



THE **THERESE M. GROJEAN**
CLASSICAL SERIES

BÉLA FLECK AND ABIGAIL WASHBURN
SONG CYCLE

WITH THE COLORADO SYMPHONY
SCOTT O'NEIL, CONDUCTOR

VILAR PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
Thursday, February 2, 2023

This evening's performance is generously supported by:

Presenting Underwriters: Alexia & Jerry Jurschak
Performance Underwriters: Betsy & Jesse Fink

PROGRAM

BARTÓK *Dance Suite, BB86a*

COPLAND *Appalachian Spring: Suite*

— INTERMISSION —

BÉLA FLECK *Dreams in Flight*
ABIGAIL WASHBURN

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

BÉLA FLECK & ABIGAIL WASHBURN: Béla Fleck & Abigail Washburn, “the king and queen of the banjo” (*Paste Magazine*), have a musical partnership like no other. Béla Fleck is a sixteen-time Grammy Award-winner who has taken the instrument across multiple genres, and Abigail Washburn a singer-songwriter and clawhammer banjo player who re-radicalized it by combining it with Far East culture and sounds. The two met at a square dance, began collaborating musically and eventually fell in love. Over the years, they played together most visibly in the Sparrow Quartet alongside Ben Sollee and Casey Driessen and informally at a pickin’ party here, a benefit there, or occasionally popping up in each other’s solo shows. Fans of tradition-tweaking acoustic fare eagerly anticipated that Béla & Abigail would begin making music together as a duo.



Fleck has the virtuosic, jazz-to-classical ingenuity of an iconic instrumentalist and composer with bluegrass roots. His collaborations range from his most recent release and celebrated return to bluegrass, *My Bluegrass Heart*, to his ground-breaking standard-setting ensemble Béla Fleck and the Flecktones, to a staggeringly broad array of musical experiments. From writing concertos for full symphony orchestra, exploring the banjo's African roots, to jazz duos with Chick Corea, many tout that Béla Fleck is the world's premier banjo player. Washburn has the earthy sophistication of a postmodern, old-time singer-songwriter who has drawn critical acclaim for her solo albums. She has done fascinating work in folk musical diplomacy in China, presented an original theatrical production, and has contributed to singular side groups Uncle Earl and The Wu-Force. In addition to being named a TED Fellow in 2012, Abigail was recently named the first US-China Fellow at Vanderbilt University, in addition to Carolina Performing Arts/Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's DisTil Fellow for 2018-2020

On stage, Fleck & Washburn will perform pieces from their Grammy-winning self-titled debut as well as their new record, *Echo in the Valley* (2017). With one eye on using the banjo to showcase America's rich heritage and the other pulling the noble instrument from its most familiar arena into new and unique realms, Bela & Abigail meet in the mean, head-on, to present music that feels wildly innovative and familiar at the same time. Whether at home, on stage or on record, their deep bond, combined with the way their distinct musical personalities and banjo styles interact, makes theirs a picking partnership unlike any other on the planet.

belafleck.com / abigailwashburn.com

SCOTT O'NEIL, conductor: As a conductor, Scott O'Neil recently completed a nine-year tenure as Resident Conductor with the Colorado Symphony in Denver. During his time there he performed with some of the classical world's elite soloists, such as Itzhak Perlman, Joshua Bell, Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, Pinchas Zukerman, Lang Lang, Van Cliburn, Christopher O'Riley, Cameron Carpenter and Sharon Isbin, as well as leaders in the larger musical world, such as Steve Vai, Chris Botti, Béla Fleck, Victor Wooten, Tracy Silverman, Eileen Ivers, Sarah McLachlan, Ben Folds, Ingrid Michaelson, Amos Lee, Rufus Wainwright, Gregory Alan Isakov, Devotchka, The Lumineers, Rodrigo y Gabriela, Susan Egan and Will Chase.



