

### **Ancient Airs and Dances for lute, Suite No. 3**

– **Ottorino Respighi**

Born July 9, 1879, in Bologna, Italy

Died April 18, 1936, in Rome, Italy

*Ancient Airs and Dances* is an orchestral transcription of music for the lute – an intimate guitar-like instrument with a gently whispering sound. Respighi recasts the tunes upon a bold and vivid orchestral fabric. Rarely does he call for the entire orchestra to play together, therefore maintaining much of the original setting's intimacy.

This work's four movements are drawn from the works of four composers –Santino Garsi da Parma (1542-1604), Jean-Baptiste Besard (ca.1567-after 1617), Count Ludovico Roncalli (1654-1713), and an unknown fourth composer.

The opening *Italiana* is a graceful dance by Garsi da Parma. This elegant movement in a leisurely 3/4 meter is typical of popular Italian dances of the period.

Respighi's second movement, *Arie di Corte* (Courtly Airs), is based on a set of songs by Besard. The first of these is a stately dance introduced by the cellos. Contrasting in nature, the second dance is sprightlier. Respighi returns to a slower tempo for the third section. The final dance alternates between pizzicato and bowed strings and duple and triple meter. The staid music of the opening returns to close the movement.

The anonymous *Siciliana* is a lilting Sicilian dance in 6/8 meter. Respighi's final *Passacaglia* is an early variation form, based here on a piece by Roncalli. Unlike more familiar variations in which a theme is used as the basis for subsequent variations, a passacaglia has a repeated pattern (usually in the bass, but here in the violins) upon which variations are superimposed. These build in complexity until they reach an almost overwhelming level of intensity.

### **Variations on a Rococo Theme for Cello and Orchestra**

– **Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky**

Born May 7, 1840, in Kamsko-Votkinsk, Vyatka Province, Russia

Died November 6, 1893, in St. Petersburg, Russia

Tchaikovsky's music was quite progressive for its day, but he occasionally looked back at previous musical periods for inspiration. The Rococo period, sometimes referred to as pre-Classical, was a short lived musical era between the Baroque and mature Classical periods. Lasting roughly from 1750 until about 1775, this period included the music of C.P.E. Bach, as well as some early works of Haydn and Mozart.

Composed in 1876 for the principal cellist of the Imperial Russian Music Society in Moscow, Wilhelm Fitzenhagen, *Variations on a Rococo Theme* consists of an introduction, theme and eight variations, and a coda. Fitzenhagen acted on

Tchaikovsky's suggestion and made significant changes in the piece to suit his style of playing. Even though many of these are extensive departures, the composer stood behind the cellist, insisting that Fitzenhagen's adaptation be published as the definitive edition.

### **Ballet for Martha (Appalachian Spring)**

**-- Aaron Copland**

Born November 14, 1900, in Brooklyn, New York

Died December 2, 1990, in North Tarrytown, New York

In 1943 Copland was in Hollywood writing the music for his fourth film, *The North Star*, when Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge contacted him with a commission for a new ballet for the renowned dancer-choreographer Martha Graham. Copland agreed to compose what would be his fourth ballet.

Once Coolidge, Copland, and Graham agreed on the terms, all that remained to be determined was the subject. In time, the two collaborators settled on the story that depicted a pioneer wedding celebration in Pennsylvania. He finished the work the following summer at Harvard University. Copland was aware of the small stage and pit in the Coolidge Auditorium at Washington's Library of Congress. Because of these limitations, the work was scored for a compact chamber ensemble of just thirteen instruments. The version most often performed today is the suite that Copland arranged a few months later to be played by full orchestra.

Despite the rural atmosphere often attributed to this music, Copland used only one pre-existing melody – the familiar “Simple Gifts,” heard near the end of the ballet. Perhaps most interesting of all is that the title of the work did not come about until the day before the performance. Martha Graham stumbled across the exhortation “O Appalachian Spring!” in Hart Crane's epic poem “The Bridge,” and it seemed to fit perfectly. The official title of the score remains “Ballet for Martha.” Copland wrote,

"I have been amused that people so often have come up to me to say, ‘When I listen to that ballet of yours, I can just *feel* spring and *see* the Appalachians,’ But when I wrote the music, I had no idea what Martha was going to call it! Even after people learn that I didn't know the ballet title when I wrote the music, they still tell me they see the Appalachians and feel spring. Well, I'm willing if they are!"

### **Symphony No. 1, Op. 25, “Classical”**

**- Sergei Prokofiev**

Born April 23, 1891, in Sontsovka, Ekaterinoslav, Russia

Died March 4, 1953, in Moscow, Soviet Union

Having recently written some of his most experimental music, Prokofiev abruptly turned to neoclassicism about 1916, while working on his first symphony. He wrote:

“If Haydn had lived in our era, I thought he would have retained his compositional style but would also have absorbed something from what was new. That’s the kind of symphony I wanted to compose: a symphony in the classical style.”

In direct opposition to his previous musical idiom of dissonance and unrest, Prokofiev embraced elements of the late eighteenth century. The *Classical* Symphony – a nickname bestowed by the composer himself – is in the traditional four-part framework with fast outer movements encasing a lyrical *larghetto* and a dance movement (in this case, a *gavotte*). The length of the work, about fifteen minutes total duration, is even shorter than most symphonies of the Classical period, and is the most succinct of the composer’s seven symphonies.

After the Russian premiere just six months after the October Revolution of 1917, the composer came to America, where the *Classical* Symphony was performed on several concerts. Even this decidedly conservative work drew the ire of an even more conservative New York critic, who lamented that the symphony was “an orgy of dissonant sound, an exposition of the unhappy state of chaos from which Russia suffers.” In spite of such a review, the *Classical* Symphony has become the most popular of Prokofiev’s symphonies, and one of the most performed works from the twentieth century.

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