

Delights and Dances Program Notes

By Clark Nichols

Franz Schubert – “Ave Maria” (1825) [5’]

One of Schubert’s most popular works, his “Ave Maria,” serves exemplar the composer’s mastery of the German lieder (song) genre. Written in 1825 as part a larger song cycle, *Liederzyklus vom Fräulein vom See*, the text is a loose translation of a section from Sir Walter Scott’s narrative poem *The Lady of the Lake*. Ellen Douglas, of Scott’s poem, the titular Lady of the Lake, sings a prayer to the Virgin Mary. However, it is not the *Ave Maria* of the Latin Mass, but a hymn of Scott’s creation. “Ave Maria! Maiden mild!/Listen to a maiden’s prayer!” Ellen pleads for Mary to bring aid to her and her people.

The song opens with a repeated bass note under a simple arpeggio figure in the upper strings, representing the harpist of Scott’s poem. This style of accompaniment is typical of Schubert’s lieder, and remains constant throughout. After a brief introduction the melody is introduced, setting a moving but pensive tone for the rest of the piece.

The work’s musical structure is simple. Multiple stanzas repeat the melody each time with different lyrics from the hymn with a repeat of the famous call: “Ave Maria.” The emotional journey of the music, however, is anything but simple. Subtle changes to the harmony and the movement of the lower strings work to provide a sense of sorrow and fear as the melody slowly expands skyward. After the third stanza is sung through and the last “Ave Maria” hangs gently over the orchestra, the gentle introduction is repeated once more and fades into nothingness. Was Ellen’s plea heard? The listener isn’t given an answer in the song, but to this writer the fading echo of the beginning suggests hope.

Edvard Grieg – *Holberg Suite op.40* (1884) [21']

Originally written for piano in 1884, Edvard Grieg's *Holberg Suite op.40* represents one of the earliest explorations of neoclassicism, a compositional style popularized in the early 20th century by Igor Stravinsky and others. A key feature of neoclassicism is the adoption of musical styles, genres, and textures from pre-romantic music, harking back to the classical era of Mozart or even further to the baroque era of Bach and Handel. In writing the *Holberg Suite* Grieg adopted the stylings and forms of a Baroque dance suite, yet retained his Romantic flair in his more subtle note choices.. Every movement,—“Praeludium,” “Sarabande,” “Gavotte-Musette-Gavotte,” “Air,” and “Rigaudon”—, is titled and modeled after an existing dance from the baroque dance suite.

The fourth movement, “Air,” is modeled after a baroque operatic aria (“Air” in the baroque suite is derived from “Aria”) and is the best example of the subtle collision of the older style being modeled and Grieg's Romanticism. The voice-like melody, passed around the orchestra, is ornamented in the baroque style while the rest of the ensemble marches along in a steady and delicate baroque-like accompaniment. Just as we, the listener, are convinced that the music pre-dates Grieg by over a hundred years, the accompaniment becomes increasingly chromatic. Suddenly, with a mighty leap upward, the melody's register expands with all of the Romantic bravado typical of Grieg. Returning to its baroque character, the orchestra makes a somber descent into a hushed, dark, and hollow minor chord typical of Grieg's romantic style; serving almost as initials on the corner of the baroque landscape he has painted. "I'm here," Grieg appears to say, "I wrote this."

Joseph J. Lilley and Frank Loesser – “I’ve Got Spurs that Jingle, Jangle, Jingle” (1942) [3’30]

“I’ve Got Spurs That Jingle Jangle Jingle” was written by songwriters Joseph J Lilley and Frank Loesser in 1942. Loesser (1910-1969) is most well-known for writing the lyrics for *Guys and Dolls* (1950) and the popular holiday song “Baby, it’s Cold Outside.” Lilley (1913-1957), who worked for Paramount studios as a composer and orchestrator, wrote the music. “Jingle Jangle Jingle” was featured in the 1942 film *The Forest Rangers*, wherein Lilley went uncredited.

