

"I became interested in the work of Plato through my friend and collaborator, the writer and philosopher Paul Woodruff. Paul's new translation, with Alexander Nehamas, of the *Symposium* gave me insights into ancient Greek ways of thinking about Love, Beauty, and Wisdom—and managed to keep the earthy, and often bawdy side of it all in full view. But their new translation of Plato's later dialogue *Phaedrus* went even further: the beauty of the speeches is breathtaking, and the discourse itself is enough to keep one awake at night.

Basically, the Great Speech of Socrates in the *Phaedrus* dialogue has to do with the place of Eros in the world, and with the conflict in the soul between fleshly pleasure and philosophic discovery. I will not attempt to encapsulate this brilliant discourse in a program note: suffice it to say that reading it gave rise to my two-sided work for clarinet, violin, and piano, *Phaedrus*. The first movement represents the philosophic life and is thus subtitled *Apollo's Lyre (Invocation and Hymn)*. It begins with an unaccompanied melody for the clarinet, which, after a pair of harp-like flourishes for the piano, expands into an accompanied canon. The voices in the dialogue (clarinet and violin) follow each other by a prescribed number of beats, but the music is totally devoid of any meter at all. The piano, representing the lyre, accompanies this lyric love feast with repeated 'strummed' chords. The canon has three large sections and ends with the violin echoing the unaccompanied clarinet invocation as the sound of the lyre fades.

The second movement, called *Dionysus' Dream-Orgy (Ritual Dance)* presents, after a brief introduction, another kind of unmeasured music. Rather than long lyric flights of philosophic song, however, this time we hear a unison dance of unbridled energy and sensual transport. The piece soon forms itself into a loose arch form, with contrasting metered dance sections divided by the unison unmeasured 'orgy' tune. Midway through the movement, Apollo's melody returns from the first movement, but it is a temporary reminiscence. The orgiastic dance returns, reaches a climax, and ends with a stomping of feet.

While Plato asserts that a proper balance between lust and reason is necessary in all men, he (naturally) gives the nod to Philosophy as the better choice in which to live. Not so in my music: the two sides are meant to coexist and to complement each other. No sides are taken.

Phaedrus was commissioned for the Verdehr Trio by Michigan State University. It is dedicated to the Verdehr Trio with great affection and admiration."

—Dan Welcher

The world premiere of *Phaedrus* was on April 26, 1996 at Casa Thomas Jefferson, Brasilia, Brazil.

Dan Welcher (born 1948, Rochester, New York) first trained as a pianist and bassoonist, earning degrees from the Eastman School of Music and the Manhattan School of Music. He joined the Louisville Orchestra as principal bassoonist in 1972, concurrently teaching at the University of Louisville. In 1976, he joined the Artist Faculty of the Aspen Music Festival.

Welcher has become one of the most-played American composers of his generation. With over one hundred works to his credit, more than half of which are published, Welcher has written in virtually every medium, including opera, concerto, symphony, vocal literature, piano solos, and various kinds of chamber music.

His orchestral music has been commissioned and performed by more than fifty orchestras, including the Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Honolulu, St. Louis and Utah Symphonies; The Boston Pops; and the Las Vegas and Rochester Philharmonic Orchestras. Works for symphonic wind ensemble have been composed for the West Point Band, College Band Directors National

Association, College of Fine Arts at the University of Texas, and the bands of the Big Twelve Universities. His piano concerto, *Shiva's Drum*, was premiered at the Round Top International Festival with pianist James Dick. *Della's Gift*, one of his four operas, has received several performances including the New York City Opera.

Welcher has won numerous awards and prizes from institutions such as the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Reader's Digest/Lila Wallace Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, Yaddo, the MacDowell Colony, the American Music Center, the Bellagio Center (Bellagio, Italy) and the Ligurian Study Center (Bogliasco, Italy). His work, *Zion*, for wind ensemble won the American Bandmasters Association Ostwald Prize in 1996. As Composer-in-Residence with the Honolulu Symphony Orchestra through the Meet the Composer Orchestra Residencies Program, Welcher distinguished himself with a weekly radio series, *Knowing the Score*, which won the 1999 ASCAP Deems Taylor Broadcasting Award.

Welcher is the Lee Hage Jamail Regents Professor of Composition and the Director of the New Music Ensemble at the University of Texas at Austin. During the early years of his tenure at UT, he also served as Assistant Conductor of the Austin Symphony Orchestra. As a conductor, he has led the premiere of more than one hundred twenty new works.

Additional information is available at www.danwelcher.com.