



Legato in Times of Staccato

Playlist #20 - Wednesday, August 19th, 2020

Curated by Music Director, Fouad Fakhouri

[Weber: Clarinet Concerto No. 1](#)

Weber's Clarinet Concerto No. 1 contains colorful orchestrations and highly lyrical melodies similar in style to his well-known Romantic operas. Weber's personal friendship with virtuoso clarinetist Heinrich Joseph Baermann led to the creation of several orchestral and chamber works showcasing the instrument. Baermann was the principal clarinetist of the Munich Court Orchestra and premiered Weber's Clarinet Concerto No. 1 in 1811. As was traditional practice for solo concertos at the time, Weber left the manuscript of the solo line somewhat sparse, allowing Baermann to phrase and embellish as he pleased.

[Bruckner: Symphony No. 9](#)

Bruckner regarded his Ninth Symphony as a summation of his life's work, and in his final days he declared: "I have done my duty on earth. I have accomplished what I could, and my only wish is to be allowed to finish my Ninth Symphony. Three movements are almost complete. The Adagio is nearly finished. There remains only the finale. I trust death will not deprive me of my pen." Sadly, Bruckner was still working on his Ninth Symphony the day he died in 1896. Performing versions have been constructed from surviving sketches which give a glimpse of what he had in mind.

[Mendelssohn: Symphony No. 5 "Reformation"](#)

Mendelssohn was commissioned to compose his Fifth Symphony to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, the formal document approved by Martin Luther to establish the Lutheran faith in the 16th century. The outer movements of this symphony are ceremonial and festive. In the first movement, Mendelssohn borrowed the popular "Dresden Amen," a sequence of rising chords often performed in Lutheran church services. To honor Luther, Mendelssohn included in the finale the popular hymn "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," which Luther wrote while the Augsburg Confession was in session.

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Berio: Sinfonia

Luciano Berio was an Italian composer of the post-World War II era known for using instruments and voice in unconventional ways. Berio explored relationships between verbal texts and music, often using the rhythms, inflections, and articulations of spoken words as compositional material. In *Sinfonia*, Berio uses fragmentary phrases and syllables from several sources expressed in different languages. These words are often unintelligible and masked by the orchestra. The text of the first movement comes from a treatise by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. The second movement, “O King,” is Berio’s tribute to slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King, whose name is reduced to elemental sounds that gradually expand until listeners clearly hear “Martin Luther King.” In the third movement, Berio draws spoken fragments from Samuel Beckett’s 1953 monologue *The Unnameable*, which is the source for the phrase “keep going” heard repeatedly throughout the movement. Underneath these words, Berio includes fragmentary quotes from the symphonies of Mahler, Debussy, and Beethoven. The fourth and fifth movements see the texture of piece reverting to that of its beginning.

Shostakovich: Piano Concerto in C minor

Before his creativity was oppressed due to an attack by Stalin on his opera *Lady Macbeth at Mzensk* in 1936, Shostakovich was the preeminent composer of the Soviet Union and he had free reign over his compositional style. His *Piano Concerto No. 1*, composed in 1933, is whimsical, yet pensive with its mocking fanfares, abrupt mood changes, and sometimes serious melodies. Eugene List, who was the trumpet soloist for the American premiere in 1934, commented: “It has youthful fire and audacity, tongue-in-cheek jollity, a number of satirical allusions to well-known classics, and brilliant piano writing. It also has a beautiful slow movement. The trumpet solo part is strikingly effective, and the scoring in general is brilliant and unusual.”

Berlioz: Harold in Italy

“*Harold in Italy*”, written in 1834, is inspired by Lord Byron’s poem, “*Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*”. The symphony is the story of what Harold witnesses in his wanderings. The restless, melancholy exile beholds Nature in her loveliest as well as her most majestic aspects, but they fail to cheer him. He is in the midst of a band of happy and devoted pilgrims journeying along to worship at a shrine, but religion no more than Nature can calm his troubled spirit. He witnesses a mountaineer serenading his mistress beneath her window, but the simple love-scene has no charm for him. In despair, he joins the bandits and rushes into



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one of their orgies, where at last all of his better thoughts and nobler feelings are lost in a vortex of dissipation and frenzy.

[Mahler: Symphony No. 9](#)

Symphony No. 9 was written between 1908 and 1909 and was the last symphony Mahler completed. This piece is usually interpreted as his “farewell to the world”, as it was composed following the death of his first daughter Maria Anna and the diagnosis of his failing heart. Because of his heart condition, Mahler died in May of 1911, without ever hearing or conducting his Symphony No. 9. This symphony is Mahler’s “True Farewell Symphony”, in which Leonard Bernstein describes each movement a different kind of farewell. The first movement being a “farewell to childhood innocence”, second the “farewell to country-life”, third “farewell to city-life” or the “hustle and bustle life of Vienna”, and the fourth movement the “actual farewell to life itself”. Mahler was aware of his failing heart condition and that Death was soon to greet him.

[Scriabin: The Poem of Ecstasy, Op. 54](#)

“The Poem of Ecstasy” is a symphonic poem written between 1905-1908. The term “symphonic poem” refers to a piece of orchestral music, usually in a single, continuous movement, which illustrates the content of a poem. In this piece, Scriabin expresses tragedy, stress, defiance, charm, pleasure, and ecstasy. Scriabin describes his “symphony” in three sections: (1) his soul in the orgy of love, (2) the realization of a fantastic dream, and (3) the glory of his own art. He also wrote a poem over 300 lines long to accompany the music, though not to be recited with it.

To read the poem, click on the link below:

[The Poem of Ecstasy](#)

[Grieg: Holberg Suite](#)

Also titled “From Holberg’s Time”, Grieg’s Holberg Suite is a collection of delightfully fresh Baroque-Style dances, inspired by the 200th celebration of the birth of Ludwig Holberg- a famous 17th Century playwright born in Grieg’s hometown of Bergen, Norway.



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[Hummel: Trumpet Concerto](#)

Johann Nepomuk Hummel wrote his Trumpet Concerto for Viennese trumpet virtuoso and inventor of the keyed trumpet, Anton Weidinger. Anton was a very popular trumpet player at the time and many composers, including Joseph Haydn, wrote trumpet concertos for him to perform. This piece in particular, was written in December of 1803, and was later performed on New Year's Day to mark Hummel's entrance into the court orchestra of Nikolaus II, Prince Esterházy as Haydn's successor.

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