

## THREE OUTSIDE by David Avshalomov (Program note by the composer)

This set of three movements, each projecting a different type of energy in a different outdoor setting, was written across 2008-2009 at the request of Margaret Thornhill, specifically for the Los Angeles Clarinet choir. They gave three performances in that period, each time adding a new movement. I am grateful to Margaret and the members of her group for patiently guiding me in making this work an almost-practical piece to play. Since this work treats each player as an individual, rather than focusing on bunched “choirs,” it is much more challenging than conventionally-scored clarinet choir etudes.

### 1. MAGIC FOUNTAIN

First comes **mechanical energy**, human-directed. Music for the eyes, mostly about harmony. In this playful piece, 12 clarinets of various sizes evoke the jetting patterns and splashy exuberance of a mechanically-programmed multi-jet “dancing” water fountain display with colored lights, in a varied sequence of variation-episodes that gradually develops a direction to a culmination. Through various musical devices, it depicts the rising, play, and falling of the individual water jets, and their movements and squirts in larger groupings. Ever-shifting modes/scales project the changing colors of the lights—but what actual colors the listeners think they are “seeing” with the “eyes of their ears” will depend on them. At the most extreme there are 12 different pitches (the entire Western chromatic scale) sounding at once. This must surely be the color brown . . . or grey?

In form the piece is variations on a motif, with a brief mood-and-mode-setting introduction (establishing the low base pool of water). Towards the end, the sequence of colors/modes cycles around several times, as the full set of jets—the unified fountain—gradually winds itself into a continuous circling motoric frenzy of squirting up and back down, over and over again, a different “color” each time, until it climaxes with vocal splashes and the most astonishing group spray and fall of all.

*Disclaimer:* This piece does not mimic a real fountain, but the projects abstraction of such fountains into an archetype (though of course the plaza at the LA Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, the Grove in Hollywood, and the Bellagio in Las Vegas come to mind). Anyone who has ever played with the pressure in a garden hose or sprinkler using a multi-shape spray selector will get what this piece is doing: having improvised playful fun with water and light. Spray it up high, wave it around, watch it scatter, look for the rainbow, let it fall, rinse and repeat. What fun on a hot L.A. day . . . (We had a heat wave that summer, too; first of many, I hear . . .)

### 2. MOON SONG

Here the ensemble projects **natural energy** all around us. Music for the heart, all about melody. A high, slow, poignant solo in the first clarinet expresses the aching mystery of

full moonlight on high-mountain pines, over wavering harmonies for the dark sky in the lower instruments. Then fast, almost inaudible scales in overlapping cluster-groups depict the murmur of a light breeze through the needles, rising and falling, passing from tree to tree and then building up to a big wind in the whole forest, with an operatic chorus of plaintive sadness crying over it. After the shouted climax, the wind winds down, subsides, trails off, and reveals the solo moon again, ending on a lonely question like the start.

### 3. HILL DANCE

Here we have **human energy**. Music for the body, all about rhythm—a lively Bulgarian-style folk dance up in the hill country. The meter is quick 5/8, which across pairs of bars creates an asymmetric four-beat rhythm, long/short, short/long. The group builds up a repeating main dance theme in three sections, over a low ostinato accompaniment, with the spotlight alternating between low and high voice groups. This dance music keeps coming back in various forms. In between are showy solos for the shrill Eb Clarinet, the solo Bb Clarinet, and the Bass Clarinet, accompanied by the “choir” who add short echo phrases in folk style between the solo riffs.

In the middle episode the band drops to half speed in a steady even 2 beat, and lays out some heavy Jewish-flavor circle-dance tunes, as though for a rustic wedding. When the first of these tunes comes back, the players *all* cut loose on their own melodies—as though the musicians are finally so drunk that everybody in the band suddenly thinks *they* have the solo; there is a bit of an exuberant if inchoate tangle until it settles down. Then they quietly resume the first fast dance and quickly whip to a wild loud fast ecstatic ending.