

**VOU-ME EMBORA**  
FOR BERIMBAU, WIND ENSEMBLE AND FEMALE CHORUS  
COMMISSIONED BY AND WRITTEN FOR  
TREVOR JORGENSEN  
AND  
THE FREEPORT SCHOOL DISTRICT WORLD ARTS FESTIVAL  
FREEPORT, IL

**PROGRAM NOTE**

*Vou-me embora*, literally means, “I’m leaving”. It is the title of a common song from the Brazilian martial art of *Capoeira Angola*. It refers to the desire common among Afro-Brazilians to leave the new world, and return home to an idealized paradise in Africa. In the song, the lyrics refer to the instrument commonly associated with *capoeira*, the *berimbau*. “I’m leaving for Angola, the berimbau is calling my name, let’s go now and hang out.”

That song has always been one of my favorites among capoeira songs, perhaps because of a particular recording of Mestre João Grande singing it on the Smithsonian/Folkways compilation, *Capoeira Angola from Salvador, Brazil*. João Grande is a very famous teacher of capoeira who has his school in New York City. His voice is so strong and musical -- to me it exemplifies the genre.

*Vou-me embora* showcases the berimbau, using the wind ensemble and chorus as a vehicle for the expression of a variety of my musical influences. After a brief introduction that references the musical manner of American Minimalism, the first movement becomes a stylized capoeira song. Here I set another song of capoeira written by Mestre Pastinha, chosen because it describes the berimbau – its sounds (onomatopoeically...the B-A-BA) and its physical appearance (the wood, the rattle, the wire and the coin) – in detail. São Bento Grande and Angola are names of specific rhythms that the berimbau plays while accompanying a game of capoeira.

The second movement is slow and lyrical, in sharp contrast to the high energy of the first movement. I allow myself as soloist, accompanied by my percussionist colleagues in the ensemble, to freely create gestures through coloristic improvisations on instruments such as sleigh bells, wind chimes, rattles and the like. The repeated melody of this movement becomes gradually supported by very rich harmonic material that betrays my interest in the music of Hermeto Pascoal.

The third movement grows out of the end of the second movement, as the two are played *attaca*. Rhythmic drive predominates here, consisting of a repeated sequence of 7/8 and 6/8 meters. The wind ensemble becomes a thick web of driving ostinati, and over the top I perform a virtuosic solo on a large pair of *caxixi*, the wicker rattle that traditionally accompany the berimbau in capoeira.

The final movement, preceded by an open cadenza on berimbau, attempts to recollect the melodic motives of both the first and third movements, layering one on top of the other above a steadily more complex harmonic language, grounded only by an ostinato of a D-Major triad in second inversion. This movement is largely influenced by Pat Metheny's 2005 album, *The Way Up*.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to Trevor Jorgensen and the Freeport, Illinois, School District for having the courage to commission this piece. Performing the work for the first time with the Freeport Middle School band children was an unforgettable and rewarding experience, and working with Trevor all along the way was quintessentially important in completing the work. I cannot thank you enough. Special thanks also go to Erin Lesser, whose practical suggestions along the way kept me firmly grounded in the reality of what needed to be done; and to my parents, who came to the first performance and sat with all the other parents who were there to support their children's musical activities. Parental love never ceases.

## **LYRICS AND TRANSLATIONS**

for  
MOVEMENT I (and Movement IV)

The lyrics in this piece, written by celebrated Capoeira Angola teacher, Mestre Pastinha, are taken from a *ladainha* (litany) or opening song of the game of Capoeira Angola.

Eu quero lê o B-A-BA  
O B-A-BA do berimbau  
A cabaça e o caxixi  
E um pedaço de pau  
A moeda e o arame, (colega) velho  
Está aí um berimbau

I want to read the ABC's  
The ABCs of the berimbau  
The gourd and the rattle  
And a piece of wood  
The coin and the wire, old (friend)  
That there is a berimbau

Berimbau é um instrumento  
Tocado de uma corda só  
Pra tocá São Bento Grande  
Toca Angola em tom maior  
Agora acabei de crê, colega velho  
Berimbau é o maior, camará

The berimbau is an instrument  
Played with only one string  
For to play São Bento Grande  
To play Angola in a major key  
I've just realized, my old (friend)  
Berimbau is the greatest, camarade!

