

PROGRAM NOTES

Why a “Blues” for orchestra? The blues is from the deepest roots of our country. It is a primary source for all music that is distinctly of the Americas. The blues leads to jazz, to rock and roll, to latin music, to gospel, and back to Africa. Stravinsky and Hindemith knew and loved Charlie Parker, and he knew and loved them. All great music flows together into the ocean of the sublime. Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven were revered as improvisers of their time but somehow this has been lost in classical training. Jazz musicians and classical musicians have so much to learn from each other and the blues is a perfect place to begin the conversation. Commissioned and premiered by YOCA in 2003, featuring fourteen-year-old Dean de la Pena as the trumpet soloist, my greatest joy is having this piece performed again by the Youth Orchestra and to see five student improvisers step forward to improvise solos in the final movement. That's progress!

Throughout the piece I have employed call-and-response trading between the sections of the orchestra. The strings have been awarded the arduous and classically uncharacteristic task of maintaining the underlying groove. The piece unfolds in an “improvisatory” the way that jazz musicians develop their solos by constantly creating new material interspersed with themes, quotes, and licks that can be the hallmarks of an individual style. The *Prelude* is three choruses of a Bb blues. Hopefully the first chorus sounds like the orchestra is *thinking* about grooving on some blues. When they decide to go for it in the second chorus, it has a sound reminiscent of bandshell music, cakewalks, slow rags. The third chorus is the trumpet solo and cadenzas. The orchestra becomes “funky” and



“greasy”. *Tri-tones and Bebop* could be seen as the *scherzo*. It's a continuous stream of bebop lines played mostly in unison, offset by a raucous double time lick based on the flatted fifth, the “devil in music”. I was taught in my early years to play tunes and improvise *a capella* to insure that, without relying on the rhythm section, swinging and making melodic sense was all on its own. That's what this movement is all about. *Mystic Blues* ends the piece on a somewhat somber note and owes a debt to John Coltrane for its overall atmosphere. It evokes the *feeling* of jazz and blues, the devotion that is at the heart of endeavor, and the very human need for self-expression in the midst of the collective.

This orchestra and Dr. West have been an absolute pleasure to work with. They are a talented and generous group of musicians! Thanks, also, to orchestra manager Scot Jonté for all her help and guidance.

John D'earth

November 7, 2010