Of particular interest for these performances is the song’s accompaniment known as the “Bo Diddley Beat” popularized by Rock n Roll guitarist Bo Diddley. The “Bo Diddley Beat” was inspired by the off-beat clave rhythm common to Afro-Cuban and Latin music. Similar rhythms can be heard within Florence Price’s “Juba,” showing the connections between rag, jazz, classical, and American popular music.

The most successful recording of “I’ve Got Spurs that Jingle Jangle Jingle” was performed by Kay Kyser, reaching number one on the *Billboard* charts in July 1942. Other notable recordings include one Gene Autrey (1942), and Jim Carrey who performed an rendition in the 1999 biographical drama *Man on the Moon*, in which he portrayed the late Andy Kaufman. “Jingle Jangle Jingle” was more recently featured in the hit video game *Fallout: New Vegas* (2010).

Lilley and Loesser’s song was also referenced in the 1995 animated film *A Goofy Movie*. The song “On the Open Road” pays homage to the song through paraphrasing the melody and includes cowbells as “jangling spurs” in the orchestral accompaniment: seemingly a reference to Kay Kyser’s chart-topping 1942 recording. It goes without saying that “I’ve Got Spurs that Jingle Jangle Jingle” continues to be influential more than eighty years after it was written.

**Florence Price – “Juba” from *String Quartet in A Minor* (1935)
[5’]**

Born in Little Rock, Arkansas, Florence Price (1887-1953) was a black interracial composer, pianist, and organist. Price occupies a unique place in music history; her work reflects an interest in the development of a uniquely American idiom. The influence of American Romanticism, especially Antonin Dvorak’s work during his stay in America, informed Price’s musical choices just as much as the music of rag, blues, jazz, and African American spirituals.

Price’s lighthearted third movement, “Juba” from her *String Quartet in A Minor* (1935), exemplifies the stylistic influence of American popular idioms on her compositional style. The title of the movement was taken from a plantation dance traceable in origin to the Central African region from where many were forced into slavery in the American south. The musical material is mostly blues and rag-inspired, rather than a carbon-copy of juba music. Resonances of Dvorak’s “American” works can be heard within as well.

Do not let the lighthearted mood of the “Juba” distract you from Price’s compositional skill: this is the work of a mature and well-practiced composer who is as familiar with the subtleties of her ensemble as any of the European masters. Within the humorous accompaniment and whimsical flourishes lies a subtle interplay between each player. This fabric of ragtime rhythms and blues-inspired melodies propels the music forward and showcases Price’s nearly forgotten talents.

**Ennio Morricone – *Gabriel’s Oboe* from *The Mission* (1986)
[3’30]**

Ennio Morricone (1928-2020), composer and conductor, began his career in film composition in 1961 in writing the score *Il Federale*, and rose to prominence by writing the soundtrack for a string of successful western films including: *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* (1966), and *Once Upon a Time in The West* (1968). By 1985, he had begun a transition to writing concert music when he was approached (after Leonard Bernstein could not be contacted) to write the score for *The Mission* (1986).

After viewing the film, Morricone initially refused the offer stating that he thought it was perfect without music. Fortunately for audiences Morricone eventually changed his mind, and his composing of a tense rainforest scene early in the film between Father Gabriel and native Guaraní inhabitants yielded the now ubiquitous *Gabriel’s Oboe*. The composition remains one of Morricone’s most-performed works, existing in many arrangements including the one for violin and string orchestra being performed today. For his work on the soundtrack for *The Mission*, Morricone received an Oscar nomination for Best Original Soundtrack losing out to Herbie Hancock’s work on *Round Midnight*. Hancock’s win was considered controversial, since his works were technically arrangements, and because of this Morricone considered himself snubbed.

After several more Oscar snubs, Morricone finally won his first Oscar for his work on Quentin Tarantino’s film *The Hateful Eight* (2015).

