Program Notes

by April L. Racana

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Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990)
Overture to "Candide"

It has been said that Leonard Bernstein never approached any work the same way twice, and his score for *Candide* may very well be the epitome of the extent to which he would go to continually rework and revise his compositions. The opening for this show, which has been dubbed both musical and operetta, came on December 1st, 1956 and was based on Voltaire's eighteenth-century satire, which had been adapted by author Lillian Helman. The first run of the show only lasted 73 performances, however it didn't take long for the 'Overture' to become an orchestral piece on its own, making its debut performance with the New York Philharmonic in January 1957.

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Over the next thirty years Bernstein continually revised the entire musical numerous times, with varying success in its many transformations. The 'Overture' contains a mixture of tunes from the show, including *The Best of All Possible Worlds, Oh Happy We*, and *Glitter and Be Gay*. So closely associated with the New York Philharmonic was Bernstein, and so well-loved was this work, that at a memorial concert following Bernstein's death in 1990, members of the orchestra performed the 'Overture' without a conductor as a tribute to the symphony's Laureate Conductor.

Work composed: 1956 **World premiere**: 26th January, 1957
Instrumentation: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3,trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (snare drum, tenor drum, bass drum, triangle, cymbals, glockenspiel, xylophone), harp, strings

George Gershwin (1898-1937)
Rhapsody in Blue

Originally titled *American Rhapsody*, George Gershwin was apparently convinced by his lyricist brother, Ira, that the title needed some re-thinking. Being an experienced wordsmith and a collaborator on so many popular tunes with George, Ira purportedly was inspired by James McNeil Whistler's colour imagery in such paintings as "Nocturne in Black and Gold" and "Arrangement in Gray and Black", when he suggested the revised title *Rhapsody in Blue*. Ironic perhaps, that in recent times, the main theme from this work has become associated with an airline, when initially the underlying rhythms were inspired by those of a train that Gershwin was riding on when he was pressed to complete the work on very short notice for an upcoming performance.

As the story goes, Gershwin had told bandleader Paul Whiteman that he was contemplating merging jazz influences with classical for an upcoming composition. Shortly afterward Whiteman decided to program a variety of works featuring his band for an event called 'An Experiment in Modern Music.' The works were all intended to highlight 'American Music' with an emphasis on jazz, and although he hadn't gotten a firm commitment from Gershwin, Whiteman published in the New York Tribune that George Gershwin was working on a 'jazz concerto' for the occasion. That was news to Gershwin, but in spite of initial resistance due to previous commitments, Whiteman convinced Gershwin to complete his proposed composition melding jazz with classical styles.

In the meantime, Gershwin had to follow through on the final rehearsals for *Sweet Little Devil*, which was due to open in New York, as well as accompany for soprano Eve Gauthier in a major recital, in the short time before Whiteman's big event. Later, Gershwin revealed that

the basic concept for the piece was inspired by the rhythmic patterns he heard on the train. Given the short time frame, Gershwin created a score for two pianos and turned it over to Whiteman's arranger, Ferde Grofé who then orchestrated it for the band.

This first version, for a relatively smaller ensemble, was premiered on February 12, 1924 at New York City's Aeolian Hall. Gershwin had not included in the score the solo passages for the piano, indicating only that Whitehead should wait for his nod to bring in the orchestra for the next section. And although the critical reviews were mixed, the work was for the most part well-received, spurring on a debate as to whether the work is best classified as classical with a jazz influence, or along the lines of a popular work arranged with classical stylings.

A revised version of *Rhapsody in Blue* was arranged for full orchestra, also by Grofé. This version is the one most often presented in modern day performances, and led Gershwin to further pursue other classical compositions, later writing his own orchestrations, which quelled many questions by critics regarding his true musical abilities. Gershwin would go on to compose some of his best work in the time remaining in his short life, but *Rhapsody in Blue* would perhaps remain his most popular work for audiences to this day.

Work composed: 1924(original version), 1942 (orchestral version)
World premiere: 12th February, 1924 (original version)
Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 3 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (snare drum, bass drum, triangle, cymbals, tam-tam, glockenspiel), 2 alto saxophones, tenor saxophone, strings, solo piano

Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936)
Ancient Airs and Dances Suite No. 3

I. Italiana / II. Arie di corte /
III. Siciliana / IV. Passacaglia

Interspersed between 'The Roman Trilogy' compositions, and showing his great devotion to early Italian music, Respighi transcribed a number of Renaissance and Baroque pieces for much smaller chamber orchestras. The *Ancient Airs and Dances for Lute* were created in three suites beginning in 1917 and finishing in 1932.

Suite No. 1 is based primarily on Renaissance lute pieces written originally by Simone Molinaro, Vincenzo Galilei, and other anonymous composers. Suite No. 2 was completed in 1924 and is transcribed from pieces for lute, archlute and viol by Fabrizio Caroso, Jean-Baptiste Besard, Bernardo Gianoncelli, and another anonymous composer. There is also a transcription included of Antoine Boësset's famous song "Divine Amaryllis."

