William Blair Emerging Markets Growth Fund
Fund Manager Commentary

Market Review

After a strong performance in 2021, global equities declined (-5.47%) in the first quarter (as measured by the MSCI ACWI IMI) amid increased market volatility induced by concerns over inflation, rising interest rates, and heightened geopolitical tension in Eastern Europe. In January, concerns over rising inflation and hawkish moves by the Federal Reserve drove a sharp style rotation into lower-value, lower-growth-oriented securities. Volatility continued in February as the Russian invasion of Ukraine prompted a coordinated response by Western countries in the form of firm sanctions targeted at Russia's financial system. The sanctions on Russia rendered Russian equities and the ruble un-investable with fears of contagion to other markets. In this environment, growth equities significantly underperformed value-oriented equities (the MSCI ACWI IMI Growth declined -9.83% while the MSCI ACWI IMI Value declined -1.08%). This was evident from a global sector perspective as consumer discretionary (-11.63%) and information technology (-10.37%) declined while energy stocks strengthened (+22.64%) on stronger crude oil prices.

Developed markets declined (-5.32%) as measured by the MSCI World IMI. U.S. equities declined (-5.38%) as the Russian invasion of Ukraine amplified existing concerns over rising inflation and interest rates. The Federal Reserve approved its first interest rate increase (0.25%) in over three years with further hikes expected throughout the rest of the year. Europe ex-U.K. plunged (-10.04%) as heightened concerns over the availability of Russian energy imports to Europe weighed on investor sentiment. In addition to targeting Russia's key financial institutions, the U.S. and European allies also cut Russia from the SWIFT International Payment system. Germany also announced it would be halting the certification of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia.

Emerging markets declined (-6.65%) with mixed returns across countries. Russian equities plunged as the broad range of sanctions imposed on their economy weighed heavily on the ruble and market returns. China sharply declined primarily in March (-14.27% for the quarter) amid a spike in COVID-19 cases and newly imposed lockdowns across major cities. Conversely, Latin America generated strong returns for the quarter (+26.34%) with broad outperformance across countries. Oil exporters and commodity beneficiaries such as South Africa (+19.30%), Kuwait (+18.56%), and Saudi Arabia (+16.64%), also outperformed.

Fund Performance

Underperformance by the William Blair Emerging Markets Growth Fund (Class N shares) versus the MSCI Emerging Markets IMI (net) was primarily driven by style headwinds and negative stock selection within the financials, information technology and communication services sectors. Information technology overweighting and materials underweighting also detracted from relative performance.

Within the financials sector, TCS Group and OTP Bank hindered relative results. TCS Group, the leading Russian digital financial services company, fell sharply on the Russia-Ukraine conflict despite the company's strong fundamental results and capital position ahead of the crisis. OTP is the largest bank in Hungary with exposure to Eastern Europe. The stock weakened as a result of Russia exposure and heightened contagion concerns. We exited both positions in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Information technology was dragged down by semiconductor names, in particular Silergy and Mediatek, which corrected after strong performance in prior quarters. Silergy is the market leader in China for analog semiconductors and remains a beneficiary of structural growth in demand from automobile, cloud, and 5G end-markets as well as a localization trend. Following strong performance results in 2021, the stock pulled back amid weaker-than-expected fourth-quarter earnings, broad macroeconomic concerns, and market rotation. Mediatek, a Taiwanese semiconductor design company, posted strong

Top 10 Holdings[1] as of 3/31/22

Company	*% of Fund*
Taiwan Semiconductor Mfg. Co. Ltd.	8.5
Samsung Electronics Co., Ltd.	5.1
Reliance Industries Ltd.	3.5
MediaTek Inc.	3.3
Capitec Bank Holdings Limited	3.1
PT Bank Central Asia Tbk	2.9
E.SUN Financial Holding Company, Ltd	2.4
China Merchants Bank Co., Ltd.	2.4
Wal-Mart de Mexico	2.1
Tata Consultancy Services Limited	2.0
Total Top 10	**35.3**

[1]Listed holdings are presented to illustrate examples of the securities that the Fund has bought and do not represent all of the Fund's holdings or future investments. Information about the Fund's holdings should not be considered investment advice. There is no guarantee that the Fund will continue to hold any one particular security or stay invested in any one particular sector. Holdings are subject to change at any time and are as of the date shown above. Top ten holdings are shown as a percentage of total net assets.

fourth-quarter results across all segments, led by smartphones +51% YoY amid continued share gains in premium models, robust 5G adoption, and the related uptick in blended ASP. The stock weakness was driven by near-term decelerating China smartphone demand and slower 5G penetration.