Mr. O'Neil has also created and developed an extensive series of concerts, entitled Inside the Score, which combined art, entertainment and enlightenment to engage audiences in explorations of a wide variety of music and ideas. Under the umbrella of Inside the Score fell a number of sub-series, including biography (Letters from Mozart, The Best of Beethoven, Brahms: A Life in Music, Rachmaninoff: From Tragedy to Triumph), individual masterpieces (Mozart's Jupiter Symphony - This I Believe!, Eroica!, Beethoven's Fifth, Stravinsky's Petrushka, Debussy's La mer, the "The Debussy Code") and a cross-genre concert - Shuffle - which includes everything from Bach, Elgar, and Prokofiev to Metheny, Björk, and Philip Glass, as well as a feature concert with cross-over artist Kip Winger. (Once the front man for the band Winger, he now composes "classical" music reminiscent of Honegger and Messiaen.) In this vein, O'Neil has also presented Masterworks programs with "cross-over" elements, notably featuring Victor Wooten, performing the premiere of his own Bass Whisperer concerto, co-written with Conni Ellisor.

Mr. O'Neil's engaging manner in addressing audiences has led to extensive speaking engagements, including a TED-talk on music he composed for

Arrow Electronics. As an arranger/orchestrator, Mr. O'Neil has created and orchestrated numerous works for the Colorado Symphony (Arrow: Five Years Out! - an original composition, Pat Metheny's "The First Circle" as well as Minuano, Björk's Overture, "107 Steps" and "New World," a live version of Philip Glass's Changing Opinions); he has also written orchestrations for Ingrid Michaelson, Eileen Ivers and Béla Fleck. Scott O'Neil continues to guest conduct and to lead his own ensemble, the Rosetta Music Society, in Denver, creating new, innovative programming and constantly seeking to draw wider audiences to live performances of music from Bach to today's cutting-edge artists.

PROGRAM NOTES

Program notes by Betsy Schwarm, author of the Classical Music Insights series.

Folk music and classical music have long been congenial companions. Consider the beloved Slavonic Dances of Dvořák and the Hungarian Dances of Brahms. Tonight's program, with soloists of unsurpassed folk reputations, pays tribute to the folk/classical connection - and not just in the works directly involving Ms. Washburn and Mr. Fleck. We'll also enjoy two orchestral scores in which the composers draw upon their own cultural heritage to make the music sound like home, while still using expected practices of the classical realm. From Bartók, we have a suite of dance-inspired pieces: not sounding like the dance suites of JS Bach, but sharing the same idea of blending genres. Then there's Copland's best-known stage work, containing the American composer's familiar and beloved variations on the Appalachian folk hymn "Simple Gifts." In all, the program celebrates the co-existence of two apparently opposite sides of the musical continuum.

Bartók: *Dance Suite*

Ethnically, artistically, and politically, Béla Bartók (1881 - 1945) was Hungarian, a fact of unequalled importance in considering his career, for nothing and no one influenced Bartók more than his native culture. He played Beethoven piano sonatas masterfully in recitals, but also his own Hungarian-flavored works. Though he had studied both piano and composition as a university undergraduate, his graduate degree was in ethnomusicology. These interests ultimately melded into a unique compositional style. Bartók's works deftly balance Classical form and Hungarian fire.

The *Dance Suite* particularly exemplifies Bartók's cultural stance. The suite was written in 1923 for a celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the union of Buda and Pest into a single city. Two other Hungarian composers of note, Dohnányi and Kodály, also wrote works for this occasion. However, the greatest success was reserved for Bartók's, which soon reached the stage in such distant venues as London and Cincinnati. Perhaps it is the high energy of the suite that most endears it to audiences, though there is also forbidding drama and tumultuous outbursts, ensuring that listeners and performers alike must pay close attention. Certainly, the *Dance Suite* is quintessential Bartók, an energetic amalgam of Hungarian rhythms with related melodic fragments from Romania and Arabia. Such a mix is not unexpected, for Bartók had realized early in his studies that music from other Eastern European cultures influenced his homeland's music. Here, by uniting diverse elements, he helped his audiences to perceive the connection.

- I. Moderato
- II. Allegro molto
- III. Allegro vivace
- IV. Molto tranquillo
- V. Comodo: Finale

Copland: *Appalachian Spring*

Aaron Copland (1900 - 1990) first imagined it as "Ballet for Martha," and began it at the request of American arts patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge (1864 - 1953), who wanted something for dancer/choreographer Martha Graham (1894 - 1991). The title by which the work is now known came from Graham herself, who borrowed it from the poem *The Bridge* by American author Hart Crane (1899 - 1932). In the stanza of that poem titled "The Dance," one finds:

O Appalachian Spring! I gained the ledge;
Steep, inaccessible smile that eastward bends
And northward reaches in that violet wedge
Of Adirondacks!

