

## Program 1

### **Blue Shades**

**Frank Ticheli (born in 1958)**

*Composed for winds and percussion in 1996; arranged for orchestra in 1999.*  
*Orchestral version premiered in December 1999 in Costa Mesa, California, conducted by Carl St. Clair.*

Frank Ticheli, born on January 21, 1958 in Monroe, Louisiana, joined the faculty of the Thornton School of Music at the University of Southern California in 1991; he is now Professor of Composition at the school. Ticheli (ti-KEL-ee) received his bachelor's degree from Southern Methodist University, where his principal teacher was Donald Erb, and his doctoral and master's degrees from the University of Michigan, where he studied with William Albright, Leslie Bassett, William Bolcom and George Wilson. From 1991 to 1998, Ticheli was Composer-in-Residence with the Pacific Symphony Orchestra in Orange County, California. His compositions, mostly instrumental, include works for orchestra, concert band and chamber ensembles. He has received commissions and grants from the American Music Center, Pacific Symphony Orchestra, Pacific Chorale, Prince George's Philharmonic Orchestra, Adrian Symphony, City of San Antonio, Austin State University, University of Michigan, Trinity University, Revelli Foundation, Indiana Bandmasters Association, Worldwide Concurrent Premieres, Inc., Chamber Music America and other ensembles and organizations. His distinctions include the Charles Ives Scholarship and the Goddard Lieberman Fellowship (both from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters), First Prize in the Texas Sesquicentennial Orchestral Composition Competition, Frances and William Schuman Fellowship from the MacDowell Colony, Walter Beeler Prize, First Prize in the Eleventh Annual Symposium for New Music, Ross Lee Finney Award, Britten-on-the-Bay Choral Composition Contest and Virginia CBDNA Symposium for New Band Music, and frequent summer residencies at the MacDowell Colony and Yaddo; in 2006, he won the William D. Revelli Memorial Band Composition Award from the National Band Association. The recording on the Koch label featuring his *Radiant Voices* and *Postcard* received an Honorable Mention in 1994 from the National Association of Independent Record Distributors (NAIRD). In July 2008, he conducted a new work for massed bands at the Sydney Opera House in Australia; in 2009, he premieres another new work and leads festivals in Beijing and Shanghai. In addition to composing, Frank Ticheli appears frequently as guest conductor of his works at universities and music festivals in this country and abroad.

The composer writes, "In 1992, I composed a concerto for traditional jazz band and orchestra, *Playing With Fire*, for the Jim Cullum Jazz Band and the San Antonio Symphony. That work was composed as a celebration of the traditional jazz music I heard so often while growing up near New Orleans. I experienced tremendous joy

during the creation of *Playing With Fire*, and my love for early jazz is expressed in every bar of the concerto. However, after completing it I knew that the traditional jazz influences dominated the work, leaving little room for my own musical voice to come through. I felt a strong need to compose another work, one that would combine my love of early jazz with my own musical style.

"Four years and several compositions later, I finally took the opportunity to realize that need by composing *Blue Shades*. As its title suggests, the work alludes to the blues, and a jazz feeling is prevalent — however, it is not literally a blues piece. There is not a single twelve-bar blues progression to be found, and, except for a few isolated sections, the eighth-note is not played in swinging style.

"The work, however, is heavily influenced by the blues: 'blue notes' (flatted 3rds, 5ths and 7ths of the scale) are used constantly; blues harmonies, rhythms and melodic idioms pervade the work; and many 'shades of blue' are depicted, from bright blue to dark, to dirty, to hot blue.

"At times, *Blue Shades* burlesques some of the clichés from the Big Band era, not as a mockery of those conventions, but as a tribute. A slow and quiet middle section recalls the atmosphere of a dark, smoky blues haunt. An extended clarinet solo played near the end recalls Benny Goodman's hot playing style, and ushers in a series of 'wailing' brass chords recalling the train whistle effects commonly used during that era."

### **Piano Concerto in F**

**George Gershwin (1898-1937)**

*Composed in 1925.*  
*Premiered on December 3, 1925 in New York, conducted by Walter Damrosch with the composer as soloist.*

Walter Damrosch, conductor of the New York Symphony and one of this country's most prominent musical figures for the half-century before World War II, was among the Aeolian Hall audience when George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* exploded above the musical world on February 12, 1924. He recognized Gershwin's genius (and, no doubt, the opportunity for wide publicity), and approached him a short time later with a proposal for another large-scale work. A concerto for piano was agreed upon, and Gershwin was awarded a commission from the New York Symphony to compose the piece, and also to be the soloist at its premiere and a half-dozen subsequent concerts. The story that Gershwin then rushed out and bought a reference book explaining what a concerto is is probably apocryphal. He did, however, study the scores of some of the concertos of earlier masters to discover how they had handled the problems of structure and instrumental balance. He made the first extensive sketches for the work while in London during May 1925. By July, back home, he was able to play for his friends large fragments of the evolving work, tentatively entitled "New York Concerto." The first movement was completed by the end of that month,

the second and third by September, and the orchestration carried out in October and November, by which time the title had become simply Concerto in F.

