

Selected Instrumental Works Doug McConnell

A Shining Synergy (2021) Duo: Soprano and alto saxophone

The Heidelberg School of Music and Theatre was proud to add the tremendous talents of saxophonist Josh Heaney to our faculty, starting in January 2021. As it turns out, Josh is one of the most successful students of Dr. Gail Levinsky, my good friend and colleague. Gail has performed on our Heidelberg stage on a number of occasions in the past; it only seemed natural to write a duet for teacher and student to play on this program.

This short piece alternates between slower, more lyric sections, and livelier ones which feature a variety of scales, from octatonic to blues, among other pitch collections. The opening motive is stolen from my incidental music for *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night*, presented by the Heidelberg Theater several years ago. There is nothing wrong with a little “recycling,” as long as it helps to get things rolling.....

While I Run this Race (2019-2020). Piano Trio

Theme: *Guide My Feet While I Run this Race*

Reflection 1: *Bring me joy, while I run this race*

Reflection 2: *Stand by me, while I run this race*

Reflection 3: *Guide my thoughts, while I run this race*

Reflection 4: *Ease my doubt, while I run this race*

Reflection 5:*for I don't want to run this race in vain*

Reflection 6: *I'm your child, while I run this race*

Commissioned by the Helios Trio and the Wyoming Music Teachers Association, *While I Run this Race* is a programmatic theme and variations composition, based on the African American spiritual, *Guide My Feet While I Run this Race*. The ideas expressed by the stanzas of the spiritual were also important to many people during the American Civil Rights era. It is the last line from each stanza that commanded my attention, as the writer implores God to help him/her through life's great challenges:

Guide my feet while I run this race,

Guide my feet while I run this race,

Guide my feet while I run this race,

For I don't want to run this race in vain.

The titles for each movement are borrowed from the stanzas of the spiritual, for the most part. After a very brief statement of the tune itself, the piece presents a series of six reflections or variations. Each movement reflects on its title, using the spiritual in a direct or indirect fashion. Movements four and five run together without a pause, but the other reflections stand as separate movements in the composition.

While I Run This Race is an eclectic work; expect to hear influences from the worlds of spirituals, jazz, and blues, with perhaps a touch of rock in selected places. Overall, I am a thoroughly classical composer in terms of technique and overall harmonic language, but our world features a wide selection of musical styles. This composition attempts to reflect portions of this wonderful diversity.

Ruminating (2014) Oboe and piano

Well, you see, it's like this..... I completed this four-movement piece for oboe and piano, called *Four States of Mind*; everything seemed to be going okay..... something was missing, though and so I thought about this, again and again..... perhaps one more movement was needed to round out the set; good plan! I thought about it and then thought about it some more.....

Suddenly, a chord progression came to mind, one that I had originally jotted down for a vocal project...I listened to it, and thought about it, letting that chord progression run through my mind, again and again....the vocal piece and the chord progression didn't seem like such a good match anymore, but perhaps it would work a whole lot better for the oboe project..... *now* I liked it!

But somehow, this new theme didn't quite fit with the mood and style of the earlier oboe suite. No worries, just keep going.....work it some more, play with it again.....a melody for the oboe emerged: this plan might have potential after all! True, it didn't exactly fit with the previous set of four pieces, but let's keep thinking about it, and let the material evolve.....all of this ruminating kept intruding into the music, producing repeated chord progressions, returning melodies and motives, prominent jazz and blues inflections. There was just no stopping this train now; sometimes, you just gotta go with the flow, for better or worse.....

Perhaps *Five States of Mind* was not intended to be.... I just keep thinking about it and pondering this gig again and again.....

Four States of Mind (2013-14) Oboe and piano, four movements. 12 minutes

Mischievous
Tranquil
Indulgent
Purposeful

All four pieces that appear in this set began years ago as a series of short pieces for solo piano. A young composer wrote the original version, one who was anxious to expand his harmonic vocabulary as he worked with various synthetic scales. A later, more elaborate version of these pieces did not bear good fruit and was discarded after a single performance. Memories of the earlier, more successful pieces remained, however.

This version of the suite has produced a new collaboration between two instruments, the oboe and the piano. Fragments of material from the earlier work have been retained, but are sometimes moved elsewhere, not unlike the painter who decides that a given image is best served by placing it in a different position on the canvas. Other less memorable moments have been cut; you will not miss them! Freshly composed material connects the earlier fragments. In total, you will hear a new piece of music that also hearkens back to an earlier time in my writing. Finally, a version of this material that is ready for prime time!

