



REGINA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
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Listening Guide

Quintet by William Rowson

This listening guide will highlight the musical attributes that create a joyful energy in William Rowson’s *Quintet*.

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Description

Lush lyrical melodies, syncopated rhythmic drive, and jubilant energy flow through William Rowson’s *Quintet*. Sweeping oboe melodies, soaring horn solos, and effervescent ensemble ostinatos imbue this work with joy and evoke sentiments of a spring afternoon walk.





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Historical Context

William Rowson begun his musical education as a violinist at age 3, in his hometown of Saskatoon. At the age of 17 he entered the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia to study composition. Like so many important musicians throughout history, Rowson balances musical life as a string musician and composer.

The divide between string and wind playing is in some ways more difficult to bridge than the divide between creation and interpretation: it requires special care and attention to write for an instrument you haven't played. "I played violin in my youth with many orchestras," Rowson explained to the Vancouver Sun in 2016, after his appointment to the position of assistant conductor with the Vancouver Symphony. "So given my string bias, I'm extra careful to include good parts for the brass and the chorus."

Writing a wind quintet, however, is a very different undertaking. "I wanted to work on my chops as a composer," Rowson explained at the Toronto premiere of his *Quintet*. "The woodwind quintet, as a non-homogenous sounding ensemble, is something really challenging. I studied a lot of quintets and talked to a lot of wind-playing friends."

The quintet originally consisted of only about a minute of music; it came to exist in its final form through the particular alchemy that takes place when a work is actually played by musicians. The Toronto wind quintet the Blythwood Winds (of which RSO oboist Tamsin Johnston was formerly a member) played through the short work, and both the musicians and the composer wanted more. Rowson then found himself in the position of revising and extending a work that he had written more than a decade earlier; putting into musical context the observation attributed to Nelson Mandela: "there is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered."

The final version of the quintet is just under ten minutes, and although it is divided into sections with clear boundaries, there is no obvious point at which the old material ends and the new begins. Instead, it takes on the character, if not the exact form of a theme and variations, beginning gently and cycling through progressively quicker tempi. However, each new section contains some small rhythmic surprise; notes syncopated in unexpected places, bars that last longer or shorter than expected, melodies that go almost, but not quite, where the ear expects them to end. Light in feel, but never predictable, the music feels unified. "If you can find the seams," Rowson told the audience at the work's first performance, "I'll buy you a drink."

Program notes by Anna Norris

Listening Guide

Composition Date: 2015

Orchestration: flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn

Duration: 8 minutes 45 second

Form: *Quintet* begins slow and lyrical followed by a fast and rhythmically driven second section.



Section 1

Description	Time
The introduction to <i>Quintet</i> opens with layering short melodic fragments beginning with the bassoon and quickly adding higher instruments.	2:07-2:31
The oboe enters with a lyrical lush melody supported by imitative counter melodies.	2:31-3:20
The mood quickly changes with a mischievous low flourish in the clarinet and the ensemble performing a steady march in the background. This new character quickly gives way to the original lush lyricism.	3:21-4:33
Section one slowly fades with the flute playing short descending bird calls.	4:33-5:26

Section 2

Description	Time
Section 2 contrasts the first with a jubilant syncopated rhythmic energy. Instruments of the ensemble play short solos answered by the full ensemble creating a dialogue.	5:30-6:29
There is a brief departure from the dialogue to a flowing undulating ensemble texture.	6:29-6:37
Another brief interruption takes place with the bassoon playing a jolly tuneful dance.	7:00-7:19



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The energy subsides briefly with horn calls heralding a false ending. 8:20-9:05

The opening jubilant energy is renewed with fast passing back and forth of melodic fragments. 9:12-10:30

The piece charges forward with the horn leading the way, performing the opening melody. 10:30-10:45

Quick staccato notes ricochet off each other in an exuberant ascend to the end. 10:45-11:34



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Further Listening

Title	Composer
<i>Summer Music</i>	Samuel Barber
<i>Kleine Kammermusik</i> , for wind quintet Op. 24 No. 2	Paul Hindemith
<i>Partita</i>	Irving Fine
<i>Wind Quintet</i> , Op. 43	Carl Nielsen
<i>Quintet for Winds</i>	John Harbison

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