

Tales of Hemingway

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Program Notes

by Tom Strini ©2018

"It is always a special joy to present new works that have quickly become modern classics. Michael Daugherty's *Tales of Hemingway* is such a work. Written in 2015, this cello concerto won three Grammy Awards last year. On the recording was our soloist this evening, Zuill Bailey, with the Nashville Symphony conducted by former Eugene Symphony Music Director Giancarlo Guerrero. Zuill has been performing the concerto around the country and we are delighted to welcome him to Eugene.

On the second half are two of the greatest works by Finnish master Jean Sibelius. At the turn of the 20th century, he found his own unique voice with music that sings and soars, but also bears witness to a fractured, struggling Europe. For me, his music carries an emotional weight and sweeps me along in a journey that, in the Fifth Symphony, ends in a moment of catharsis and one of the most memorable finales ever conceived."

— Francesco Lecce-Chong

ERNESTO LECUONA (1895–1963)

Malagueña (1928)

Scored for flute, oboe, two clarinets, bassoon, two horns, three trumpets, two trombones, timpani, percussion and strings. First performed by the Eugene Symphony in October 1981 under the direction of Wayne Bennett, and performance time is approximately four minutes.

Malagueña, probably the single most famous composition by a Cuban composer, leads many lives.

The piece, based on a flamenco form rooted in Malaga, Spain, began life as the sixth and final movement of *Suite Andalucía*, a piano work that Lecuona played on his wide-ranging tours. He recognized its potential and recast it as a song, complete with his own Spanish lyrics. German, English, French and even Farsi versions popped up throughout the 1950s and '60s. Malagueña graced the B-side of Connie Francis' 1960 hit, "My Heart Has a Mind of Its Own." Stan Kenton made it a jazz-band extravaganza. Marching bands play it at halftime. It came full circle when flamenco guitarists took it up.

Lecuona, like his friend George Gershwin, strode the world stage with one foot in classical and the other in pop, as a master of both. Ferde Grofé, the famous orchestrator of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, also created this evening's version of Malagueña.

MICHAEL DAUGHERTY (b. 1954)

Tales of Hemingway (2015)

In addition to the solo cello, this work is scored for two flutes, piccolo, oboe, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons and contrabassoon, two horns, two trumpets, two trombones, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings. This is the first Eugene Symphony performance, and performance time is approximately 30 minutes.

Michael Daugherty had four Hemingway stories in mind as he composed this 30-minute work for cello and orchestra.

The first is "Big Two-Hearted River," from 1925. Nick Adams, damaged from soldiering in World War I, seeks solace and restoration in remote Michigan woodlands. You can hear Nick's pain in the cello's laments and the healing in the orchestra's shimmering waters and birdsongs.

"I live in Michigan," Daugherty said, in a phone interview. "I went up to Northern Michigan and followed Nick Adams' footsteps."

Though Daugherty delved deeply into Hemingway's life and works, he did not set out to musically re-tell the stories.

"It's not a blow-by-blow narrative," he said. "But I did put some passages, little fragments of text from Hemingway, into the score, to give the players an idea of what's going on. I've never done that before."

The second story, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), tells of a loyalist guerrilla group and a volunteer American fighting Franco's Fascists during the Spanish Civil War. Daugherty relates the violence, relentlessness and desperation of it in a surreal *danza macabra* of slashing, grinding gestures and implacable drive.

A cello soliloquy parallels the Cuban fisherman's pre-dawn preparation in *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), the third movement's tale. The low strings suggest the ocean's swells and troughs. Ruminative lines allude to the passage of time and the solitude of one man in one small boat on the trackless sea. Pounding timpani and heavy strings suggest brawn against brawn in the fisherman's epic battle with the catch of his life. Spanish-sounding trumpets near the end foreshadow the next movement and compare the fisherman's challenge with that of the matador.

The finale, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), focused on another wounded World War I doughboy, Jake Barnes, left impotent and foundering in France and Spain in the 1920s. He and his circle of expats engage in a desperate revelry that Daugherty captures in crazed, whirlwind dances. The *Brave Bulls* trumpets, lots of Phrygian mode, and a remarkable pizzicato evocation of flamenco guitar soak the music in Spanish atmosphere. (The running of the bulls in Pamplona figures prominently in this roman à clef based on Hemingway and his Lost Generation companions.)

It's hard to write a great tune that is not a cliché. Great tunes suit the cello. — Michael Daugherty

Hemingway hated the movie adaptations of his novels and stories, but Daugherty is a fan. In some ways, *Tales of Hemingway* recalls the lush harmony, melody and high drama of mid-century film scores.

