



Arizona State University

School of Music

GUEST ARTIST CONCERT SERIES

MICHAEL SULLIVAN

CLARINET

Assisted by

Rita Borden, piano
Robert Spring, clarinet
Winston Collier, bassoon

KATZIN CONCERT HALL
Saturday, November 20, 1999 • 5:00 p.m.



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Notes on the Program

In 1891 Johannes Brahms struck up his last great musical friendship, when he heard the clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld play in the renowned court orchestra of Meiningen (which Brahms had once directed). By now Brahms was nearly 60, and he considered the String Quintet, Op. 111, to have been the last music he would compose. But the strong impression of Mühlfeld's personality and playing drew Brahms to write two chamber works for clarinet: a trio with cello and piano, Op. 114, and a quintet with strings, Op. 115. In 1894, having meanwhile produced four sets of piano pieces, Brahms again presented Mühlfeld with two works: the Sonatas, Op. 120.

But these were gifts for more than Mühlfeld. Clarinetists (and violists) have made these works into centerpieces of their repertoire; no previous composer of Brahms's caliber had written a full-scale sonata for clarinet and piano. The second sonata begins with an "amiable allegro." Here the two instruments are intimate partners, spinning a continuous web of music out of a few simple motives. Nowhere is the cooperation closer than in the second theme, where the piano accompanies in canon, repeating what the clarinet plays just one beat later. Instead of a slow movement as such—perhaps because neither outer movement is particularly fast—the middle movement is a waltz-scherzo, alternately surging and tentative. The last movement presents variations on a simple theme that, in characteristically Brahmsian fashion, is itself based on one motif varied over and over. The variations seem to lead a double life: even while embellishing and playing with the theme, they seem to be simplifying it to its essentials.

Leslie Bassett has been the recipient of numerous prizes for his compositional efforts including the Pulitzer Prize (1966), the Rome Prize, a Fulbright Fellowship, and two Guggenheim Foundation Fellowships. He holds membership in the American Academy of Arts and Letters and is the Albert A. Stanley Distinguished University Professor Emeritus of Music at the University of Michigan. Born January 22, 1923, in Hanford, California, Bassett was educated at California State University, Fresno, the University of Michigan, and the Ecole Normale de Musique, Paris. His teachers include Ross Lee Finney, Roberto Gerhard, Arthur Honegger and Nadia Boulanger. While everything from echoes of gospel music and jazz to serialism and a strain of neo-classicism have found their way into Bassett's music, the composer has never allowed his work to be tagged with any "ism." He states: "I've always adhered strictly to Bassettism. You do what you believe in. That doesn't mean you don't notice what's going on around you. I grew up hearing a lot of music, and there's a lot of music I really love. And I've always stolen whatever I wanted."

Soliloquies for Solo B-flat Clarinet was written in 1978 and is dedicated to the Reverend Robert Onofrey. Composed in four movements, the piece reflects Bassett's predilection for contrasting instrumental timbres. One way he does this is through the use of resonance trills: trills which alternate tone color rather than pitch in rapid succession.

Richard Strauss's last instrumental composition, the Duet-Concertino, for the uncommon combination of clarinet and bassoon with string orchestra and harp, dates from 1947 and was first performed in Lugano, Switzerland in 1948. Dedicated to the composer's friend, the bassoonist Hugo Burghauser, the "little concerto" evolves with logic and momentum as an abundance of imaginatively protracted melodic lines seamlessly unfolds through its three continuous movements: *Allegro moderato*, *Andante*, and *Rondo (Allegro ma non troppo)*. From its beginning to the extensive finale, this example of Classical miniaturist writing reflects the retrospective style-consciousness that had informed such "Neo-Classical" masterpieces as Igor Stravinsky's ballet *Pulcinella* of 1920, Sergei Prokofiev's *Classical Symphony* of 1918, and earlier Strauss compositions. Likewise, melodic reminiscences of Gustav Mahler's symphonies and orchestral works of Strauss's own coincide with allusions to Mozart and Beethoven. The dialogue treatment of the clarinet and bassoon, their lyrical arabesques juxtaposed against the harp and sometimes soloistic strings, recalls the eighteenth-century *sinfonia concertante*.

