

Program Notes

Valerie Coleman

“Red Clay and Mississippi Delta”

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is a light *scherzo* work that references Valerie Coleman’s family background of living in Mississippi. The piece takes inspiration from the juke joints and casino boats that line the Mississippi River to the skin tone of her relatives from the area: a dark skin that looks like it came directly from the red clay. The solo lines are instilled with personality, meant to capture the listener’s attention as they wail with “bluesy” riffs that are accompanied (‘comped’) by the rest of the ensemble. The result is a virtuosic chamber work that merges classical technique and orchestration with the blues dialect and charm of the south.

Kalevi Aho

Wind Quintet No. 1

Kalevi Aho’s Wind Quintet No. 1 unfolds in four movements, each built around vivid contrasts of character, color, pacing, and texture. The work explores the wind ensemble as sometimes unified and sometimes scattered across space, and always in expressive motion.

I. Agitato – Cantando

The opening movement moves between restless, agitated energy and warm, singing lyricism. Rapid, unsettled figures propel the music

forward until a sudden release allows long, cantabile lines to bloom. The listener feels both tension and relief, as if the ensemble is learning how to breathe together.

II. Vivace, leggiero – Allegro marcato

Light, swift gestures open the second movement, skimming playfully across the ensemble. This airy brilliance eventually gives way to sharper, more grounded rhythms. The effect is a shift from sparkling agility to firm, decisive drive, with two sides of the same lively spirit.

III. Marziale, pesante – Furioso

The third movement begins with a heavy, martial tread, austere and deliberate. Without warning, it erupts into a furious whirlwind: fast, fiery, and breathlessly intense. The contrast heightens the emotional impact, releasing energy held back since the opening of the work.

IV. Andante, con tristezza

The finale offers the most poetic gesture of the quintet. There is a reoccurring, intense organ-like choral between horn and bassoon that contrasts with music that takes on a haunting distance, its sadness gentle rather than dramatic. Lines fade into space, creating the sense of a memory dissolving as it is heard. The piece ends not in finality but in disappearance.

Aho’s First Quintet is a study in contrast, motion, and the expressive

potential of timbre. It is a journey from agitation to stillness, from presence to distance.

Paquito D’Rivera **“A Little Cuban Waltz”**

“A Little Cuban Waltz” is a rhythmically lively piece for wind quintet that captures D’Rivera’s signature blend of Cuban flair with jazz syncopations and harmonies. Written in a waltz feel, with both a classical and improvisatory spirit, the work showcases each instrument of the wind quintet, and serves as an homage to D’Rivera’s roots and to the joy of cross-cultural musical dialogue.

In the words of D’Rivera himself, “In the days when my old friends of Imani Winds commissioned me to write a new composition for their wonderful quintet, *DownBeat* magazine had published a note-by-note transcription of the clarinet solo I recorded over my song, “I Missed You Too!” on the CD of the same name with Cuban pianist Chucho Valdés. Said song is a jazz waltz and the present piece is a recreation of the totally improvised solo I played on that historic recording session.”

Stevie Wonder **(arr. Mark Dover)** **“Overjoyed”**

This arrangement is inspired by Stevie Wonder’s intimate live performance of “Overjoyed” on *Saturday Night Live*, featuring only Wonder at the piano. It opens with an eight-bar instrumental

introduction before launching into an odd-metered groove driven by the bassoon, with the remaining winds weaving intricate melodies and counterlines throughout the form. After a full instrumental cycle, the opening returns and gives way to a vocal *tour de force* by hornist Kevin Newton, whose soaring voice floats above the same groove in newly colored lines. The music builds toward a climactic apex, then shifts into an original outro, gradually intensifying into a clarinet solo that carries the piece to the end.

Fazıl Say **“Alevi Dedeler Rakı Masasında”**

Renowned Turkish composer and pianist Fazıl Say is celebrated for his distinctive voice that bridges Western classical music with the folk traditions and spiritual heritage of Anatolia.

“Alevi Dedeler Rakı Masasında” (Alevi Elders at the Rakı Table) is a vivid, imaginative portrait of an intimate gathering of Alevi dedeler or spiritual elders in the Alevi faith, who come together to share music, poetry, philosophy, and rakı, a traditional anise-flavored alcoholic drink.

This chamber work draws inspiration from the mystical and communal aspects of Alevi culture, integrating modal melodies reminiscent of Turkish *makams* (or scales), dance-like rhythms, and expressive phrasing that evokes both storytelling and spiritual

reflection. The music unfolds in contrasting episodes that are lyrical, rhythmic, and improvisatory, all while mirroring conversation, memory, and celebration.

Rather than depict a specific ritual, the piece conjures an atmosphere: one of wisdom, warmth, laughter, and quiet reverie. With its blend of Anatolian soul and contemporary expression, “Alevi Dedeler Raki Masasinda” offers a heartfelt homage to a disappearing oral tradition and a vanishing world of spiritual camaraderie.

Simon Shaheen

(arr. Jeff Scott)

“Dance Mediterranea”

“Dance Mediterranea” is one of Simon Shaheen’s classic compositions. The essence of traditional Middle Eastern sounds met with virtuosic compositional technique is more than apparent in this multi-dimensional, multi-metered piece. It mixes improvisation with block ensemble writing, concluding with a fiery finish. This arrangement stems from the collaboration Imani Winds has established with master oud player, Shaheen.



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