

# *War and Peace*

**Performed May 3, 2003**

This evening's concert features three works, each touched in some way by the grim realities of war and each providing its own individual response.

*Specimen Days* was commissioned and premiered by Mendelssohn Club in 1992 in conjunction with the centenary of the death of Walt Whitman. Since its premiere it has received a number of subsequent performances and has been commercially recorded on the Koch label. Composer Charles Fussell is Professor of Composition at Boston University, Artistic Director of New Music Harvest, Boston's first city-wide festival of contemporary music, and co-founder and Director of the New England Composer's Orchestra. He earned advanced degrees in both composition and conducting at the Eastman School of Music and also studied at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik. He is the recipient of numerous awards including Fulbright, Ford and Copland Foundation Grants and grants from the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities. *Wilde - A Symphony for Baritone and Orchestra*, an earlier collaboration between Fussell and librettist Will Graham, was runner-up for the 1991 Pulitzer Prize. *Invocation*, also a Mendelssohn Club commission, was featured on NPR's First Art, and he is preparing another commission for Mendelssohn Club to be premiered next season.



Librettist Will Graham is currently Director of Planning and Administration at the Fletcher Opera Institute of the North Carolina School of the Arts. Previously he served as Director of the Opera Institutes at Boston University and at the University of Missouri at Kansas City. He has conducted acting workshops at universities across the country and directed a number of major productions for the National Opera Company, Kansas City Lyric Opera, Minnesota Opera, Opera South and Opera New England. Graham has taken excerpts from Whitman's poems, letters, lectures and diaries as well as original material to fashion the text for *Specimen Days*.



Whitman (1819-1892) burst onto the scene of American letters with the publication of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855. Written in free verse, his poetry was exuberant, expansive, colorful, sensuous, sometimes erotic, and above all, highly personal, much of it being written in the first person and even referring to himself by name. Never shy about self-promotion, he created his own public persona, not only by his poetry but also by publishing 'anonymous' reviews of *Leaves of Grass*. In one oft-quoted passage he describes himself:

"An American bard at last! One of the roughs, large, proud, affectionate, eating, drinking and breeding, his costume manly and free, his face sunburnt and bearded, his posture strong and erect, his voice bringing hope and prophecy to the generous races of young

and old ... He must imbue [his poetry] with himself as he is, disorderly, fleshly, and sensual, a lover of men and women above the whole of the other objects of the universe."

There was little in Whitman's life up to that point to suggest such an extraordinary character. Born in Long Island and living mostly in Brooklyn, he had taught school, built houses briefly, but mostly worked in the newspaper trade. He had been a printer's devil, copyboy, compositor, reporter, editor and publisher, and in fact set the type for the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* himself. It was not an immediate success, although he did send a copy to Ralph Waldo Emerson and received a very favorable reply in return. He continued to add material, and with the third edition in 1860, containing the *Children of Adam* and *Calamus* poems, he began to achieve a measure of success.

A turning point in his life came when his brother George was wounded at the Battle of Fredericksburg in 1862. Whitman left Brooklyn to find his brother (who was fortunately not badly wounded) and ended up spending the rest of the Civil War in military hospitals, serving as an unofficial nurse and social worker. He talked to the soldiers, listened to their stories, wrote letters for them, brought little treats and gifts, chivvied the doctors when he saw patients whom he thought were not receiving adequate treatment, and occasionally even assisted the medical staff. The experience was profoundly moving for him and provided a wealth of material which found its way into *Drum Taps and Specimen Days*, a combination journal and autobiography.

Fussell's *Specimen Days* is a symmetrical work, both in musical form as well as in the arrangement of subject matter. The first movement, *Aerial Voices*, opens with a long orchestral introduction which includes some thematic material that reappears later, most notably a hauntingly beautiful melody which represents the type of Victorian parlor-song style of which Whitman was so fond. This melody is quoted again in the third movement, but actually appears throughout the piece in various rhythmic guises. *Aerial Voices* deals with Whitman's expansive and all-embracing approach to life. Fussell and Graham see Whitman as an aerial or antenna, picking up and amplifying the spirit of a new age (and Whitman certainly did see himself as the archetype of the new American spirit). And in a subtle play on words they also imagine Whitman's spirit soaring above, stretching across the land.

*Calamus Voices* refers to the poems in which Whitman directly confronted his homosexuality. This is the most light-hearted music of the piece, featuring snatches of fiddling tunes and celebrating what Whitman called his need for "comrades." The thumbnail descriptions of Whitman's comrades are his own. The recurring theme of the "red-haired boy on the bridge" serves as a segue into the third movement, *Irretrievable Voices*, in which Whitman's comrades now become the wounded soldiers he nursed during the Civil War. The music first swells to a heroic affirmation of life but then turns poignant as Whitman reflects on how young the soldiers are and how much they suffer (and it is here that the parlor-song melody is reprised.) The music becomes more ominous as the text moves on to one of the most significant events for Whitman, the death of Lincoln. Although they never met, Whitman had a deep admiration and sympathy for the president and was devastated when he learned of Lincoln's assassination. Yet he took

considerable consolation that the Union survived even that challenge as it had survived civil war.

