

PROGRAM NOTES | January 22, 2011

By Robert Kirzinger

Tonight's collection of double concertos demonstrates the modern range of a genre that developed beginning about the end of the 1600s, essentially parallel to the solo concerto. Double and other multiple concertos were quite common in the High Baroque, including lots of examples by Vivaldi and, under his influence, Bach, but the solo concerto dominates the Classical period and beyond, with relatively few notable exceptions—Mozart's two-piano concerto and *sinfonias concertante*, Beethoven's Triple, Brahms's Double—remaining solidly in today's orchestral repertoire. This concert's variety of approaches has as its chronological and stylistic extremes Michael Tippett's 1939 Concerto for Double String Orchestra—one of the composer's first works of significance—and the brand-new, up-to-the-moment world premiere of the Double Concerto for Baritone Saxophone, Percussion, and Orchestra written for BMOP by Pittsburgh-based Mathew Rosenblum. Tippett's neoclassical language and opposition of two string groups is very different from Rosenblum's high-energy, microtonally colored work. Stephen Paulus's Concerto for Two Trumpets and Orchestra and Harold Meltzer's *Full Faith and Credit* feature fairly traditional relationships between the soloists and orchestra within distinctive styles, and all four offer the opportunity for a sense of musical play and virtuosity.

**Michael Tippett (1905-1998)
Concerto for Double String Orchestra**

Sir Michael Tippett—he was made a CBE in 1959 and was knighted in 1966—was in some sense a living dichotomy. He and his music were strongly rooted in the English tradition, particularly a pastoral tradition so evident in the works of composers from Dowland to Vaughan Williams and Benjamin Britten. He also existed, as a composer, on a periphery of the mainstream, in part due to his strongly leftist social leanings, and in part due to the shadow cast on him by Britten's extraordinary brilliance and popularity. Nonetheless he did receive considerable acclaim during his lifetime.

Unlike his younger contemporary, Tippett was no prodigy and made his decision to study music composition formally only in his late teens, at first through books, and then at the Royal College of Music. His parents were perplexed by his choice of career but ultimately supportive. Tippett remained for some time unsure of his own technical gifts, even as early works were performed and received good notices. The beginning of his mature period, stylistically and technically, dates to his mid-thirties, with the ambitious, socially minded, pacifist-oriented oratorio *A Child of Our Time*, which brought him broad recognition upon its first performance in 1944, which was led by Walter Goehr and featured Peter Pears.

Tippett served a prison term for failing to justify his conscientious objection to World War II and refusal to fight (Britten, having managed to do so, sat out the war mostly in the U.S.). He was an avowed Communist, but the social stance of his work was less political than humanitarian. Although he wrote several major instrumental works, including four mature symphonies, a piano concerto, a triple concerto, and five string quartets, his best-known and most important works were vocal. His experience in the 1930s leading a madrigal group cemented an interest in choral forms and counterpoint, putting a stamp on his later style. In addition to *A Child of Our Time*, his *The Mask of Time*, written for the Boston Symphony Orchestra with vocal soloists and chorus and premiered in 1984, is a significant piece, springing from the championing of his music by the conductor Sir Colin Davis. His operas are the foundation of his reputation: *The Midsummer Marriage*, produced at Covent Garden in 1955, was a major event. The later operas *King Priam*, *The Knot Garden*, and *The Ice Break*—the latter two conducted at their Covent Garden premieres by Colin Davis—cemented his place as one of the great dramatic composers of

the twentieth century. In some sense, though, his posthumous reputation has not yet lived up to the mastery and uniqueness of his vision, at least in the U.S.; his music has mostly remained the purview of English conductors.

Tippett wrote his Concerto for Double String Orchestra in 1938-39. Along with his String Quartet No. 1 and the Piano Sonata No. 1, it represents his first work of true technical mastery; it only remained for him to invest his music with the social consciousness that was so important in *A Child of Our Time*. Although his language would expand through harmonic and formal complexity in future years, these works all contain the nugget of his lyricism and rhythmic energy. The Concerto is in three movements, influenced by the Baroque form, fast-slow-fast. In the first movement Allegro con brio, Tippett immediately sets up counterpoint between the two orchestras—high strings in orchestra I, low in orchestra II, then flipped for the second phrase—and the syncopated rhythms are reminiscent of Copland or Gershwin. (Tippett was certainly aware of jazz, and *A Child of Our Time* would explicitly feature American blues idioms.) The music is primarily modal-diatonic, with the clarity of folk music. The Adagio cantabile begins with an archaic-sounding unison in rising fourths, the string textures recalling Vaughan Williams's *Tallis Fantasia*. A solo violin plays the poignant first phrase, answered by the section violins in octaves. Exploratory counterpoint develops the idea, and a passage for solo cello reintroduces the first melody toward the end of the movement. The Allegro molto finale, a strikingly clear sonata form, makes much of an ambiguity between 3/4 and 6/8 meters in the first section. A second, beginning with a rising melody in cellos, establishes 4/4 time as a possibility as well. The movement hints at fugue without ever diving in completely, although counterpoint remains in force in this lilting, utterly charming finale.

