

## Review

### Cleveland Winds with Bay Village H.S. Wind Ensemble at Waetjen Auditorium, CSU (March 4)

by Daniel Hathaway



Twice each season, Cleveland Winds brings together a group of excellent and dedicated wind players — mostly, it would seem, area music teachers — to explore the rich tradition of music written for Symphonic Wind Ensemble. The group, conducted by Cleveland State University music department chair Birch Browning, has also developed a tradition of inviting wind ensembles from area high schools to share the program.

On March 4, the Bay High School Symphonic Band under director Darren Allen were the invited guests for “Lights and Legends” in CSU’s Waetjen Auditorium. Between them, the two ensembles featured some famous British military band pieces by Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst which helped establish a new standard of quality for twentieth-century wind ensemble music.

Taking the stage for the second half of the concert, Cleveland Winds opened with an energetic performance of Vaughan Williams’s *Toccata Marziale*, capably teasing out every strand of its busy counterpoint. Holst’s *First Suite* (there are two) received a similarly authoritative reading. Though its opening *Chaconne* might have benefitted from a more laid-back tempo, fine oboe, clarinet and cornet solos adorned the *Intermezzo*. The concluding *March* brought the suite to a festive conclusion, especially when its two themes were superimposed at the end.

Cleveland-trained John Mackey (who studied at CIM under Donald Erb) has made a specialty of composing for wind ensemble. His *Aurora Awakes* celebrates the coming of dawn with vibrant colors and subliminal energy. Birch and his band paced it admirably, following it with Frank Ticheli’s three-movement *Symphony No. 2*, an astral study of shooting stars, new-moon reveries and whatever “Apollo Unleashed” might mean.

The work is dedicated to James E. Croft, a retirement gift following his many years as director of bands at Florida State University (Browning, who was a student of Croft’s noticeably choked up during his prefatory remarks). Colorful and interestingly episodic, the *Symphony* is crowned by the Bach chorale *Wer Gott vertraut, hat wohl gebaut*, a Berg violin concerto-like gesture. Cleveland Winds gave it a handsome performance.

The Bay Village Symphonic Band opened with Alfred Reed's "Latin Fantasy", *El Camino Real*, then turned to Vaughan Williams's infectious *English Folk Song Suite* and finished with Mark Williams's *Variants on a Nautical Hymn* (the "Navy Hymn").

What fun to have the energy of a young ensemble onstage to begin the concert! Though a number of players are still in the process of mastering their instruments, the Bay Village musicians approached their task with verve and commitment. Tuning more carefully beforehand would have added more focus and clarity to their performances. Doubtless they learned a lot from hearing Cleveland Winds play later in the evening — and from seeing their director trade his baton for a place in the older ensemble's percussion section.

It was delightful and quite nostalgic for this former band oboist (who predates the Symphonic Wind Ensemble era) to hear the three Holst and Vaughan Williams pieces on the same program. Cleveland Winds is a great idea. It would be thrilling to hear them play more than twice a year.

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