



WILLIAM NEIL

A Brilliant Composer

Article: Deborah Nerud

Photos: Chad Berger

Speaking with William Neil about composing music is much like one of his compositions. Anecdotes, memories, family, history and emotions fluidly weave and bob, intertwining a thoughtful harmony that supports the melody of the topic at hand—a new composition to be premiered and performed with the La Crosse Symphony Orchestra (LCSO) for the 2015-2016 seasonal debut on October 24, 2015.

Neil, 61, a father, husband, composer, musician, radio host on WDR's "Symphony Sunday," financial advisor and co-founder of Project Fourth Stream (a production unit co-founded by Tom Gullion that aims to create a synthesis between improvised and composed music in a multi-media format) has lived a life steeped in music. Neil began his first serious compositions at age 14. "I may have started early, but I'm a late bloomer," Neil states, referencing the accomplishment of his first focused piece and the amount of time involved in the composition.

A former composer-in-residence with the Lyric Opera of Chicago and theatrical sound designer, Neil dedicates this piece, nearly five years in the making, to his father (aged 86). "It took a long time to create," says Neil. "I'm glad my father will be around to hear it."

Influenced by place

Neil feels the piece is organic; its

roots are found in Neil's cultural Nordic heritage, his innate appreciation of darkness and the return of light from a hard, long winter into a fertile spring.

The 13-minute piece is heavily influenced not only by 12 years lived in the Driftless Region, but also from Neil's connection to LCSO and the conductor, Alexander Platt, whom he credits for bringing the music to life. Highlighting that connection, Platt comments, "Bill is so in touch with this Driftless Region. The piece has a very organic quality, especially as it grows out of the lakes, fields and forests of the region."

Citing influences, Neil references Debussy, Satie, Mozart and Bach, but notes that the Finnish Sibelius "feels like a kindred spirit" for his vibrancy, clarity and his immersion into the darkness that comes with living in a far-northern country, where light is scarce.

"Sinfonia delle Gioie," which will be premiered as the first part of a program titled Nordic Moods, will include Jean Sibelius' violin concerto, featuring Janet Sung, artist-in-residence at Chicago's DePaul University, and Carl Nielsen's Symphony No. 3 in C Major, the "Sinfonia Espansiva," which will feature vocalizations by La Crosse residents Ann Schoenecker and Hans Laping. Reflective of the Nordic theme, Neil chose to highlight a traditional Nordic folk instrument, the willow (sallow) flute. "I wanted a flute made specifically for this piece and sourced a Croatian maker.

It was my goal to find a way to play and orchestrate this instrument with the [La Crosse] Symphony."

Ready to share his work

Neil hopes to challenge the audience with his arrangement, stating, "My approach is eclectic. It's a compelling style that challenges the audience to abandon everything, to expose their deeper consciousness to the power within the composition."

The title of the piece, which translates from Italian as "The Symphony of Joys," takes on deeper meaning when looking at the etymological plurality of gioie, which denotes joys or jewels. "This piece is very much a reflection of the joys in my life that have emerged over time," says Neil. "I love music, I love Italy, I love the Driftless Region, and my memories and experiences with these things are like jewels."

Platt is excited for Neil's piece and shares, "Our [LCSO's] audiences are very accepting of new good things, and the intensity of our rehearsals and anticipation for the work usually match that of the audience on the day of performance."

Neil, who feels his orchestration matches the dreamed color and complexity of his vision, is ready to share his work. He states, "Living in a piece is like living in a musical dream world. I hope to invite an audience to the edge of their seats—the place where they surrender and wonder, 'Wow. What was that?'"

Deborah Nerud is a ukulele-playing mama-of-two/writer/gardener/pie baker/cyclist/runner/performer with work published in Coulee Region Women and Coulee Parenting Connection. A firm believer in the emotional power of pen and paper, she still loves sending (and receiving) letters via USPS and will happily send you a note in the mail.

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La Crosse Symphony Orchestra:
Nordic Moods

Where:
Viterbo Fine Arts Center,
929 Jackson St., La Crosse

When:
October 24, 7:30-10 p.m.

Purchase concert tickets or season tickets:
www.lacrossesymphony.org

Learn more about William Neil:
www.williamneil.net,
www.projectfourthstream.com



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