

The Music of Timothy Hagen: Notes on the Program

Blowout

The Jack Kent Cooke Foundation is the extraordinary organization that underwrote my master's degree at the University of Southern California and made it possible for me to study with Jim Walker. To thank them for their generosity, I volunteered to perform at their annual Scholars' Weekend in 2004, 2006, and 2008. By 2008, I had gained a reputation amongst my friends (mostly non-musicians) at the event for playing "outside-the-box" pieces, like Ian Clarke's *Zoom Tube*. When I was packing to depart for DC that year, nothing that was under my fingers at the time felt like quite the right fit. Enter Jim Walker's influence.

Jim had been suggesting for several years that I write a rock-and-roll piece, a la Ian. Over the next 60 hours—on the plane across the country and on the ground in DC—I wrote and subsequently performed *Blowout*. With sounds rooted in different rock traditions from the Beach Boys to Twisted Sister, the piece is an explosion of energy that explores many different ways of blowing to produce sound.

L'histoire du Chat

I have long been jealous that, unless I were to narrate it, there is no place for me in Igor Stravinsky's masterful work, *L'histoire du Soldat*. It is full of wit and energy (and would definitely benefit from a flute part in my most humble opinion). My admiration for this particular work, combined with my lifelong love of fairy tales, gave birth to this piece. The opportunity to write it came from one of my dearest friends and colleagues, Greg Milliren, who is currently Associate Principal Flute of the Minnesota Orchestra and was my classmate in Jim Walker's studio at the University of Southern California from 2005-2006.

In all the years that I have known him, Greg has consistently been a first-rate flutist and an inspiration to me. When he asked me to write something for his second master's recital at USC in the fall of 2006, he was immediately game for this fairy tale piece, based on the age-old "Puss in Boots" story. Due to his technical and musical gifts, I purposely wrote something that would be a challenge. Thankfully, he found the piece rewarding, and I hope you do as well.

In a Yellow Wood

A lifelong Ohio resident, Jack Wellbaum (1922-2011) grew up in Greenville, Ohio and was first inspired to play the flute after hearing a Cincinnati Opera performance of *Lucia* while visiting the Cincinnati Zoo. Though his early professional achievements while still in high school foreshadowed a successful music career, he actually hoped to parlay his flute and piccolo skills to assist with the expenses of veterinarian school. With the onset of the Second World War, Jack served in the United States Navy, after which he settled in Cincinnati, where he completed his studies in flute at what is now the University of Cincinnati, College-Conservatory of Music under the tutelage of Robert Cavally. Jack married Linda Iacobucci and together they had three children: Lisa, Ray, and Laura.

In 1950, he was hired to be the solo piccolo player with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, and would play with this illustrious group for 38 years. A talented administrator, he also served as personnel manager of the CSO for eighteen years, holding both positions for sixteen of those years.

Jack began his tenure teaching flute and piccolo at CCM in 1960. In 1983 he started teaching his renowned weekly piccolo masterclass, a class he taught until his retirement in 2008. The hundreds of flutists who took piccolo class at CCM can attest to the genuine interest he took in each one of them. His practical approach to piccolo playing helped to remove the panic sometimes associated with playing an instrument that is an important part of any working flutist's career. Additionally, the broader flute and piccolo community is fortunate that he recorded his sage advice on orchestral excerpts in the book that he wrote in partnership with Martha Rearick, *Orchestral Excerpts for Piccolo*. His approach to teaching was the perfect combination of honesty and compassion. — Heather Verbeck, Lead Commissioner, *In a Yellow Wood*

Like many other professional flutists, I have found Jack Wellbaum's *Orchestral Excerpts for Piccolo* to be an indispensable resource, full of generous wisdom. Since I never had the good fortune to know Mr. Wellbaum in person, after Heather Verbeck and I first chatted about this commission in 2015, my first mission was to find out as much as I could about him.