Italian composer Amilcare Ponchielli was born in Paderno in 1834 and died in Milan in 1886. After receiving his first music lessons from his father he studied at the Milan Conservatory and served as an organist in Cremona. His first opera, *I Promessi Sposi* was produced in 1856 but the only work of his to hold a place on the operatic stage is *La Gioconda* (1876).

Il Convegno (The Tryst) was originally written for two clarinets and wind band. The original score is in the library of the Istituto Nazionale di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte in Rome. Ponchielli chose to call it a Divertimento, although he avoided the form of separate movements, in favor of connected sections, which corresponds more to the form of a Potpourri. Cantilenas with operatic characteristics alternate with virtuoso passages, evidence of the high level of Italian wind playing of that time. In view of the dialogue form both clarinet parts are equally challenging.

About the Artists

Michael Sullivan is Assistant Professor of Clarinet at the Northern Arizona University School of Performing Arts. He received his degrees from Florida State University and the University of Michigan. Upon receiving a grant from the German Academic Exchange Service, he studied at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Munich, Germany, and as first prize winner of the Pro-Mozart Society of Atlanta Concerto Competition, he was awarded a grant to study at the Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst (Mozarteum) in Salzburg, Austria where he earned certificates in clarinet and saxophone. Dr. Sullivan has served on the faculties of the University of Michigan at the Interlochen Center for the Arts and Pittsburg State University. He appears regularly as a soloist with symphony orchestras throughout the United States and has presented recitals in the U.S. and Europe, most notably performing at the Salzburg Festival in 1993. Michael Sullivan serves as principal clarinetist with the Ernest Bloch Music Festival in Newport, Oregon and has served as principal clarinetist with the Phoenix Mainly Mozart Festival, the Flagstaff Festival of the Arts Orchestra and Arizona Opera's Wagner Festival Orchestra. He has performed as guest artist with the Music Academy of the West, the U.S. Army Field Band, and the Sedona Chamber Music Festival. He is in demand as an adjudicator and clinician with universities and high schools across the country. His principal teachers include Frank Kowalsky, Fred Ormand, Gerd Starke, and Alois Brandhofer.

Rita Borden joined the piano faculty of Northern Arizona University in 1995 and is a frequent performer with NAU faculty and visiting artists on the Performing Artists Series. She has performed concerts for the Sedona Chamber Music Society and is principal keyboardist with the Flagstaff Symphony Orchestra. Ms. Borden earned her Bachelor of Music degree from the University of Northern Colorado and her Master of Music in Accompanying from the University of Southern California. Her teachers included Gwendolyn Koldofsky, Brooks Smith and Malcolm Hamilton. She has concertized extensively with members of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and San Diego Symphony.

Winston Collier teaches bassoon and music literature at Northern Arizona University, where he performs regularly as Principal Bassoonist of the Flagstaff Symphony Orchestra and bassoonist for the Kokopelli Woodwind Quintet. He holds degrees from the University of Michigan, where he was a student of Richard Beene, and has been the recipient of numerous musical and academic awards including a Rackham Dissertation Grant. He has performed with the orchestras of Toledo, Flint, Ann Arbor, and Windsor, among many others, and has given recitals and master classes throughout the United States and Canada. Passionately committed to the music of our time, Mr. Collier has worked to increase the bassoon's repertoire through numerous commissioning projects and premieres. In addition, he is a founding member of Quorum Chamber Arts Collective, which recently gave an acclaimed New York debut in Merkin Hall and is scheduled to record a CD of the music of composer Evan Chambers in Summer, 2000. Mr. Collier served for six summers on the faculty of the Interlochen Center for the Arts, where he coordinated the annual all-state bassoon workshop. He joined the NAU faculty in the Fall of 1999.