Michael Abels – *Delights and Dances (2007) [13’]**

Michael Abels is best-known for his scores for the Oscar-winning film *GET OUT*, and for Jordan Peele’s *US*, for which Abels won the World Soundtrack Award, the Jerry Goldsmith Award, a Critics Choice nomination, an Image Award nomination, and multiple critics’ awards. Abels’s hip-hop influenced score for *US* was short-listed for the Oscars and was even named “Score of the Decade” by online publication *The Wrap*.

Abels wrote the following about his piece *Delights and Dances*:

Delights and Dances showcases a quartet of string soloists in a kind of diptych of American musical genres, one regarded as “black” and the other “white.” The piece begins with a slow, lyrical introduction that grows from a cello solo into a duet with the viola, culminating in a gentle crescendo for the full quartet. The first major section is a blues, which allows the soloists to flaunt their musical talents through a series of solos that are designed to sound improvised, although they are actually notated. The second half of the piece is a rousing bluegrass hoedown, once again featuring the quartet as they trade riffs back and forth (in a way that might recall “Dueling Banjos”) which culminates in a boisterous coda. It’s a piece that celebrates musicians playing together. I hope it fills you with joy.”

**Bio and Program Notes Courtesy of Michael Abels*

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky – “Finale” from *Serenade for Strings* op.48b (1880) [7’]

Following a decade that produced some of his most enduring compositions, the 1880’s marked a decade of increased popularity for Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s (1840-1893) among his fellow Russians who had dismissed his music as “overly dependent on the West.” Two works stand out from the beginning of this more welcoming time, the first being his 1812 Overture, of which Tchaikovsky commented that there were “probably no artistic merits in it” and later on stated that it was “in a style unsuitable for symphony concerts.” Ironically, the 1812 Overture would become one of his most famous works for many of the reasons he thought people would not take to it, such as the inclusion of cannons in the finale. Composed from “inner conviction,” the second work, the *Serenade for Strings* soon cemented itself as one of the composer’s personal favorites.

Serenade was not always conceived as a work for string orchestra. Tchaikovsky thought so highly of the material that he considered orchestrating the piece for several different ensembles, including string quartet and symphony. For the purposes of this concert, we are fortunate that he chose string orchestra.

The finale from *Serenade* is particularly “Tchaikovskian”: Fast, bombastic, with a distinctly Russian bravado. Within the opening andante of the finale Tchaikovsky quotes the folksong “On the Green Meadow” and the main theme of the quick-paced Allegro section is another folksong “Under the Green Apple Tree.” Tchaikovsky’s love of the piece is made apparent in the enthusiastic and energetic ending, and it is no doubt due to the care the composer spent in writing the work that it has long been a staple of concert programs.

Aaron Copland – “Hoe-down” from *Rodeo* (1942) [4’]

For the typical concertgoer, the music of Aaron Copland, perhaps more than any other composer, defines their conception of a distinctly American musical style. Three works in particular, *Rodeo*, *Appalachian Spring*, and *Billy the Kid* seem to naturally evoke images of mid-century Americana: rolling hills, open plains, and the Wild West. Copland and mid-century Americana are often so conflated, that it is easy to take for granted that the folksy and joyful tunes through “Hoe-down” and the rest of *Rodeo*, once lacked the associations that they now hold. Copland and other composers within his circle (such as Virgil Thomson, Lou Harrison, and David Diamond) were largely responsible for our collective understanding of the American sound.

Copland’s “Wild West” stylings are not simply a copy of existing folk tunes, but rather a uniquely American melting pot of sounds from all walks of life. In writing “Hoe-down” Copland borrowed the “boom-chuck” of stride piano, the syncopated intricacies of big-band jazz, and incorporated a uniquely personal re-imagining of American West folk melody. It is delightfully ironic that such a personal style became endemic of Americana and it speaks to Copland’s status as the “Dean of American Music” that his music remains the model soundscape of the American West to this day.