Gershwin provided a short analysis of the Concerto for the *New York Tribune*: "The first movement employs a Charleston rhythm. It is quick and pulsating, representing the young, enthusiastic spirit of American life. It begins with a rhythmic motif given out by the kettledrums, supported by other percussion instruments and with a Charleston motif introduced by bassoon, horns, clarinets and violas. The principal theme is announced by the bassoon. Later, a second theme is introduced by the piano. The second movement has a poetic, nocturnal atmosphere which has come to be referred to as the American blues, but in a purer form than that in which they are usually treated. The final movement is an orgy of rhythms, starting violently and keeping the same pace throughout."

Though Gershwin based his Concerto loosely on classical formal models, its structure is episodic in nature. His words above do not mention several other melodies that appear in the first and second movements, nor the return of some of those themes in the finale as a means of unifying the work's overall structure. He was learning as he went, and this Concerto is nothing short of astonishing when it is realized that it was only his second concert work, written when he was just 27 years old. Few other composers could boast of such a successful beginning. Noting the brilliant natural talent displayed in the Concerto, Milton Cross wrote, "[The flaws in Gershwin's large works] become insignificant when placed beside the many strong points: the amazing melodic inventiveness; the never-failing freshness of ideas; the basic feeling for rhythm; the extraordinary instincts which dictated the proper effect and the precise means; the unfailing inspiration in getting the idea required by the big moment. His talent, in short, was a conservatory in itself."

### Symphony in D minor

César Franck (1822-1890)

*Composed in 1886-1888.*

*Premiered on February 17, 1889 in Paris, conducted by Jules Garcin.*

César Franck was a private man, self-effacing and apparently contented. During César's youth, his zealous father tried to push him into the life of a piano virtuoso, even going so far as to move the entire family from Belgium to Paris so that he could take French citizenship and make his son eligible for admission to the prestigious Paris Conservatoire. Much to his father's chagrin, however, César was fit neither constitutionally nor musically to follow this course, and soon after his marriage in 1848, he left *chez Papa* when the rest of the family was out for a walk one afternoon, never giving another thought to the rigorous life of the traveling virtuoso.

The remaining forty years of Franck's life were spent in the relatively quiet world of teaching, organ playing and composition. His teaching was done in a number of colleges in Paris and was mostly devoted to the

organ, though after his appointment as professor at the Conservatoire he did cause some consternation among the regular composition faculty by guiding the creative work of many of his pupils. He was among the greatest church organists of his time, occupying the important post at Sainte-Clothilde in Paris, and he helped to spark a renewed interest in the musical virtues of that great instrument through both his improvisations and his compositions. His playing and teaching left little time for composition, so that activity was relegated to the two hours before he left the house each morning at 7:30. Franck seems to have delighted in his regular work schedule, in his generally halcyon domestic life (though his wife and son offered an occasional barb designed to spur him to greater financial success, to no avail), and in the daily musical practice of his faith. He did not actively seek public recognition for his works, and his first general acclaim as a composer came only four years before his death, with his Sonata for Violin and Piano. His self-possessed attitude and apparent lack of ambition for fame were reflected at the premiere of his Symphony, generally decried by critics, the public and many fellow musicians. Though the evening must have been a disappointment to him, he simply said, "It sounded well, just as I thought it would." It was through his proselytizing students, especially Vincent d'Indy, that the music of this calm, kind man was brought into the limelight, a celebrity Franck never sought for himself.

Franck's compositions show a growing mastery of his art throughout his life, with his greatest and best-known works appearing during his last decade. The Symphony in D minor of 1888 dates from only two years before his death, and is the last of his orchestral compositions. This work, among the earliest of the symphonies produced in France at the end of the 19th century, was a rallying point for those French musicians who desired their country to have a serious concert repertory characterized by profound, sober emotional statement. Franck's Symphony is in three movements, though the second has characteristics of both an *adagio* and a *scherzo*, thereby combining the two traditional symphonic middle movements into a single structure, a technique Franck used in other works. The opening movement, in sonata form, begins with a somber introduction based on a three-note motive heard immediately in the strings. This motive is carried over into the following section in faster tempo and becomes part of the main theme. The second theme, in a contrasting major tonality, is a sweet melody that circles around a single pitch. The second movement opens with an atmospheric accompaniment of harp and plucked strings over which the English horn sings its doleful theme. The middle of this movement is given over to a delicate, *scherzando* scurrying in the strings which, in a masterly combination of two different musical moods, continues as accompaniment when the English horn theme returns. The festive D major finale, another sonata-form design, uses an arpeggiated main theme and a scalar secondary theme among which are woven reminiscences of the two earlier movements. The work ends with a triumphant affirmation of the finale's main theme by the full orchestra.

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