

## Southwest Washington Wind Symphony embraces the music of autumn - Symphony opens season of concerts based on paintings that you can bid on

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How can a painting turn into music? And if it could, what would the painting on this page, “September Hut” by Sheep Jones, sound like? “It kind of confused me,” admitted Patrick Murphy, conductor of the Southwest Washington Wind Symphony. “Every time I looked at this painting, I read it differently. One day it would seem dark and dreary. Another day it might be kind of uplifting.” The center structure could be a little shack or a family home, he said; or it could be a schoolhouse, lonely and empty or busy and full. Also, what time of day is it in the painting? Murphy can’t decide — but it seems like the red sky is “almost catching on fire,” he said.

The Wind Symphony is getting ready for a whole season of translating artistic images and vibrant colors into music. Murphy has programmed an entire autumn-themed Sunday concert for the 55-member band based on Jones’ painting, and he’ll continue that practice with other paintings for the next two Wind Symphony concerts, set for March 3 and May 19.

Meanwhile, art lovers who attend Sunday’s concert will be able to bid on “September Hut,” plus approximately 10 more paintings by contemporary American artists — including Keith Lindberg, Carole Watanabe, and Marianne Kolb — in a silent auction. Proceeds will support the Wind Symphony. If you’re interested, don’t forget to show up early so you have time to peruse the artworks and make your bids before the music starts at 3 p.m.

### Donation collection

The paintings were donated to the symphony by a pair of local art collectors, Grace Teigen and Gene Wigglesworth, who were profiled in this newspaper a few years ago as they pursued the dream of a new Vancouver art museum where their holdings could be exhibited. But that has never come to pass, and now — even as their own collection keeps growing — the couple and their nonprofit Give Art Foundation have been brokering art donations between other parties. “We are approached by people whose art collections need a home as their owners transition to smaller homes,” Teigen said by email. “We try to find the ‘highest and best use’ for a work or works of art. Sometimes it’s a museum, sometimes an institution like a school or hospital, and other times an auction of sorts.” She said the donors of “September Hut” were music lovers, so the Wind Symphony seemed “an especially good fit.” (“Our own collection remains intact; it grows in fact,” Teigen added. “But we’ve had no luck finding a suitable place to take it.”)

It was a Wind Symphony board member who hatched the idea of building concert programs around the paintings, according to organization president Peter Boulé. Boulé invited Murphy over to check out all the artworks donated by Give Art and see what he thought — and that’s when Murphy found himself intrigued by “September Hut.”

### **Ambiguous, inspiring**

Because it's a little weird and ambiguous, "September Hut" wasn't Murphy's immediate favorite among the donated paintings. But that's also why he eventually chose it as the inspiration for a whole concert program: its ambiguity drew him in. "The more time you spend with it, the more you read into it on a personal level," Murphy said. He even avoided learning the painting's title for as long as possible, he added, because he didn't want that to limit his diverse reactions; when he takes his students in an Introduction to Fine Arts class at the University of Portland to visit the Portland Art Museum, he added, their task is the same: to take in the most modern and strange of artworks without looking at their titles. "I want to know your reactions, I want to know what you feel without the artist telling you how to feel. That's what's most important," Murphy said.

But for this event, Murphy has handled the initial interpreting himself. The more he studied "September Hut," he said, the more he discovered highlights and made musical connections. The idea of a family home reminded Murphy of "Shortcut Home," a cheerful, jazzy piece by Dana Wilson; the idea of a little red schoolhouse evoked "The Little Red Schoolhouse," a complex collection of young personalities by William Grant Still, whom Murphy called an underappreciated African-American composer; and the dying corn stalks and lurid palate made him think of autumn and death, so he selected "Autumn Air" by Nicole Piunno, "Scarecrow Overture" by Joseph Turrin and "Under the Willow," a Civil War lament by Julie Giroux.

"I see some desolation in the painting ... and I can imagine this being a lone shack standing in the midst" of a scorched battlefield, Murphy said. And, for that burning red sky, his choice was easy: "Night on Fire," an urgently sizzling piece by John Mackey. "For a lot of people, it's easier to identify with the visual than it is to listen and interpret a piece of music," Murphy said. "We don't usually put those together, but in these concerts we will."