

“How Beautiful - The Music of Barbara York”

Matthew K. Brown, tuba
Maria Thompson Corley, piano
Jason Ham, euphonium

Liner Notes by Barbara York

Concerto for Tuba and Orchestra:

This Concerto was commissioned in 2004 by tubist, Michael Fischer, and the Boise State University Symphony Orchestra. It was my fourth piece for Dr. Fischer, and is subtitled “Wars and Rumors of War”. Since I do tend to write “concept pieces”, there is some programmatic content that proceeds through the development of its underlying musical and emotional structure. Contrary to what its subtitle might suggest, this is not intended to be a political statement about war, but is rather intended to be a philosophical and even rather intimate examination of the personal effect that a war has on those who are in it.

In the first movement, imagine a young soldier in the military reserve, being called up to serve his country. There are calls to patriotism and noble intentions, but behind that there is also something darker, more ominous, unsettled and foreboding. The soldier goes on a long journey, far away from home and arrives at a destination where he is reminded again of what is being asked of him. In this sense, the concept of war here is rather abstract, intellectual and angular, yet behind it is the unexpressed anxiety that tells us that something is amiss.

In the second movement, our hero is thinking of home, family, perhaps a wife or lover, and all things safe and warm. Here we have the concept of “peace”, but this is far from abstract and intellectual - it is filled with longing, and with the intimate and personal images that come to us each, individually, from our own human experience.

In the third movement, we are thrust into the actuality of war. The “alarm bells” are going off and there is a sense of urgency and danger, where nothing is safe and every nerve ending must stay alert to the driving force of the situation around us. There is a pause in the battle, where our protagonist has the opportunity to look around and see the carnage and the waste around him. This is not the glory that he envisioned, not what he thought it would be like, nor what he was told. It is real, and it creates a sick and empty feeling in the pit of his stomach. Before he has time to deal with this or to resolve it, the alarm bells are going off again and he is back in the battle, fighting for his own survival.

Completely aside from the programmatic or philosophical content of the piece, one will also notice a certain influence from the Russian symphonic composers. I have always been very fond of the Russian composers and there is a certain musical “homage” paid to that influence in my life in each of the movements – consecutively to Prokofiev, Rachmaninoff and Shostakovich.

On a personal note, the piano reduction for this piece is, as are many orchestral reductions, rather difficult for the pianist. This rendition, by pianist Maria Corley, is truly exemplary in both musicality and technical execution.

Arioso Gloria:

“Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax” (“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace”) was the text used as the inspiration for this piece. It was the second of several tuba pieces originally commissioned by Michael Fischer and has been widely played in both its tuba and also euphonium versions, even being used occasionally as a required test piece for competitions both in the USA and also internationally. The popularity of this piece has at times surprised me, yet it remains one of my most played and programmed pieces for both instruments. It seems that it has become a welcome addition to the low brass repertoire for both performers and teachers in both studio and concert venues, especially as a contrast to the many complicated and more rhythmic pieces currently available. I was recently asked for a Clarinet version of this piece, which is now available through Cimarron Music Press. Each version is slightly different in both key and piano accompaniment, but the melody remains essentially the same and the piano part is only slightly altered in each case.

Sonata for Tuba and Piano, “Shamanic Journey”:

In Memory of John Griffiths (1948- 2007)

John Griffiths was in many ways a “Shaman of the Tuba”. He spent a lifetime pushing the envelope of what could be done on the tuba and exploring the vast realms of his own musical consciousness to bring back information and inspiration to share with others.

As I was writing this piece, John passed away. I had been having some rather mixed imagery for the piece, and had already planned to subtitle it “Shamanic Journey”. On one hand I was seeing the opening measures as the voice of the Guide/Facilitator of Consciousness that invites one on a journey into the netherworld to explore and bring back inspiration for others. On the other hand, I was also hearing it as the voice of the mythical Charon, the ferryman that takes one across the River Styx to the land of the dead. As I finished the piece, and in light of John’s death I began to feel that perhaps those two images were not so incompatible.