Suite No. 3 breaks from the previous two in that it is arranged for strings only. The first movement, *Italiana* is an anonymous 16th century song. *Arie di Corte* follows, in a mini-suite taken from several songs attributed to Giovanni Battista Besard, although it is believed that he may have been merely the compiler of these. The third of this suite, called *Siciliana* by Respighi is more commonly known as *Spagnoletta* in 17th century Spain and Italy. The finale, *Passacaglia* by Lodovico Roncalli is the only baroque guitar work set by Respighi. The wide variety of strumming and plucking techniques found in the original are wonderfully orchestrated by Respighi to mirror their unique sounds.

These pieces show Respighi's intense interest in and love of early music, as well as his brilliant abilities as an orchestrator. He found a way

not only to give tribute to the legacies of great early composers through these transcriptions, but as stated by annotator Julia Bömers: "…early music became a source of musical renewal and self-discovery for him."

Work composed: 1931 **World premiere:** January 1932, Milan
Instrumentation: strings

Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936)
Symphonic Poem "Pines of Rome"

I.Pines of the Villa Borghese / Ⅱ.The Pines Near a Catacomb /
Ⅲ.The Pines of the Janiculum / Ⅳ.The Pines of the Appian Way

Born in Bologna, Italy in the late 19th century, Respighi found himself in the shadow of many great composers of his country, including the likes of Puccini, Rossini and Verdi. He was not only a scholar, but also an admirer of early Italian music, and is perhaps most well known for combining the "old with the new." After building his reputation composing in a variety of genres, including opera, songs, quintets, a piano concerto, sonatas and a tribute to Bach (*Suite in G major for Strings and Organ*); and arranging numerous orchestral transcriptions of works by Bach, Monteverdi, Tartini Vivaldi, and Rossini, as well as editing many early chamber works, Respighi turned his attention to symphonic poems.

The most popular of these tone poems are considered by many to be the three that belong to what have been called 'The Roman Trilogy.' Within these, one can hear not only reminiscences of ancient Italian music, but folk and children's songs as well. All three are enhanced by the evocative orchestral colourings he developed after studying in Russia with Rimsky-Korsakov, and being influenced by other 20th century composers of similar romantic tendencies, including Ravel and Strauss.

Fountains of Rome was composed first of the three (1916), and after several years of contemplating a sequel, Respighi began work on *Pines of Rome* which was completed in 1924. In his own words, and speaking of himself in the third person, Respighi commented: "While in his preceding work, *Fountains of Rome*, the composer sought to reproduce by means of tone an impression of Nature, in *Pines of Rome* he uses Nature as a point of departure, in order to recall memories and vision. The centuries-old trees which so characteristically dominate the Roman landscape become witnesses to the principal events in Roman life." In addition, giving specific program notes about *Pines of Rome*, he wrote:

The Pines of Villa Borghese (Allegretto vivace)—Children are at play in the pine groves of the Villa Borghese, dancing the Italian equivalent of "Ring around a Rosy." They mimic marching soldiers and battles. They twitter and shriek like swallows at evening, coming and going in swarms. Suddenly the scene changes.

The Pines near a Catacomb (Lento)—We see the shadows of the pines, which overhang the entrance of a catacomb. From the depths rises a chant, which echoes solemnly, like a hymn, and is then mysteriously silenced.

The Pines of the Janiculum (Lento)—There is a thrill in the air. The full moon reveals the profile of the pines of Gianicolo's Hill. A nightingale sings.

The Pines of the Appian Way (Tempo di Marcia)—Misty dawn on the Appian Way. The tragic country is guarded by solitary pines. Indistinctly, incessantly, the rhythm of unending steps. The poet has a fantastic vision of past glories. Trumpets blare, and the army of the Consul bursts forth in the grandeur of a newly risen sun toward the Sacred Way, mounting in triumph the Capitoline Hill.

Roman Festival was the last of the trilogy to be composed, and combines seemingly disparate images of the Circus, a Jubilee, October Fest, and the Epiphany. His wife, Elsa, noted the significance of this work: "…finally ('Festivals'), in which all the composer's characteristics are powerfully displayed, admirably crowns the cycle…. The impressions contained therein…reflect the multiform spirit of Rome just as (he) saw and sensed it…. This reminds me of what (he) told me as soon as the work was finished: 'With the present constitution of the orchestra, it's impossible to achieve more, and I don't think I shall write any more scores of this kind.'"

Work composed: 1923~1924 **World premiere:** December 1924, Rome
Instrumentation: 3 flutes (3rd doubling on piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (tambourine, bass drum, triangle, two small cymbals, cymbals, tam-tam, ratchet, glockenspiel), harp, celesta, piano, organ, strings / **banda:** 4 trumpets, 2 trombones, gramophone

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