

## Rockville Concert Band “Holiday Themes” Concert on December 18, 2022

### Program Notes by Noreen B. Friedman

#### ***A Christmas Fantasia***

##### **Arranged by Elliot A. Del Borgo (1938-2013)**

Born in Port Chester, New York, **Elliot Del Borgo** was a dedicated music educator, clinician, conductor, and composer. He earned his B.S. from State University of New York (SUNY), Ed.M. from Temple University, and M.M degree from Philadelphia Conservatory where he studied composition with famed American composer Vincent Persichetti whose extensive output included many works for concert band. Del Borgo taught instrumental music in the Philadelphia public schools and later joined the faculty of SUNY’s Crane School of Music with a tenure spanning three decades. SUNY granted him a doctoral equivalency in 1973. The prolific Del Borgo’s over 600 published compositions include music for the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, New York, and a wealth of music for concert band.

A Fantasia is a free-form music composition with an improvisatory feel, often including familiar tunes. In ***A Christmas Fantasia***, Del Borgo creates a festive, overture-like offering, weaving together well known Christmas Carols *God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen*, *Deck the Halls*, *Angels We Have Heard on High* (*Westminster Carol*), and *The First Noel*. Del Borgo, who studied trumpet, employs the brass section extensively, with interludes and decorative figures from the saxophones and other woodwinds.

#### ***Christmas Spirit***

##### **Arranged by Sammy Nestico (1924-2021)**

A composer, arranger, trombonist, and jazz educator, **Sammy Nestico** (born Samuel Louis Nistico in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) received his bachelor’s degree in music education and an honorary doctorate from Duquesne University. A preeminent composer and arranger for military bands, Nestico was affiliated with the U.S. Air Force Band, primarily as the chief arranger for the Airmen of Note (jazz ensemble), later transferring to the U.S. Marine Band, leading the White House orchestra. Further solidifying his jazz “chops”, Nestico later was composer/arranger for the Count Basie Orchestra and worked on major projects with Capitol Records. His large opus includes jazz big band compositions for young students and music for concert band. Nestico enjoyed a highly successful career composing, arranging, and orchestrating for film and television, with classic credits including *Hawaii Five-O*, *Mission Impossible*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *M\*A\*S\*H*.

In ***Christmas Spirit***, Nestico calls upon the full concert band instrumentation, with notable trumpet solos, in a medley of four Christmas Carols—*Silent Night*, *Westminster Carol*, *Away in a Manger* and *Joy to the World*.

## ***Rhapsody for Hanukkah***

### **Stephen Bulla (B. 1953)**

**Stephen Bulla** attended Berklee College of Music in Boston where he studied trombone and composition/arranging. He spent three decades as the Staff Arranger to “The President’s Own” United States Marine Band. Bulla has contributed a substantial number of compositions and arrangements for orchestra, wind band, and artists including The Manhattan Transfer, Mel Torme and Sarah Vaughan.

Capitalizing on the flexibility inherent in the Rhapsody form, Bulla’s musical tribute to the Festival of Lights wanders beyond traditional Hanukkah repertoire. Except for the popular *Neyr Li* (My Candle) and *The Dreidel Song* (simple, but joyful Children’s song about making and playing with the holiday’s spinning top), Bulla incorporates the lesser known folk songs *Simu Shemen* (Pour Oil) and *Hanukkah Begins Tonight* plus the marginally Hanukkah-related Y’Ladim (Children). Further eschewing traditional repertoire such as *Maoz Tzur* (Rock of Ages), the composer/arranger adds the beautiful Yiddish lullaby *Raisins and Almonds* (from the opera *Shulamis* by Abraham Goldfaden), plus a spirited closing with *Those Were the Days*, Russian romantic song with music by Boris Ivanovich Fomin. This last song became famous—ranking number one on the UK Singles Chart and number two on the Billboard Hot 100-- as a 1968 debut single by Mary Hopkins, produced by Paul McCartney. *Although Those Were the Days* is not typical Hanukkah music, the song’s English lyrics, credited to/copyrighted by folk musician Gene Raskin, align well with the Hanukkah theme. One verse:

Those were the days, my friend  
We thought they'd never end  
We'd sing and dance forever and a day  
We'd live the life we choose  
We'd fight and never lose  
For we were young and sure to have our way

## ***A Sentimental Christmas***

### **Arranged by Jerry H. Bilik (B. 1933)**

Born in New Rochelle, New York, **Jerry Bilik** earned Bachelor and M.M. degrees from the University of Michigan. Playing trombone in the University’s Marching Band, Jerry later became the ensemble’s chief composer and arranger. Bilik’s compositions and arrangements include works for major universities, including the U.S. Military Academy at West Point where he served in the U.S. Army, film and television, and popular vocalists. As an Executive for Disney on Ice, Bilik has arranged the music and directed the group’s shows. He has composed more than a dozen works for concert band.

Bilik’s ***A Sentimental Christmas*** has a jazz flavor and masterfully combines contemporary holiday tunes *Christmas Waltz*, *Blue Christmas*, and *You’re All I Want for Christmas* into a distinctive medley for concert band.

