

Diploma Recital at Barnett Hall

April 21, 2023

7:00 p.m.

Dana Sullivan, bass trombone

Kanade Tsurusawa, piano

Vier ernste Gesänge

- I. Denn es gehet dem Menschen wie dem Vieh (Prediger Salomo, Kap. 3)
- II. Ich wandte mich und sahe an
- III. O Tod, wie bitter bist du
- IV. Wenn ich mit Menschen und mit Engeln redete

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

Concerto for Bass Tuba

- I. Prelude
- II. Romanza
- III. Finale

Ralph Vaughan Williams
(1872-1958)

Intermission

Withering Grass

Robert Denham
(n.d.)

Fantaisie Concertante

Jaques Castérède
(1926-2014)

This recital is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Diploma in Music Performance Studies.

We gratefully acknowledge that we are gathered together for this performance on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) people.



Programme Notes

Brahms composed the ***Vier ernste Gesänge/Four Serious Songs*** (1896) for bass voice and piano, the last song cycle he wrote, the aftermath of a series of tragic deaths of those close to him and in anticipation of the death of his dear friend Clara Schumann, who had suffered a stroke. The work is dedicated to the artist Max Klinger in acknowledgement of his series of prints inspired by Brahms's music.

The text of each song is excerpted from the German Lutheran Bible. The designation of the songs as "serious" rather than "sacred" indicates that despite the religious source of the texts, this was meant to be a secular work. The first three texts ("For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts" – Ecclesiastes 3:19-22, "So I returned, and considered" – Ecclesiastes 4:1-3, "O death, how bitter art thou" – Ecclesiasticus 41:1-2) from are from the Old Testament, and deal with death and the futility of the human condition. The last text ("Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels" – 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, 12-13), taken from the New Testament, is more optimistic, reflecting on the value of charity. Together, the songs chart a journey from dark resignation to hope and transcendence, which is heard as each song places more focus on the major mode than the last.

Vaughan Williams's **Concerto for Bass Tuba and Orchestra** (1954) was the first concerto written for solo tuba and remains possibly the most iconic tuba concerto to this day – unlike many tuba works that have been appropriated and dominated by bass trombonists, the Vaughan Williams Concerto is very secure in its reputation as an original tuba piece. It was written for and premiered by Philip Catelinet, principal tuba of the London Symphony Orchestra. Characteristic of Vaughan Williams, the work is infused with the English folk style. There are some humorous touches to the music, like the heavy offbeats in the Prelude and the comically fast runs and trills in the Finale, but the piece is remarkable in its treatment of the tuba as a serious solo instrument. The outer movements are full of virtuosic intricacies, and the lyrical second movement is beautifully sincere.

Withering Grass (2012) by Robert Denham was written for Ilan Morgenstern in memory of Mabel Coulson Fry, who died of cancer. The piece seems to be a journey

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through grief with its mournful wide and dissonant intervals, solemn and resigned before an outburst. Like the reality of wrestling with unpleasant emotions, the music is not always pretty – the angularity of it reflects the alienating experience of grieving while the world continues to turn, and there are moments where anger comes through in the roughness of the sound. But there are also moments of rest and unity, and a listener that embraces the unfamiliar sound world might find a glimmer of peace amongst the instability.

Jacques Castérède's **Fantaisie Concertante** (1960) was commissioned as a jury piece for the Paris Conservatory for bass trombone, French C tuba (which is actually more comparable to a euphonium than it is to the more familiar modern bass tubas), or Bb bass saxhorn (another conical brass instrument similar to a euphonium with a lighter tone). As a competition piece, the work rapidly explores a variety of characters to efficiently showcase the technical and expressive capacity of the performer: a whimsical main theme, a frenetic development, and a calm melody with open intervals evoking Impressionist music. Irregular meters and constantly morphing tonality keep the listener (and performer) on their toes.

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