Your Morning Rises With a Song (2013) Alto saxophone, organ. Commissioned work in memory of Dr. Leanne Fazio. 7 minutes

Leanne Fazio (1944-2013) was a keyboard performer with multiple interests; she performed regularly on the organ, piano, and harpsichord throughout her career as a soloist and as a collaborative musician. For more than three decades, she served as a member of the music faculty at Mississippi State University, in Starkville, Mississippi. She was also an active church musician throughout her career. Leanne used her love of music to build community; those of us who were privileged to work with her will always remember her enthusiasm, her generous spirit, and her sincere interest in everyone who came in contact with her.

Your Morning Rises as a Song, written in memory of Leanne, is a fantasia based on the *Lasst uns erfren*, a hymn tune that dates back to the seventeenth century. This is a tune that would have been well known to Leanne from numerous church services. The title of the piece is a fragment taken from a hymn text, as adapted by Miriam Therese Winter, one that is sometimes associated with this tune.

*“Your morning rises as a song,
And lights of evening sing along....”*

The music is cast in two large sections, as various motives from the well-known hymn tune are gradually introduced and developed. The opening section is slow and meditative; the alto saxophone sings out freely over a more sustained organ accompaniment. A second, faster section, marked “With Joy” in the score works more directly with the hymn tune fragments, using various compositional devices, from imitation to inversion, before building to a final triumphant section.

The Trinity Suite (2012)

C Trumpet, flugelhorn and organ, three movements. Movement Two also features two solo voices, choral voices, and triangle percussion.

Children of Creative Purpose, C trumpet and organ (5')
Great Spirit, Come, Flugelhorn, C Trumpet, voices, light percussion and organ (7' 30")
Their High Communion Find, C Trumpet and organ (7')

Written for Thaddeus Archer and Joan McConnell, *The Trinity Suite* is an exploration of the Holy Trinity. While the three movements are to be presented as a set, performers can select individual movements for recitals.

Children of Creative Purpose: based on the *Holy Manna* hymn tune, which originally appeared in the Columbian Harmony collection of 1829. Some people associate the tune with the text, *God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heaven*, as written by Catherine Cameron. The title of the movement is a phrase borrowed from this text (“Children of creative purpose, serving others, honoring you.”) This fantasia-like movement is a re-working of an earlier organ setting of this tune.

Great Spirit Come..... This movement features the use of flugelhorn with one brief passage for C trumpet. The music also features the use of choral voices; they are asked to perform in various groupings within the audience. The size of the choir may vary, from 20 voices (recommended minimum) to a larger group of singers, depending on local availability. Two vocal soloists are used in the middle section of the movement, and are placed in appropriate places in the nave. Light percussion (2 – 4 triangle players) are also used. The music should surround the audience as much as possible. The movement uses prominent motives from the traditional Southern hymn tune *Prospect*, with choral text taken from the traditional hymn, *The Lone Wild Bird*.

Their High Communion Find: The tune is a traditional African-American melody, which some congregations use for the text, *In Christ There is No East or West*. The piece is a uses a theme and variations approach to feature the tune in several contrasting styles.

Triptych (2011) Trombone, piano, three movements

Spiritual (5')
Hymn for Jan B. ((3')
Drinking Song (4")

Years ago, I wrote a suite of pieces for trombone for my friend and colleague Joel Pugh. They were my first attempt at writing for this instrument, and like most first attempts, I liked certain portions of the work, but

not all. Years later, while working with Joel Shonkwiler, I decided to return to this earlier material and reconsider what I had done before. Five movements shrunk to three, with an overall approach that pleases me more

Spiritual: In the original version, this movement was composed for trombone alone; in the new version, a piano part has been added. The jazz and blues influences are now far more prominent. The freedom of *Every Time I Feel the Spirit*, an African-American spiritual, is in evidence here, although the movement is not a setting of this tune. On occasion, you may hear a motive or two that will remind you of this classic spiritual.

Hymn for Jan B: The name in the title is that of the late Jan Bender, my first formal composition teacher. Jan was a composer, organist and church musician. Born in Holland, he later moved to Germany, where he served in the army during World War II. After the war, he came to America, where he enjoyed a successful career, teaching at various colleges and universities. Jan's approach to composition was conservative; he sent his students through the rigorous teachings of Paul Hindemith's composition treatises. I am a product of this training; while Jan and I disagreed on a number of points, I did benefit greatly from the craft that I learned from him. This brief movement is a tribute to his work as a church musician and his spirit as a teacher. There is a tune (the 17th century tune, *Lobe Den Herren*) that is given a lively and rhythmic setting.

