

FORBES CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS  
**JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY®**

School of Music

*presents*

**JMU Symphony Orchestra**  
***Singing Rivers***

**Foster Beyers, *director***

Tuesday, October 5, 2021  
8 pm  
Concert Hall



There is no intermission.

## Program

Tragic Overture, Op. 81

Johannes Brahms  
(1797-1828)

Wood Notes

William Grant Still  
(1895-1978)

Singing River  
Autumn Night  
Moon Dusk  
Whippoorwill's Shoes

The Moldau, from *Má vlast*

Bedřich Smetana  
(1824-1884)

Kim Souther, *DMA conductor*

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## Program Notes

### Tragic Overture

Brahms was active during the latter half of the 19th century, putting him squarely within the Romantic musical tradition along with musicians like Richard Wagner, Johann Strauss II, and Franz Liszt. The music that Brahms wrote, however, was profoundly different from most of the composers of his time, lying more in the tradition of earlier artists such as Mozart, Haydn, and particularly Beethoven. While Wagner took on musical drama by writing marathon operatic cycles, Strauss became “The Waltz King”, and Liszt created the genre of the “Symphonic Poem” as we know it, Brahms used Classical forms, conventional harmonies, and formats absent of any relation to other non-musical sources (like drama, dance, and poetry).

While in some ways traditional, Brahms innovated greatly on what he drew inspiration from. Harmonically, he uses the standard voice-leading ideas of the Classical period as a blueprint, but often sidesteps expectations smoothly to embellish certain parts of phrases and create intense and dramatic turbulence. During his youth, he became fascinated with the irregular rhythms of Hungarian folk music and frequently incorporated rhythmic irregularity into his music. His construction with Classical forms rarely, if ever, resulted in a standard format; sections are moved, truncated, extended, added, and removed as he saw fit to heighten tension and create an extended slow-burn. While Brahms was somewhat of a traditionalist, his music also innovated.

Brahms was famously self-critical, to the point where he'd write and rewrite pieces only to end up destroying the drafts entirely. Under tremendous pressure due to his fame as well as the long shadow Beethoven cast with his 9th Symphony, Brahms destroyed draft after draft of his 1st Symphony until, over 15 years after he began writing it, it was released to very favorable reviews. When he premiered his 1st Piano Concerto with himself as the soloist, it was lambasted by critics, causing him to see it as a “decisive failure”. During its second public performance, the audience's reaction was so hostile that Brahms had to be restrained as he tried to leave the stage in shame after the first movement.

When big personalities collide, the results are usually funny, often interesting, and always eye-opening, giving a face to the people we're taught about in history classes. Brahms's life is no different. It is fascinating to note the relationships he had with several other legendary musicians. Brahms became fast friends with Robert and Clara Schumann, and after Robert's suicide attempt only months after they met, Brahms moved closer to support Clara and the rest of her family while Robert remained in the mental sanatorium. Even after his death two years later, Brahms and Clara remained strictly platonic friends and they grew to deeply respect one another. Their relationship lasted over 30 years until Clara's death. In the case of Richard Wagner Brahms took a particular interest in his operas despite writing vastly different music. He assisted in the preparations for the 1862 and '63 performances of Wagner's work in Vienna, and, for his help, he was given a manuscript for part of *Tannhäuser*. Wagner, however, never shared the enthusiasm for Brahms's work that Brahms did for Wagner's. In 1875, he demanded the manuscript back. Somehow, this ranks among the more polite of Wagner's public interactions.

Brahms's *Tragic Overture* is one of a set of two Overtures composed in the summer of 1880, the other being his Academic Festival Overture. Like most of Brahms's music, neither of these titles convey any specific story or image; their names were given to highlight the different moods each represented. Of these two pieces, Brahms claimed that “One laughs while the other cries.” In all 3 main sections, Brahms chose the key of D Minor to emphasize the tormented character of the piece. The first two chords intentionally feel very hollow, lacking the grounded feeling of the older works Brahms emulated. The strings then begin a melody that at first ascends and appears hopeful, but ultimately falls, punctuated by “sighing” at the end of both segments. Finally, the violins try to recover with a heroic march-like idea, building to a big “question” posed by the entire orchestra that goes unanswered for the entirety of the introduction. Throughout the piece, Brahms continues to play with these ideas as he pits the descending motion of the melody against the ascending motion of the rest of the orchestra,

directly confronting the promise of hope in the opening with the inevitable tragedy of its end. The *Tragic Overture* was premiered on December 26th, 1880 in Vienna before a reportedly unenthusiastic audience however 8 days later it was performed at the University of Breslau, paired with its cheerier sibling, the *Academic Festival Overture*. In that performance the *Tragic Overture* apparently had a profound effect on the audience.

