

Heard Melodies are Sweet

Classical evening host Bill Morelock remains in awe of music, literature and imagination by Luke Taylor

The music played, and the story suddenly sprang to life.

When Classical Minnesota Public Radio's Bill Morelock was an undergraduate studying English literature at Washington State University in Pullman, Wash., he found an album of the Philadelphia Orchestra playing George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* Fantasia and Concerto in F. The opera, set in the 1920s, seemed to transport Morelock to that decade. "It felt like an aural component to reading F. Scott Fitzgerald," Morelock recalls. "It fit in with the literature. There was a connection there, a buoyancy. It felt like touching something in

an era that means something to me."

He felt similarly transported the first time he heard Ralph Vaughn Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*. "I couldn't believe what I was hearing," Morelock reflects. "It was like some kind of strange dream of a former life."

Understanding the music's power, Morelock has a reverence for what he plays on Classical MPR ("Obviously we're dealing with something really aesthetically substantial," he says), but he doesn't proselytize on behalf of it. He'll spin a whimsical yarn or share a little story to set up each piece, and then he lets the music speak

for itself. "It's fun for me,"

Morelock says. "I sense that if I'm engaged in telling a story in all good faith, there's a chance that that's an effective broadcast."

Morelock's broadcasting career actually began in public television; later, he was hired as a part-time host at KWSU public radio in Pullman. Offering a mix of news and classical music, KWSU provided fertile ground for Morelock to cultivate his skills as a classical-music host.

In the late '80s, Morelock and KWSU colleague Bob Christiansen conspired to create the arts-and-culture program *Bob & Bill*, which was



Photo by John Nicholson

Listen to Bill Morelock weekdays from 7 – 11 p.m. on Classical Minnesota Public Radio.

aired nationally by NPR. Arthur Cohen, then the director of programming at Minnesota Public Radio, invited the pair to base their show at MPR in St. Paul. They produced the program until 1997, and both men obviously continue as Classical MPR hosts.

Although very much at home in Minnesota, Morelock was born in Everett, Wash., and graduated from high school in northern California. His character is influenced by the zeitgeist of the American West, and he maintains a pioneer spirit by using his bicycle as his primary mode of transportation and by passing his summers cultivating the staples for his diet. Harvesting last season's potatoes was particularly fulfilling. "It was something I started in May when I cut up a bunch of potatoes with eyes in them and put them in rows," he says. "When I dug them up, I was thinking," – Morelock playfully summons a guttural, caveman voice – "I ... have ... food!"

He encourages a similar sense of self-reliance on the audience's part when he plays music each weekday evening on Classical MPR. Although the meaning behind much of the music is well documented, Morelock tacitly encourages listeners to fashion their own interpretations. He considers any interpretation to be deeply personal; so personal, in fact, that Morelock believes something is lost in trying to share those stories. For him, it literally is the thought that counts. "What's really interesting to me is how an individual imagination brings together all the stimuli around it and creates meaningful connections," he says.

Much the same way one might find a connection between, say ... George Gershwin and F. Scott Fitzgerald. ◉

Overtures

Upcoming programs to note

This month, Michael Barone celebrates the birthday of the greatest organ composer by common consent, Johann Sebastian Bach. *Pipedreams* will feature Bach's music in three consecutive shows, culminating in a special performance on the newly reinstalled organ at Alice Tully Hall in New York.

Listen to Pipedreams every Sunday from 6 – 8 a.m. on Classical Minnesota Public Radio. For more details and archived programs, visit Pipedreams.org.

QuickNOTES



Photo by Curtis Johnson

Cantus concerts continue

Cantus, Classical Minnesota Public Radio's artists-in-residence, continue their tour of greater Minnesota this month with concerts in Grand Rapids and Crookston.

On Tuesday, March 29, Cantus will perform at Davies Hall on the campus of **Itasca Community College** in Grand Rapids. Tickets can be purchased through the Myles Reif Performing Arts Center's website (reifcenter.org) or by phoning 218-327-5780.

Cantus then head west on Highway 2 to Crookston, where they'll perform at the Kiehle Auditorium at the **University of Minnesota, Crookston**, on Thursday, March 31. Tickets can be purchased by calling 218-281-8266.

Both concerts begin at 7:30 p.m., and MPR members receive a discount on ticket prices.

For more information about Cantus as Classical MPR's artists-in-residence, visit ClassicalMPR.org/air.

March 13 — Celebrating Bach! Notable performers bring decided individuality to their interpretations and tributes.

March 20 — Sebastian and Max: Honoring the birthdays of the two greatest German exponents of the pipe organ: J.S. Bach (March 21) and Max Reger (March 19).

March 27 — Bach in the Big Apple: Paul Jacobs rechristens the 1975 Kuhn pipe organ at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall with a performance of Bach's *Clavierübung III* (aka the "German Organ Mass").