dvořák’s most important, most misunderstood and most underrated compositions.” He likens them to Schumann’s Overture, Scherzo and Finale, as a sort of three-movement symphony lacking a slow movement.

Village celebrations, captured in music

Carnival has fared the best of Dvořák’s three concert overtures, earning a prominent niche as a curtain-raiser on symphonic programs. Like its companion pieces, it has no association with an opera or stage work but rather was conceived as concert music. Its popularity derives from the exuberant energy of the music, a reflection of the composer’s childhood memories of village celebrations. From the opening cymbal crash, vibrant Bohemian dance rhythms burst forth at a furious pace, rarely relinquishing their hold on our sensibilities.

Big orchestra, bright key center

The overture is in A major, a particularly bright key for strings. To enhance that brightness, Dvořák wrote for one of the largest orchestras he ever employed. Swashbuckling flair and big gestures are the order of the moment in *Carnival*. But to place undue emphasis on the dazzling brilliance of the piece and its clangy loud sections does an injustice to the composer. His quicksilver moods require consummate control from both conductor and orchestra; his customary melodic abundance provides many rich glimpses of individual orchestra talent. The pastoral middle section, marked *Andantino con moto*, is particularly lovely, showcasing English horn, flute, clarinet and violin soloists. Dvořák takes a coy bow to Wagner, referring frankly to the Venusberg music from *Tannhäuser*.

Carnival was dedicated to the Czech University in Prague, and was conducted by the composer at the premiere in April 1892 as part of a farewell concert prior to his American tour. All three overtures figured prominently in the concerts that Dvořák conducted during that visit, but *Carnival* established its preëminence then and has held it steadfastly.

Aaron Copland: *Lincoln Portrait*

Aaron Copland

Born: November 14, 1900, in Brooklyn, New York

Died: December 2, 1990, in Tarrytown, New York

Composed: 1942

World Premiere: May 14, 1942, by the Cincinnati Symphony. André Kostelanetz conducted.

New Jersey Symphony Premiere: 1948–49 season. Canada Lee narrated; Samuel Antek conducted.

Duration: 14 minutes

Instrumentation: two flutes (both doubling piccolo), two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, cymbals, bass drum, tam-tam, glockenspiel, sleighbells, xylophone, celesta, harps, solo speaker and strings.

During the summer of 1942, André Kostelanetz was guest conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony. Kostelanetz sought out several American composers, asking them to express their musical concept of an individual great American. The United States had declared war on Japan the previous December and was now actively involved in the Allied effort to defeat Hitler. With patriotism at fever pitch, a unified war effort drew Americans together as it has rarely done in the past century.

Kostelanetz wanted the piece to reflect American life and the best aspects of this country's ethos and character. "I want to discover what music can do to mirror the magnificent spirit of our country," he explained. Copland was already too old to serve in the armed forces—but he knew how to write the kind of music that would serve and strengthen America's fighting spirit. He selected Abraham Lincoln. He approached his subject in the form of narrative with supporting music. The result was *Lincoln Portrait*, a work cut from the same mold as Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*.

Copland chose the texts for *Lincoln Portrait* exclusively from Lincoln's writings and speeches, excepting some biographical information. The speaker does not enter until almost halfway through the work; however, once the narration has commenced, Lincoln's voice becomes the most significant component of the orchestra. The instruments themselves, after their lengthy introduction, are largely background.

Copland's music incorporates phrases from "The Camptown Races" and "The Pesky Sarpent." These familiar tunes, along with a noble atmosphere that is Copland's own, contribute to the inherent dignity of this American classic.