

# THE THREE REEDS DUO PRESENTS METAMORPHOSIS

Leah Forsyth, oboe • Paul Forsyth, saxophone

Program Notes by Jackson Harmeyer

Now entering our fourth season, *Nachtmusik Alexandria* tonight welcomes the Three Reeds Duo as they celebrate the release of their new album, *Metamorphosis*. This duo, consisting of oboist Leah Forsyth and saxophonist Paul Forsyth, is the only one of its kind and, thus, this husband-and-wife team out of Natchitoches, Louisiana has actively sought new repertoire for their unique ensemble. Their first commissions in 2011 were the result of the Donald Derby Professorship at Northwestern State University, where Leah and Paul are on faculty. The Alford Professorship, awarded to Three Reeds in 2015 and again in 2018, has allowed them to record these initial commissions, their successors, and several transcriptions to their albums, *signals cross* and *Metamorphosis*. Many of the works they perform tonight can be heard on this second album, *Metamorphosis*, released this month on the Blue Griffin label and titled after the work by Benjamin Britten. Pianist Chialing Hsieh joins them on several tracks, so that the album's title also reflects the transformation of their ensemble to occasionally include piano. We are honored that our concert tonight is the first of six concerts across the southern United States given by Three Reeds in celebration of their new CD release.

The first piece we hear is *Duo Displasia* by composer and oboist **Alyssa Morris (born 1984)**. Morris received her DMA in oboe performance from the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music in 2017 and now serves as Assistant Professor of Oboe and Music Theory at Kansas State University; she is also Principal Oboe of the Topeka Symphony Orchestra. Her compositions have been performed at national and international conferences, and include commissions from Carolyn Hove—Principal English Horn of the Los Angeles Philharmonic—among others. They have also been featured on several recordings, including her own debut album, *A Higher Place*, on which her and colleagues play several of her chamber compositions. As written in the *American Record Guide*, "Morris is a truly impressive musician... her works marry a

wide range of extended techniques and harmonic figures to paint gorgeous and thoughtful musical portraits." Her works are often programmatic, stating their subject through their creative titles and elaborating these through their musical sounds. *Duo Displasia*, a work commissioned by Three Reeds and premiered by them at the 2017 International Double Reed Society Convention, is no exception. Set in four short movements, it opposes the musical idioms traditionally associated with its instruments—oboe with music of the Baroque era and alto saxophone with jazz—and combines these seemingly disparate genres. In essence then, it treats these instruments as cultural artifacts, tied to their distinctive histories as much as their respective playing styles, but yet not limited by these considerations either. *Duo Displasia* is formatted as a Baroque suite with movements named after dance genres (prelude, courante, loure, and gigue) which also appear in suites by Johann Sebastian Bach, Jean-Philippe Rameau, and other composers of the era.

Though certainly well-known abroad, **Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992)** is a household name in his native Argentina where he has attained the same popular mythos and critical acclaim accorded to Frank Sinatra, John Williams, and a handful of other musicians here in the United States. Nevertheless, this composer, bandleader, and accordionist faced much resistance from his countrymen when he first introduced his *nuevo tango*. These "new tangos," built on the characteristic rhythm and passionate emotions of this favorite Argentine dance, could also include extreme chromaticism, fugal elements, and aspects of jazz; they also often exceeded the typical instrumentation of more traditional tangos. Piazzolla albeit was a classically-trained composer, having studied first with Alberto Ginastera—at the time, Argentina's leading exponent of art music—and then Nadia Boulanger—the same French pedagogue who had taught Aaron Copland, Darius Milhaud, and Elliott Carter. Piazzolla would instead first receive acclaim in France and the United States, places where he was

appreciated foremost as a composer who, like Johann Strauss II and the waltz, transformed a popular dance genre into a vibrant art form. Since the 1980s, however, his music has also been accepted in Argentina, actually hailed as saving the tango which had stagnated during the 1950s and 1960s. Tonight Three Reeds plays *Oblivion*, one of Piazzolla's most famous tangos in an arrangement by Adam Hudlow, Assistant Professor of Music Theory at Northwestern State University. This short piece with its longing nostalgia and passion was composed for the 1982 film, *Enrico IV*, directed by Marco Bellocchio.