*The JMU Symphony Orchestra would like to dedicate this performance of the Brahms Tragic Overture to the victims of Covid-19 and the many family members, friends and colleagues who have been affected by their loss.*

Notes by Matt Tignor and Foster Beyers

## Wood Notes

William Grant Still (1896-1978) was the 20th century's most successful and prominent African-American composer. Despite his relative success and vast output his music has unfortunately not gained a foothold in the repertoire of the modern symphony orchestra. Still, born in Woodville, Mississippi, went on to study at the prestigious Oberlin Conservatory with F.J. Lehmann. Later composition teachers included Edgar Varese, George Chadwick but Still was also influenced by his work with the influential songwriter W.C. Handy.

Still accomplished many milestones as African-American composer. His most well-known piece, *Symphony No. 1: "Afro-American"*, became the first piece written by an African-American to be performed by a major symphony (Rochester Symphony Orchestra in 1931 and New York Philharmonic in 1935). His opera, *A Bayou Legend*, went on to become the first opera composed by an African-American to be performed on national television in 1981. Still's eclectic musical style draws from themes in jazz, blues, and ragtime while infusing classical and romantic styles within many of his works. Among his most popular pieces that have yet to be mentioned are *Symphony No. 2: Song of a New Race* (1930), *Suite for Violin and Piano* (1943), *Danzas de Panamá* (1948), and *The American Scene* (1957). In all Still composed five symphonies, four operas, and many works for band, strings, and full orchestra. In 1999, William Grant Still was recognized for his accomplishments as a composer and was inducted into the Mississippi Musicians Hall of Fame but much more should be done to recognize this supremely gifted composer.

The work on tonight's program, *Wood Notes*, is a four-movement work based on the poetry of J. Mitchell Pilcher, an Alabama war veteran and social worker. Each of the four movements entitled *Singing River*, *Autumn Night*, *Moon Dusk*, and *Whippoorwill's Shoe*'s correspond to a specific poem by Pilcher which will be projected on to the screen during our performance of the work. Each of the movements, audibly representative of their titles, are described as pastoral and impressionistic while reflecting a woodwind orchestration that is reminiscent of the Romantic-era composer Antonín Dvořák. Be sure to listen out for Still's extraordinary textures and brilliant ability to weave together multiple motifs that portray common themes within each of the movements. The composer spoke about his collaboration with Pilcher on this work:

"Wood Notes has a social significance because it is a collaboration between a southern white man and a southern born negro composer in which both of the participants were enthused over the project. I liked Mr. Pilcher's poems as he sent them to me and wanted to make use of them in music."

The work originally contained five movements however the fifth movement was unfortunately redacted by the publisher against the composers wishes. It should be noted that the orchestration heard tonight also does not completely reflect the composer's final wishes however this version is the only one available to perform. It is hoped that the increasing respect for this composer's work will be cause for a more serious consideration of his legacy.

Notes by Kyle Mendez and Foster Beyers

## The Moldau

When discussing examples of Musical Nationalism, *Má vlast* and Bedřich Smetana often finds its way into the conversation. Smetana was a Bohemian composer of the Romantic period, whose works blend the cultural and sociopolitical landscape of Bohemia; the region of Czech lands later formed into the First Czechoslovak Republic, currently known as the Czech Republic. Smetana established his prominence and fame as the “father of Czech music.” During his lifetime, he worked and traveled mainly in Sweden and Prague; where, in 1848, he wrote his first piece of Nationalistic music during the Prague Uprising.

Later in his life, by 1882, he would compose a set of symphonic poems titled *Má vlast*, translated as My Fatherland, the six pieces would come together to exhibit a work that embodies the ideals of Musical Nationalism in its devotion to the landscapes, folklore and history of Bohemia. Tonight, the second and most famous of the symphonic poems, *Vltava*, very well known by its “English title,” *The Moldau* is what we will be performing for you. The “English title” of the piece is actually the German translation of the word Vltava, which is a river in the Czech Republic, often considered the national river of the Czech Republic, it is the longest river in the country spanning 267 miles. Smetana composed this symphonic poem with its themes and developments to celebrate and illustrate the river with its tone painting, imagery and progression.

