

CANVAS

OUR 49TH SEASON // NOVEMBER 10, 2024 // **SOUNDSCAPES**



How do you paint a symphony?

With the flick of a brush, painters can manipulate elements of color, contrast, and texture to craft meaning from visual inputs and create powerful emotional experiences from everyday tools and images. In EYSO's 49th season, explore how composers transform simple soundwaves into extraordinary art through the awesome sonic palette of the orchestra.

I. CANVAS

White. A blank page or canvas.

The challenge: bring order to the whole.

Through design

Composition

Tension

Balance

Light

And harmony.

The 1984 musical *Sunday in the Park with George* opens—perhaps predictably—with the eponymous George sitting in the aforementioned park. (The day? Sunday.) Immediately, though, with these words, our protagonist makes clear that this is no simple blow-by-blow account of a day. Stephen Sondheim, one of the world's great composers, is about to take us on a journey to explore central concepts of artistic identity: the responsibilities of artists to their creative muse, the role of artists in telling stories and capturing the world as they perceive it to be, and even the relationship between artists and those in their world.

The first challenge? A blank page, as George grapples with both its challenge—to bring order to the whole—and the endless possibilities within. His opening monologue is an ode to canvas: to what it is, what it isn't, and what it can be.

Think back to the most recent time you faced a blank page, whether metaphorical or literal. Perhaps it was the start of a new initiative at work, or the redesign of a physical space...or perhaps it was a fresh and crisp sheet of paper at the start of a writing project. (As I write, erase, scratch out, and rewrite, this one hits closest to home.) Our language is filled with different examples that speak to both the promise and the terror of starting anew: the blank page, the empty canvas, or the clean slate, all awesomely boundless and terrifyingly open-ended before joy emerges as lines, colors, words, and notes start to flow.

For many artists, choosing the canvas (or more broadly speaking, the medium) is the critical first decision that starts the journey along the path from idea to art. The ramifications of that decision reverberate through and influence each choice that follows. Michelangelo's *Sistine Chapel* wouldn't be the same on a postage stamp; Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* would read differently as a haiku. Music is the same: composers often make decisions early in the process that inform everything to follow. How can we, as the performing artists who help bring a composer's vision to life, help understand and illuminate these choices as we take them and frame them as our own?

Since Fall Camp, EYSO musicians have explored these ideas and more through music, visual art, and spirited engagement with big ideas. Using our "expert noticer" approach, we interrogated our music, drawing connections between it and the rich world of visual art. We speculated as to composer intent, and we crafted our own images and visual metaphors to fire our imagination. In *Soundscapes*, our 49th season, we continue to explore big ideas, celebrate and cultivate curiosity, and examine how we fit into the world around us...all while exploring music through the spectacular art that we study and perform. Thank you for being a part of this journey.

Matthew Sheppard
Artistic Director

PROGRAM / 4:30 CONCERT

BRASS CHOIR

Dan Sartori, conductor

Fanfares Liturgiques

Henri Tomasi (1901-1971)

- I. Annonciation
- II. Evangile
- III. Apocalypse (Scherzo)

“Music that doesn’t come from the heart isn’t music.” ~Henri Tomasi

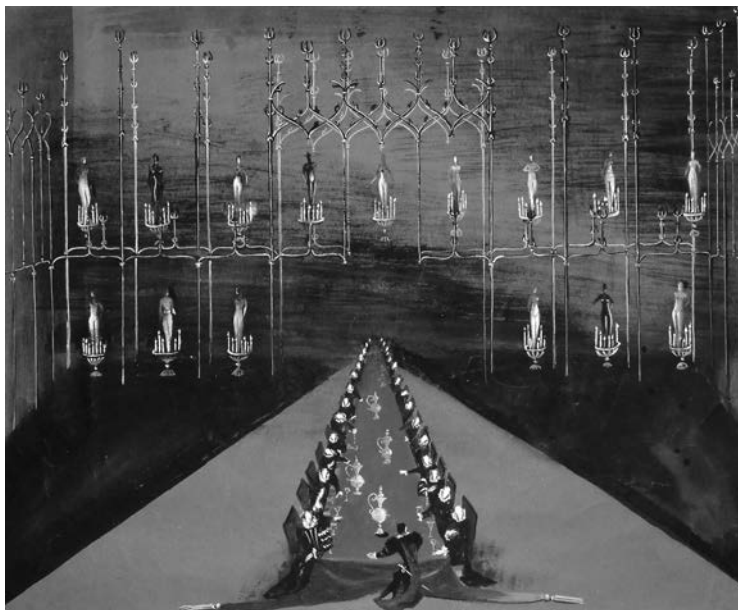
Henri Tomasi was a French composer and conductor born in Marseilles. His parents were from Corsica, where his grandmother remained. During the summer, Tomasi stayed with his grandmother and learned many traditional Corsican songs. These, along with the early films of Charlie Chaplin, influenced much of his work.

