**Concerto Grosso in G minor, Op. 6, No. 8**

**“Christmas Concerto”**

Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713)

Corelli’s “Christmas” Concerto gets its name from its subtitle, “made for the night of the Nativity” (i.e. Christmas Eve). Scored for a pair of solo violins and solo cello who are accompanied by a continuo (re-orchestrated for this evening’s performance as a string quartet), it’s in many ways a standard example of a “sonata da Chiesa” (church sonata), a (usually) four-movement Baroque genre that was sometimes substituted for parts of the Mass Proper during the era.
Where it differs is in the number of movements – there are six, not four – and their key structure. There are two pairs of connected movements in G minor, the first (Grave) and second (a syncopated Allegro), and fourth (a rollicking Vivace) and fifth (a stern Allegro). In between comes a stately Adagio in E-flat major. And then there’s the finale, which shifts, rather surprisingly, into G major. Perhaps most consequential, though, was Corelli’s choice to use the pastorale form here, which set a model that was copied most famously by Handel at a climactic point in the first part of Messiah.

-- Note by Jonathan Blumhofer --
String Quartet No. 4
“Fantasia on Three Christmas Carols” (2018)*

Mark Buller (b. 1986)

I. Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence • II. Lo, How A Rose E’er Blooming  
III. What Is This Fragrance?

String Quartet No. 4 “Fantasia on Three Christmas Carols” is my fourth string quartet, a set of three fantasies based on centuries-old Christmas carols. Each movement takes its time, exploring small pieces of the melodies, then gradually coalesces into more recognizable melodic material. Finally, at the end of each movement, the soprano enters and sings the carol. Each of these melodies means a lot to me, and I’m thrilled to have created this new work for Apollo!

-- Note by Mark Buller --
Suite Brasileira de Natal 
(Brazilian Christmas Suite) (2019/2020)*
Jovino Santos Neto (b. 1954)

I. À Espera (Waiting) • X. Moon Dew • XI. Bom Natal • XII. Finale

Suite Brasileira de Natal (Brazilian Christmas Suite) by Jovino Santos Neto is a Christmas collection of 12 musical vignettes inspired by the way Brazilian culture blends Iberian, West African, Middle Eastern, Celtic, and jazz traditions. The music depicts a time of waiting for an important arrival, followed by a procession of shepherdesses, the birth of a special child, nightfall (inspired by Boas Festas, a popular song by Assis Valente), and how sages from distant places followed the stars to convene in a celebration of cultural and spiritual diversity.
During the COVID pandemic in 2020, Apollo Chamber Players asked me to compose an additional three movements to this suite for their Apollo Christmas Special livestream program. These new movements - Moon Dew, Bom Natal, and Finale - explore the influences of jazz and “scatting” vocal elements in Brazilian music culture and holiday traditions.

-- Note by Jovino Santos Neto --
A Sephardic Chanukah is based upon five songs from the Judeo-Spanish tradition: four folk songs and one composed by the Bosnian singer-composer, Flory Jagoda. Of these, the final two songs are Chanukah melodies. Middle-Eastern music in general involves microtonal melodies and complex rhythms. Attempting to harmonize such melodies in a “Western” manner without losing the Eastern flavor is the challenge. My solution in this quartet was to compose introductory and connecting material within the maqam (mode), a technique used by both instrumentalists and vocalists in Middle-Eastern music performance. Such improvisations within the maqam are called “taksims”, an example of which can be heard in the last song, “Ocho Candelicas”, played by the 1st violin between verses.

-- Note by Isabelle Ganz --
Kwanzaa Suite, for string quartet and tenor (2021)*
Brian Raphael Nabors (b. 1991)
WORLD PREMIERE
I. Umoja (Unity) • II. Kujichagulia (Self-Determination) • III. Ujima
IV. Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics) • V. Nia (Purpose)
VI. Kuumba (Creativity) • VII. Imani (Faith)

Kwanzaa Suite was commissioned by the Apollo Chamber Players featuring tenor, Wanye Ashley. When pondering a work that could capture the spirit of the Kwanzaa celebration, I felt it best to approach the work with the structure of a suite in seven short movements. This would allow for each principle of the Nguzo Saba (one for each of the seven days of Kwanzaa) to have its own musical characteristics. In addition to the music, I’ve taken the time to study and become close with the seven principles. From this meditation, I have written seven short poems to accompany the music of each movement. It is a joy to add this work to the body of music that encompasses the spirit of such a culturally rich celebration.
I. **Umoja (Unity)**
One love,
One people, Together
One light, In harmony, Together
One heart, One mind, With goals and dreams Aligned
One Family, Aligned Aligned

II. **Kujichagulia (Self-Determination)**
We are empowered by our will to persist.
We are creators.
We are builders.
We make our own destiny We shape our future
We define ourselves
III. **Ujima**  
(Collective Work and Responsibility)  
We work and we build, We build and we work.  
We work to build strength in our community.  
We work to give hope and prosperity.  
We work and we build, We build and we work.