This movement is a symphonic poem, a form brought to prominence by Franz Liszt who was a good friend, mentor and teacher to Smetana. Throughout the movement there are titular sections that move the piece through its progression of the river and the embodiment of its journey. Beginning in the forest where the river is born as two springs, a description of the springs and their connection to the composition is described perfectly by poet and composer Václav Zelený, “It sings of its first two springs, one warm the other cold, rising in the Bohemian forest...” The light, rippling flow heard in the first passage of the music brings to life the imagery of the Vltava’s awakening. These two springs eventually join together to form the river, we can hear this in the music as it grows in intensity and orchestration leading to rich and warm exchange between the strings depicting the ebb and flow of the growing river. This eventually gives way to the lyrical motive, played by the first violins, which characterizes the beauty and strength of the river. This theme was an adaptation of a popular 16th century song, *La Manatovana*, often attributed to Giuseppe Cenci; this melody and other variations of it have found itself used in many folk songs and pieces, most notably, as a basis for *The Hatikvah*, the national anthem of Israel, and in Smetana’s *Vltava*.

As the movement progresses, we, as the embodiment of the river, moving downstream past various scenes illustrated in the music. The declarative, festive theme played on the horns can characterize the joyous and dutiful hunters one would find in the forests of Bohemia, and the change we find in rhythm and style as the music moves from the continuous, flowing lines to a polka-like dance depicts a village wedding where we see the peasants dancing. As we continue on, we see the fantastical elements of Romanticism in the characterization of the water nymphs and magical creatures we hear in the mysterious, poised, yet rousing lines of the music which lead us back to the theme before progressing on. This time, the theme is built further becoming more and more tumultuous as we enter St. John’s Rapids, we hear this stretch of the rolling white water as the music becomes more chaotic and intense, the tempo faster and more agitated as the orchestration grows. The sudden diminuendo and steadying of the pulse indicates our way out as the river becomes broader as it reaches Prague, we hear this widening in the brass and percussion with their stately assertion. This assertion also depicts the Vyšehrad, of which the first movement of the cycle is based upon, it is a castle in Prague where the earliest royalty in Czech reigned. The music eventually begins to slowly taper, diminishing in its sound as the river trickles down and slowly fades away, before the piece ends with a loud and abrupt two-chord cadence.

Notes by Louanna Colon

## Biographies

**Foster Beyers** (*conductor*) is the Director of Orchestras and Assistant Professor of Orchestral Conducting at James Madison University where he conducts the Symphony and Chamber Orchestra and leads the Opera each Fall. His duties also include courses in orchestral literature and mentoring of students in the Masters and Doctoral program in Orchestral Conducting. Beyers came to Virginia from Minnesota where he was Director of Orchestras at Concordia College in Moorhead, MN.

Beyers is a committed advocate for and partner to music educators at every level. He began his career in the public schools of Green Bay, Wisconsin where he served as Music Director of the Green Bay Symphony Youth Orchestras while also teaching orchestra and band in the Green Bay Public schools for five years.<sup>[1]</sup><sup>[2]</sup><sup>[3]</sup><sup>[4]</sup><sup>[5]</sup><sup>[6]</sup><sup>[7]</sup><sup>[8]</sup><sup>[9]</sup><sup>[10]</sup><sup>[11]</sup><sup>[12]</sup><sup>[13]</sup><sup>[14]</sup><sup>[15]</sup><sup>[16]</sup><sup>[17]</sup><sup>[18]</sup><sup>[19]</sup><sup>[20]</sup><sup>[21]</sup><sup>[22]</sup><sup>[23]</sup><sup>[24]</sup><sup>[25]</sup><sup>[26]</sup><sup>[27]</sup><sup>[28]</sup><sup>[29]</sup><sup>[30]</sup><sup>[31]</sup><sup>[32]</sup><sup>[33]</sup><sup>[34]</sup><sup>[35]</sup><sup>[36]</sup><sup>[37]</sup><sup>[38]</sup><sup>[39]</sup><sup>[40]</sup><sup>[41]</sup><sup>[42]</sup><sup>[43]</sup><sup>[44]</sup><sup>[45]</sup><sup>[46]</sup><sup>[47]</sup><sup>[48]</sup><sup>[49]</sup><sup>[50]</sup><sup>[51]</sup><sup>[52]</sup><sup>[53]</sup><sup>[54]</sup><sup>[55]</sup><sup>[56]</sup><sup>[57]</sup><sup>[58]</sup><sup>[59]</sup><sup>[60]</sup><sup>[61]</sup><sup>[62]</sup><sup>[63]</sup><sup>[64]</sup><sup>[65]</sup><sup>[66]</sup><sup>[67]</sup><sup>[68]</sup><sup>[69]</sup><sup>[70]</sup><sup>[71]</sup><sup>[72]</sup><sup>[73]</sup><sup>[74]</sup><sup>[75]</sup><sup>[76]</sup><sup>[77]</sup><sup>[78]</sup><sup>[79]</sup><sup>[80]</sup><sup>[81]</sup><sup>[82]</sup><sup>[83]</sup><sup>[84]</sup><sup>[85]</sup><sup>[86]</sup><sup>[87]</sup><sup>[88]</sup><sup>[89]</sup><sup>[90]</sup><sup>[91]</sup><sup>[92]</sup><sup>[93]</sup><sup>[94]</sup><sup>[95]</sup><sup>[96]</sup><sup>[97]</sup><sup>[98]</sup><sup>[99]</sup><sup>[100]</sup> As an educator he has conducted the Merit School of Music Symphony Orchestra, Music Institute of Chicago Junior Academy Orchestra and the 2010 Minnesota Middle Level Honors Orchestra as well as numerous regional honors orchestras throughout the Midwest and East. Most recently Mr. Beyers conducted the All-Virginia Orchestra in March of 2019 and the North Carolina Eastern Regional Orchestra in February of 2020.

