

## BICENTENNIAL JAZZ COMMISSIONS, PROGRAM NOTES

### **Listen Up!**

Members of the Jazz Knights were deeply saddened by the October 2, 2001 passing of composer Manny Albam, who influenced the sound of jazz from the end of World War II to the 1960's and beyond. Mr. Albam was born in 1922 in the Dominican Republic and raised in New York City. He began his professional career in 1940, playing alto and baritone saxophone with a number of bands. After leaving the Army in 1946, he began to write music while playing with the bands of Charlie Barnet, Jerry Wald and others. By the early 1950's, he had become a full-time composer and arranger.

During his career Manny Albam wrote for the bands of Count Basie, Woody Herman, Stan Kenton, Buddy Rich, Dizzy Gillespie, Stan Getz, Gerry Mulligan, Coleman Hawkins and others. He also arranged for such well-known singers as Sarah Vaughan and Carmen McRae.

Albam became a pioneer in the field of jazz education during the 1960's, promoting the creation of new works for big bands with workshops at the Eastman School of Music, Glassboro State College in New Jersey and the Manhattan School of Music. In 1988, he succeeded Bob Brookmeyer as associate musical director of the Jazz Composers' Workshop, which the music licensing organization BMI established to help guide aspiring composers and arrangers in their creative efforts. In 1997, Albam provided most of the arrangements for saxophonist Joe Lovano's Grammy-nominated album *Celebrating Sinatra*. He carried on with his many activities until being confined to the hospital late in the summer of 2001.

Manny Albam's commission for the Jazz Knights was his last creation. A contemporary swing composition in one movement, the piece makes use of sophisticated melodic and harmonic techniques. It features solo phrases answered by group motifs in a manner reminiscent of Gospel call and response. Appropriately titled *Listen Up!*, Mr. Albam's work grabs the listener's attention with its high level of creativity and individual style.

### **Suite for a New World**

Composer and drummer Dennis Mackrel is widely recognized as one of the best big-band drummers around, and as an accomplished writer as well. His numerous performance credits include touring with the Count Basie Orchestra from 1983 through 1987.

Mr. Mackrel's compositions and arrangements have been recorded and performed internationally by ensembles such as the WDR Radio Big Band in Cologne, Germany; the RIAS Radio Big Band in Berlin; and the Kluvers Big Band in Aarhus, Denmark. He has also written for the McCoy Tyner Big Band, whose Grammy winning albums *The Turning Point* and *Journey* included four of his arrangements.

In November of 2001, Mr. Mackrel commented on his work as it was in progress for the band: “When I originally started writing, I had a very different type of piece in mind. It was to be bright and flashy and serve as a showcase for the Jazz Knights. Then came the World Trade Center tragedy. The emotions that I felt were so powerful and so strong that I felt it would be wrong to ignore them. So, what I've come up with so far would be best described as an extended concert piece that tries to capture the sense of loss that I felt on September 11. So far, it combines elements of European classical music and Brazilian rhythms with American jazz harmonies. It's been difficult to work on the music, because of the emotional roller coaster that we've all been on. As a composer, my challenge is to focus my emotions and to express them in a musical way. The difficulty has been that my feelings are changing on a daily basis as each day brings new information. At the moment, this one piece looks like it may evolve into a three-part suite. The exciting part for me is that I don't know how it's going to end or what direction it's going to take, but I guess that's how life is for all of us these days.”

### **Grainger Suite**

Guitarist and composer James Chirillo has first-hand knowledge of life at West Point, and of the activities of the Jazz Knights in particular. He was the guitarist for the band for three years in the early 1980's. After leaving the Army in 1982, he worked with many of the greats from the Swing era, and was a member of Benny Goodman's last band. Chirillo was a charter member of the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra from 1992 to 1999, under the direction of David Baker and Gunther Schuller. He also performed with the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra. Mr. Chirillo studied composition and arranging with John Carisi and Bill Finegan. In 1995, the National Endowment for the Arts awarded him a jazz composition grant for *Homage Concerto*, for clarinet and jazz orchestra, performed by clarinetist Ken Poplowski.

James Chirillo had the following to say about his commission for the Jazz Knights: “My piece is based on two themes associated with Percy Grainger - *The Sussex Mimmers' Christmas Carol* (because I like it) and *Hill-Song no. 2* (which the West Point Concert Band premiered in 1940). Grainger had a longstanding relationship with West Point. He often would bring new pieces to the band in order to hear them first hand. When asked a couple of years ago to submit an idea for a possible commission for the bicentennial, I immediately thought of a tie-in, incorporating a piece of Grainger's associated with West Point. What I've tried to do is come up with something fun and challenging for the band to play based on his music in a jazz context.”