

Program Notes

The Cape Cod Files

Paquito D’Rivera is the definition of a multifaceted musical artist. Born and raised in Cuba, he began his musical career at the age of 5 learning saxophone from his father. By the age of 7, D’Rivera signed as a Selmer artist. At the age of 10, he performed with the National Theater Orchestra in Cuba. Eventually, he started to become interested in composition. His works are as unique as he is, and often combines his love of classical and Latin influences in his works. He is the winner of fourteen Grammy Awards and is the only artist to win in both the Classical and Latin Jazz categories.

The Cape Cod Files takes his love of combining classical music with other genres. It was commissioned by the Cape Cod Music Festival for their 30th anniversary. Each movement of the piece is unique. The first movement, inspired by Benny Goodman for his 100th birthday, is derived by his unique way of jazz phrasing. It also celebrates Goodman’s welcoming into the classical arena. The second movement pays homage to the Argentinean Milonga. This instrument represents to many the very soul of the Tango. The third movement is a tribute to Ernesto Lecuona, one of the most prominent Cuban composers. In this movement, the unaccompanied clarinet takes improvisations around the melodies written by Lecuona.

Wings

Joan Tower is widely regarded as one of the most important living American composers. *The New Yorker* has stated that she is “one of the most successful woman composers of all time.” Her career has spanned more than sixty years, writing works for orchestras, chamber ensembles, and soloists. Not only is she an accomplished composer, but an extraordinary pianist. One of her most notable achievements is founding the Da Capo Chamber Players in 1969, who she went on to write many pieces for. Their goal as an ensemble is to bring American music to destinations around the world. Even though she left this ensemble in 1984, the group is still alive today.

Wings was inspired by Tower’s collaboration with Laura Flax in the Da Capo Chamber Players. Tower was very interested in Flax’s unique qualities as a clarinetist. The piece, like the title suggests, supports plenty of bird imagery but was not written based upon a specific image. The piece is unmetered, presents long phrases and dynamic extremes. The score itself is very specifically notated and defined, not allowing the performer to take many liberties from what is written. Regardless of this, it is up to the performer to establish a natural flow of motion and energy, like a bird taking off into flight.

Clarinet Quintet in B Minor, Op. 115

Johannes Brahms was a German composer, pianist and conductor. He is considered to be one of the most prolific composers of the Romantic period. Many of his works have become standards of the modern concert repertoire – including works for orchestra and chamber music ensembles. Brahms' successors are fully aware with the significance of his works, and people often speak about the "Three great Bs" – referring to Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. By the time Brahms reached his mid-fifties, he believed he had exhausted his creative output and retired from composing. He went to see the Meiningen Court Orchestra with clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld, and upon hearing Mühlfeld, was inspired to compose again. For Mühlfeld he wrote a trio, quintet and two clarinet sonatas – all which are now standards in the clarinet repertoire.

Brahms' clarinet quintet is a four-movement work written for clarinet in A. This masterwork has some of the most beautiful musical lines and colors of any chamber music work composed. Listening (or performing) the work is a journey; one of introspection, yearning, and melancholy. There are dark hues, lush textures, and singing vocal lines. Each movement has its own personality, yet creates a comprehensive whole. Throughout, the listener is brought back and forth between B minor and D major, often without the realization that it is happening. This creates the flow needed to progress the piece forward but keep the listener engaged for a full 35-minute work. The piece begins in a similar way it ends – with the last measures of the fourth movement calling back the melody of the first movement – bringing the music to a sorrowful conclusion.

About the Title:

This program explores covid and its impact on society. The title, *Wings*, is a nod to a bird as it migrates for winter, changing its surroundings to survive. With covid, we have needed to adapt in a similar way – often changing the way we do things.

Right before the pandemic, we were all going about our daily lives. Similarly to *The Cape Cod Files*, all cultures around the world were going about their lives. Towards the end of the "normal" though, some people could begin to sense things changing, and often found themselves being alone like in the final unaccompanied movement. *Wings* is a piece unaccompanied and unmeasured. This is what many of us felt during the first month of lockdown – alone and unsure. Many of us still carry this feeling even as the "new normal" begins to take shape. Finally, Brahms' *Clarinet Quintet* shifts us between major and minor keys throughout the movement, reflecting many of the emotions of the pandemic with hope, sorrow, optimism, and uncertainty.