Drinking Song: The historic tune *L'Homme Arme* has been around for centuries; originally a drinking song, the tune was used as a cantus firmus for any of a number of Mass settings of the Renaissance period. This unique combination of the secular with the sacred has always fascinated me; the idea has influenced some of the composition projects that I have completed over the years. This setting, however, has no such goal. It is an earthy setting of the tune that clearly hearkens to the song's barroom intentions! *Drinking Song* was first composed for French horn, years ago; another version for alto saxophone is also available. This latest setting has been modified to fit the trombone.

Another Fine Mess (2011) Flute, guitar. Three movements.

A Normal Deviation (3'30")
The Vices of Our Virtues (3')
Sweet sorrows.....such (3"20")

My daughter Susan came home one day from school and told me that she was learning about oxymorons. She had already obtained numerous lists from the internet, ones that offered hundreds of amusing examples. I looked at page after page of these phrases with their contradictory intent and saw only one thing: titles for musical compositions!

When guitarist Michael Patilla approached me about writing some new pieces for his instrument, I pulled out my oxymoron lists. *A Fine Mess* was born, a series of solo pieces for this instrument. Oxymora were used not only for the titles of movements, but also as tempo markings in the score whenever possible. As a composer, I have often struggled finding titles; my new resource was providing a seemingly endless supply!

Tonight's entries are a new version of the older works, reconstructed for the pleasant combination of flute and guitar. *A Normal Deviation* is derived largely from a motive that is presented in the first measure of the music. From there, the piece "deviates" from its model, presenting this initial idea in a variety of ways. *The Vices of our Virtues* functions as a gentle, John Dowland-like strain, one that operates from its own set of eccentricities, right from the opening tempo marking (*With Harmonious Dischord*). The piece is cast in a simple ABA form, with developmental activity pervading the middle section. *Sweet Sorrows.....such* is a quiet and more sorrowful ballad; the title brought up images of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in my mind. Like the previous movement, *Sweet Sorrows* also relies on a simple three-part structure; the middle section offers contrasting material in a new tonal area.

Go My Children With My Blessing (2010; Revised 2016). Violin and piano. Written in memory of Dr. John Groce, Professor of Chemistry

*Go, my children, with my blessing, Never alone.
Waking, sleeping, I am with you: You are my own.
In my love's baptismal river
I have made you mine forever.
Go, my children, with my blessing – You are my own.*

-Jaroslav J. Vajda (Text copyright 1983, Concordia Publishing House)

We live in troubled times. People from all walks of life, from all historical eras can easily claim their fears. This is all the more reason to remember that no matter how dark the world we inhabit may seem at time, God continues to be with us.

Written in memory of Heidelberg professor John Groce (1930 – 2010,) this short piece for violin and piano is partially inspired by the hymn text above. It also makes use of the traditional Welsh tune *Ar Hyd y nos*, for the violin lines, occasionally in the piano as well. The violin presents the tune in augmentation through the first 2/3 of the work; later, the melody appears in a more straightforward manner, shared by the two instruments.

Many people know *Ar Hyd y nos* for its association with the text for *All Through the Night*. As a result, the tune is given a classical, nocturne-like setting; if the music sounds a bit Chopin-esque at times, that was quite intentional. The harmonies are chromatic at times, and there is some harmonic tension, a reflection of our own existence. But overall, the theme is one of comfort and blessing.

I keep returning to this setting; it first began as a more extensive piece for solo piano. A later version was included as a movement in my piano trio. This third appearance, the shortest of the three, may be my favorite. Sometimes, it pays to keep working with your material.....

Piano Trio (2006) Violin, cello, piano

Fantasia (3:30")
Invention (4')
Nocturne (7')
Song Without Words (5')

A commission from the Ohio Music Teachers Association gave me the opportunity to write for a piano trio for the first time. Two of the movements were brand new; two of the movements had their origin in solo piano pieces that I wrote sometime before. All four movements are unified in their use of borrowed melodies acting as a subtext for the total picture.

Fantasia: This spirited movement uses the *Agincourt Carol* as its inspiration, an English folk tune that dates back to the early fifteenth century. Its origins are tied to Henry V's victory over the French, but in the years since, the tune has also been used with sacred texts. The setting uses melodic material from the carol as the basis for an energetic fantasia that builds in intensity to explosive finish.

