



## Legato in Times of Staccato

### Playlist 14 - Wednesday, July 8th, 2020

Curated by Music Director, Fouad Fakhouri

#### [Wagner: Tannhäuser Overture](#)

Also titled *Tannhäuser and the Song Contest at the Wartburg*, Wagner's Overture is a piece in the three-part *Tannhäuser Opera* set in 13<sup>th</sup> century Germany. Based on two German legends: Tannhäuser, the mythologized medieval German lyricist- also known as a "Minnesänger" and poet, and the tale of the Wartburg Song Contest. The story describes the struggle between sacred and profane love, and redemption through love. For the theme of his piece, Wagner portrays these struggles by including woodwinds to convey chanting pilgrims and the aching, arching strings to allude to sexual temptation and lust.

#### [Bruckner: Symphony No. 6](#)

After the "disastrous" performance of his third symphony in 1877, Bruckner became very depressed and lost his confidence in composing music. He was so devastated by the event, he entered a two-year period of "compositional silence". In 1881, Bruckner completed his *Symphony No. 6*. This symphony was considered an "outlier" compared to other symphonies of his, audience claimed it was "mature" and "bold". Today, it is still unknown whether Bruckner witnessed his *Symphony No. 6* be performed fully. In fact, as Bruckner wrote, the true premier of the Sixth "had to wait until 1935", 40-years after his death.

#### [Prokofiev Symphony No. 5 in B flat Op.100](#)

Sergei Prokofiev composed his Fifth Symphony in the summer of 1944, shortly after the landings of Allied troops on the beaches of Normandy and the Soviets were pushing back the Nazis from their borders. Prokofiev, along with other great composers such as Glière, Shostakovich, Khatchaturian, and Kabalevsky, were relocated to an "artists retreat" 80 miles outside of Moscow, to help compose in a quiet surrounding. With influence of the raging war, Prokofiev was able to compose his *Symphony* in the duration of one month. By the time of its premier in Moscow in January of 1945 under the composer's direction, distant celebratory artillery fire caused Prokofiev to pause, raise his arms and begin the performance. As a member of the audience, Soviet pianist, Sviatoslav Richter said of the performance:

"The Great Hall was illuminated, no doubt, the same way it always was, but when Prokofiev stood up, the light seemed to pour straight down on him from somewhere up above. He stood like a

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monument on a pedestal. And then, when Prokofiev had taken his place on the podium and silence reigned in the hall, artillery salvos suddenly thundered forth. His baton was raised. He waited, and began only after the cannons had stopped. There was something very significant in this, something symbolic. It was as if all of us- including Prokofiev- reached some kind of turning point.”

### [Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 4](#)

In a letter to his financial backer, Nadezhda von Meck, Tchaikovsky outlined the concept of *Symphony No. 4* by stating that the “ominous” opening fanfare, sounded by horns and bassoons, represents “fate hanging over one’s head like a sword”. The theme suggests an all-consuming “gloom” that devours any brief glimpses of happiness. The second movement expresses the “melancholy feel at the end of a weary day”, the third movement presents “fleeting images that pass through the imagination when one had begun to drink a little wine” , and the fourth movement projects bold and positive energy. To Tchaikovsky, *Symphony No. 4* represents his “prescription for happiness”. In another letter to von Meck, he expresses his opinion of his work, in which he quotes:

*“Never yet has any of my orchestral works cost me so much labour, but I’ve never yet felt such love for any of my things....Perhaps I’m mistaken, but it seems to me that this [symphony](#) is better than anything I’ve done so far.”*

### [Torke: Ecstatic Orange](#)

Another one of Michael Torke’s *Color Music* suites, *Ecstatic Orange* is a representation of “uplifted frenzy” while maintaining a “static” structure. As Torke describes it: “like someone confined to desk work as the caffeine of the morning’s coffee reaches his blood.” He uses the rhythm of constant sixteenth note pulses and counterpoint to express the “active” elements in this piece, as the “static” material is a six-note melody of G#-A-D-C#-B-E. Throughout the piece, color headings appear in the score, such as “Absinthe”, “Apricot”, Terra Cotta”, “Unripe Pumpkin”, and “Copper”, all of which refer to different shades of orange experienced by Torke.