If the second movement celebrated the lives of Whitman's friends and comrades, the fourth movement, *Earth Voices*, becomes an elegy for those that fell. It is a beautiful duet for baritone and alto soli. The chorus enters a cappella at the end with some of the most consoling words that Whitman ever wrote: "Word over all, beautiful as the sky, beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in time be utterly lost." Despite the horrors of death and destruction which Whitman had experienced during the Civil War, he still shared in that 19th century optimism and belief in progress and the perfectibility of man. Fussell ends this section with a deceptive cadence, introducing a tonal ambiguity which may reflect a more 20th century perspective of uncertainty.

The final movement, *Heavenly Voices*, opens, like the first movement, with an extensive orchestral prelude. Just as the first movement showed Whitman embracing life, the last shows Whitman embracing death as a new journey and adventure. And the music comes full circle as it quietly ends with the same phrase "I travel, I sail." taken from the first movement.

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Philadelphian Harold Boatrite's *Choral Elegy* was composed in 1973 for performance by the combined chorus and orchestra of Haverford and Bryn Mawr Colleges. Boatrite (b. 1932) has had a long and distinguished career as an educator and composer. After early studies with Stanley Hollingsworth, he received a fellowship to the Berkshire Music Center in Tanglewood where he studied with Lukas Foss and Aaron Copland. In 1961 he was invited by Rudolf Serkin to serve as composer-in-residence at the Marlboro Festival. For many years he served on the faculty of Haverford College where he taught theory and composition. In 1992 he was appointed composer-in-residence at the Conductor's Institute of the University of South Carolina and currently he serves as contemporary music consultant to the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia. His music has been heard throughout the United States and Europe, most notably at the prestigious Prague International Festival. He has been the recipient of many commissions including the ballet *A Childermas*, for CBS-TV, a *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* for The National Association of Composers, and *Fantasia on a Gregorian Tune for String Orchestra*, *Harpsichord*, *Celesta*, and *Boychoir* commissioned by the Samuel S. Fels Fund.



The text of the *Choral Elegy* is taken from Stephen Crane's bitterly satirical poem *War is Kind*, written in 1899. Crane (1871-1900) is best known for his 1895 Civil War novel *The Red Badge of Courage* but spent most of his short career as a journalist. There was a strong element of social criticism as well as an uncompromising presentation of an often harsh reality in both his reportage and his fiction. He spent several years writing articles about the seamier side of life in New York City before becoming a war correspondent, covering wars in Mexico and Greece before covering the Spanish-American War in Cuba in 1898 for William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal*. While in Cuba he traveled

with the troops and experienced first hand the disillusionment, fear and self-doubt that he had written about in *The Red Badge of Courage*. His sojourn in Cuba also left him with tuberculosis and malaria, and he died in 1900 at the age of twenty-eight.

Crane's reaction to the Spanish-American War is complex. Like many other Americans, he supported the Cuban revolutionaries' struggle for independence from Spain. In 1897 he was even part of an ill-fated mission to smuggle contraband to the Cuban guerrillas. The ship foundered off the coast of Florida and he drifted at sea for 30 hours in an open boat before being rescued. But he was also aware that it was the lurid and sensational articles published by his own employer Hearst and rival publisher Joseph Pulitzer which stirred up public opinion in support of military action, to such an extent that it can credibly be said that Hearst actually started the war. In the end, it was Crane's connection to the ordinary people, to the soldiers and to their families left behind, and to the often grim reality that they faced, which makes *War is Kind* such a powerfully moving poem.

The *Choral Elegy* was premiered in 1973 at the height of the Vietnam war and reflects the composer's own response to that conflict. Boatrite underscores the bitter irony of the text with music that is anything but ironic. The piece opens with muted trumpet calls which swell into music of an almost heroic character as the chorus enters. Boatrite also makes extensive use of polyphony with multiple, overlapping vocal lines, a technique much more associated with the sacred music of Palestrina. These associations are not accidental, for war has often been justified by appeals to heroism or religious fervor. There is also a kind of relentless quality to the music, propelled forward by long passages of restless eighth notes, especially in the polyphonic sections which seem to only pause at cadences before moving on again, like the irresistible, ruthless force of war sweeping onward.

Mendelssohn Club performed the *Choral Elegy* once before in 1982 at a concert devoted exclusively to Boatrite's music in honor of the composer's 50th birthday, sponsored by the Pennsylvania Alliance for American Music.

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Josef Haydn (1732-1809) is a paradoxical figure for us, a truly innovative composer who maintained what we might see as an archaic notion of loyalty and service, remaining in the employ of four different Prince Esterhazys for 48 years! Yet it was the life that Haydn carefully chose and one which offered him a great many advantages. Nor should it obscure his towering genius. It was Haydn who developed the modern symphony from the genial but unsubstantial three-movement style galant. It was Haydn who invented the string quartet. When the impresario Johann Peter Salomon attempted to recruit both Haydn and Mozart to London in 1790, it was the sixty-year old Haydn who accepted the offer and went on to compose some of his greatest works during his six years in London. It was the seventy-year old Haydn who revived an art form



dormant since the days of Handel, the oratorio, and created one of the most stunningly original works in *The Creation*. And it was Haydn more than anyone else who developed the concert mass as a musical form.