"It's hard to write a great tune that is not a cliché," Daugherty said. "I set that particular challenge for myself. Great tunes suit the cello."



Hemingway in Idaho, 1939, by Lloyd Arnold, photographer for the Sun Valley Resort. (Getty Images)

The Nashville Symphony commissioned the concerto. Giancarlo Guerrero, former Eugene Symphony Music Director, conducted the premiere, with Zuill Bailey, tonight's soloist.

"I listened to every cello concerto written in the last 50 years," Daugherty said. "Most of them are really about the orchestra, with the cello buried a good part of the time. I wanted this to be about the cello. I actually wrote the cello part first and orchestrated around it."

Daugherty famously takes on American icons; among his subjects: Rosa Parks, Liberace, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Abraham Lincoln, Georgia O'Keefe, Superman, Hemingway.

"Hemingway continues a very long arc," he said. "I wanted someone literary. I found out that, as a youth, Hemingway played the cello. That was the clincher."

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JEAN SIBELIUS (1865–1957)

Valse Triste (1903-04)

Scored for flute, clarinet, two horns, timpani and strings. First performed by the Eugene Symphony in October 2016 under the direction of Danail Rachev at a pair of elementary school Youth Concerts. Performance time is approximately six minutes.

Symphony No. 5 (1915, rev. 1919)

Scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, timpani and strings. First performed by the Eugene Symphony in March 1975 under the direction of Lawrence Maves, and last performed in February 1984 under the direction of William McGlaughlin. Performance time is approximately 30 minutes.

Jean Sibelius' musical star rose with Finnish nationalism in the early 1890s. It ascended further with *Valse Triste*, from incidental music to a play, *Kuolema* (Death), by his brother-in-law, Arvid Järnefelt. The project arose from one of many long evenings of eating and drinking with a group of Finnish literary men.

The piece was a hit, but something of a Pyrrhic victory. The composer's excessive partying with his pals distressed his wife and lightened his wallet. Soon after the premiere, he had to sell the rights to *Valse Triste*—before it had become world famous—to cover his extravagant restaurant bills. His family urged him to stop drinking and move to the country, away from Helsinki's temptations. Eventually, he did.

In the play, an old woman waltzes with a man she believes to be her deceased husband, miraculously brought back to life. Her dance partner turns out to be Death Himself.

"It's a short study in what the Fifth Symphony would become," said Music Director Francesco Lecce-Chong. "It's really dark, and it's *momentum momentum momentum* with a big whack at the end."

Sibelius conducted the premiere of his 35-minute Symphony No. 5 in Helsinki on his 50th birthday, with great success. The piece advanced

his ongoing evolution away from the contrasting themes of rigid Classical forms and toward ideas that evolve, as if organically, over long stretches of time (so subtly that theorists argue about where some themes begin and others end). Prominent conductor Robert Kajanus declared it the dawn of a truly Finnish style.

But it failed to satisfy Sibelius. He published version two in 1916 and version three in 1919. He reduced four movements to three, installed the famous long, long rests among the final, thunderous chords, and added the French horn call to the opening.

[When] the winds play a gorgeous, but simple melody all in unison, your heart just opens up.

— Francesco Lecce-Chong

"It asks for an incredible level of finesse and for expressiveness from the orchestra as an entire group," Lecce-Chong said. "Long melodies go on and on. If you linger to put your individual stamp on them, the music loses momentum, and the Fifth is nothing if not a study in momentum.

"He builds tension. He leaves you uncertain. You feel that he's always on the verge of ruining everything. And then comes that moment, 22 minutes in, where the horns begin this ostinato of leaping thirds and over them, the winds play a gorgeous, but simple, melody all in unison. Your heart just opens up. And you realize that Sibelius has absolutely been in charge from the very first notes, guiding us on this journey.

"His pacing is different than that of any other composer, because Sibelius plays such a long game. It takes patience. You have to stay with it to the end."

Ah, that ending, with those crazy gaps among the final chords—gaps that make the audience applaud before the symphony actually ends. But you won't make that mistake, dear reader, because you stayed with the program notes all the way to the end. Well done. 🎻

Sources:

Wikipedia pages on *Malagueña*, *Lecuona*, *flamenco malagueña*; the detailed bio at [encyclopedia.com](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernesto_Lecuona); http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernesto_Lecuona

Michael Daugherty's website; "The Composer in the Rehearsal Room," Tom Strini, *Third Coast Daily*, now *Urban Milwaukee*.

The Jean Sibelius website; Wikipedia articles on Sibelius, *Valse Triste* and the *Symphony No. 5*; the *Allmusic* article on the *Symphony No. 5*.