In the 1st movement we hear the voice of the Guide/Charon calling us (and John) to undertake yet another journey into the realms of Consciousness. The 2nd movement depicts the somewhat tumultuous boat ride across the waters of the “between worlds”, a place where we have been before, one that is energetic, even unpredictable and somewhat unsafe, but still familiar and not particularly frightening in that respect.

In the opening measures of the 3rd movement we hear again the voice of the Guide/Charon, calling to reawaken us from our journey. But this time, for John, it is not to reawaken him back into the world from which he has come, the world he has shared with us. This time it is to set him on the farther shore, the culmination of his last Shamanic journey, the one from which he will not return to us.

Some may find the last section of the 3rd movement to be placed a little high in the tuba range. To be honest, that is still somewhat of a compromise in its homage to John Griffiths. John would have probably taken the melody in its original key and simply played it an octave higher. However, for the sake of better writing and in deference to the rest of us poor mortals who are not so daring and such workers of miracles, I have at least pushed the envelope within reasonable limits.

How Beautiful:

How Beautiful was written at the request of Matt and Kristy Brown in memory of their son, Eli Reuben Brown, who passed away on May 19, 2008. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings of peace; who publishes good tidings of good, and who declares salvation; who says to Zion, Your God reigns!” (Isaiah 52:7) This was the text used here.

It was privilege for me to write this piece for the Browns, who shared with me some of their most intimate thoughts and feelings in the process of losing their son. It was a great challenge for me to write this memorial piece for their son and I agonized over it for months. But the Browns became for me not only a great support, but also a true inspiration in the writing of this piece – they also became for me the embodiment of Faith, Hope and Love and a living example that “the greatest of these” is always Love.

This piece has become one of, if not my own favorite of all the pieces I have written so far. It is, as has been said before about my work, “deceptively difficult” (or deceptively easy if you would prefer). The piece was not only extremely difficult to write, but is also more than apparently difficult to play both within its long-breathed phrases and also within its musical and emotional transparency. There is virtually nowhere to “hide” in this piece, either as a composer or as a performer, so one is both assisted and also trapped by and within its simplicity and transparency.

Both Matt Brown (tuba) and Maria Corley (piano) have captured not only its simplicity and transparency, but also its difficulty, in a truly masterful way on this recording. Never be deceived by how difficult it is to play and to perform slower and more lyrical music. Sometimes – even often – this is more difficult than any of the faster, more complicated pieces you will ever present.

How Beautiful should be nothing but that – simple, transparent, emotional, yet sincere and “unaffected” in that sense when it is performed well. Please enjoy this performance in all of those respects as you listen to this recording by two of my most favorite and well-respected artists. This is not a complicated piece technically, but is a very demanding piece both musically and emotionally. The beauty of the sound and phrasing here on this recording, by both of these artists, is extremely gratifying to me.

Suite for Tuba, Euphonium (or Horn) and Piano:

This is my “take” on a more traditional dance movement suite, but with a slightly more contemporary and even psychological twist.

The movements are all in dance meters and rhythms, but the piece itself is very much interconnected in thematic material and almost cinematic in quality. In that sense, the movements make sense individually but will often have a slightly unfinished quality to them unless they also proceed to the next one. You will

notice that the first and third movements begin with the same thematic material, but wind up in different places through their development. I have also chosen to end the piece with the slowest and most introspective of the movements.

To my own mind, the Suite is rather moody and even “quirky” at times without, hopefully, going over the top in that respect. For me it is a bit of the “Bohemian Barbara”, coming out of the bars and cafes of my youth into the misty, late-night streets of cosmopolitan Montreal.

As the subtitle “Dancing with Myself” suggests, I am also reflecting on the fact that all of our relationships/dances with others are all, in many ways, simply relationships with ourselves (or aspects of ourselves), mirrored back to us in our own perception.

The dedication “to JLL and other friends” is in gratitude to certain people with whom I have had relationships mostly in correspondence, yet who have provided me with insights into myself - even sometimes ones that were both revealing and occasionally somewhat uncomfortable for me.

As always, the dance goes on.

A Final Note:

This CD, its recording and the Artists involved with it are very dear to me and also have my unwavering personal affection and professional respect. It takes many, many years – even in many places, even in many countries to find people with whom you can connect so well as both a composer and a player. I am tremendously grateful to Matt Brown, Maria Corley and Jason Ham for the wonderful performances on this recording. I hope for many more years of personal and professional association with all of them in years to come.

