

## BICENTENNIAL COMMISSIONS VOLUME I, PROGRAM NOTES

### **Legacy...**

Born in 1954 in Cleveland, Ohio, Eric Ewazen received his training from the Eastman School of Music and the Juilliard School, where he has served on the faculty since 1980. A student of Samuel Adler, Milton Babbitt, Warren Benson and Joseph Schwantner, Ewazen has achieved his own position of prominence. His music has been commissioned and performed by ensembles at home and abroad, and his works have been recorded by members of the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony and Cleveland Orchestra.

*Legacy...*, his commission for the West Point's bicentennial, is a large, three-movement work written in cyclic form. It contains wonderfully broad Schumann-like themes that return in the final movement, creating a very full, powerful statement.

Dr. Ewazen has this to say about his piece:

When I was first approached to compose this work, I immediately thought of my father, who was a World War II veteran. Wounded at the Battle of the Bulge, he was always very proud of his military service. The stories he would tell - of gallantry, loss, determination, harrowing experience - always resonated with pride. It is the spirit of his stories that I am trying to capture in this piece.

The United States Military Academy is situated high above the Hudson River. It commands a grand view of this spectacular valley, and is a most imposing sight as viewed from the river. A true fortress, it seems as if it is carved into the massive, rocky cliffs. "...of a Fortress over a River Valley" describes this scene. The music depicts the stateliness of the buildings, the flow of the river and the drama of the beautiful landscape. "... of Fields of Battle" recalls the frightening WWII stories told by my father and uncles. Violent sounds of conflict surround a reassuring chorale. The finale "...of Home and Country" speaks of the never-ending hope to return home. Memories of West Point are ever present, and the old West Point song *Benny Havens* is heard, along with many traditional bugle calls.

### **Perpetual Song**

Dan Welcher, a graduate of the Eastman School of Music, served with the U.S. Military Academy Band from 1969 to 1972 as a bassoonist and arranger. His compositions cover virtually every genre, including opera, concerto, symphony, wind ensemble and chamber music. Welcher has enjoyed performances of his music by over fifty orchestras and ensembles, including the Chicago Symphony and the Boston Pops. He currently serves as professor of composition at the University of Texas at Austin, and his recent commissions have been premiered by the Utah Symphony Orchestra and the Handel & Haydn Society Orchestra and Chorus.

*Perpetual Song* is a single-movement work in three sections, reminiscent of the charming style of Percy Grainger, for many years a great friend to the Academy Band. In this work, Welcher also pays tribute to J. S. Bach and Dmitri Shostakovich through his use of seamless and well-crafted counterpoint.

### **Hudson River Rhapsody**

James Kessler, a graduate of the Eastman School of Music, served for over twenty years on the arranging staff of the U.S. Army Band. His writing includes music for National Geographic, Kennedy Center Honors, numerous PBS specials and a host of performances involving the National Symphony Orchestra.

*Hudson River Rhapsody*, for solo oboe and band, was the first in a series of works written for the Academy Band to celebrate the bicentennial of the Military Academy. Like the Hudson River School paintings of Thomas Cole and Thomas Benjamin Pope, the rhapsody is really a bit of nostalgia, a remembrance influenced by the pastoral beauty and history that surround West Point and the Hudson River Valley. For over two hundred years, people have traveled from near and far to enjoy the quiet and tranquil peace of the Valley - to relax and perhaps meditate for just a moment on America's hard-won freedom. *Hudson River Rhapsody* is a modern day ballad, a reflective and melancholy camp song - the sort of music that has long been part of army life.

### **Restless Birds Before the Dark Moon**

David Kechley, a native of Seattle, Washington, holds degrees from the University of Washington and the Cleveland Institute of Music. He is currently a professor of music and chair of the music department at Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts. Kechley has produced 67 major works, with combined performances totaling more than eight hundred. These include collaborations with the Minnesota Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Boston Pops, Seattle Symphony, North Carolina Symphony, Colorado Symphony, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, Kronos Quartet and Lark Quartet. He is the winner of numerous national prizes and awards, including a Barlow Foundation commission, and ASCAP and National Association of Schools of Music awards.

His tone painting *Restless Birds Before the Dark Moon* captures with realism all the effect of birds in flight. Both jagged and lyrical, it is a technical tour de force expressing the conflict of good and evil. The piece received its premiere in 2000 at the twelfth World Saxophone Congress, in Montreal, Quebec, and was the winner of the National Band Association's William D. Revelli Composition Contest.

### **The Line**

Jerry Bilik, conductor, lecturer, arranger and composer began writing while a student at the National Music Camp at Interlochen, Michigan. He graduated from the University of Michigan and served as chief arranger for the U.S. Military Academy Band from 1955 to 1958. After a distinguished career of teaching at his alma mater and Wayne State University, Bilik moved to Los Angeles, where he wrote for television, film, and live shows. He currently resides in Cabin John, Maryland and is the vice president of creative development for *Disney on Ice*. His spirited march *The Line* opens with a mist-shrouded reference to America's past. Distant drums set the tone, and a lonely piccolo quotes an early Revolutionary War tune. The title, of course, refers to West Point's "Long Gray Line" - the graduates of the United States Military Academy who have courageously served the Army and our nation for the past two hundred years.

*Sergeant Major Joël Evans*