Graduate Recital: Byron Ward, trumpet
Thursday, September 10, 2020

Program Notes

Giuseppe Torelli (1658 – 1709) composed many works for trumpet and strings during the Baroque period when the trumpet thrived. Being Italian, Torelli spent much of his time in Bologna, where many great pieces for trumpet were created. Bologna’s San Petronio church provided an exceptional acoustical environment for the trumpet and employed the talented trumpet players of the day. While it is unknown the exact date of when Sinfonia avanti l’opera was written, it can be reasonably assumed that it was written between the years of 1679 – 1699 when trumpeter Giovanni Pellegrino Brandi performed at San Petronio for the church’s festivals. Today the music of Torelli is generally played on piccolo trumpet in the key of A, but during the Baroque era his music would have been played on natural trumpets in the key of D. Sinfonia avanti l’opera is in three movements, fast-slow-fast, and the music provides a great opening with triumphant fanfares and trills.

Henri Tomasi (1901 – 1971) is a French born composer and conductor who began his studies of music theory and piano at the age of five. As he grew older, Tomasi would perform in upscale hotels, restaurants, brothels, and movie theaters. This helped develop his composition and improvisations at the keyboard. Tomasi attended the Paris Conservatory and won the Grand Prix de Rome in 1927. In 1948, Tomasi wrote Concerto for Trumpet. At first, the concerto was said to be unplayable, however, later that year it was first performed and received several other performances the following year. While the concerto has the classic three movements, the music of Concerto for Trumpet is far from ordinary. In his own words Tomasi said, “I tried to make a synthesis of all the expressive and technical possibilities of the trumpet, from Bach up to the present including Jazz.” With angular phrases and haunting mute passages, Concerto for Trumpet continues to challenge trumpeters today with its stylistic and melodic content.

Kevin McKee (b. 1980) was born in Yreka, California and attended Sacramento State before moving to the DC area to study trumpet performance as a grad student at the University of Maryland. McKee is establishing himself as a great composer of brass chamber music. In 2011, McKee was commissioned by Catherine Sheridan to write a piece for trumpet and piano. Immediately his thoughts went to his late grandmother Gerturde who had suggested he write a piece with Colorado as the subject. As a reference to the State that was given the nickname of the “Centennial State” for being inducted into the Union one hundred years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Centennial Horizon was born. The two contrasting movements, Aspen Grove and Roaring Gunnison, capture the beauty and adventure of Colorado. The slow first movement pays homage to McKee’s grandmother and paints a serene picture of a beautiful grove of quacking aspens. The quick second movement paints a different picture as if one was rafting down the Gunnison river going up and down and through the rapids. Centennial Horizon is rapidly gaining popularity and becoming a standard work for trumpet soloists.

Alexander Arutiunian (1920 – 2012) studied composition and piano at the Komitas Conservatory in Yerevan, Armenia, where he was born. Afterward, he studied in Moscow with H. Litinsky where he perfected his composition skills and became internationally known through competitions. Arutiunian was inspired by Armenian folk music which can be heard in his operas, cantatas, symphonic works, concertos, and chamber music. Concert Scherzo was written in 1954, four years after his well-known Concerto for Trumpet. Like his concerto, Concert Scherzo requires the performer to double tongue rapid sequences of notes up and down the range of the trumpet. This creates an aggressive and heavily articulated theme which is contrasted immediately by a lyrical theme utilizing syncopations and legato playing. While only 3 minutes in length, Concerto Scherzo provides a challenge for the performer to keep the quick tempo steady and their tonguing light and clear.