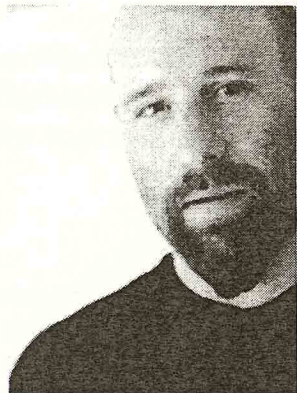


About the Program

February 27, 2003

By Brian Wise

Tonight's program features six composers whose works stem from outside of the dominant Austro-German orbit – that venerable tradition stretching from Bach and Beethoven to Wagner and Schoenberg. Instead, our musical journey begins in the turbulent, immensely fertile decades of the early 20th century, when long dormant traditions of countries like England and Spain experienced a renaissance. Other traditions, including those of the United States and Finland, rose to fame on a wave of nationalist-fueled creativity. Ultimately, concert life was enriched by these fresh ideas and exotic new sounds – a trend that continues to this day.



BRIAN GRUNDSTROM

Celebration!

(World Premiere SONOS Commission)

The music of Brooklyn-based composer Brian Grundstrom draws on a wide palette of influences, notably the celebrated "Americana" style of Aaron Copland, with its sturdy harmonies and open spaces. Yet Grundstrom brings a distinctive approach to tonality, maintaining an essential tonal foundation while avoiding key signatures. "The absence of a key

signature gives me the freedom necessary to use tonality in more interesting ways, letting my ear guide my music along its path."

Though appropriate as a curtain raiser, *Celebration!* is also the third and final movement of a three-part orchestral suite. The first movement, *Before the Fall*, evokes the sense of loss and decay that accompanies the turning of summer to fall. The second movement, *Avalon*, is a musical evocation of the mystical island of healing that King Arthur went to after his battle. *Celebration!* provides a sense of resolution. "It deals with the joy and celebration of life that we need to express after coming to terms with the darker side," says Grundstrom.

The nine-minute piece contains shades of Copland, especially in its approachable melodies and expansive harmonies. The main theme,

originally stated by the clarinet, is developed through the course of the piece, expanded through canonic sections and broadened in a chorale section. The theme returns enriched and fully orchestrated, ending the piece with a grand flourish.



BENJAMIN BRITTEN

Les Illuminations, Op. 18

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) was constantly motivated from sources both national and cosmopolitan, from the sturdy English musical values of his predecessors Vaughan Williams and Holst to various continental traditions. In 1934, after seeing a performance of Berg's *Wozzeck*, he expressed a desire to go to Vienna to study with the composer, but family objections prevailed. Then, in

1939, he began a three-year stint in New York, at which time he was introduced to the works of French author Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891). He immediately began setting to music selections from the volume of prose poems called *Les Illuminations* (The Illuminations).

Although many composers—including the notoriously nationalistic French—had passed over Rimbaud's works, considering them too difficult for lyrical settings, Britten responded to their mixture of world-weary cynicism and longing for childlike innocence (it's also been rumored that Britten was intrigued by a supposed affair between Rimbaud and French poet Verlaine). In setting *Les Illuminations*, Britten not only embraced the French language, but also distinctly French musical elements, marking a departure from various "Britishisms," and toward a more cosmopolitan style.

Les Illuminations abounds in felicitous touches of orchestration, beginning with the opening fanfare, in which a violin and viola imitate the sound of two trumpets. The second movement, "Villes," evokes the mechanical sounds of American cities through a constant eighth-note pattern while the sixth song, "Marine," features a vocal line against a martial ostinato accompaniment. *Les Illuminations* was dedicated to the Swiss soprano, Sophie Wyss, who gave the premiere in London in 1940.