Thus, Copland had nothing to do with the title; it was all Graham, entranced by something in Crane's enigmatic imagery. In later years, the composer was often amused to find fans declaring to him how much his music sounded to them like the Appalachians in spring, when that was never his original intention.

He may not have been thinking specifically of Crane, but Copland was certainly considering how best to evoke the setting. According to Graham's scenario, a pioneer celebration is underway in a Pennsylvania farmhouse as a young couple is due to be wed by a revivalist preacher before a small gathering of their friends at the home that the couple will soon share. Dawn is ushered in gentle with strings and winds. The friends gather, and dancing ensues for the entire group as well as for the couple. As the day concludes and the guests drift away, Copland evokes the scene - and the presence of the preacher - by quoting the old Shaker hymn "Simple Gifts," widely known in the region and even more widely beloved since Copland brought it to further attention. The ballet closes not only in the same quiet character as that with which it had begun, but also with exactly the same delicate chords, so that sunset and sunrise inhabit similar worlds.

Appalachian Spring premiered at the Library of Congress in Washington DC October 30, 1944. Usually used for chamber music, the performance space was rather small to accommodate an entire orchestra together with dancers. Knowing this in advance, Copland had scored the piece for double string quartet, along with individual players on bass, flute, clarinet, bassoon, and piano. Not quite a year later, on October 4, 1945, an orchestral suite of selections from the ballet (including the "Simple Gifts" scene) would be presented in concert by the New York Philharmonic: full orchestra, but no dancers. It is in this form that *Appalachian Spring* is most frequently encountered. With all the nuances of aural color available through the larger ensemble, one hardly misses the dancers: Copland lets us imagine what sort of movements would best suit this passage or that one.

Dreams in Flight

Béla Fleck & Abigail Washburn

Orchestra Arrangements by Scott O'Neil & Béla Fleck

I. In Search

I Must Come To You - Abigail Washburn

Dreams of Nectar - Abigail Washburn & Kai Welch

After Dreams - Béla Fleck & Juno Fleck

Little Birdie - Traditional, arr. by Béla Fleck & Abigail Washburn

Roving Cowboy - Traditional, arr. by Béla Fleck & Abigail Washburn

II. Regret, Acquiescence & Wonder

Circus of Regrets - Béla Fleck, arr. by Scott O'Neil & Béla Fleck

And Am I Born To Die - Traditional, arr. by Béla Fleck & Abigail Washburn; orchestra arrangement by Scott O'Neil

III. Finding Place in the Mortal World

After Dreams (Reprise)

Go Down - Abigail Washburn

I Must Come To You (Reprise)

Tutti - Béla Fleck

Pretty Bird - Hazel Dickens

Little Bird (Reprise)

MOVEMENT I

I Must Come To You

Abigail Washburn

O, I Must Come to you

On the wings of morning,

Let spirits lift and notions fade

And daylight fill this changing sky

Inspired by Primitive Baptist vocal traditions*, this verse is an original lyrical meditation on a celestial connection to our ever-changing physical world, and an invitation to meet in transitional space. This verse returns throughout *Dreams in Flight*, always set anew in changing harmony, time signature and meaning.

*Primitive Baptist singing is an ancestral and sacred unaccompanied singing tradition which - in the words of Ginny Hawker- features pitches

“sliding toward their destiny” rather than landing on distinct destinations.

Dreams of Nectar

Abigail Washburn & Kai Welch

“Dreams of Nectar” speaks to Abigail’s experience as an adult ESL teacher, and is based on a true story shared with her by one of her students, an immigrant from a small town in Mainland China.

