

## Orlando Philharmonic 2005-06 “Phil at Carr” Series – *A Celtic Fantasy*:

Notes provided by David R. Glerum, *Senior Classical Producer/Host* – WMFE-FM/NPR, Orlando

### Malcolm Arnold (b. 1921) – *Four Scottish Dances*, Op. 59:

One of England's most talented and versatile musicians; Malcolm Arnold was born in Northampton on October 21, 1921. During childhood, Arnold's mother, an accomplished pianist, introduced the boy to classical music and purchased for him a trap drum set. He was also encouraged to study violin, but it was the trumpet that ended up capturing his heart. Arnold's interest was spurred along by the strong influence of jazz and in particular the recordings of Louis Armstrong, viewed by Arnold with adolescent idolatry. He obtained his first trumpet in a local instrument shop and took lessons from a Russian teacher who taught the young musician of the value of spending long hours in the practice room. During this period, he also composed regularly and seriously and took to conducting and piano as well.

At the age of only sixteen, he won a scholarship to the Royal College of Music where he studied piano with Hurst Bannister, trumpet with Ernest Hall, conducting with Constant Lambert, and composition with Gordon Jacob. In 1941, his music began to be taken seriously when he won the Cobbett Composition Prize for a *Phantasy String Quartet*. That same year he joined the trumpet section of the London Philharmonic Orchestra and the following year ascended to principal trumpet of the LPO. Arnold would have been happy to remain with the orchestra, having earlier been a conscientious objector. However, he came under considerable pressure to submit to military service and so he joined up to serve a miserable stint in the Army from 1944-1945 as a cornet player in a military band. He hated it. So extreme was his distaste that he actually shot himself in the foot to get out of marching. He later wryly commented, “I hoped I might die from loss of blood.” This resulted in a medical discharge from the military and he was able to return to the London musical scene as a professional trumpeter. He hooked on as second trumpeter for a season with the BBC Symphony Orchestra before being engaged again with the London Philharmonic. His virtuosity was such that he firmly established a reputation as one of the country's leading instrumental virtuosos.

During this period, Arnold stretched his musicianship to include both conducting and composition. He often discussed conducting with the LPO's Music Director, the Dutch conductor Eduard von Beinum. And in 1948, Arnold was awarded a Mendelssohn Scholarship, making it possible for him to travel to Italy to do a year's study at the British School in Rome at the Piazza d'Espagne. From this juncture on, Arnold's trumpet spent most of its time in the case and composition became Arnold's full-time profession.

First attracting public attention with his comedy overture *Beckus the Dandipratt*, Arnold became known for a mastery of orchestration no doubt developed from having spent many years in the midst of a symphony orchestra. Such facility in writing for instruments of all sorts and his irrepressible and keen sense of humor became hallmarks of his compositional style. He went on to write a total of nine symphonies, two operas, five ballets, and ten overtures, including *A Grand, Grand Overture* for three vacuum cleaners, floor polisher, rifle, and orchestra, written for the 1956 Hoffnung Festival.

But when most hear the name of Malcolm Arnold, it is his film music that comes to mind. It brought him his greatest fame and remuneration, and spanned the decades of the 50's and 60's, encompassing some 118 films, including *The Bridge Over the River Kwai* (which won him an Oscar for Best Score in 1968) and *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*. Commenting on his film music, Arnold wrote, “I wrote for films to ensure a living but I was careful what I wrote because it would be heard by a huge audience.” Unfortunately, his considerable financial success as a film composer led some critics to devalue or even dismiss his other works altogether. Time has a way of filtering out such petty and unjust criticism, though, and today Arnold is rightfully appreciated for his wonderfully colorful and effective scoring. His music is tuneful, broad in its range of moods and styles, and always shines in its glorious sound. This sound could only have been cultivated from his unique position of coming to composition from a player's point of view. Few composers have such an encyclopedic knowledge of instrumental techniques and such sensitivity for how each instrument could be used to its best advantage.

Among Arnold's most popular pieces are his brilliant suites of dances written during the period from 1950 to 1989. The English, Scottish, Cornish, Irish, and Welsh dance sets continue to win the hearts of listeners around the world. Of his *Four Scottish Dances*, the composer writes, “These Dances were composed early in 1957, and are dedicated to the BBC Light Music Festival. They are all based on my own melodies except for the first one, the theme of which was composed by Robert Burns. The first Dance is in the style of a slow strathspey, a dance in 4/4 meter with many dotted rhythms [long-short]. The name derives from the strath (valley) of the Spey, where the dance was practiced. The second Dance is a lively

reel. The third Dance is in the style of a Hebridean Song, and attempts to give an impression of the sea and mountain scenery on a calm summer's day in the Hebrides. The last Dance is an energetic fling, which makes a great deal of use of the open strings of the violins."

