



Legato in Times of Staccato

Playlist 11 - Wednesday, June 17th, 2020

Curated by Music Director, Fouad Fakhouri

Selections by Fouad Fakhouri

Beethoven: "Leonore" Overture No. 3

Beethoven struggled to compose an appropriate overture for his only opera, *Leonore*, later re-titled *Fidelio*. After three attempts, alongside several changes to the libretto, he finally came up with the *Fidelio* Overture, which did not use any musical themes from the opera. *Leonore* No. 3 was deemed too grand an opening, though it does powerfully summarize the dramatic themes of the opera, including triumph of good over evil and deliverance from oppression. The Overture begins with ominous descending octaves to evoke the main character's descent to the dungeon. The clarinets and bassoons paraphrase the aria of lament and hope he sings while imprisoned. Anxious violins build to a powerful climax cut short by a distant trumpet call representing salvation. After the development and recapitulation of these themes, a thrilling coda brings the Overture to a triumphant close.

Mascagni: Intermezzo from Cavalleria Rusticana

In 1890, Italian composer Pietro Mascagni won first prize in a one-act opera competition for his composition, *Cavalleria rusticana* ("Rustic Chivalry"). The opera was adapted from the novella by Italian writer Giovanni Verga, who was a popular *verismo* writer. The *verismo* movement in literature sought to portray the world with greater realism, and written works focused on stories about the average man and his problems instead of the fantastical tales of kings and queens or mythological figures. *Verismo* operas take on the same ordinary subject matter and the music is less ornamental and more through-composed than traditional "bel canto"- styled operas. The Intermezzo from *Cavalleria rusticana* opens the final scene of the opera where people are in church celebrating Easter Sunday.

Schubert: Symphony No. 9 in C major "The Great"

The "Great" Symphony in C Major represents Schubert's highest maturity in symphonic writing, but the work was never performed during his lifetime. In 1826, Schubert presented the work to the Austrian Philharmonic Society, however, it was deemed too long and too technically difficult for actual performance. It wasn't until 1839, nearly 10 years after Schubert's death, that the "Great" Symphony would premiere. Schubert's earliest symphonies modeled the classical styles of Haydn and Mozart, but



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Schubert ultimately desired to emulate the grand style of Beethoven and use the freer forms of Romantic symphonies. The “Great” Symphony is a triumphant realization of his ideal symphonic style.

Bizet: L'Arlésienne Suite No. 2

L'Arlésienne, or “The Woman from Arles,” is a tragic play about unrequited love in which the title character never appears. Though the plot failed to capture audiences, the music was very well-received, and Bizet quickly arranged four of the 27 numbers into Suite No. 1. After Bizet’s death in 1875, his friend Ernest Guiraud arranged Suite No. 2. The *Pastorale* accompanies the dialogue between two aged lovers who reunite after 50 years of separation. The *Intermezzo* is based on a French folksong and divides scenes in Act 2 of the play. The *Minuet* is taken from Bizet’s opera, *The Pearl Fishers*, and highlights the tender affection between two characters on stage. The *Farandole*, which accompanies a pre-wedding party, comes from the traditional French line dance of the same name, and the melody comes from the popular French folk song, *March of the Kings*.

Verdi: Messa da Requiem

Giuseppe Verdi was primarily an opera composer and his *Requiem* had critics conflicted on whether the work was more apt for the church or the stage. Verdi's intent in composing a requiem mass was not to compose an ecclesiastical work, but rather to commemorate the deaths of two culture giants for whom he much revered: Gioacchino Rossini and Alessandro Manzoni. The music is intense and emotional, and rather than focusing on the concepts of hope and salvation expressed in Catholic dogma, Verdi offers his own bleak interpretation of death and judgement that is more apocalyptic in nature.

Two Selections by Richard Carter

Chopin: Nocturne in F-sharp Major, Op. 15 No. 2

Chopin’s Nocturne in F-Sharp Major is technically challenging due to its large leaps and intricate ornamentation of the melody. Composed in ABA form, the two outer sections are quite delicate in contrast to the dynamic middle section. Chopin often composed small pieces for small spaces. Unlike Liszt, who displayed much virtuosity in the concert hall, Chopin performed for more intimate venues, such as the private social gatherings of wealthy, aristocratic patrons. Much of his music is full of subtle, yet expressive nuances that are breath-taking up close, but would get lost in a large hall.