In having lengthy conversations with Heather and reading the words of Mr. Wellbaum's colleagues, students, friends, and family, what struck me repeatedly was his overwhelming generosity. Here was a very busy man at the top of his profession—a first-rate orchestral musician, personnel manager, and professor—yet he freely gave time, energy, knowledge, and kindness to anyone in his life who needed it. As someone whose tendency is to withdraw when I become busy, I am moved by Mr. Wellbaum's example. He proved that giving does not have to deplete us; instead, the truth may well be that the more we give, the more we have to give.

Mr. Wellbaum's conscious, continuous decision to give of himself reminded me of "The Road Not Taken," the iconic Robert Frost poem:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

In my mind, the “yellow wood” is the place inside all of us where decisions are made. How many people do you know who decide to give of themselves as freely as Mr. Wellbaum did? He certainly took the road “less traveled by, and that has made all the difference” in the lives of all those who knew and loved him.

To that end, *In a Yellow Wood* explores the moment of decision between light and dark, between opening up and withdrawing. This is an oversimplification, as most decisions are not so easily divided into white and black, yet the piece idealizes Mr. Wellbaum and exhorts us all to give of ourselves to others, whenever and however we can. Along the way, there are subtle and not-so-subtle hat tips to some of the piccolo’s composer-champions, including Mahler, Bartók, and one of Mr. Wellbaum’s personal favorites, Rossini.

In writing this piece, I have found myself inspired to be the best composer I could be and, more importantly, the best person I could be. For this, I offer my profound thanks to Heather, who catalyzed the piece, and to all those who took part in the commissioning consortium. I hope *In a Yellow Wood* brings joy to all those who play and hear it and keeps alive the legacy of Jack Wellbaum, a truly marvelous human being.

Chant

In 2010-2011, the American Composers’ Forum awarded me funding to produce a flute recital series in Los Angeles. The series featured new American music, and one of my works appeared on each program. For the final program in July 2012, I wrote *Chant*, my first solo piece since *Blowout*, with vocal music—specifically from the Medieval period—as the primary inspiration.

When a score calls for a player to simultaneously sing and play, composers generally treat the sound as a single color. *Chant* takes a different route, setting the flute and voice as two opposing characters in a drama. As the oldest instrument, the voice has pride of place in the canon of western art music; after all, opera is still considered the highest musical art form by many composers. As another venerable instrument, it seems reasonable to me that the flute might be jealous of the voice, which brings to my mind the question: in a battle between the two, who would win? This is the question explored in *Chant*.

A Fragile Circle

2012 was a tough year for me, largely due to the events of March-June. Josephine (or Jojo, as I called her) was my cat, and she was nearing her 16th birthday. I had had her from the time I was in ninth grade, which means she had seen me through high school, college, graduate school, starting my career, and two cross-country moves. She became ill with kidney disease in March 2012, and though I did everything in power to help her recover, she died on May 31.

Three weeks later, my mom was diagnosed with stage four cancer. It had metastasized and was everywhere. The doctors gave her six months to live. She was dead a week later, on June 27. I never got to say goodbye.

Using Verdi's *Requiem* as source material, this piece expresses the combination of rage and emptiness, followed slowly by acceptance and healing, that I felt in the aftermath of tremendous loss. I am still grateful to George Pope for allowing me to premiere it with Dianne Frazer as part of the Remembrance and Healing Concert at the 2012 NFA Convention.

Pop

To this day, I remember the first two pop songs I knew as a child: "Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go" by Wham! and "Walk Like an Egyptian" by The Bangles. I was obsessed with these tunes long before I began any kind of musical study and soon moved on to the great 1980s hits of Madonna, Cher, and other pop superstars. Thus, my lifetime love of pop music was born, and it is that love that I honor in Pop.

Many elements of the piece come out of pop music's idiosyncracies: harmonic simplicity, rhythmic complexity and drive, the importance of backbeat, a wide range of percussive sounds, and the use of the voice. Like the best of pop music, the piece is meant to be both fun and challenging.

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