NEIGHBORHOOD MUSIC SCHOOL
presents

THE 2018
RENAEE B. FISHER PIANO COMPETITION

Folk Rhapsody

by Richard Thomas Jones

HIGH SCHOOL DIVISION WORK

Commissioned by the Renée B. Fisher Foundation
Richard Thomas Jones – Biography

Richard was born and raised in Germany to English-speaking parents. At eight, he started piano lessons with the obscure Schenkerian Karl-Otto Plum, and had some success in various piano competitions as a teenager. He started composing at the age of nine, and won a “Jugend komponiert” third prize for a flute sonata in 1995.

From 1997 to 2000, he read Music at King’s College, Cambridge, where he studied free composition with Robin Holloway. After struggling to fit in at Cambridge, he abandoned all plans of a career in music after graduation. However, he soon started a rock band with friends, and over the next few years co-wrote and recorded two studio albums, and played piano on others.

During that time, he briefly worked in television before training as a secondary school teacher in London. He has since taught adults with learning difficulties, as well as countless students of all ages one-to-one in performance and composition. After becoming a father in 2009, he decided to answer his nine-year-old self’s demands to fully return to composition. In 2013, he completed a Dubstep & Fugue for symphonic wind band, a reconciliation of swing, dubstep and traditional polyphony. He has since completed a number of pieces synthesising popular vernaculars with studied techniques, and recently enrolled at Bristol University as a research student in composition under John Pickard.
Folk Rhapsody – Performer’s Note

The main theme is a homage to old American folk melodies, many of which were refitted during the Civil War with heroic, sentimental or combative lyrics ("Join the Cavalry", "Waitin’ for the Federals", "I wish I was in Dixie"). Likewise, the theme hardens, militarizes and harkens back as the piece progresses. In contrast, the second theme, whilst rooted in the same tradition as the first, incorporates a more diverse and modern spectrum of American folk music, and is generally more playful and laid-back. Here, the variations grow in size, complexity and meaning.

Many have commented on the current cultural divisions inside America as, at their worst, akin to the spirit of the Civil War. The vitriolic nature of some recent political discourse – typically conducted online – reminds me of the childish frustration felt when failing to beat a particularly tricky boss at the end of a computer game level. And so the final incarnation of the “Civil War” theme is as unreal arcade battle music.

This all makes the piece sound terribly thoughtful and serious, but really it’s meant to be fun. The performance should be uninhibited and rollicking, like the music from which it takes its inspiration.

Richard Jones, October 2017
Folk Rhapsody

R. T. Jones

Allegro vigoroso e marcato assai

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Moderato e precipitato