IV. **Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics)**  
We dream.  
We plan and forge new paths To build wealth for our children.  
Collective and strong, Wealth unshakable,  
Rooted in endurance, Rooted in love.

V. **Nia (Purpose)**  
I am a seed  
Full of life and springing up, Bursting with world-altering potential.  
I am filled with the blessing of my ancestors to be all that I am meant to be.

VI. **Kuumba (Creativity)**  
Let your imagination take flight As on the wings of an eagle Soaring through eternity.  
May it create such beauty  
That darkness has no place to hide.  
May it create such wonder That light is all that abides  
Shoot for the moon Reach for the stars Touch infinity
VII. Imani (Faith) We believe.
We believe in a future.
Free of hatred, Free of malice, Free of deception.
Full of light, Full of equity, Full of dreams.
We believe In life.

-- Note by Brian Raphael Nabors --
L. Wayne Ashley, tenor, is a versatile artist known for his charismatic vocal tone and appreciation for many genres. Wayne is a member of the internationally acclaimed Houston Chamber Choir and can be heard on their 2020 Grammy® Award winning album Duruflé: Complete Choral Works. A native of Arkansas, Wayne was raised in a stellar musical environment surrounded by Gospel, Delta Blues, Zydeco and RnB musicians, many within his own family.

A graduate of Henderson State University and the University of Houston Moores School of Music, Wayne is a choir member and Cantor at St. Paul’s United Methodist Church-Houston, founding member of the Cloudburst Vocal Jazz Quartet, and soloist with the Houston Ebony Opera Guild. Beyond his love for music, Wayne is an avid follower of current events, politics and public policy.
Mark Buller, a composer based in Houston, writes music which blends rich lyricism with bold gestures and striking rhythms. A specialist in vocal and choral music, he has also written a large body of instrumental works, from tiny miniatures for solo instruments to works for large orchestra. He has been privileged to write for a number of world-class ensembles and organizations, including the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Houston Grand Opera, Houston Chamber Choir, Apollo Chamber Players, and ROCO (River Oaks Chamber Orchestra).

His flexibility as a composer has led to some unique commissions: three operas for Houston Grand Opera -- including a pastiche opera -- all with libretti by Charles Anthony Silvestri; a series of searingly poignant art songs and a major choral work also for HGO, setting words by...
veterans and by Leah Lax; and several dozen very short pieces for various forces, entitled Quarantine Miniatures, which celebrate the community of musicians whose resilience in the face of COVID-19 uncertainty is worth admiration. In recent years, Mark’s comic song cycles have gained some notice, beginning with Tombstone Songs, which sets hilarious epitaphs from the U.S. and U.K.. One-Star Songbook explores terribly sophomoric one-star Amazon reviews of literary masterworks, maintaining the original poor grammar and spelling. And an upcoming cycle, The Beginner’s Guide to Conspiracy Theories, once again turns to found texts, setting screeds about the Illuminati, JFK, Goop and other peddlers of pseudoscience, and QAnon.

Upcoming performances include a second work for the Atlanta Symphony and Robert Spano, The Parallactic Transits, on Spano’s final concert as artistic director; String Quartet No. 5 with the Houston New Arts Movement; a large-scale Mass in Exile with Leah Lax; and The Passion of St. Cecilia with Silvestri celebrating the 25th anniversary of Houston Chamber Choir.

Originally from Maryland, Mark studied as a pianist before earning his Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Houston, where he studied with Marcus Maroney and Rob Smith. He currently teaches at Lone Star College and is Director of Education and Chair of Composition Studies at AFA.
3-time Latin Grammy nominee Jovino Santos Neto is a master pianist, flutist, composer, arranger and conductor from Rio de Janeiro. After 15 years as a member of the legendary Hermeto Pascoal Group, he moved to Seattle in 1993. Since then, Jovino has established himself as a fascinating performer, whether playing solo piano, leading his award-winning Quinteto, or in guest appearances with ensembles and orchestras worldwide. He has shared the stage and the studio with some of the most creative musicians of our times. Jovino is available for lectures on the connections between biology and music, usually coupled with his live performances. He is a Professor of Music at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle.

