

## BlueWater & Verb Ballets collaborate — at a distance

by Daniel Hathaway



On Saturday, November 21, two Cleveland institutions will come together in a collaborative project without ever having been in the same room.

“Building Bridges Together” is a joint project between BlueWater Chamber Orchestra (Daniel Meyer, artistic director) and Verb Ballets (Margaret Carlson and Richard Dickinson, artistic

directors). The program includes performances of Heinz Poll’s *Adagio for Two Dancers*, set to a famous piece attributed to Albinoni, and Michael Escovedo’s *Broken Bridges*, choreographed to Shostakovich’s *Chamber Symphony*. In between, BlueWater will play Anton Webern’s *Langsamer Satz*.

The program, pre-recorded at the Shore Cultural Center in Euclid, will debut at 7:30 pm on November 21 and remain available to [ticket holders](#) for 24 hours.

Speaking from his home in Pittsburgh, Daniel Meyer, who also conducts Pennsylvania’s Erie Philharmonic and Westmoreland Symphony, as well as Ohio’s summertime Lakeside Symphony, said that the idea of working with a dance company came to him when he was auditioning for the Lakeside job. “That happened to be the same weekend Verb was in residence at Lakeside, and I was deeply impressed,” he said. “If I got hired, I definitely wanted to continue the tradition of working with this group.”

The company performed the Albinoni *Adagio* on that occasion, and Meyer had seen them dance the Shostakovich the summer before. Because those pieces were already

in the dancers' repertory, he thought that a collaboration in Cleveland with BlueWater could be put together quickly.



“We assembled the chamber orchestra component first, then put their choreography to the music two weeks later,” Meyer said. “The dancers and musicians were never in the same room. It was bizarre, but intriguing. We separated each of the twenty string players by a radius of six feet, and we all wore masks. We were really sad about not being able to include winds.”

Both audio and video were recorded at the Shore Center. “It’s an old high school auditorium slash basketball court with a lovely acoustic and lots of space to spread out,” Meyer said. “I already had a collaborative relationship with both Maggie and Richard, and we spent a good many minutes on Zoom working out the logistics of how this would all come together. Gratefully, Verb was already up and running with creating video content for their season.”



Meyer noted that one of the oddities of this collaboration is that the responsibility for establishing tempos has been flipped because the music has been recorded first. “Usually, I’m always asking the choreographer if the tempo is right, and if I’m doing OK.”

Meanwhile, back at Meyer’s orchestral ranches, plans are going ahead as well as the pandemic will allow. “BlueWater won a grant from Cuyahoga Arts and Culture to produce a program that can be

webcast for Cleveland school children. The idea is to connect chamber orchestra music to iconic Cleveland locations and artists — connecting Michael Daughterty’s *Metropolis Symphony* to Cleveland, or using a piece of pastoral music to celebrate the Cleveland Metroparks.”

The conductor admits that his role has changed. “You know, I’ve become a video producer. We’re developing a series in Erie for public television that explores string repertoire from various parts of the world. I’m currently editing a program about American composers, including music by Jennifer Higdon, George Gershwin’s *Lullaby*, Scott Joplin’s *Maple Leaf Rag* for string quartet — repertoire we wouldn’t necessarily be performing on the mainstage. I act as host, weaving commentary in between. We’ve already recorded a holiday program and have plans for at least three more.”

And the summer season at Lakeside? Meyer said they’ll probably develop Plans A, B, and C, but all of them will include some kind of live music making, “whether it’s holding performances in Hoover Auditorium or outside, or a combination of both.”

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