As I said before, dance goes on.

Barbara York, 2011

Acknowledgements

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EXTRA SPECIAL THANKS to my mother Kathleen, and my wife Kristy. Without your love and support, I'd be a mess.



Matthew K. Brown, a native of Reading, Pennsylvania, began his musical studies on the classical guitar at the age of seven and started playing the tuba at the age of fifteen. At the age of seventeen he became the grand-prize winner of the Pennsylvania Sinfonia Concerto Competition, and made his concerto debut with the Pennsylvania Sinfonia later that same year to rave reviews: “Brown was exciting.....a tour de force!” (Allentown Morning Call); “The best performance of the {Vaughn Williams} tuba concerto I recall hearing!” (Bethlehem Globe Times).

While a tuba student at Boston University, he began his professional chamber music career as tubist and founding member of the award-winning Paramount Brass Quintet. Mr. Brown went on to study at the Peabody Conservatory of Music at Johns Hopkins University, and he holds degrees from Mansfield University and Michigan State University. His teachers include Sam Pilafian, Phil Sinder, David Fedderly, Robert Shunk, Steve McEuen, and Don Stanley.

A founding member of the Avatar Brass Quintet, he has performed hundreds of concerts throughout the United States, including weekly internationally televised performances from the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Mr. Brown is an active arranger, having arranged and transcribed over one hundred pieces for various brass ensembles, many of which are published by his own publishing company – Hawkeye Music Publications. He is a member of ASCAP.

Mr. Brown has held the principal tuba position with the Palm Beach Opera Orchestra, and has also performed with the Florida Philharmonic Orchestra, the New World Symphony, the Miami City Ballet, Ballet Florida, the Greater Lansing Symphony Orchestra, the Ann Arbor Symphony, the Reading Symphony, the Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra, Alea III, and Ensemble 21.

From 1994 through 2000, he served as a member of the Artist Faculty at the prestigious Harid Conservatory of Music (now the Lynn University Conservatory) in Boca Raton, FL, where he taught applied tuba, coached chamber music, and conducted the brass ensemble. He has also served on the faculty at the Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp, Michigan State University, and Florida Atlantic University where he was a Schmidt Distinguished Teaching Fellow.

Currently, Mr. Brown resides in Reading, Pennsylvania with his wife and three children. In addition to performing and conducting, he is well known as an avid collector and dealer of vintage recordings. He currently teaches tuba at Montclair State University (NJ) and low brass at Franklin and Marshall College (PA). In addition to performing with the Rodney Mack Philadelphia Big Brass, Matt freelances throughout the northeast.

Matthew K. Brown is a Yamaha Performing Artist.

Barbara York has been working in both Canada and the U.S. for over 35 years as a concert accompanist, choral and theatrical music director and composer. Her score and lyrics for the Canadian musical Colette won a Dora Mavor Moore Award (Canada’s version of a Tony) in 1981. She has received commissions from two Canadian symphony orchestras (Mississauga and Saskatoon), the Boise State University Symphonic Winds and the Boise State Symphony Orchestra, plus numerous private groups and soloists in both the US and Canada.

She has presented compositions at three World Saxophone Congresses and at the 2003 International Double Reed Symposium. Her 50-minute scripted, children’s



piece, *A Butterfly in Time* was nominated for a Canadian “Juno Award” for recordings in 2006 and is available through Amazon.com and elsewhere on the Children’s Group label. Her first tuba piece, *Sea Dreams*, was on the required repertoire list for the International Tuba Euphonium Association’s 2004 Young Artists Competition in Budapest. *Conversations*, for Euphonium, Alto Saxophone and Piano, won the Harvey Phillips Award for Euphonium in Chamber Music at the 2006 International Tuba Euphonium Congress. Her *Concerto for Tuba and Orchestra* was recently recorded by Tim Buzbee with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra and is available internationally through Albany Records.

As an accompanist, Barbara plays regularly at school, university and professional concert venues throughout the United States and Canada, has recorded for CBC Radio and has premiered numerous works for other composers at International congresses. Barbara lives in Kansas City, Missouri.



