



Flowing Pens from Concord (2009)

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PROGRAM NOTES

Composer Roger Cichy was inspired by the writings of four of Concord's greatest authors and wrote a four-movement piece for concert band based on his interpretation of his feelings about the words of these writers and the places associated with these particular books or essays. As with so many artists in the past, Cichy felt it was necessary to travel to Concord to "come up with ideas" and to "get the feel of the place". He visited Walden Pond, saw the shack where Thoreau lived, saw the flute that Thoreau had played at Walden; visited Orchard House where Louisa May Alcott had lived and had written "Little Women"; saw the desk that her father had built for her; he went to the Old Manse and looked at the surrounding orchards and gardens and river. He said he wanted to soak up the atmosphere of the places and spaces, as well as read the words written by the four authors: to view all this through his eyes, ears, and mind, and draw inspiration from all those senses.

And Cichy wanted there to be contrasts between all of the movements, from the more light-hearted attributes of the very young "Little Women" to the more all-incompassing thoughts about "nature". The words he used to describe the entire piece were: "integrated, interconnected, perceiving things as a whole; so that the audience hears an overall integrated blend"; he said the audience members don't even have to know all the tiny details of the either the words of each book or the compositional process, but he hopes they will be moved by the music itself, the variety in the different movements, and the overall integration of the entire piece.

Both residents of and visitors to Concord continue to be fascinated and inspired by the writings of Hawthorne, Alcott, Thoreau, and Emerson, and continue to visit the Old Manse, Orchard House, Walden Pond, and the entire 'natural' world of this area written about by Emerson and the others. Cichy's piece is a new and different musical perspective inspired by some of the most famous writers in American history, who happened to live and write in Concord. And it is refreshing to hear how these ideas are interpreted by a composer very much of the 21st century; as compared to other composers of past eras, such as Charles Ives.

The Old Manse is an "icon" in Concord, says Cichy, and he wrote a musical 'description' not only of the Manse but also of the surrounding area: the orchards, gardens, willow trees, and river, which he feels are as much a part of the Manse as is the building itself. And he read the words by Hawthorne and thought about the "ghosts of the people who'd been there before", since people who had inhabited the Manse had left old sermons, letters, and other writings there once

they left. So his music 'speaks' to both the iconic building and the writing/the essay by Hawthorne and his words, his philosophies about life and nature.

Regarding "Little Women", Cichy said he would read a chapter, then compose, then read another chapter or two, then compose some more. He spoke about this movement as seeing/imagining the Alcott sisters when they were very young, as children, with a lightness about them, before they became mature women. Cichy said he liked the "melodies" he wrote that reflected that childhood. He further said he was amazed to learn that in 19th century Concord, it was not commonplace for most women to have desks on which to write; and so Bronson Alcott built a desk for his daughter, Louisa May ("Jo" in "Little Women"); Cichy was surprised to see how small a desk it was, and was amazed at how much glorious writing had "come" from such a tiny desk.

"Walden" by Thoreau emphasizes how the author tried to simplify his life by attempting to live at Walden Pond, which inspired the "slow" movement of Cichy's piece. This movement is all about the serenity in Thoreau's "Walden" and his attempts to be at peace with the natural world. Cichy said he was also intrigued by the fact that Thoreau even brought a flute with him to Walden (which flute is now in The Concord Museum) and, thus, wrote a lovely flute solo in this movement of the piece.

Even though Emerson is perhaps more well-known for his writings on philosophy, Cichy chose his book on "Nature" and admitted this was the most challenging movement of "Flowing Pens from Concord" for him to write. In this movement he used a "freer interpretation of this work"; based on the philosophy of nature, on how one perceives things, how one looks at things as a whole. This idea of "integration", of the "whole" is most pertinent in this movement, and reflects both the technical compositional techniques he used in the creation process and the overall spirit of the music. Cichy said that a concert band, even though a large ensemble of 65 members with 34 individual parts written for it in this piece, should be thought of ultimately as a "single ensemble", and he worked to integrate all those 34 parts so that they would blend into one unified whole. He wove a collection of disparate and unique individual parts into a whole, integrating all the different parts so that the band, and ultimately the listener/audience hears a blended "whole" piece of music and not just a variety of individual parts. For example, Cichy said, the percussion parts are an integral part of the overall rhythmic and musical scheme, not just providing "rhythm" as background. Their parts are all integrated with the others, interconnected into the overall blend. And this is very much in the spirit of Emerson's writings on "Nature".

How fitting that the unique history of The Concord Band, formed in 1959 as a marching unit for historic Concord's Patriot's Day Parade, has come "full circle" in a way, back to its "roots" for its 50th Anniversary concert, reflecting, in musical language, the words and thoughts of some of Concord's most well-known and revered authors, words that speak not only to this town and these writers, but to universal truths and ideas and philosophies that transcend place and time.

INSTRUMENTATION

Winds: Piccolo, Flute 1 & 2, Oboe 1 & 2, Bassoon 1 & 2, Eb Clarinet, Bb Clarinet 1 - 3, Bb Bass Clarinet, Eb Alto Saxophones 1 & 2, Bb Tenor Saxophone, Eb Baritone Saxophone

Brass: Bb Trumpet 1 - 3, F Horn 1 - 4, Trombone 1 - 3, Euphonium, Tuba

Percussion: Timpani, Percussion 1 (maracas, bass drum, field drum, crash cymbals, finger cymbals, suspended cymbal, wood block, snare drum, metal wind chimes, tam-tam, chimes, tambourine), Percussion 2 (tam-tam, crash cymbals, celesta [orchestra bells], triangle, vibraslap, vibraphone, suspended cymbal, cowbell, wood block, temple blocks, chimes, sleigh bells, 4 concert toms), Percussion 3 (chimes, orchestra bells, xylophone, vibraphone, triangle)

Strings: String Bass