### [Fauré: Nocturne No. 6](#)

While Fauré wrote a number of important chamber and choral works, including his great Requiem, he is better known for his songs and solo piano works. In the summer of 1894, Fauré broke a six-year “piano composition creative block” with his notorious *Nocturne No. 6*. The piece begins with emotional,



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outpouring phrases, followed by a soft and contemplative melody, and ends with a stormy climax back into the beginning theme. Among all Fauré's works, *Nocturne No. 6* is the most popular piano pieces.

### [Stravinsky: Symphonies of Winds](#)

In 1920, Igor Stravinsky was asked by *La Revue Musicale* to contribute a memorial piece for their special issue honoring Claude Debussy, who died two years prior. The piece Stravinsky submitted was a short piano composition in the form of a chorale, and it soon became the cornerstone for his *Symphonies of Winds*, composed in November 1920. The *Symphonies of Winds* is not a symphony in the way the term typically denotes a multi-movement orchestral work. Instead, Stravinsky meant the term in the more ancient Greek definition of a group of instruments "sounding together." The piece, therefore, is constructed in one movement that contains distinct segments of different sets of wind instruments creating unique "symphonies" of sound.

### [Ravel: Piano Concerto in G Major](#)

Maurice Ravel composed his *Piano Concerto in G Major* after concluding his American concert tour in 1928. The influence of American jazz music is evident in the first movement, which features material often compared to Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. Ravel wanted this work to be first and foremost a piece of entertainment, what he called a "divertissement de luxe." In the composer's own words: "A concerto can be gay and brilliant and need not try to be profound or strive after dramatic effects." The *Piano Concerto in G Major* is a light-hearted piece that offers a unique, jazz-inflected spin on the Classical concerto form.

### [Chopin: Prelude in E minor](#)

Chopin's 24 Preludes are universally recognized as some of the composer's most characteristic works. Each prelude is a concise, yet complete work that can exist independently, or the entire cycle may be played at once. The set encompasses an enormous variety of technique and expressive range. *Prelude No. 4 in E Minor* is rather melancholic, and pianists often perform this prelude with a rubato (flexible) tempo to emphasize the elegiac mood of the piece.

### [Granados - Spanish Dance No 10 in G \(Danza Triste\)](#)

The performer in this video is Andrés Segovia, a self-taught classical guitarist from Spain who is credited with reestablishing the guitar as a concert instrument in the 20th century. Segovia enlarged the classical



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guitar repertory with more than 150 transcriptions of works originally written for lute and harpsichord by such composers as Couperin, Rameau, and Bach. Here, Segovia performs a guitar rendition of 19th-century composer Enrique Granados' *Spanish Dance No. 10 in G*, originally written for solo piano.

### [Rodrigo: Concierto de Aranjuez](#)

Joaquín Rodrigo was a 20th-century Spanish composer best known for his *Concierto de Aranjuez*. Rodrigo was blinded by diphtheria at the age of three, but he was able to attend a sophisticated school for the blind, where his gift for music was quickly discovered. He excelled at the piano, and using a braille notation system, he was able to compose his own works. Rodrigo never mastered the guitar, but he rose to the challenge of composing a guitar concerto when his friend, Spanish guitarist Regino Sainz de la Manza, requested the work. The *Concierto de Aranjuez* was an instant success after its premiere in Barcelona in 1940 and has since become a cornerstone of the classical guitar repertoire.

### [Mahler Piano Quartet in A minor](#)

Gustav Mahler is primarily known for his massive symphonies; however, during his years as a student at the Vienna Conservatory, he composed several chamber works as composition exercises. His *Piano Quartet in A Minor* is one of the surviving compositions from this period and offers a glimpse into the kind of music Mahler was studying at the time. The piece is composed in the mid-19th century romantic tradition of Brahms or Schumann and contains no distinct Mahler signatures. The first known performance of the piece took place in New York City in 1964, nearly a century after it was written.

**\*\*\*To access the full Spotify playlist for week 14, click [here](#)!\*\*\***