*The first day I stepped foot in this fair country
Border man took my paper, told me I would be free*

Border man took my paper, told me I was now free

Walkin’ out into the open air, well, what did I see

*Birds flyin’ on a west wind, sure an omen for me
Birds flyin’ on a west wind, sure an omen for me*

Opened up my momma’s suitcase, saw the holes in my shoes

Kicked off my old home soil knowing I couldn’t lose

I kicked off that dried-up soil knowing I couldn’t lose

Wear my hands down on three jobs from the morning thru the night

Weary eyes don’t see the difference ‘tween the dark and the light

Weary eyes don’t see the difference ‘tween the dark and the light

10 years later poppa wrote me saying mama had died

Wish that I could see her face now and the hope in her eyes

Wish that I could see her face now and the hope in her eyes

I’m just old now, all alone, in a land of fertile lies

I see my unborn babies, tired birds in the sky

I see my unborn babies, tired birds in the sky

Before I die grant me one thing, grant one thing to me

Don’t let me dream of nectar, make me the fruit on the tree

After Dreams

Béla Fleck & Juno Fleck

An original composition by Béla Fleck, “After Dreams” is inspired by the piano playing of his son, Juno, at two years old. The tight harmonic clusters represent the abandon and curiosity of a fresh musical heart...an essence older musicians have a lot to learn from. (Tiny hands do help with clusters!) Themes from “After Dreams” appear continually throughout *Dreams in Flight*.

Little Birdie

Traditional, arranged by Béla Fleck & Abigail Washburn

“Little Birdie” is a beloved and well-known traditional tune in Appalachian folk music. Its many floating verses can be dropped and added as the singer wishes, as is evident in its multitude of variations - from the first known recorded version by blues singer John Hammond in 1925, to The Coon Creek Girls (1938), to Ralph Stanley (1952), to Roscoe Holcomb & Wade Ward (1962), to Peggy Seeger (2008), and many more. According to the *Traditional Ballad Index*, “Little Birdie” was first collected by Frank C. Brown in 1909 as part of his collection of North Carolina folk songs. This new version is rhythmically updated and re-harmonized. Béla and Abigail chose the floating verses that serve as *Dreams in Flight*’s mediation on searching, regret, hope, and ultimate coming-to-peace with our perception of temporal human life.

*Little birdie, little birdie,
Come and sing to me your song.
Got a short time to stay here
And a long time to be gone.*

*Little birdie, little birdie,
What makes you fly so high?
Is it cuz your true lover
Is waiting in that sky?*

*Little birdie, little birdie,
What makes your wing so blue?
Is it cuz you’ve been a-grievin’,
A-grievin’ thru and thru?*

*Little birdie, little birdie,
Come and sing to me your song.
I’ve got a short time to stay here
And a long time to be gone.*

Roving Cowboy

Traditional, arranged by Béla Fleck & Abigail Washburn

“Roving Cowboy” is a song with many versions in the US folk music canon, sometimes glorifying - but often lamenting - the story of the hopeful young man heading west to discover heroism and fortune only to find himself defeated by the western landscape and the defenses of indigenous nations against the dangers of white colonial migration.

*Come all you rovin’ cowboys, bound down this
lowly land
I’ll tell to you a story, while you around me
stand
I’m a goin’ to quit this wild west; it’s a bleak
and stormy plain
For I’m a-thinkin’ I will leave you to never
return again*

*Sweetheart, my dear sweetheart, for sure,
dear, I can’t get along
I left my dear old father, my country, and my
home
I left my dear old mother, for to weep and to
mourn
Goin’ to be a rovin’ cowboy, and with the
cattle roam*

*I left my friends and home so dear, with many
a partin’ tear
My father followed, sayin’ “My boy, my boy, I
fear.
May God protect and guide you, and keep you
safe from harm”
Or bring this rovin’ cowboy back to his native
home”*

*O, I Must Come to you
On the wings of morning,
Let spirits lift and notions fade
And daylight fill this changing sky*

*I’ve tried the straits of ramblin’, I know their
trial well
I’ve crossed the rocky mountain, where many a
brave boy fell
I’ve seen the far and distant lands, full of
nations, armed and wild
I’ll never forget my dear old home, nor mother’s
sweetest smile*

MOVEMENT II

Circus of Regrets

Béla Fleck, arranged by Scott O'Neil & Béla Fleck

Béla created this tune in the early 90s not knowing that one day he would get to play it for Bozo the Clown (the Chicago one), who, upon hearing the piece, said, "It sounds like a Circus of Regrets". Scott O'Neil created and arranged this sad, carnival waltz section.