SEA, Ltd. and Yandex weighed on relative results within the communication services sector. SEA, Ltd. underperformed amid market rotation and weaker fundamental results, with slowing growth in the core gaming segment and continued investments into new markets, which added to investor concerns about Indian market restrictions and management's capital-allocation discipline. Yandex declined as a result of Russia geopolitical and macroeconomic risk; we liquidated the position as a result.

Partially offsetting these effects was positive stock selection within the energy sector, bolstered by Reliance Industries of India. The company delivered very strong results, benefiting from robust retail trends as India reopened its economy, rising gas prices, and wireless tariff increases. We believe Reliance's transformation from an asset heavy, cyclical energy business to more diversified, end-consumer businesses with a large and expanding total addressable market is under-appreciated and will continue to drive strong growth and returns over the long term while commodity business will continue to provide earnings support in the near term. Consumer staples stock selection was also additive to relative results, helped by Wal-Mart de Mexico. The stock performance was fueled by solid fundamental trends with favorable sales momentum reflecting market share gains and growing ecommerce, coupled with positive sentiment toward Mexico.

Positioning

The most notable portfolio change during the period was the significant increase to financials exposure, from an underweight to an overweight position, through addition to existing holdings and new purchases. In particular, exposure to banks was bolstered by new investments in Credicorp, Itau and First Abu Dhabi Bank.

Credicorp stands out as a leading banking franchise in Peru with strong management, brand, scale, and a strong ROE. The bank continues to invest in technology to improve efficiency and enhance client service, while also leveraging scale and synergies across business lines. The long-term growth outlook continues to benefit from increasing loan penetration from a relatively low number. Itau is Brazil's leading private sector bank; it has a strong retail banking franchise with leading positions in automobile, mortgages, and SME. After delivering strong results in 2021, we believe Itau is well positioned to deliver strong earnings growth and ROE, driven by robust loan growth, margin improvement, efficient cost control, and stable credit costs. An improved economic growth outlook for Brazil and attractive valuation relative to regional peers and historical levels should continue to support stock performance. First Abu Dhabi Bank is the largest UAE bank, with roughly 30% market share. We believe the bank is in a strong position to capitalize on UAE structural reforms, market consolidation, capital markets expansion, and green financing growth.

The financial sector increase was funded primarily through reduction to communication services, information technology, and healthcare exposure. We sold SEA, Ltd. and Yandex in communication services and liquidated Globalwafers in information technology amid a deteriorating growth outlook as a result of the Siltronic deal failure, impact of inflation, and supply chain disruption. Within healthcare, we exited Wuxi Biologics Cayman Inc and WuXi AppTec amid increased geopolitical risk as the companies were added to the U.S. Commerce Department's Unverified List.

Outlook

As we begin the second quarter of 2022, we reflect on the unique environment we have experienced the last two years. The nature of the economic cycle, originally due to the COVID pandemic, has been exacerbated. We've experienced an extreme closing and reopening of the global economy, accompanied by unprecedented liquidity, and pronounced rotations in style – first with growth outperforming strongly, and more recently value charging back. Finally, the Russian invasion of Ukraine continues to impact the economy and the markets and in response we have needed to reassess our outlook leading into this year.

Similar to our forecast earlier this year, we continue to see a natural slowing of economic growth from very high levels seen in 2020; but also, rising inflation, which implies a further deceleration of earnings growth. We also continue to analyze the rising interest rate environment and its relationship to valuations.

Growth – Post-Russian Invasion

In terms of growth, we continue to see risks of slower economic and corporate profit growth than we had originally expected. Importantly, in contrast to our prior outlook, we now expect materially lower growth in Europe. Leading into the year, most European economies remained much below their pre-pandemic output trajectory and now the Russian invasion of Ukraine has created further downward pressure. Particularly in Eastern and Central Europe, expanding past Russia, into Hungary and Poland, we'll expect continued acceleration in inflation, currencies under pressure and higher interest rates.

Within the U.S., we see less impact and expect growth to remain at broadly similar levels as in our pre-Russian invasion case, which is a significant sequential deceleration in economic activity, from approximately 5.5% growth that we observed in 2021 down to closer to 2.5% growth rate by the end of the year. Corporate profit growth expectations seem reasonable and remain at the highest level for most major countries.

Within China, our outlook is mixed. We've seen a resurgence of COVID and lockdowns, which we expect to impact economic activity and weakening of growth in the first half of this year, coupled with potential geopolitical risk. In contrast, we think the government's focus on a stable economic environment will lead to a moderate fiscal and monetary stimulus as well as potential for some easing of regulatory pressures. Valuations in China are also relatively attractive in our view, after a difficult 2021.