Mathew Rosenblum (b. 1954)

Double Concerto for Baritone Saxophone, Percussion, and Orchestra (world premiere)

Mathew Rosenblum was an admirer of baritone saxophonist Kenneth Coon's musicality before ever working with him, which came about when the Raschèr Quartet, of which Coon is a member, commissioned the composer for the piece that was to become *Möbius Loop*, a concerto for quartet and orchestra. In January 2007 the Raschèrs performed *Möbius Loop* with the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, by which time a new commission for BMOP and Coon for the present Double Concerto from the Fromm Foundation was already in place. More recently, in September 2009 (during the Lower Saxony Music Festival), the Raschèrs gave the world premiere of his "science fiction cantata" *The Big Rip*, with the Calmus Ensemble of Leipzig, which commissioned the work.

Rosenblum was born in New York City, received bachelor's and master's degrees from the New England Conservatory, and went on to earn master's and doctoral degrees at Princeton. Since 1991 he has taught at the University of Pittsburgh, where he is now a full professor of music. He also directs Pittsburgh's Music on the Edge (MOTE) new music series. A commission from Sequitur with Pittsburgh Opera Theater and Meet the Composer resulted in the multimedia chamber opera *Red Dust*, which premiered at Pittsburgh's Andy Warhol Museum in May 2007. Other current and forthcoming projects include a music theater piece for the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble based on James Dickey's experimental poem *Falling*, a clarinet concerto for David Krakauer, and a new orchestral work for BMOP.

Arguably the most unique feature of Rosenblum's music is his combination of the pitch worlds of the "traditional" twelve-note chromatic octave and a 21-pitch octave derived from the Just Intonation system, based on natural harmonics. Rosenblum articulates this complex musical space with surprisingly simple means, using clear and rhythmically concise motifs. These he combines into longer lines, layering the lines in ever more intricate patterns, with the push and pull of tempo within individual lines adding a sense of organic unfolding. Rosenblum's rhythmic language parallels the pitch palette, moving gracefully between sharp, definite pulse and fluidity.

This friction between tunings, which exists also within the ensemble, helps to create the harmonic world of the piece, but once the listener is within that environment (which is quickly established),

musical action takes over. In the four-movement Double Concerto, gesture is king: the multiphonics of the baritone saxophone at the start are, in a sense, a theme, which returns at significant points and delineates structure, both within and between movements. A rapid falling and rising scale/arpeggio is a recurring gesture in the first movement. Both are “shared” at least to a point by the percussion solo, although it’s important to realize the percussionist’s fixed-pitched instruments (primarily marimba in the first part of the piece, and later vibraphone) can’t match the microtonal pitches of the saxophone, and in any case the unpitched and semi-pitched instruments form a different sonic grouping entirely. The percussionist writing requires a very physical approach, one that suggests the power of rock music and specifically the personality of soloist Lisa Pegher. Similarly, the multiphonics and other extended techniques of the sax part are linked closely to Kenneth Coon’s playing style.

The concerto is in five movements. The fast opener ends with a notated cadenza for the soloists and a short recapitulating coda. The very brief second movement is slow and highly lyrical. The percussion soloist doesn’t play at all here, but the equally brief third movement is, essentially, the second movement recast with marimba, ending with a second cadenza. The fourth movement nearly balances the first movement in length and heft, beginning with the bari sax improvising on a series of harmonics, a sonority that returns later in the movement. The closing moments of the movement echo the start of the piece. The composer writes:

I remember being very inspired by Ken’s performances with the Raschèr Saxophone Quartet both live and on recordings, and I’m still in awe of his tone, technical ability, and amazing musicianship. As a result, when the Raschèr Saxophone Quartet asked me to compose a new piece for them in 2000 (Möbius Loop), I wound up writing a killer baritone part, very challenging, which Ken took to new heights. After the U.S. premiere of that piece, Ken suggested I write a duo for baritone and percussion, and I countered by offering a double concerto. Soon after, I approached Gil Rose with a recording project idea involving the Raschèr Saxophone Quartet and BMOP which would include Möbius Loop, the Double Concerto, and a piece or two to be named later, and we were fortunate to receive a Fromm Foundation commission for the concerto. The project was conceived in 2003, and after writing an opera and several other works, the Double Concerto was completed last month.

