

ChamberFest Cleveland: a conversation with bassoonist Fernando Traba

by Mike Telin



On Wednesday, July 1 at 7:00 pm, ChamberFest will pull out all the stops when it caps off its season with a concert at the Blackstone Pipe Organ Residence in Bratenahl. The concert, titled “Stars and Stripes,” will feature Todd Wilson on the home’s custom-built organ in a performance of Ives’s *Variations on a National Hymn, “America.”* The prize-winning Echo Saxophone Quartet will play Terry Riley’s *Tread on the Trail*, and the concert will conclude with Dvořák’s *String Quintet No. 3, Op. 97*. At 6:15 pm, festival speaker Joel Smirnoff will present a prelude talk, and a picnic on the lawn will follow the performance.

At the suggestion of bassoonist [Fernando Traba](#), the concert will also include Ned Rorem’s rarely-performed *Winter Pages for clarinet, bassoon, violin, cello, and piano*. “Frank Cohen asked me to let him know if I hear any great piece that hasn’t been played at the Festival,” Traba recalled during a recent telephone conversation. “I often visit YouTube and Spotify to try to find pieces that I don’t know. I came across a performance of this one, and it immediately struck me that it should be played at ChamberFest. I sent Frank the link, and he got back to me saying that he had actually played the piece shortly after it was premiered. I’m ashamed to say that I didn’t know a lot about Ned Rorem. He is 91 years old now, and he’s mainly known as a composer of art songs.”

What attracted Traba to the work? “Each one of its twelve movements is quite different. They beautifully showcase the different instruments in the quintet. The piece has everything — there’s a wonderful, happy waltz for piano and clarinet that depicts Paris at the time that Rorem was living there and studying with Nadia Boulanger. He also based each movement on a different poem. For example the second movement is a huge

cadenza for the bassoon, inspired by John Greenleaf Whittier's *Snow-Bound*. The wonderful penultimate movement is for solo cello. During the finale, Rorem brings back thematic material from every movement and ties them together, bringing the piece to a very peaceful end."

Composed in 1981 at the request of pianist Charles Wadsworth, *Winter Pages* was premiered on February 14, 1982 by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. "The piece was tailor-made for that ensemble," Traba said. "At the time, Wadsworth was its artistic director, and he was a good friend of Rorem's, so he asked him to write it. And interestingly, Rorem knew who would be playing the premiere.

In the liner notes of a New World recording of the piece, Rorem writes, "In October of 1980, my old friend Charles Wadsworth and I had lunch at O'Neill's (Eggs Benedict, chocolate truffles, espresso) to discuss the length, choice of instruments, degree of difficulty, fee, and deadline for the piece I had long been wishing he'd invite me to write, tailor-made for his Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Here, too, the color combination was unprecedented in catalogs of chamber music — and I knew the instrumentalists before I set pen to paper: Gervase de Peyer, clarinet; Loren Glickman, bassoon; James Buswell, violin; Leslie Parnas, cello; and Charles himself on piano."

"I'm looking forward to playing it in that wonderful house," said Traba. "It's going to be a lot of fun."

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