Haydn's musical career began as a boy soprano at the Cathedral of St. Stephen in Vienna. He took the opportunity to learn violin and keyboard as well as singing, but the tenure of a boy soprano is necessarily limited and he found himself at 17 on the streets of Vienna with no job, no lodging and no prospects. He barely supported himself by giving lessons, playing organ at one church and singing as tenor soloist at another and performing with the many impromptu musical ensembles which were a feature of musical life in Vienna. His musicianship progressed well enough that he made important contacts which furthered his career: imperial court poet Pietro Metastasio, who engaged him as a clavier teacher; opera composer Nicolo Porpora, who tutored him in music theory; and the Dowager Princess Esterhazy, who persuaded her son to hire Haydn as kapellmeister.

Prince Nicolas I Esterhazy was imperious, as anyone who styled himself Il Magnifico might be expected to be, but he respected Haydn and fully appreciated Haydn's musical genius. He entertained lavishly and lost no opportunity to showcase his increasingly famous kapellmeister. Although Haydn's contract called for his compositions to belong exclusively to the prince, he was allowed to publish freely and his music became so popular abroad that unscrupulous publishers would often affix Haydn's name to music of lesser composers to satisfy the demand. In return Haydn was made an Officer of the House of one of the most powerful families in the Empire, and was rather well remunerated. (And as an Officer of the House he was required to wear a uniform, something which did not bother Haydn in the least. He even bragged about how much money he was able to save from his clothing allowance!) There was a constant demand for his music and a superb orchestra to perform it. He was able to gather musicians together on an impromptu basis to try out new ideas. Secure in his position, Haydn was insulated from the vagaries of the imperial court and the conservatism of the Viennese musical community, and he was spared the relentless self-promotion in which Mozart and Beethoven were forced to engage in order to further their careers.

Haydn's last six masses were written annually for the name day celebrations of the wife of Prince Nicolas II, Haydn's fourth and last Esterhazy. The *Missa in tempore belli* (Mass in Time of War) was composed in 1796. The subtitle *Paukenmesse* (Kettledrum Mass) refers to the prominent role of that instrument, especially in unexpected parts like the *Agnus Dei*. The *Missa in tempore belli* belongs to that same expansive compositional period as his late symphonies and *The Creation*, and it is truly symphonic in concept and scale. As mass settings became increasingly elaborate the musical form became increasingly disconnected from the underlying liturgy. Haydn himself had been a major contributor to this trend. There had been a number of attempts to scale back the musical mass, but when Emperor Joseph II put strict limitations on the use of instruments in a mass in the early 1780s, Haydn's response was to stop writing masses. Haydn was clearly interested in something more than merely setting the text of the mass.

The *Missa in tempore belli* opens like a symphony, with a slow introduction in the *Kyrie* (and the first appearance of the tympani) before moving on to the main theme. The music does not reflect the three-part structure of the *Kyrie* text; Haydn disposes of the second line, "Christe eleison", in a mere four measures. The *Gloria* is divided into three parts, allegro-adagio-allegro, like a miniature Italian symphony. The middle section features a beautifully lyric cello line. The *Credo* is divided into sections that generally reflect the text, but again Haydn is more concerned with the larger musical structure. At the opening, as each voice part enters, it takes a different line of text. Haydn introduces a truncated fugue at the last line, but rather than continue the fugue to the end as might be expected, he instead constructs an elaborate coda with the quartet of soloists and the chorus alternating in an antiphonal manner.

The *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei* contain the most strikingly unusual music of this mass. The *Sanctus* opens slowly, but builds to a rather ominous forte on the text "pleni sunt coeli" before moving to a brief but more genial Hosanna. The *Benedictus* is set largely for the solo quartet, with the three lower voices supporting the soprano melody with detached notes like pizzicato strings. The sense of foreboding continues into the *Agnus Dei*, which opens in a minor key, with the tympani sounding ominously underneath. The music brightens with trumpet fanfares, ending with an unexpectedly dance-like "dona nobis pacem."

France had been at war with Austria almost continuously since the French Revolution, which had greatly traumatized Austria. Marie Antoinette, who was executed in 1793, was the sister of Emperor Joseph II. Napoleon was commander-in-chief of the French armies and was at that time systematically defeating Austrian armies at every turn and despoiling Austria of its Italian possessions. Haydn composed the *Missa in tempore belli* in 1796 while Austria was mobilizing its troops again after an ineffectual peace accord, and some people hear the distant thunder of cannons in the persistent tympani of the mass. If the upbeat ending reflects Haydn's faith in the Austrian army, Haydn was sadly mistaken. The Austrians endured a series of defeats by the French, and Napoleon's armies occupied Vienna in 1805 and again in 1809. Ironically, the French revered Haydn far more than his native Austrians ever did, and set an honor guard around his house to make sure he was not disturbed.

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