



Legato in Times of Staccato

Playlist 10 - Wednesday, June 10th, 2020

Curated by Music Director, Fouad Fakhouri

Selection chosen by Hunter Sanchez

[Bernstein: Overture to Candide](#)

In 1955, Leonard Bernstein collaborated with famed playwright Lillian Hellman to create the satirical comic opera, *Candide*, based on the novella of French philosopher, Voltaire. Both Bernstein and Hellman were blacklisted in the era of McCarthyism and wanted to make an artistic statement against political intolerance in America, just as Voltaire did in France in the 18th century. Though the opera itself never found a large audience, the witty and colorful overture has become one of Bernstein's most frequently performed pieces.

Selection by Matt English

[Adam Schoenberg: Picture Studies](#)

In 2011, composer Adam Schoenberg received a commission from the Kansas City Symphony and the Nelson-Atkins Museum to write a 21st-century version of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. In the composer's own words: "Unlike Modest Mussorgsky, who set all of his movements to the work of Viktor Hartmann, my piece brings eight seemingly disparate works of art to musical life...My main objective was to create an architectural structure that connected each movement to the next while creating an overall arc for the entire piece...The outcome is *Picture Studies*, a 26-minute work for orchestra based on four paintings, three photographs, and one sculpture. Creating this series pushed me in a new direction and allowed me to grow as an artist in the most unexpected ways." The YouTube link is a band transcription by Don Patterson.

Selection by Hannah Wadley

[Sabine Devielhe: Les Contes d'Hoffmann- Les Oiseaux dans la Charmille "The Doll Song"](#)

"Les Oiseaux dans la Charmille" (nicknamed "The Doll Song") is one of the most famous arias from Offenbach's opera, *The Tales of Hoffmann*. In this scene, the mechanical doll, Olympia, is wound up to entertain party guests with a song. Partway into the aria, Olympia begins to malfunction, and though she

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is re-wound, she continues to break down throughout the performance. Both the soprano and the orchestra demonstrate musical elements that suggest the malfunctioning of the doll, such as holding trills longer than necessary and pitting staccato rhythms against legato textures. Towards the end of the aria, the doll sings a passage first in a major key, then in a minor key, mimicking the idea of a dying gear mechanism.

Hannah: “The soprano vocalist in the video above, Sabine Devieille, has the most beautiful and unbelievable voices I have ever heard. I’ve heard recordings of this piece in many different variations, but this has to be the best in my opinion. I love this performance because it captures how insanely high she can sing, especially after the 3:00 marker.”

Selection by Garland Richardson of Alexandria, LA

[Wagner: Ride of the Valkyries](#)

Die Walküre is the second opera in Wagner’s *Ring Cycle*. Act III of this opera opens with the rambunctious “Ride of the Valkyries.” In this scene, the nine warrior daughters of the god Wotan, known as the Valkyries, soar through the skies collecting the souls of fallen soldiers to bring them back to Valhalla. The music captures the grandiose nature of the scene with a bold brass line cutting through a chaotic background of strings and woodwinds. On stage, the actresses shout the famous *Hojotoho* battle cry, however this passage of music is still effectively thrilling without the vocal lines and has become an orchestral favorite for audiences and musicians alike.

Selections by Fouad Fakhouri

[Strauss: Ein Heldenleben](#)

Ein Heldenleben (A Hero’s Life) is an epic tone poem by composer Richard Strauss that reflects upon the nature of heroism. The work is presented in six sections that are performed without pause: I. The Hero, II. The Hero’s Adversaries, III. The Hero’s Helpmate, IV. The Hero’s Battlefield, V. The Hero’s Deeds of Peace, and VI. The Hero’s Flight from the World and Fulfillment. By the time of its conception, Strauss had already composed other large works featuring heroic characters, such as *Don Juan* and *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, and he was once heard saying: “I do not see why I should not compose a symphony about myself; I find myself quite as interesting as Napoleon or Alexander.” When *Ein Heldenleben* premiered, critics immediately condemned the work as an autobiographical piece of self-glorification. Strauss never outright denied these accusations, and when asked to explain the program of the piece, he simply



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responded: “There is no need of a program. It is enough to know that there is a hero, fighting his enemies.”

