

In Concert with the University of Illinois Symphonic Band

The Begian Years • Vol. VIII

- Suite of Old American Dances.....Robert Russell Bennett (20:15)
1. Mvt. I (3:58)
 2. Mvt. II (2:41)
 3. Mvt. III (3:34)
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- ABOUT THIS SERIES -

In order to preserve and make permanent the artistic accomplishments of Dr. Harry Begian at the University of Illinois, Mark Custom Recording Service, Inc. is producing a limited number of compact disc recordings. Compact discs such as this one have been remastered from the original University of Illinois tape recordings made between 1970 and 1984. Works which have been included on this compact disc were selected personally by Dr. Begian. This project was undertaken by Mark Records as a tribute to Dr. Harry Begian and the memory of Vincent S. Morette and his great admiration of Dr. Begian. Many of the older Master Tapes in the recording industry have undergone a chemical change between the acetate and the polyester substrate binding that holds them together. To keep the original integrity and historical perspective, the compact discs in this series have not been altered to compensate for these changes.

Robert Russell Bennett (1894-1980) was a gifted arranger and composer who had an enormous impact on American music, especially musical theatre. The musical arrangements and shows which came to be associated with the “Broadway Sound” are directly attributed to Bennett and those whom he influenced. A listing of some 200 shows orchestrated by Bennett includes some of the biggest Broadway hits of all time including *Oklahoma*, *Show Boat*, *The King and I*, *My Fair Lady*, and *The Sound of Music*. In addition to his consummate skill as an arranger, Bennett maintained an active career as a composer including significant work in chamber music, opera, symphonies, band compositions, instrumental sonatas, and film scores.

Bennett’s own musical training was influenced by his father, a professional musician, as well as by his association with army bands as a conductor, arranger, and composer. Beginning in 1926, Bennett spent six years of study in Europe, including four years of music composition with Nadia Boulanger in Paris.

Suite of Old American Dances is an original and much beloved five-movement work for band written in 1950. With this piece, now a staple in band repertoire, Bennett sought to depict the mood of a Saturday night barn dance, with all of the usual festivity and excitement. Bennett recalls several of the characteristic turn-of-the-century dances from his childhood days in Kansas City, Missouri. The music has been described by Bennett as “native American dance forms ... treated in a ‘riot’ of instrumental colors.” The dances of the suite, comprising five movements, include the *Cake Walk*, *Schottische*, *Western One-Step*, *Wallflower Waltz* and *Rag*. The orchestration of *Suite of Old American Dances* exemplifies Robert Russell Bennett at his very best. The musical ideas embrace a wide range of emotion from festive to humorous to poignant, with a seamless flow of melodic genius.

H. Owen Reed (b. 1910) received his graduate degrees from Louisiana State University and the Eastman School of Music, studying with Bohuslav Martinu, Howard Hanson, and Roy Harris. Reed taught for many years at Michigan State University, retiring in 1976, and was the author of several textbooks. His best-known composition is *La Fiesta Mexicana*, a suite for band which he also transcribed for orchestra. In 1975, Reed won the Kjos Memorial Award with his band score, *For the Unfortunate*.

La Fiesta Mexicana was written after Reed had spent a year in Mexico studying folk music and composing on a Guggenheim Fellowship. The work depicts a religious festival dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary and faithfully represents all of the contrasts and contradictions of these festivals. It is both serious and comical, festive and solemn, devout and pagan, boisterous and tender. The first movement, “Prelude and Aztec Dance,” opens with the

traditional pealing of the church bells and the noise of fireworks announcing the beginning of the fiesta. The main part of the movement represents a midday parade featuring a group of brilliantly plumed and masked Aztec dancers who dance with increasing frenzy to a dramatic climax. The second movement, titled "Mass," is of a serious, liturgical nature. The principal theme is chant-like and it is set amid coloristic sections representing the tolling of church bells. The last movement, appropriately named "Carnival," is given over to unceasing entertainment and celebration. At the beginning of the movement, the itinerant circus is heard, followed by the market, the bull fight, the town band, and finally the *cantinas* with their band of *mariachis*.