### **Victor Herbert (1859 – 1924) – *Irish Rhapsody*:**

Victor Herbert was born in Dublin, Ireland on February 1, 1859. When the composer was three his father died, and the family moved to London, where they lived with Herbert's maternal grandfather, the poet, novelist, and dramatist Samuel Lover. The mother, Fanny, soon married Wilhelm Schmid, a physician from Germany. In 1866, the family immigrated again to Stuttgart, where Herbert's blossoming musical talents were encouraged with lessons and a rich cultural environment at home. Taking up the cello early on, he quickly became an accomplished virtuoso and won the first cellist position in the Stuttgart Royal Orchestra. Later, he entered the Stuttgart Conservatory as a composition student of Max Seifriz. While there he began composing songs and more ambitious works in the popular Lisztian style of the day. After rising to the first cellist position in the Vienna Strauss Orchestra, Herbert fell in love with and married Theresa Forster, a leading soprano of the Stuttgart Opera.

Two months later, in October of 1886, the young couple moved to New York City where Herbert began to compose for the musical theater. He met with little success for almost a decade until he wrote his breakthrough show, *Wizard*. It ran for thirteen weeks at the Casino Theater in New York before it went on tour nationally. Before too long, the musical's lilting melodies were being sung, played, or whistled across the country. Herbert's career was now on a roll and he produced even more popular works, such as *Mlle. Modiste*, *The Only Girl*, *The Red Mill*, *Babette*, *Orange Blossoms*, *The Fortune Teller*, and his most famous work of all, *Babes in Toyland*.

Riding the success of his theater works, Herbert was also able to experience success in other genres. His marches, overtures, dance music, and character pieces made regular appearances on many an American orchestral concert program. Particularly popular was his *Irish Rhapsody*, which became so popular that it became inexorably linked to any and every Irish festivity.

### **Peter Maxwell Davies (b. 1934) – *An Orkney Wedding, with Sunrise for Orchestra with Bagpipe Solo*:**

Born on September 8, 1934 in Manchester, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies is one of Britain's most renowned and successful modern composers. He was educated at the Royal Manchester College of Music and Manchester University. Following his graduation in 1957, he won an Italian government scholarship to study with Goffredo Petrasi in Rome. While there he wrote his orchestral work *Prolation*, a work which was performed at the International Society for Contemporary Music Festival in Rome in 1959. It was so successful that it won the Olivetti Prize and helped to springboard the composer's career.

Later that year he returned to England and taught for three years at the Cirencester Grammar School. Previously much influenced by Viennese serialism, his practical experience with children prompted him to develop a theory of education and led to a simpler and leaner compositional sound. With the help of a strong recommendation from Aaron Copland, Davies was able to secure a Harkness Fellowship in 1962 enabling him to study with Roger Sessions at Princeton. Three years later he joined the UNESCO Conference on Music in Education traveling around the world on a lecture tour, becoming in 1966-1967 the composer-in-residence at the University of Adelaide (Australia).

Gravitating once again to Britain, in 1967 Davies helped to organize a contemporary music performance group called "The Pierrot Players" (later renamed "The Fires of London") with composer Harrison Birtswistle, and wrote for it numerous avant-garde theatrical pieces, the best known being *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, a suite dealing with the origins of the madness of King George III. Not all of Davies' works, however, are esoteric and over the years his charismatic and versatile musical personality enables him to reach an unusually large and varied public.

His theatrical works include his operas *Taverner*, *Resurrection*, and *The Doctor of Myddfai*. His orchestral works include some eight symphonies, which *The Times* has called "the most important symphonic cycle since Shostakovich." He has also written numerous chamber operas, concerto, some lighter orchestral works, and major works for chorus, soloists and orchestra including *The Three Kings*, *Job* and *The Jacobite Rising*. More recently Davies has concentrated his compositional efforts on chamber music, and current commissions have included a cycle of ten string quartets which are being performed in their entirety at the Wigmore Hall in London by the Maggini Quartet over a five-year period.

Sir Peter Maxwell Davies was appointed *Master of the Queen's Music* in March 2004.

Davies' *An Orkney Wedding, with Sunrise* was commissioned by the Boston Pops Orchestra in 1985 for its centennial, receiving its first performance under the direction of John Williams. The composer offers this description: "This work is a picture-postcard recording of a wedding on [the island of] Hoy, Orkney, with the guests arriving out of violent weather, the processional, the tuning up of the band, the increasingly inebriated dance, the walk home through the night across the island, then the sunrise (denoted by the entry of the bagpipe.)"