Franck: Symphony in D minor

The Symphony in D minor was French composer César Franck’s only symphony. The work combines French and German musical traditions, which did not sit well with critics at its premiere in 1889. In the wake of the Franco-Prussian War, anything considered a mainstay of German culture was rejected by the French, and critics thought the work sounded too much like the Romantic symphonies of prominent 19th-century German composers. Franck used cyclic technique to unify the piece, where much like the “fate” motives in the works of Beethoven and Wagner, the three-note motive that begins the D minor symphony reappears in many guises throughout the work’s three movements.

Sibelius: Symphony No. 2

Finnish composer Jean Sibelius conducted the premiere of his Second Symphony in Helsinki in 1902. At the turn of the 20th century, Finland was swept up in a nationalistic fervor amidst political turmoil with Russia. Finnish artists, writers, and musicians delivered a stunning output of patriotic and propagandistic compositions to combat the Russification of Finland. Sibelius had previously composed his nationalistic piece, *Finlandia*, in 1899, and he quickly became one of Finland’s most important and beloved composers. Though Symphony No. 2 is not programmatically patriotic, the Finnish people still viewed the work as such, and even today the piece remains a source of pride for Finland.

György Ligeti: Atmosphères

If you have seen Stanley Kubrick’s film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, then you have heard György Ligeti’s *Atmosphères*. The piece was played in its entirety during the Stargate sequence of the film. György Ligeti was a 20th-century avant-garde composer who developed the concept of micropolyphony, where several unique melodies, rhythms, timbres, and ornaments are clustered together to create one large sound mass that suspends any notion of musical time or space. The very first cluster chord that opens *Atmosphères* consists of 55 pitches spanning four octaves in the strings and woodwinds. Each pitch moves at its own pace, fluctuating in intensity. As Ligeti explained: “Music as frozen time, as an object in an imaginary space...to hold on to time, to suspend its disappearance, to confine it in the present moment, this is my primary goal in composition.”



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Cage: 4'33"

“The material of music is sound and silence. Integrating these is composing. I have nothing to say and I am saying it.” – John Cage, 1952

The pianist in this video is David Tudor, who premiered John Cage’s *4'33"* to an “incensed” audience in 1952. Even today, this piece garners mixed reactions. Cage’s initial idea of composing a piece entirely of silence came in 1947, but he was afraid that such a piece would be taken for a joke. Not until 1951, after a revelatory visit to Harvard University’s anechoic chamber, and with a visual influence from the white paintings of artist Robert Rauschenberg, did Cage follow through with the concept of a silent composition. Later, Cage remarked: “I think perhaps my own best piece, at least the one I like the most, is the silent piece. It has three movements, and in all of the movements there are no sounds. I wanted my work to be free of my own likes and dislikes, because I think music should be free of the feelings and ideas of the composer. I have felt and hoped to have led other people to feel that the sounds of their environment constitute a music which is more interesting than the music which they would hear if they went into a concert hall.”

Giya Kancheli: Styx for viola, choir, and orchestra, Rysanov

In Greek mythology, dead souls must cross the river Styx on their way to Hades, and Charon is the ferryman who transports these souls. Giya Kancheli’s *Styx* paints a haunting musical picture of this voyage between realms, with the river Styx portrayed by the orchestra, the dead souls voiced by the choir, and Charon incarnated by the viola. Kancheli’s musical style consists of long, quiet sections of music frequently juxtaposed with powerful outbursts of sound, making the themes of death and despair even more poignant and gripping.

Rush: Force Ten

Rush is a band that has written some terrific songs. Neil Peart, who passed away earlier this year, was one of the best rock drummers that I have heard.

*****To access the full Spotify playlist for week 10, click [here!](#)*****



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