



## Legato in Times of Staccato

### Playlist 18 - Wednesday, August 5th, 2020

Curated by Music Director, Fouad Fakhouri

#### [Rachmaninoff: Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini](#)

Niccolò Paganini revolutionized violin playing in the early 19th century. His most celebrated original works were his 24 caprices for solo violin, the last of which was a theme and variations. This theme inspired generations of composers to create their own sets of variations. Rachmaninoff's Rhapsody is unique in that after a brief introduction, the first variation is played in the bass line before the main theme is played in the violins.

#### [Béla Bartók: Divertimento for Strings](#)

Bartók composed his Divertimento for Strings in just 15 days while on a working vacation in August 1939. With Europe heading into World War II, Bartók sought retreat in the Swiss Alps to compose in a more contented environment. As a result, the Divertimento is one of Bartók's lightest and most accessible scored. Like the divertimentos of the 18th century, the piece utilizes dance rhythms. The work also models the tradition of the 18th-century concerto grosso, where small groups of solo instruments alternate passages with the full ensemble.

#### [Charles Ives: Symphony No. 4](#)

Ives composed his Fourth Symphony between 1910 and 1925. The piece quotes several popular American songs dating back to the 1890s as well as some of Ives' own previous compositions. The piece also revisits the philosophical ideas Ives posed in *The Unanswered Question* (1908). In Ives' own words: "The aesthetic program of the work is...the searching questions of What? and Why? which the spirit of man asks of life."

#### [Silvestre Revueltas: Sensemayá](#)

Silvestre Revueltas was a Mexican composer known for his intrinsic ability to express Latin-American culture in music. *Sensemayá* brought Revueltas to international fame after its world premiere in 1938. The piece is based on a poem by Cuban writer Nicolás Guillén that depicts the ritual killing of a



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snake in a rite performed by the Cuban Mayombe. Revueltas uses dissonance, abrupt dynamics, emphatic rhythms, and ominous melodies to evoke the tense and sinister atmosphere of the ceremony.

### Brahms: Symphony No. 3

Symphony No. 3 is the shortest of Brahms' four symphonies and is unique in that each movement ends quietly. The symphony begins with three dramatic chords that underscore the notes F-A flat-F, and all the melodic ideas that follow are related to this motif. These notes are a variant of Brahms' famous F-A-F motto, which is a musical cipher for "frei aber froh" meaning "free but happy." Though the key of the Third symphony is F major, the note A-flat belongs to the key of F minor, and this conflict of tonality drives the entire symphony.

### Debussy: Estampes

Estampes is a collection of 3 short solo piano pieces, composed in 1903, known as Debussy's first "impressionist works". Estampes is translated to 'prints', while each piece describes a place. They are titled "Pagodes (Pagodas), "La Soirée dans Grenade" (An evening in Granada), and "Jardins sous la pluie" (Gardens in the Rain). This collection of solos includes Debussy's "exploration" of new sounds for the piano.

No. 1 "Pagodes" – Debussy wanted to replicate the "Oriental" sounds of Javanese Gamelan in this piece. A pagoda is an Asian tiered tower with multiple overhanging, sloped eaves. These buildings are distinctive in Japan, China, Korea, and Vietnam. Debussy used the visualization of these rooflines to shape the melodic lines in this first solo.

No. 2 "La Soirée dans Grenade" evokes a Spanish dance through a distinctive "Habanera" rhythm, which consists of a dotted-eighth and sixteenth note followed by two eighth notes. The Habanera is a Spanish version of the contradanse, which was an internationally popular style of music and dance in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

No. 3 "Jardins sous la pluie" – This third and final piece in Estampes takes us to Debussy's homeland, France. He incorporates two French folk tunes: "Do, do, l'enfant do" and "Nous n'irons plus au bois." This piece is characteristic of Debussy's Impressionist writings, representing scenes of mist and rainstorms, followed by sunshine and blue skies.



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### [Beethoven: Symphony No. 8](#)

Beethoven referred to this Symphony as “my little Symphony in F”, to distinguish from his Sixth Symphony, which is a longer work also in F. The Eighth Symphony is generally “light-hearted”, though not “light-weight”. According to composer, pianist, and conductor, Antony Hopkins, “the cheerful mood of the work betrays nothing of the grossly unpleasant events that were taking place in Beethoven’s life at the time. As Beethoven was growing increasingly deaf, it is said “the orchestra largely ignored his ungainly gestures and followed the principal violinist instead.”

### [Shostakovich: Symphony No. 7](#)

Also referred to as “Leningrad”, Symphony No. 7 by Shostakovich is a piece that puts the reality of War into music. Not only was Europe at war, but the German army stood at the gates of Leningrad. Several members of the orchestra succumbed to famine during the rehearsal period, leaving the ensemble short of players. The Russian military officer in command of defense forces released any soldier who could play an instrument long enough for the performance. They performed the piece over the loudspeakers, both to hearten the Russian people and to make the point to the Germans that surrender was not at hand. The Seventh symphony was interpreted by listeners all over the world as “proof that the Nazis would not, and could not win in Russia”.

### [Béla Bartók - String Quartet No. 6](#)

The String Quartet No. 6 was the final string quartet that Béla Bartók wrote before his death. Shortly after he completed his Divertimento for String Orchestra in the Fall of 1939, Bartók started on the Quartet for his friend, Zoltán Székely. Due to the break out of WWII, communication between Bartók and Székely was difficult, and the Quartet was not premiered until January of 1941, when the Kolisch Quartet, to whom the piece is dedicated, gave its premiere at the Town Hall in New York City.

### [Mendelssohn: Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Op. 56 \(Scottish\)](#)

Mendelssohn was initially inspired to compose his Symphony No. 3 during his first visit to Britain in 1829. On July 30, Mendelssohn visited the ruins of Holyrood Chapel at Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh, where he wrote:



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“In the deep twilight we went today to the palace where Queen Mary lived and loved... The chapel below is now roofless. Grass and ivy thrive there and at the broken altar where Mary was crowned Queen of Scotland. Everything is ruined, decayed, and the clear heavens pour in. I think I have found there the beginning of my ‘Scottish’ Symphony.”

**\*\*\*To access the full Spotify playlist for week 18, click [here!](#)\*\*\***