Invention: The title says it all; a light-hearted, two-part invention for piano, modeled after J.S. Bach, but with the sensibilities of more contemporary composers such as Webern and Cage. Expect to hear silence as a compositional element, not to mention the use of more extreme octave registers. German Lutheran hymn fragments abound, most notably *Lord Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word*. This movement also exists in a version for solo piano (See Keyboard works)

Nocturne: A quiet, delicate, Chopin-esque movement, one that is inspired by *Ar Hyd y Nos*, a Welsh folksong that some people associate with the text *All Through the Night*. The tune is heard prominently in the outer sections of the work. A contrasting middle section has fragments of the tune, but also is a gentle reminder of the time of day. Based on an earlier work for solo piano (See Keyboard)

Song Without Words: The final movement of the trio salutes the musical contributions of the Shakers, a religious community that dates back to the early years of the United States, and still exists to a tiny extent today. While several Shaker tunes are present, a more prominent one is indeed a song without words, a sacred song that does not actually have a text but was performed to a neutral syllable, in praise of God.

Fantasy for the Beloved (1999) Solo flute

Years ago, I wrote an immense song cycle for soprano, flutes (various) a chamber women's ensemble and piano, called *Songs of the Beloved*. Running more than 50 minutes, the six-movement work presented the thoughts and emotions of a young maid from Shulem, as she awaited for her shepherd lover to join her. Flute writing was very prominent in this work, and I enjoyed the wonderful, florid lines that decorated the text as presented by the solo soprano.

Presenting performances of this extended work is a challenge at best, but I still liked the flute part very much. This separate composition attempts to take some of that material and fashion it into a work for flute alone. *Fantasy for the Beloved* has two large sections. The first is slow and sensual; its inspiration comes from the second movement of the song suite, as the maid dreams of her lover. The second section is lively and shows off the tremendous flexibility of the flute. This music was inspired by the maid's anticipation of the arrival of her lover. Motives and melodies from the original song cycle have been combined into a new fabric, with some new material added.

Langston's Lot (1996) Tenor voice, alto saxophone, piano.

I've Known Rivers
Joy
A Conservatory Student Speaks of Higher Culture
Blues at Dawn
Song to Billie Holiday
Oppression
Daybreak in Alabama

Commissioned by Gail Levinsky and Jackie Edwards-Henry, *Langston's Lot* is a song-cycle for tenor, alto saxophone and piano which celebrates the work of Langston Hughes. The selected texts reflect the poet's sincere love of life, his people and their African- American cultural heritage. Lyric beauty and simplicity dominate the overall style of the poems, a quality which is reflected by the accessible nature of the musical settings. As a poet, Langston Hughes was very influenced by music, especially, jazz, blues and gospel. All of these popular music styles are reflected in the song cycle, combined with traditional classical musical forms and procedures. The composer would like to dedicate this work to the memory of a close friend, Kirk Bollinger, whose eclectic tastes in music and other forms of artistic expression would resonate with those of Hughes himself. (24')

A Burgundian Jazz Suite (1994) Alto saxophone, piano, three movements

Hommage to Gulliaume (4')
Chanson à l'amour (4')
L'Homme Arme' (3'30)

This suite of pieces was originally written for the French horn, once of the few times that I wrote a piece to enter in a competition. At that time, the International Horn Society was calling for pieces for the horn

that incorporated jazz styles. I wrote the suite as a tribute to some of the composers and tunes of the fifteenth century, examined in a contemporary jazz context.

Hommage to Gulliaume: as the title implies, this movement is a tribute to the fifteenth century composer Gulliaume Dufay (1397–1474.) I admire his simple, straightforward musical style, as seen in his Mass settings, among other compositions. This piece uses *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, a Marian hymn, as a sort of *cantus firmus*. In realizing the solo saxophone part, I used melodic techniques that Dufay himself used in his Mass setting of this hymn. If you are a lover of the Burgundian school of composition, you will hear the under third cadences (single and double!) among other stylistic traits of the period.

Chanson à l'amour: A couple of secular tune from the fifteenth century dominates this song-form middle movement, from the pen of Gilles Binchois (1400-1460.) Owners of the Harvard Anthology of Music (HAM) will be able to trace these tunes, which include *De Plus en plus* (A sections) and *Filles à marier* (B section). All of this is translated into a more casual jazz medium, of course....

L'Homme Arme~The historic tune *L'Homme Arme* has been around for centuries; originally a drinking song, the tune was used as a *cantus firmus* for any of a number of Mass settings of the Renaissance period. This unique combination of the secular with the sacred has always fascinated me; the idea has influenced some of the composition projects that I have completed over the years. This setting, however, has no such goal. It is an earthy setting of the tune that clearly hearkens to the song's barroom intentions! A more recent version of this piece for trombone/piano also exists (see *Drinking Song*, from my *Triptych*, listed above.)