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Satie: Gymnopedie No. 1

In 1888, French composer Erik Satie published three short, atmospheric piano pieces called *Gymnopédies*. The first piece, marked *Lent et douloureux*, or “slow and painful,” is the most famous of the three, with its simple melody floating over a gentle, rocking theme in the bass. The melody is divided into expressive phrases shaped by a *rubato* (flexible) tempo, and there is no specific harmonic structure, only colorful, sustained chords that slowly sway and invite a pensive ambiance. Considered too avant-garde in the late-Romantic era, the *Gymnopédies* did not gain success until the 1900s, where it set the stage for ambient and minimalist music.

Two selection chosen by Hunter Sanchez

Rachmaninoff: Symphonic Dances

Rachmaninoff’s final composition, *Symphonic Dances*, was composed entirely in the U.S. in 1940 and premiered with the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1941. Rachmaninoff was a beloved pianist, often composing and performing his own virtuosic piano compositions; however, his non-piano works were not well-received. The last of the great Romantic composers, his orchestral works were often unfavorably compared to the radical 20th-century works of Stravinsky and Schoenberg. His First Symphony failed miserably in 1897, and by the mid-1930’s, he had more failures than successes in his orchestral output. In 1936, he stopped composing altogether, and it wasn’t until 1940, while exiled in the U.S., that he found inspiration for a new composition. *Symphonic Dances* features several of Rachmaninoff’s musical signatures, including jazzy harmonies and rhythmic vivacity. The work is also unique in its use of an alto saxophone as a solo instrument in the first dance.

Shostakovich: Symphony No. 5

Dmitri Shostakovich was the preeminent composer of the Soviet Union until 1936 when Joseph Stalin viciously denounced the composer’s opera, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. Shostakovich later recalled: “Now everyone knew for sure that I would be destroyed.” With his artistic reputation and even possibly his life hanging in the balance, Shostakovich responded by withdrawing the premiere of his Fourth Symphony, which was in rehearsal during that time. One year later, he won reprieve with the premiere of his Fifth Symphony in November 1937. One critic famously called the piece “a Soviet artist’s response to just criticism,” and a member of the audience remarked: “The whole audience leapt to their

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feet and erupted into wild applause – a demonstration of their outrage at all the hounding poor Mitya had been through. Everyone kept saying the same thing: ‘That was his answer, and it was a good one.’ [Shostakovich] came out white as a sheet, biting his lips. I think he was close to tears.” The Fifth Symphony has since become Shostakovich’s most popular and most performed symphony.

Selection by Chuck Pugh

[Franz Liszt: Liebestraum No. 3 in A-flat Major](#)

Liebestraum, or “Dreams of Love,” is a set of three nocturnes composed by Franz Liszt. Published in 1850, the work is an intensely expressive example of Romantic ‘programme’ music. Each nocturne depicts a different poem, and the most popular nocturne of the set is No. 3, which is based on a poem about love and loss by Ferdinand Freiligrath entitled: *O Lieb, so lang du lieben kannst*, or “Oh Love, love as long as you can.” The emotion of the poetry shapes the form of nocturne, which is in three sections. Each section is divided by a cadenza that represents the ‘dream-state’ of the poet. Themes of hope, anguish, love, and death play out in this masterfully lyrical and heart-wrenchingly dynamic piece of music.

Selection by Hannah Wadley

[Tchaikovsky: Waltz of the Flowers](#)

Tchaikovsky’s iconic “Waltz of the Flowers” is the celebratory conclusion to *The Nutcracker* ballet and is one of Tchaikovsky’s most beloved pieces. A slow introduction of the main melody leads to a harp cadenza that sets a mystical tone. The illustrious horn theme begins the waltz, complemented by the melodious tune of a solo clarinet, and followed by the luscious string theme. Rich textures and decorative interludes keep the magical atmosphere going as the piece builds up to its magnificent finale.

Hannah: “This is a piece I’m sure everyone will recognize. This is a “classic” in my book. Growing up, Disney’s *Fantasia* was always one of my favorite movies. This piece, along with many others by Tchaikovsky, are featured in the film. It also makes its appearance in *The Little Rascals*. Although, the movies made this piece more “pops”, it is still a great classical piece. It shows how gorgeous the strings can be and really accentuates their sound as a whole.”

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