## ***Blue Danube Waltz***

**Johann Strauss II (“The Younger”) (1825-1899)**

**Arranged by William Gustav Erik Leidzén (1894, Stockholm, Sweden-1962, New York City)**

When thinking of the beautiful city of Vienna Austria, one might conjure up images of ornate palaces, decadent pastries, graceful horses (Lipizzaner Stallions of the Spanish Riding School), and classical music. “The City of Music” was home to famous composers including Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and the “Waltz King” — **Johann Strauss II**. Hailing from a musical family including his musically competitive father (Johann Strauss the Elder), Strauss II composed an enormous opus of light music including waltzes, polkas, marches, and operettas.

Strauss’ composition and performances of waltzes led to the popularity of the form in Vienna and beyond, its legacy being the Vienna Philharmonic’s annual *Vienna New Year’s Concert*. Broadcast worldwide, the concert features waltzes, marches, and other music by Strauss II, his family members, and others. Always performed is Strauss’ quintessential waltz, ***By the Beautiful Blue Danube***, commonly called ***“The Blue Danube”***. The work originated as a choral piece for the Vienna Men’s Choral Association (premiered in 1867), which Strauss later adapted for orchestra. Leidzén’s concert band arrangement follows the original structure, including an introduction, calling dancers to the ballroom floor, with five musically distinctive, but well-linked waltz themes. These are followed by the Coda, harking back to the themes, and then moving to a grand conclusion.

## ***On Christmas Day***

**World Premiere of Wind Ensemble Version**

**John Thomas Dodson (Born in Dayton, Ohio)**

Born in Dayton, Ohio, **John Thomas Dodson** is a conductor, composer, educator, and lecturer. Principal Guest Conductor and Music Advisor of the Atlanta Community Symphony Orchestra, Dodson received his M.M. in Orchestral Conducting from the Peabody Conservatory and studied composition at Tennessee Technological University with Robert Jager. He has conducted orchestras in North America and Europe. Dodson is Music Director of the Lexington Bach Festival (Michigan) and Artistic Director of *Conciertos de la Villa de Santo Domingo* (Dominican Republic). Dodson presents lectures and workshops on various music topics, including mindfulness for performers. [John Thomas Dodson, Conductor](#)

Originally composed for orchestra, John Thomas Dodson’s ***On Christmas Day*** was later arranged by the composer for wind ensemble, **premiered today by the Rockville Concert Band conducted by Dr. Juan Gallastegui**. The following is excerpted from the composer’s program notes:

***On Christmas Day*** re-imagines the Christmas story through five carols: *The Holly and the Ivy, I Saw Three Ships, Coventry Carol, Angels from the Realms of Glory, and Il est né, le divin Enfant (Now is Born the Divine Christ Child)*. Throughout the work, I thought about both the musical beauty of the carols and...the words to be sung.

After a brief introduction with a short reference to the beginning of the *Sussex Carol*, with its words...reveal(ing) this moment to be the beginning of the story...*The Holly and the Ivy* foreshadows the end of this entire story. With references to the characteristics of the holly tree...the music shifts between the beauty and joy of the manger to the pain and sorrow of the cross...The excitement of Christmas morning is expressed through the carol *I Saw Three Ships*...the camels carrying the three wise men from the East...With each verse played higher than the last, the music anticipates the joy of the coming birth...What follows is *Coventry Carol*, telling of...Herod the King and the Slaughter of the Innocents. The solemnity of the music honors the dead...The ensemble creeps to its uppermost reaches, as the souls of the children ascend upward as the carol concludes. The darkness brightens with the appearance of the regal music *Angels from the Realms of Glory*... As the angels announce this birth to the world, they invite all to "come and worship" ...We (then) hear the lovely French carol. *Il est né, le divin Enfant*...We have entered the manger scene and the music...captures the mix of the pastoral and regal.

Finally, I imagined the scene opening out to envision the whole Earth showered in divine light. As the work moves toward its conclusion, the winds undulate with growing energy as we hear important phrases in the brass from the previously heard carols with simultaneous perspectives of the angelic heavens and the humble manger. *Realms of Glory* is layered with *Now is Born the Divine Christ Child* over the winds swirling and growing in intensity until everything is suddenly interrupted by a quiet reminder from the angels to "come and worship" ...***On Christmas Day*** concludes in a culminating passage of grandeur and joy".

## ***Disney Fantasy***

**Arranged by Naohiro Iwai (1923-2014, Japan)**

**Naohario Iwai** was a Japanese composer, arranger, conductor, and clinician. A graduate of the Tokyo Ongaku School's Instrumental Department (now part of Tokyo Gijyuto University), he pursued work arranging music for jazz ensembles. Over his long career, Naohario Iwai arranged over 5,000 songs for a wide variety of ensembles, including brass and concert bands. His music includes more than thirty wind ensemble compositions and arrangements.

***Disney Fantasy*** is a delightful arrangement of classic Disney music. The piece includes the *Mickey Mouse March*, *It's a Small World*, *Heigh Ho*, *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?*, *Someday My Prince Will Come*, *Whistle While You Work*, and *When You Wish Upon a Star*. This festive music array appeals both to children and those who reminisce on childhood, capturing the joy of the holiday season.