I have always loved Lisa Pegher’s style of performing which often blends the pointed and intense energy of avant rock with the technical expertise of new music, and I have closely followed her career for several years. Lisa is one of the brightest young percussionists in today’s music scene. I therefore seized the opportunity to involve her in this project; it was the perfect fit. It’s a great honor to work with these two close friends and astonishing musicians.

Harold Meltzer (b.1966)

***Full Faith and Credit* for two bassoons and string orchestra**

Harold Meltzer is a Brooklyn-born New Yorker, and it was there that he co-founded the adventurous new music ensemble Sequitur with pianist Sara Laimon and conductor David Amado in 1996. He studied composition with Lewis Spratlan at Amherst College in Massachusetts, with Alexander Goehr at King’s College, University of Cambridge, and at Yale University worked with Martin Bresnick, Jacob Druckman, and Anthony Davis, receiving his master’s and doctoral degrees. He is also a graduate of the Columbia University School of Law and was for a time a practicing lawyer. Meltzer’s reputation as a composer has grown significantly in recent years. In 2004 he was a Fellow of the American Academy in Rome as a recipient of the Rome Prize, and his mixed chamber ensemble work *Brion* was a finalist for the 2009 Pulitzer Prize; he has been recognized also with the Barlow Prize, a Charles Ives Fellowship, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. In October the Naxos label released a recording of *Brion, Exiles, Two Songs from Silas Marner, and Sindbad*, featuring the Peabody Trio with John Shirley-Quirk, Sequitur, and the Cygnus Ensemble. *The New York Times* acclaimed the disc as one of the best of the year. Next week, January 30, the Italian Academy at Columbia University, in New York City, sponsors a celebration of the release. *Brion*—an intricate sextet inspired by Carlo Scarpa’s Brion-Vega cemetery also receives several

performances by a variety of ensembles later this season. He teaches at Vassar College and this summer will be guest composer at the Wellesley Composers Conference.

Meltzer is also a performer; he was harpsichord soloist in his concerto *Virginal* with the American Composers Orchestra, and more than thirty times has delivered the text to his *Sindbad* for narrator and piano trio, based on a short story by Donald Barthelme. Meltzer's music has been performed by The Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group with Ursula Oppens, the Vancouver Symphony, Dinosaur Annex, and many others. For the New York Festival of Song the ASCAP Foundation commissioned his *Beautiful Ohio*, which premiered in May 2010 at Merkin Hall in New York City. Meltzer is currently working on two anniversary pieces for 2012: a Fromm Foundation commission for mezzo-soprano Mary Nessinger and ensemble for Maverick Concerts' 75th anniversary commemoration of Maurice Ravel's death, and a McKim Fund commission from the Library of Congress for violinist Miranda Cuckson and pianist Blair McMillen to mark the 50th anniversary of Fritz Kreisler's death. The Boston Modern Orchestra Project and pianist Ursula Oppens performed Meltzer's *Privacy*, a concerto for piano and winds, in January 2010. His Piano Concerto No. 2 was commissioned by BMOP to be performed by his Sequitur co-founder, Sara Laimon. The concerto will anchor a planned BMOP recording of Meltzer's works.

Whereas *Privacy* was in part a public hearing of individual anxiety, *Full Faith and Credit*, a concerto for two bassoons and string orchestra, was composed initially as a response to the developing movement to legalize gay marriage in California. "Full Faith and Credit" refers to the obligation of one state to recognize the legitimacy of a legal act undertaken in another state. Would a state be *required* to accept the marital status of couples united in a different state? (The question is far from settled.) The composer writes:

The seven sections of Full Faith and Credit were conceived originally as program music about gay weddings and the subsequent reception of the married couples in parts of the country perhaps less friendly to homosexuality. Different aspects of Americana appear in veiled and not-so-veiled ways throughout the piece. The double concerto, which scrambles the order of the "program" into abstract music, was composed chiefly in the fall of 2004 at the American Academy in Rome. It is dedicated to Peter Kolkay, whose exceptional artistry brought the music to life.

The concerto's seven sections are varied in character, the seventh reiterating the first two pages of the opening. The textures are largely contrapuntal, with small gestures in one part fitting into another like pieces of a puzzle. Interestingly and unusually, the two bassoons act almost like a single unit throughout; although they don't play entirely together, each often seems to complete the others' thought like an idealized couple. Also, there is rarely a sense of leader-follower, as one often finds in double concertos, but rather a fundamental equality. The string orchestra's accompaniment is frequently very restrained, sometimes absent entirely, but in some sections—trading off with the bassoons in II, providing a "Blistering" introduction to III—comes to the fore or at least shares equal billing.