Samuel Barber (1910-1981) was a highly successful and gifted American composer. Growing up near Philadelphia, Barber studied piano as a young child and attempted to compose an opera at age 10. When he was 14, Barber entered the Curtis Institute of Music where he studied piano, composition, singing, and conducting. It was, of course, composing which held the most interest for young Barber. His compositional style tended toward a lyrical and romantic orientation, avoiding the more fashionable dissonant trend of his generation. In 1935, Barber received a Pulitzer scholarship, as well as the American *Prix de Rome*. While studying in Europe during the 1930's, Barber composed his *Symphony No. 1*, in one movement, which became the first American work to be presented at the Salzburg Festival of Contemporary Music in 1937. It was Maestro Arturo Toscanini, however, who catapulted Barber to worldwide fame in 1938 when the NBC Symphony Orchestra performed his *Essay for Orchestra No. 1* and *Adagio for Strings*, the latter of which has become one of the most popular works in the orchestral repertoire.

The Overture to the School for Scandal was composed for orchestra in 1931 as Barber was completing his studies at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. The Philadelphia Orchestra premiered the piece at Robin Hood Dell in 1933 with Alexander Smallens conducting. The *Overture* was inspired by a comedy of the same title by Irish playwright Richard Sheridan (1751-1816). A bubbling sense of merriment, with mischievous undertones, runs throughout the composition. The delightful and challenging overture was transcribed for concert band by Frank Hudson.

Few contemporary American composers of the first rank have shown more active interest in providing music for wind and percussion instruments of the concert band than **Paul Creston** (1906-1985). His ten works for band include such major contributions as *Legend*, *Zanoni*, *Celebration Overture*, *Prelude and Dance*, and *Anatolia*. His thirty-five major works for orchestra include five symphonies, his *Symphony No. 2* having been performed by the New York Philharmonic in 1945. Creston has also written extensively for solo winds and chamber

groups including concertos for saxophone, trombone, harp, accordion, and marimba. A native of New York City, he was completely self-taught as a composer. Though obliged at an early age to work for a living, his parents recognized and sympathized with his passionate devotion to music and did not allow family hardship to interfere with his musical development. Receiving a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1939, he quickly advanced to the front ranks of American composers.

Anatolia is an original work for concert band which was commissioned by Eastern Illinois University and was premiered in 1968 by that band with the composer conducting. The title *Anatolia* is the ancient name of the area east of Asia Minor which now includes most of Turkey. *Anatolia* consists of four distinct sections: Slow, Moderately fast, Very slow, and Moderately fast. The first section is based on original material; the second, on a folksong which utilizes the *zeybeck*, a characteristic Turkish rhythm. The third section includes a slow and mournful folksong, and the concluding section is comprised of three lively folk dances.

Symphonic Songs for Band by Robert Russell Bennett was commissioned by the Kappa Kappa Psi Band Fraternity and premiered at the 1957 national convention in Salt Lake City by the National Intercollegiate Band. About the three-movement work, Bennett has written the following:

Symphonic Songs are as much a suite of dances or scenes as songs, deriving their name from the tendency of the principal parts to sing out a fairly diatonic tune against whatever rhythm develops in the middle instruments. The Serenade has the feeling of strumming, from which the title is obtained, otherwise it bears little resemblance to the serenades of Mozart. The Spiritual may possibly strike the listener as being unsophisticated enough to justify its title, but in performance this movement sounds far simpler than it really is. The Celebration recalls an old-time county fair with cheering throngs (in the woodwinds), a circus act or two, and the inevitable mule race.

Notes by Dr. John R. Locke, Director of Bands, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Sources for program notes:

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Credits

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- Dr. Harry Begian -

Conductor and Director Emeritus, University of Illinois Bands

Dr. Harry Begian is one of the world's most renowned band conductors. He was Director of Bands at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign from 1970 to 1984. Prior to that appointment he was director of Bands at Michigan State University for three years and at Wayne State University for the previous three years. Dr. Begian's work at both M.S.U. and W. S. U. carried forward the reputation he earned during his many years at Detroit's Cass Technical High School where he developed one of the finest high school bands in the country. In addition to his band conducting duties, during his last few years at Cass Tech, Begian headed the Music and Performing Arts Departments.

Begian's early musical training was in the Detroit area where he studied trumpet with Leonard Smith and flute with Larry Teal. He received undergraduate and masters degrees at Wayne State University and a Ph.D. at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

Begian organized and conducted his first band and orchestra while in his teens and has studied conducting at Tanglewood, summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He has appeared as guest-conductor, clinician and lecturer throughout the United States, Canada and Australia. Along with his band conducting activities, he has also conducted operatic and musical comedy performances, community bands and orchestras, and church choir. In 1987, the musicians of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra invited Dr. Begian to conduct a formal concert in Detroit's Orchestra Hall.