Tomasi excelled at improvisation at the piano yet was described by his friend and fellow musician Maurice Franck as “an inveterate workaholic.” He was one of the first radio conductors, but he spent equal time composing as conducting. In 1939 he was drafted into the French army and served as a marching band conductor at the Villefranche-sur-Mer fort southwest of present-day Monaco. Tomasi became disillusioned by World War II and subsequently rejected all faith in God, which is particularly interesting in the context of this piece.

Tomasi loved the theater and loved writing music for wind instruments. The *Fanfares Liturgiques* for brass and percussion are musical vignettes (admittedly, the final movement is quite long to be labeled as a vignette) that are symphonic in nature, though they derived from his opera *Don Juan de Mañara*. *Fanfares Liturgiques* was premiered first in 1947, even though the opera had been completed in 1944. (The full opera wasn’t given a staged performance until 1956 in Munich, Germany.)

The first movement, *Annonciation*, depicts the main character, Miguel, renouncing his past life of depravity in order to marry the innocent and pure Girolama. In the opera, Girolama dies shortly after their marriage, and Miguel Mañara becomes a monk, devoting his life to charity and selflessness. The second movement, *Evangile*, evokes Miguel’s reading of sacred text as he struggles with doubt over his piety and grief over his wife’s death. The third movement, *Apocalypse*, features raucous hunting horn calls as a picture of the apocalyptic horsemen, as an aged Miguel faces a final withering temptation to renounce his faith.

Tomasi’s statement on music coming from the heart came in response to criticism from his musical contemporaries that his music remained firmly tonal, even as many others began committing to post-tonal and atonal idioms in the avant-garde. He was certainly responding with a modicum of criticism himself, insinuating that those composers were straying from “writing from their hearts.” How ironic that this most famous of works by Tomasi chooses religious stories as its canvas, even as he himself staunchly rejected God. Even the word *liturgical* connotes something having to do with a religious service or with religious rites. Being that Tomasi rejected all religious insinuations, one could certainly make the case that this piece fails to meet the basic criterion for music he lays out in the quote above, since he claimed to have no religious fervor whatsoever. Criticism of the work asks the question how a heart empty of religious zeal could produce music with deep religious undertones?



Stage design by Helmut Jürgens for
Henri Tomasi's opera, *Don Juan de Manara*, 1956

Nevertheless, the *Fanfares Liturgiques* is a work of art with great depth of musical meaning. From polytonality to extensive use of mutes in the third movement, Tomasi clearly understands the capabilities of his instrumental canvas (that is, what brass instruments are capable of). He deftly employs the soundscapes at his disposal to portray the announcement of a changed life in movement one, the open-air sermon of outdoor tent preaching with the subsequent altar call in movement two, and the deathly temptations of worldly pleasure that threaten to drag the pious down to hell in movement three.

Beyond the technical demands of this piece, which are considerable (especially for the horns), Tomasi's work provided the brass choir with an opportunity to explore tonal options often not employed by a work for this ensemble. The polytonality of the horn ballad in the first movement, as well as the horror movie sounds of the third movement, are prime examples of this stretched tonality. How do you understand notes that seem to clash with what everyone else is playing around you? Well, you find the people in the ensemble you do match with, of course! We spent a lot of time discovering who had matching parts across the ensemble, a strategy that has clear ramifications for ensemble playing in any piece these students will come across in the future. This has been a great work for opening up our ears and learning how to listen in an ensemble. I am confident you will be amazed at what a brass choir can sound like in the hands of a master composer and arranger like Tomasi.

[D. Sartori]



Henri Tomasi in Cassis, France, 1965