Jovino’s personal style is a creative blend of energetic grooves, deep harmonies, telepathic improvisation, lyrical
melodies and great ensemble playing, always inspired and informed by the colorful richness of Brazilian music. His compositions include samba, choro, baião, xote, forró, marcha and many more styles, rooted in centuries-old musical tradition while pointing to new and adventurous harmonic languages.

Jovino’s compositions have been performed by the Seattle Symphony, NDR Big Band in Hamburg, Swiss Jazz Orchestra and by numerous jazz and chamber music groups. His orchestration of Hermeto Pascoal’s Suite Universal was premiered in January 2019 by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. Jovino was featured in NPR’s Tiny Desk Concert in October 2019.
An international performing and recording artist and one of the pioneers in the field of Sephardic music, Isabelle Ganz and her New York-based ensemble have produced 4 CDs of Judeo-Spanish music. She holds a D.M.A. in Voice and Music Literature from the Eastman School of Music, has been a Fulbright scholar to Jerusalem and received a Solo Recitalist grant from the N.E.A. to perform works of living composers. She has recorded “Ryoanji for Voice and Percussion” by John Cage (composed for her) and “Sequenza III” by Luciano Berio, included on a 4-CD set of the Sequenzas and cited by the NY Times as “one of the best classical recordings of 2006”.

ISABELLE GANZ
Her original choral compositions have been published by Boosey & Hawkes, Transcontinental and Shalshelet Publications. In 1989 her song “Go Away Tango” for voice and piano was the first prize winner in the “Lind Solo Song” competition sponsored by Cornell University. She has been on the faculties of the Moores School of Music, Lamar University, Texas Southern University, Houston Community College, H.S.P.V.A., the University of St. Thomas, the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria, conducted improvisation “playshops” on three continents and recorded over 25 CDs.

On February 5, 2022, Apollo Chamber Players will premiere a newly commissioned work by Isabelle, “La Palomba”, at Holocaust Museum Houston.
Brian Raphael Nabors (b. 1991, Birmingham, AL) is a composer of emotionally enriching music that tells exciting narratives with its vibrant themes and colorful harmonic language. Nabors’ music has been performed by the Cincinnati, Atlanta, Nashville, & Detroit Symphonies, as well as ROCO Chamber Orchestra. He has also been performed by artists such as the Atlanta Chamber Players, Dallas’s Voices of Change, Boston Musica Viva and the Detroit Chamber Winds & Strings. Kwanzaa Suite is his first commission by Houston-based Apollo Chamber Players.

He was named a 2021 composition fellow of the Tanglewood music festival; a 2021 Seikilos Focus Fellowship recipient by Air Serenbe; a 2019 composer fellow in the American Composers Orchestra’s Earshot program with the Detroit
Symphony Orchestra; a 2019 composer fellow with the Nashville Symphony Orchestra’s Composer Lab; and 2019 cycle five grand prize winner of the Rapido! National Composition Contest. Nabors was also a 2020 Fulbright scholarship recipient to Sydney, Australia, studying with composer Carl Vine at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

Nabors earned a Doctor of Musical Arts and Master of Music degree in Composition at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (CCM). Prior to graduate studies, he obtained a Bachelor of Music Theory & Composition degree from the School of the Arts at Samford University.
Houston-based Apollo Chamber Players “performs with rhythmic flair and virtuosity” (The Strad) and has “found fruitful territory” (Houston Chronicle) through innovative, globally-inspired programming and multicultural new music commissions. Winner of Chamber Music America’s prestigious Residency Partnership award, the quartet has twice performed for sold-out audiences at Carnegie Hall, and it holds the distinction of being the first American chamber ensemble to record and perform in Cuba since the embargo relaxation. Apollo is featured frequently on American Public Media’s nationally-syndicated program Performance Today.

Apollo’s fifth commercial album, With Malice Toward None, reached No. 1 on Amazon’s Hot New Release chart upon its release in August 2021. The ensemble’s catalogue of records has been featured on hundreds of radio and media stations nationally and internationally.
A passionate advocate of contemporary music, Apollo launched a bold project in 2014 to commission 20 new multicultural works by the end of the decade. 20x2020 saw its triumphant conclusion in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic with digital world premieres and global recording collaborations. The project features a diverse roster of the world’s leading composers and instrumentalists including Jennifer Higdon, Libby Larsen, Pamela Z, Leo Brouwer, Jerod Impichchaachaaha’ Tate, and Vân Ánh Võ.

Apollo reaches further into the community by partnering with schools, universities, at-risk youth centers, refugee and veterans service organizations, hospitals, airports, and public libraries, providing performances, educational programs, and entrepreneurship lectures that impact a wider, underserved audience.

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