And Am I Born To Die

Traditional, arranged by Béla Fleck & Abigail Washburn; orchestra arrangement by Scott O'Neil

This song comes from "The Sacred Harp", a living shape-note hymnal, adapted to this day with original and derived compositions of hymns, psalms, anthems, and contrapuntal fugueing from ancestral Anglo-Celtic roots, as translated through Southern US and New England singing traditions since its original publishing in 1844. Sacred Harp choirs arrange themselves around a hollow square, one part on each side, facing one another, with each group directing their a capella sound inward towards a center occupied by a rotating cast of singers conducting one song at a time. In *Dreams in Flight*, there is one lone singer reciting the melody, meditating on our mortal nature.

*And am I born to die
To lay this body down
And must my trembling spirit fly
Into a world unknown*

*Soon as from earth I go
What will become of me
Eternal happiness or woe
What shall my portion be*

*A land of deepest shade
Un-pierced by human thought
The dreary regions of the dead
Where all things are forgot*

*And am I born to die
To lay this body down
And must my trembling spirit fly
Into a world unknown*

MOVEMENT III

After Dreams (Reprise)

Go Down

Abigail Washburn

An original song by Abigail about finding the fight to be who we are, and to live with intention and purpose even when it feels that many forces are working against us.

Standing on the corner, loitering the whole day thru

*But somethin's bangin' in ya', your vergin' on a
one man wrecking crew
You always broke the mold, but baby this time
the mold's breakin' you
Just don't let'em take you easy, don't let'em
take you, baby, no, don't let'em take you at
all...*

*But if you're gonna go down, go down, scream
and holler and swing'em round
Bust the beams, crack the walls, feel it all
freakin', yea, feel it all
and go down, yea, go down*

*Holding on for life, in the thick of a hurricane
You batten down the hatches, you know how to
play this game
First move was yours, baby, second barreled in
like a train
Just don't let'em take you easy, don't let'em
take you, baby, no don't let'em take you at all*

*But if you're gonna go down, go down, scream
and holler and swing'em round
Bust the beams, crack the walls, feel it all
freakin', yea feel it all
and go down, yea, go down*

*I been watchin', holding hope
You been tuggin', now, don't let go
I need you to see this thru
Break the chain*

*Pushin' up that peak, baby, talus giving out
each step
Rain throwin' down, yankin' on the noose
'round your neck*

*You're raising up the rope now it's a halo
shinin' bright above your head
You won't let 'em take you easy, don't let 'em
take you, baby, no don't let 'em take you at all*

*Cuz when you gotta go down, go down, scream
and holler and swing 'em round
Bust the beams, crack the walls, shine so
bright cuz just one light can bring it all down*

I Must Come To You (Reprise)

*O, I Must Come to you
On the wings of morning,
Let spirits lift and notions fade
And daylight fill this changing sky*

*O, I Must Come to you
On the wings of morning,
Let spirits lift and notions fade
And daylight fill this changing sky*

Bluegrass/Old-time instrumental version follows, into a “Circus of Regrets” reprise, which leads to the orchestra tutti.

Tutti

Béla Fleck

Béla’s development of “Dreams of Nectar”, combining new music and materials reintroduced throughout the song cycle.

Pretty Bird

Hazel Dickens

Hazel Dickens (1925-2011) was the 8th of 12 children, born and raised in a coal mining town in West Virginia. As with many coal mining families in search of a better life, Hazel’s moved to the big city of Baltimore where they worked factory jobs and maintained Appalachian cultural communities amidst the urban industrial backdrop. Hazel carried on the old songs, pioneered the first female-led bluegrass recording, and most importantly, wrote and performed commanding works that called attention to the inequities faced by workers and the unique hardships faced by

females. She wrote “Pretty Bird” as an a capella song about what could be better, what should be better, and ultimately the power we have to imagine a different future and take flight.

Dreams in Flight only features the first verse of her 6-verse song.

In this context it takes on a different meaning, leading us to consider moving on, letting go, and accepting the choices we have made.

*Fly away little pretty bird
Fly fly away
Fly away little pretty bird
And pretty you always stay*

Little Birdie (Reprise)

*Little birdie, little birdie,
Come sing to me your song.
Got a short time to stay here
And a long time to be gone.*