Jamaican-born Canadian pianist **Maria Thompson Corley** gave her first public performance at the age of eight. Since then, she has appeared on radio, television, and concert stages in Canada, the United States, Central America, the Caribbean, Bermuda and Europe, both as a solo and collaborative artist, including performances in Budapest at the Liszt Academy, and in Carnegie Recital Hall, Aaron Davis Hall and Alice Tully Hall, all in New York City. She has collaborated with such artists as Metropolitan Opera soprano Priscilla

Baskerville, and internationally renowned clarinetist James Campbell. Her performances as soloist with orchestra include engagements with the Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Gunther Schuller, the Lancaster Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Stephen Gunzenhauser, and the Allegro Chamber Orchestra, with Brian Norcross. She has also performed with the Philadelphia based Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra directed by Jeri-Lynne Johnson.

Her first CD, *Dreamer*, a collaboration with tenor Darryl Taylor, was released internationally on the Naxos label. Her subsequent discs, on Albany, include a recording of the first twelve of African American composer Leslie Adams’ etudes for solo piano and *Soulscapes*, consisting of music for solo piano by African American women. Her most recent CD is *Of the Father’s Love Begotten: A Contemplative Christmas*.

Her undergraduate work was completed at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, where she studied with Alexandra Munn, whose teachers include Irwin Freundlich. Maria Corley received both Masters and Doctorate degrees in piano performance from the Juilliard School, where she was a student of renowned Hungarian pianist Gyorgy Sandor and she was the only pianist admitted into the doctoral program for the period of two years. She was also chosen to represent her alma mater in a tour of Central America, where she gave performances and master classes.

Aside from being an accomplished pianist, Maria Corley is an author, whose first novel, *Choices*, was published by Kensington. She is also a composer and arranger of music for both solo voice and chorus, with pieces commissioned and recorded by the Florida A&M University Concert Choir, the Tallahassee Boys Choir, and soprano Randye Jones. Her music is published by Walton Music Corporation. Her arrangement of “Steal Away” is featured on Countertenor Darryl Taylor Albany release, *A Charm of Spirituals*.

Maria Corley leads an active and busy concert life. Among her recent appearances include as featured artist at the Epidaurus Festival in Cavtat, Croatia and recent appearances in Canada. Maria Corley is also pianist with the Blue Moon Trio, which recently world-premiered *Haunted by Waters*, written especially for that ensemble by Rusty Banks. Maria Corley is a member of Sigma Alpha Iota.

Now in his seventh year with the West Point Band in New York, **Jason Ham** has established himself as one of America's most active euphonium soloists. Ham studied both music education and euphonium performance at the University of Georgia under the late Dr. David Randolph and David Zerkel. While at the University of Georgia, Ham was the winner of the Atlanta Brass Society Collegiate Soloist Competition (1998), as well as a finalist in the National Music Teacher's National Association Competition (2000). In June of 2001, while still a student at UGA, he won a position with the West Point Band, to be followed by his winning the Solo Euphonium Artist Competition at the International Tuba and Euphonium Conference (Lahti, Finland) just two months later.



Ham is recognized as a pioneer of the euphonium. In October 2004, he participated in the first military to military musical interaction between the nations of the United States and China when he performed with the People's Liberation Army Band in Beijing. His performance there marked the first time that a euphonium had ever been seen as a solo instrument in that city. In September of 2007, he was the first American euphonium soloist to appear in the nation of Argentina, performing at the 3er Encuentro de Tubas y Eufonios, held in Buenos Aires. In April 2009, he gave the North American premiere performance of Bert Appermont's euphonium concerto in New York's famed Carnegie Hall as part of the New York City Wind Band Festival.

Ham is the instructor of euphonium at Montclair State University. This past summer, Ham was established as the Valade Fellow in Euphonium at the Interlochen Summer Arts Camp in northern Michigan, where he teaches annually. A recording of the David Gillingham Euphonium Concerto, titled "Summer of 2008", will be released this autumn by Illinois State University, with Ham as the soloist. He can be found on the web at www.jasondham.com.

Jason Ham is a Yamaha Performing Artist and performs exclusively on the YEP-842 euphonium