The English composer **Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)** wrote his *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid*, Op. 49 for solo oboe in 1951. Britten dedicated this work to oboist Joy Boughton—the daughter of friend and fellow composer Rutland Boughton—who gave the premiere on June 14, 1951 at the Fourth Annual Aldeburgh Festival of Music. Each of this work's six movements describes a different character from the Roman poet Ovid's famed *Metamorphoses* which retells many of the myths of ancient Greece and Rome. Three Reeds alternates movements, so that several remain oboe solos, others become solos for soprano saxophone, and uniquely *Narcissus* becomes a duet for these instruments. Britten assigns his first movement to Pan, the goat-god known for his music-making on the reed pipe which had once been his beloved Syrinx. Although Britten indicates phrasings and breath marks in his score, he does not give a specific meter. Without metrical constraints, the musician is able to bring the same spontaneous feeling to this music that Pan might have brought to his own playing of the pipes. Phaeton receives the second movement. According to Ovid, Phaeton was the son of Apollo who nearly crashed his father's chariot of the Sun before being struck-down by Jupiter's thunderbolt. The music given to Phaeton fittingly moves at a quick pace, galloping along as if pulled by horses. The third movement describes Niobe and her desperate lamenting, whereas the fourth movement portrays Bacchus and his wild parties. Narcissus who fell in love with his reflection and was consequently transformed into a flower is the subject of the fifth movement; his music is single-minded and decorative if not completely self-obsessed. Arethusa, a nymph who became a fountain, receives the sixth and final movement.

The next piece we hear, *Double Soliloquy*, is by Shreveport-based composer **Thomas Hundemer (born 1954)** whose compositions have been heard several times at Nachtmusik and our Sugarmill Music Festival and who will perform with a brass trio at our next concert on October

8. Hundemer, a native of Bogalusa in southern Louisiana, has since 1983 been Principal Horn of the Shreveport Symphony Orchestra—a role he also plays with the Longview, Marshall, Texarkana, and South Arkansas orchestras. Additionally, Hundemer is on faculty at Shreveport's Centenary College where he is lecturer in horn and Director of the Hurley Music Library. Among his major compositions are the orchestral piece *On Highways and Byways* and *Gently Weep* for solo horn and digital audio delay which references the Beatles song "While My Guitar Gently Weeps." Hundemer's *Three Reeds Suite* was part of a 2014 commission by the duo and premiered by them the next spring at the Region VI North American Saxophone Alliance Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. Each of its five movements has a programmatic title. Hundemer also describes his piece as "an exploration into the timbral possibilities between oboe and alto sax, English horn and tenor sax." *Double Soliloquy* is its inquisitive opening movement in which the instruments begin to discover their identities. The full suite can be heard on Three Reeds' first album, *signals cross*.

The final piece we hear tonight is *Little Rivers* by **Peter Lieuwen (born 1953)**. This American composer, though born in the Netherlands, has spent much of his life in the southwestern United States. Raised in New Mexico, he studied and then taught at the University of California, Santa Barbara before joining the faculty at Texas A&M in 1988 where he has now remained for three decades. Southwestern landscapes, a love for nature and animals, as well as the wider musical culture of the United States are all reflected in his compositions. Indeed, *Little Rivers*, which Three Reeds shares with us tonight, is one of several compositions by Lieuwen which take rivers or the movement of water as their subject matter. Lieuwen has described this piece as, "a sonic image of the visual and auditory intricacies of mountain rivulets, from the first snow melt in spring to their gradual evolution into small streams with their tranquil pools, glides, rapids, and waterfalls as they gradually morph into larger rivers." Accordingly, the music starts with the simplest of ideas—a note held in unison between the two instruments—before gradually expanding into something much larger. The music which follows, like a stream, is free-flowing and continually in motion, yet also quite unpredictable. Once it gains momentum, it never halts altogether: only slows its pace or changes course. This music is also full of joy, suggesting the wonder Lieuwen sees in this gradual coalescing and coming to life of inanimate water droplets. The most recent commission by the Three Reeds Duo,

*Little Rivers* was premiered in July 2018 at the Zagreb World Saxophone Conference in Croatia.

© Jackson Harmeyer 2019

**About Jackson.** Jackson Harmeyer graduated with his Master of Music in Music History and Literature from the University of Louisville in May 2019 following the completion of his thesis, “Liminal Aesthetics: Perspectives on Harmony and Timbre in the Music of Olivier Messiaen, Tristan Murail, and Kaija Saariaho.” He has shared this pioneering research through presentations given at the American Musicological Society South-Central Chapter’s annual meetings in Asheville, NC and Sewanee, TN and at the University of Tennessee Contemporary Music Festival in Knoxville, TN. During his studies in Louisville, he was the recipient of the Gerhard Herz Music History Scholarship and was employed at the Dwight D. Anderson Memorial Music Library where he did archival work for the unique Grawemeyer Collection which houses scores, recordings, and documentation for over five thousand entries by the world’s leading contemporary composers. Previously, Jackson graduated *summa cum laude* from the Louisiana Scholars’ College in Natchitoches, LA. Then, from 2014 to 2016, Jackson served as director of the successful chamber music series, Abendmusik Alexandria. He has remained a concert annotator and organizer, acting as Director of Scholarship of the annual Sugarmill Music Festival. The writings he has produced for this festival have even attracted the attention of the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities. Aside from his studies, he is a composer, choral singer, and award-winning nature photographer.

Read additional program notes by Jackson at [www.JacksonHarmeyer.com](http://www.JacksonHarmeyer.com).