A native of Richmond, Virginia, **Kimberly Souther** (*DMA conductor*) received her Bachelor of Music Education from James Madison and Master of Music Education from Shenandoah University. She is currently an orchestral conducting doctoral student at James Madison University. As a cellist, she has performed with the Fox Valley Symphony, Williamsburg Sinfonia, Las Colinas Symphony Orchestra, Peninsula Players Theater, Northern Lights Theater, Green Bay Symphony Orchestra, Weidner Philharmonic, Manitowoc Symphony, and Oshkosh Symphony.

She is currently the conductor of the Nelson County Community Orchestra and enjoys guest conducting university, youth, and regional orchestras whenever possible.

Souther is known for her genre-bending and alternative string playing on the cello. She specializes in multi-style performances using her six-string electric cello and has performed with the Tran-Siberian Orchestra and genre-fusion rock orchestra, Symphony on the Rocks. An active global musician, she has participated in projects with the Silk Road Ensemble, Sarah Jarosz, Aoife O'Donovan, Mark Wood, Michael Bolton, Rushad Eggleston, Mike Block, Yo Yo Ma and many other international musicians.

Ms. Souther currently serves as the program director for Shenandoah Valley Preparatory Music at Eastern Mennonite University and is on faculty at EMU as an instructor of cello, music education, and alternative styles.

# List of Ensemble Members

Members are listed alphabetically by section

## Violin I

Lauren Bristow  
Aidan Coleman  
Isaac Cotnoir  
Adeline King  
Tomona Mims  
Rachel Tan  
Patrick Shaughnessy\*

## Violin II

Paul Anderson  
Briana Clark  
Louanna Colon  
Nathaniel Gordy  
Thomas O'Keefe^  
Sierra Rickard  
Emily Werner

## Viola

Mary Binder  
Kamryn Cajohn  
Madeleine Gabalaski  
Ryan Haymans  
Chris King^  
Nina Ravel  
David Swanson

## Cello

Alison Lilly  
Kyle Mendez  
Isaiah Ortiz  
Jessi Sfarnas  
Kim Souther^

## Bass

James Adkinson-  
Picciello  
Tina Battaglia  
Michael Cseh  
John Foley  
Alex Haldane  
Joey Lane  
Gabe Ravel^

## Piccolo

Ariel Collins

## Flutes

Dominic Baldoni^  
Bo Boisen

## Oboes

Rebekah Gernert  
Will Slopnick^

## Clarinets

Josie Garner  
Gregorio Paone^

## Bassoons

Hanna Maranzatto  
Matt Tignor^

## Horns

Jacob Andersen  
Andrew Parker  
Jordyn Shultz^  
Jackson Van Hyning

## Trumpets

Eva Bayliss^  
Owen Brown  
Max Parrish

## Trombones

Shiv Love^  
Thomas Valentine

## Bass Trombone

Will Crowson

## Tuba

Jake Munn

## Harp

Vanessa Putnam

## Celeste

Norman Charette

## Timpani

Will Alderman

## Percussion

Josh Cummings^  
Tyler Ende  
Aaron Soferenko

## Key

\*Concertmaster  
^Principal

## JMU School of Music Diversity Statement

Difference in identity enriches our community, fosters artistic and intellectual growth, and is vital to creating thriving venues for expression in a global world. In addition to welcoming all individuals and perspectives regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, socio-economic status, or citizenship status, we wish to make the following acknowledgements and affirmations, adapted from Americans for the Arts:

- In the United States, there are systems of power that grant privilege and access unequally such that inequity and injustice result. We resolve to educate ourselves, keep vigilant watch, and act to bring an end to systemic oppression.
- Cultural equity—which embodies values, practices, and policies that ensure all people have access to, and are represented in, the arts—is critical to the sustained engagement of music in society.
- Acknowledging and challenging our inequities and working in partnership is how we will make change happen.
- Everyone deserves equal access to a full, vibrant creative life, which is essential to a healthy and democratic society.
- The prominent presence of musicians in society can challenge inequities and encourage alternatives.



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