

Many instrumental musicians' introduction to the music of **Randall Thompson** is the singing of his *Alleluia* at Tanglewood Music Center's opening convocation, a summer tradition for fellows dating back to 1940. While he is primarily remembered for his choral pieces, Thompson's *Suite for Oboe, Clarinet and Viola* is among his most performed works. The suite is a prime example of the "Prairie Sound" popularized by Aaron Copland and other World War II-era American composers. Utilizing open intervals, spare textures and folk idioms, these composers created the "American" sound that has since been cleverly co-opted by advertisers, film composers and political campaigns to evoke patriotic feeling. The suite features echoes of New England hymns, Scotch-Irish reels and cowboy songs from the Old West. It was one of the composer's favorite pieces and he enthusiastically encouraged its performance during guest appearances across the United States.

Perhaps no work in the classical canon has been as obsessively scrutinized as **J.S. Bach's** *Goldberg Variations*. The piece, which has been commercially recorded more than 200 times, is endlessly fascinating due to a surface level beauty that belies incredible complexity and mathematical precision. It has been described by pianist Jeremy Denk as a "Rubik's Cube of invention and architecture." The oft-repeated (and dubious) origin story of the piece comes from Bach's first biographer Johann Forkel. The story goes that a wealthy count in Dresden "was often sickly and then had sleepless nights. At these times [Bach's pupil Johann Gottlieb] Goldberg, who lived in the house with him, had to pass the night in an adjoining room to play something when the Count could not sleep. The Count once said to Bach that he should like to have some clavier pieces for his Goldberg, which should be of such a soft and somewhat lively character that he might be a little cheered up by them in his sleepless nights." The arrangement for violin, viola and bass performed by Olmos Ensemble is one of dozens of instrumental versions of Bach's masterpiece.

In 1923, **Sergei Prokofiev** was hard at work on his Symphony No. 2 and looking for extra income to tide him over until the commission was complete. The origin of the *Quintet, Op. 39* was as a side commission for a "roving ballet troupe which wished to present a program of several short pieces accompanied by five instruments...The simple plot based on circus life, was titled *Trapeze*." Unfortunately the alternating time signatures of the third movement proved too complex for the company's choreography to work and the commission was abandoned. Prokofiev eventually reworked the unpublished score into a six-movement suite which was premiered in 1927. It is one of Prokofiev's most radical scores, filled with jagged harmonies and irregular rhythms. The unusual instrumentation makes for a particularly unblended sonority, giving the piece a rough, quirky, and appropriately "circusy" sound.

Norwegian composer and violinist **Johan Halvorsen's** *Passacaglia* is one of the most widely performed string duos in the repertoire. Utilizing a theme from Handel's G Minor Harpsichord Suite, Halvorsen spins twelve virtuosic variations in a wide range of contrasting moods and style. The penultimate variation is particularly breathtaking, featuring dramatic scales spanning the extreme low and high register of both instruments.

Program Notes by Jeff Garza.