A charter member of the American School Band Directors Association, he is also a past-president of the American Bandmasters Association and a member of the College Band Directors National Association. An honorary member of the National Band Association and Phi Beta Mu Band Fraternity. Begian is also a member of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, Phi Delta Kappa and Omicron Delta Kappa. Most recently he was conferred honorary memberships in Kappa Kappa Psi and Tau Beta Sigma.

Dr. Harry Begian is a recipient of the National Band Associations Citation of Excellence, the Edwin Franko Goldman Award, the Notre Dame St. Cecelia Award and was elected to the Academy of Wind and Percussion Arts. His more than 60 record albums produced with the University of Illinois Symphonic Band comprise, what has been called "the most distinguished and complete collection of recorded band performances in existence."

After a year of retirement, Begian returned to the podium for two years as conductor of the Purdue University Symphonic Band from 1985-1987. He is presently active as guest-conductor, clinician, adjudicator and lecturer with over 20 engagements a year, is a Consulting Editor to The Instrumentalist magazine and serves on the Board of Directors of the Mid-West International Band and Orchestra Clinic.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS BAND

In the 1920's, John Philip Sousa called it the "World's Greatest College Band." During separate guest conducting appearances in the 1950's, Edwin Franko Goldman acclaimed it "second to none," and the "finest of all concert bands."

More recently, many of the country's most prominent composers and conductors have written in terms such as these:

"I have never heard such professional playing and sheer musicianship from any band"

"I have never heard any band, professional or otherwise, that has the warmth of tone and brilliance of sound that the Concert Band has."

"I know of no other band that could have played so much difficult music so well."

"One can easily see why the University of Illinois Bands continue to lead the nation in cultural attainment."

Shortly after the University of Illinois opened in 1868, a military band was organized. The military band became also a concert band and gave its first formal concert in 1890. Beginning in 1906, the University of Illinois Bands were guided to a position of eminence by Albert Austin Harding, universally regarded as "the father of the college band." Mark Hindsley, who had come to the University in 1934 as principal assistant, became Director of Bands in 1948 upon the retirement of Harding. It was during Hindsley's tenure that the University of Illinois Band Building was planned, constructed and dedicated to Harding. It is Hindsley who receives credit for initiating the far-sighted project of producing long playing disc recordings of the University of Illinois Concert Band.

Without question, Albert Austin Harding and Mark Hindsley were pioneers in the college band field, both as conductors and as arrangers. Both conductors produced numerous transcriptions of orchestral repertoire for performance by the Illinois Band greatly enriching the amount of quality music available for band performance. Upon the retirement of Hindsley in 1970, Dr. Harry Begian was appointed Director of Bands, only the third person ever to serve in that position.

During Dr. Begian's tenure at Illinois, the Symphonic Band performed virtually every work of substance in the concert band repertoire including original compositions, transcriptions and marches. Dr. Begian greatly enjoyed conducting the transcriptions of Harding and Hindsley, continuing the grand legacy of the Illinois Band. Further, Dr. Begian championed the music of Percy Grainger, producing a landmark two-album set of Grainger's works. Among transcribed literature, Begian is perhaps best known for his interpretive genius with the tone poems of Richard Strauss. Among original band literature, Begian's name is inseparably linked with the *Armenian Dances, Part I and II* of Alfred Reed which were composed for and dedicated to him. Additionally, Dr. Begian's career at Illinois demonstrated a devotion to march music which was second to none. Producing several march albums, Begian demonstrated interpretive possibilities to the band world which have long been admired and imitated.

In 1985, after the retirement of Dr. Begian, James Keene was appointed as the fourth Director of Bands in the history of the University of Illinois. Before coming to Illinois, Keene served for five years as director of Bands at the University of Arizona during which his bands received national recognition and acclaim through their concert tours and convention performances. Previous to his appointment at Arizona, Keene taught at East Texas State University, the University of South Carolina, Louisiana Tech University and the University of Michigan. At the University of Illinois, the Symphonic Band has continued to flourish under the leadership of Keene with frequent performances throughout the country at the most prestigious conferences and conventions.



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