Inflation

The ongoing lockdowns and the military conflict that we now have in Europe has prompted us to revise our inflation projections further. We originally expected inflation to peak in early summer. We now expect inflation to peak at a higher rate in the later part of this year and to rollover thereafter. Of course, wage pressures were something that we were going to monitor on an ongoing basis, and that that remains a key variable to watch in the U.S. What that means for equity markets, is that corporate earnings growth, especially outside the U.S., is expected to decelerate further throughout much of 2022, which will put further downward pressure on multiples.

Valuation and Style Performance

Thus far in 2022, we've seen one of the most significant style rotations we have experienced in multiple decades, which leads us to a discussion regarding equity valuations. The general relationship between rates and valuations holds, and despite the influences of the conflict and persistent inflation, we do believe that we are still in a long-term economic recovery. Thus, we expect gradual monetary tightening and removal of excess liquidity, consequently leading to further multiple contraction as the expansion continues and rates go higher.

This has direct implications for the performance of Growth equities vs Value equities, and we have seen this play out significantly in the beginning of 2022. Valuation as a factor has been by far the strongest driver of performance year to date.

Does this imply that the very long run of quality growth over value is over? We don't think so. Many of the drivers of the outperformance of Growth are still in place: positive but lower economic growth, low (albeit rising) interest rates, and a competitive landscape in the real economy that acknowledges the structural advantages of some areas of the economy over others, as well as those of differentiated, innovative business models. As it relates to interest rates, as measured by the 10-year yield, we believe would need to meaningfully rise from current levels (+300bps), to significantly affect relative future profitability and future investment premium.

And as we look forward, what hasn't changed? We think the innovation and disruption cycle hasn't changed, and arguably, has even accelerated. The dynamic shifting of corporate winners and losers remains a constant, and again, if anything, may be accelerated. Importantly, durability or improvements in corporate competitive advantage will likely remain underappreciated.

We believe this environment will create an important backdrop for active investing. Understanding companies with differentiated business models, unique cultures and durable competitive advantages will increasingly be crucial to determining investment performance in this complex environment.

INVESTMENT PERFORMANCE (AS OF 3/31/22)

	QTR	YTD	1 Y	3 Y	5 Y	10 Y
Class I (SI: 06/06/05)	-12.74%	-12.74%	-10.53%	13.30%	10.96%	5.99%
Class N (SI: 06/06/05)	-12.80%	-12.80%	-10.74%	13.00%	10.69%	5.73%
MSCI Emerging Markets IMI Index (net)	-6.65%	-6.65%	-9.49%	5.74%	6.19%	3.59%

Performance cited represents past performance. Past performance does not guarantee future results and current performance may be lower or higher than the data quoted. Returns shown assume reinvestment of dividends and capital gains. Investment returns and principal will fluctuate with market and economic conditions and you may have a gain or loss when you sell shares. For the most current month-end performance information, please call +1 800 742 7272, or visit our Web site at www.williamblairfunds.com. Class N shares are available to the general public without a sales load. Class I shares are available only to investors who meet certain eligibility requirements.

EXPENSE RATIOS

	Gross Expense
Class I	1.30%
Class N	1.55%

Expenses shown are as of the most recent prospectus.

IMPORTANT DISCLOSURES

The Fund involves a high level of risk and may not be appropriate for everyone. You should only consider it for the aggressive portion of your portfolio. The Fund's returns will vary, and you could lose money by investing in the Fund. The Fund holds equities which may decline in value due to both real and perceived general market, economic, and industry conditions. Investing in foreign denominated and/or domiciled securities may involve heightened risk due to currency fluctuations, and economic and political risks, which may be enhanced in emerging markets. The securities of emerging market companies may be subject to greater volatility and less liquidity than companies in more developed markets. Individual securities may not perform as expected or a strategy used by the Adviser may fail to produce its intended result. Currency rates may fluctuate significantly over short periods of time and may reduce the returns of a portfolio. Convertible securities may be called before intended, which may have an adverse effect on investment objectives. The Fund is expected to incur operating expenses that are higher than those of mutual funds investing exclusively in U.S. equity securities due to the higher custodial fees associated with foreign securities investments.

The Morgan Stanley Capital International (MSCI) Emerging Markets IMI Index (net) is a free float-adjusted market capitalization index that is designed to measure equity market performance of emerging markets. This series approximates the minimum possible dividend reinvestment. The Index is unmanaged, does not incur fees or expenses, and cannot be invested in directly.

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Please carefully consider the Fund's investment objectives, risks, charges, and expenses before investing. This and other information is contained in the Fund's prospectus and summary prospectus, which you may obtain by calling +1 800 742 7272. Read the prospectus and summary prospectus carefully before investing. Investing includes the risk of loss.

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