Full Faith and Credit was commissioned by Concert Artists Guild for its competition winner the bassoonist Peter Kolkay, with the participation of the Brooklyn Friends of Chamber Music, the San Francisco Chamber Orchestra, and the Westchester Philharmonic. Kolkay gave the premiere with bassoonist Rufus Olivier and the San Francisco Chamber Orchestra led by Benjamin Simon on December 31, 2004, at St. John's Presbyterian Church in Berkeley, California.

Stephen Paulus (b.1949)

Concerto for Two Trumpets and Orchestra

Stephen Paulus was born in New Jersey but from childhood has lived in Minnesota, where he attended the University of Minnesota and studied with Dominick Argento and Paul Feller. He co-founded the American Composers Forum there and has been strongly associated with the Minnesota Orchestra,

serving as its composer-in-residence for many years. He was also composer-in-residence with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. Paulus is as hard-working a composer as one finds today—currently he has some two dozen bespoke projects to complete, including a collaboration with his son Greg, a trumpeter and electronica/jazz composer, for the musicians of the jazz group Fat Kid Wednesdays and the Minnesota Orchestra with conductor/clarinetist Osmo Vänskä. Paulus's music has been performed and recorded by Gil Rose and the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, who released a disc of his *The Five Senses* and *The Age of American Passions* on the ARSIS label in 2005. The author of more than 200 works, the composer has written for all manner of genres, including dozens of choral works and many concertos. His Concerto for Organ and Chorus was premiered by Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Chorus; he has written three works for violin and orchestra and concertos for cello (for Lynn Harrell), piano, and trumpet, among others. He has also written works on commission from the New York Philharmonic, the Cleveland Orchestra, the National Symphony Orchestra, and many other major ensembles.

Paulus is perhaps best known for his operas. He has a longstanding relationship with the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, which commissioned and in 1982 produced his *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, based on James M. Cain's noir novel. (The Boston University Opera Institute will present this work next month, February 24-27 at the BU Theater.) That piece has become one of the most successful and oft-performed opera of recent years, and was the first American opera to be produced at the Edinburgh Festival. Opera Theatre of Saint Louis also premiered his *The Village Singer* and commissioned and premiered *The Woodlanders* and *The Woman at Otawi Crossing*. In 2002 the Juilliard Opera Center premiered his opera *Heloise and Abelard*.

Paulus first became familiar with the great trumpeter and well-rounded musician Doc Severinsen after he had conducted the composer's *Ordway* Overture. He suggested Paulus write a trumpet concerto for him to play with the Phoenix Symphony, where he conducted the orchestra's pops concerts. That piece came to fruition in 1991. The two became better acquainted during Severinsen's tenure as principal pops conductor with the Minnesota Orchestra, which ultimately commissioned the present work for Severinsen and Minnesota principal trumpet Manny Laureano. The concerto was premiered by the Minnesota Orchestra in Minneapolis under Osmo Vänskä's direction in November 2003, and has since received many performances by orchestras throughout the country. Laureano and Severinsen had played together on many occasions in the context of the orchestra's pops performances.

In a letter to the newsletter *The Trumpet Herald*, Laureano related part of his experience of the premiere: "As there was no written cadenza, we found a spot in the 3rd movement where we were able to insert three cadenzas, each lasting a little longer and accompanied by our percussion section. They played everything they could including cowbells and a police whistle! This, while Doc and I improvised on themes from the piece. Then, spontaneously, the conductor (music director Osmo Vänskä) led the orchestra (and ultimately the audience) in rhythmic clapping while Doc and I kept improvising. We wound up keeping it up for all the other subsequent performances." Paulus recalls that the cadenza idea was tentatively abandoned prior to the first performances, but that Vänskä, almost inadvertently, resurrected it by requesting it during a rehearsal. Audience response has been wildly enthusiastic in the concerto's many performances, leading to the rare contemporary circumstance of spontaneously encoring the end of the last movement.

The concerto is in three movements, fast-slow-fast, titled Fantasy, Elegy, and Dance. The relationship between the two trumpets is handled masterfully: sometimes the two act as one meta-instrument, blending notes in such a way that the listener can't tell them apart, sometimes playing a continuation of the same melodic idea. At other times, the two players bounce small ideas off one another, or play a harmonized melodic line. Their relationship to the orchestra is similar: the ensemble is instigator or responder by turns, for example at the very start of the piece, where a violin ostinato figure provides the initial energy, while bassoons and cellos hint at an important later motive. Although Paulus draws little on jazz in his musical language, the energy and flow of his concerto relies on, and provides the soloists with, great drive and swing and room to romp and sing.

