

Notes on the Program by DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

Capriccio Italien, Op. 45 (1880)

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

(Born May 7, 1840 in Votkinsk, Russia;
died November 6, 1893 in St. Petersburg)

For nearly a decade after his disastrous marriage in 1877, Tchaikovsky was filled with self-recrimination and doubts about his ability to compose anything more. He managed to finish the Violin Concerto during the spring of 1878, but then had to wait more than three years for someone to perform it, and he did not undertake another large composition until the *Manfred Symphony* of 1885. His frustration was only increased by staying at home in Moscow, and he traveled frequently and far during those years for diversion. In November 1879 he set off for Rome via a circuitous route that took him and his brother Modeste through Berlin and Paris, finally arriving in the Eternal City in mid-December. Despite spending the holiday in Rome and taking part in the riotous festivities of Carnival (Tchaikovsky recorded that this "wild folly" did not suit him very well), the sensitive composer still complained in a letter written on February 17, 1880 to his benefactress, Nadezhda von Meck, that "a worm gnaws continually in secret at my heart. I cannot sleep. My God, what an incomprehensible and complicated mechanism the human organism is! We shall never solve the various phenomena of our spiritual and material existence!"

Though Tchaikovsky was never long parted from his residual melancholy, his spirits were temporarily brightened by some of the local tunes he heard in Rome, and he decided to write an orchestral piece that would incorporate several of them. As introduction to the work, he used a bugle call sounded every evening from the barracks of the Royal Italian Cuirassiers, which was adjacent to the Hotel Costanzi where he was staying. He sketched the *Capriccio Italien* in a week, but then did not return to the score until he was back in Russia in the spring; the orchestration was completed in mid-May at his summer home in Kamenska.

The *Capriccio Italien* opens with the trumpet fanfare of the Royal Cuirassiers, which gives way to a dolorous melody intoned above an insistent accompanimental motive. There follows a swinging tune given first by the oboes in sweet parallel thirds and later by the full orchestra in tintinnabulous splendor. A brisk folk dance comes next, then a reprise of the dolorous melody and finally a whirling *tarantella*, perhaps inspired by the finale of Mendelssohn's "Italian" Symphony. This "bundle of Italian folk tunes," as Edwin Evans called the *Capriccio Italien*, ends with one of the most rousing displays of orchestral sonority in all of Romantic music.

Concerto No. 1 for Flute and Orchestra in G major, K. 313 (1778)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(Born January 27, 1756 in Salzburg;
died December 5, 1791 in Vienna)

During his stay in Mannheim early in 1778, Mozart met "a gentleman of means and a lover of all the sciences," one Willem Britten de Jong who numbered among his accomplishments a certain ability on the flute. De Jong had heard of the 21-year-old musician's extraordinary talent for composition from a mutual friend, Johann Baptist Wendling, the flutist with the Mannheim orchestra, and he commissioned Mozart to write three concertos and three quartets with strings for his instrument. Since he was, as always, short of money, Mozart accepted the proposal to help finance the swing he was then making through Germany and France in search of a permanent position. The next leg of the journey was to lead from Mannheim to Paris, and these flute pieces would help to pay the bills.

Mozart could not generate much enthusiasm for the project. Already the trip was six months old, and he had not had so much as a hint of a firm job offer. He was flustered over a love affair recently hatched with a local singer, Aloysia Weber (whose sister he eventually married when this first choice became unavailable), and letters from his father in Salzburg persistently badgered him about his lack of a dependable income. Most of all, however, these

flute works took time that he wanted to spend composing opera, the most alluring avenue to success for an 18th-century musician. He vented his frustration on the closest target — the flute — and vowed how he disliked it, and what a drudgery it was to have to write for an instrument for which he cared so little, and how he longed to get on with something more important. Still, Mozart was too full of pride and good taste to make hack work of these pieces, and he wrote to Papa Leopold, “Of course, I could merely scratch away at it all day long; but such a thing as this goes out into the world, so it is my wish that I need not be ashamed that it carries my name.” He managed to finish all three quartets but completed only two of the concertos (the second one is actually just a transposition of the Oboe Concerto from the preceding year) by the time he left Mannheim. He settled with De Jong for just less than half of the original fee, and let it go at that. Despite his disparagement of the instrument, Mozart’s compositions for flute occupy one of the most delightful niches of his incomparable musical legacy — Rudolf Gerber characterized them as combining “the perfect image of the spirit and feeling of the rococo age with German sentiment.”

The opening movement of the G major Concerto is one of Mozart’s flawlessly calculated sonata-concerto forms. The orchestra presents the principal thematic material in quick order in its introduction: a stately melody in the violins, an ingratiating phrase with a falling close in slower rhythm, and a step-wise motive with a bustling rhythmic underpinning. The soloist then assays each of these themes in tastefully elaborated versions. The central section of this movement is less a true development of what has preceded than a free fantasia displaying the agility of the solo flute. After a recapitulation that subtly manipulates the themes from the exposition (simple repetition was anathema to Mozart), the soloist is given an opportunity for a cadenza. A brief galop home concludes the movement. The slow movement is remarkable for the depth of sentiment engendered by its many harmonic felicities. Its rich texture and elevated spirituality recall Gluck’s famous “Dance of the Blessed Spirits” from *Orfeo et Euridice*. The finale is a rondo in the rhythm of a minuet, already a staid and old-fashioned dance in Mozart’s time. It has a certain air of frolic hiding behind formality for which this is the perfect expression.

Alternative Energy for Orchestra and Electronica (2011)

Mason Bates

(Born January 23, 1977 in Philadelphia)

Mason Bates brings not only his own fresh talent to the concert hall but also the musical sensibilities of a new generation — he is equally at home composing “for Lincoln Center,” according to his web site (www.masonbates.com), as being the “electronica artist Masonic® who moved to the San Francisco Bay Area from New York City, where he was a lounge DJ at such venues as The Frying Pan — the floating rave ship docked off the pier near West 22nd Street.”

Bates was born in Philadelphia in 1977 and started studying piano with Hope Armstrong Erb at his childhood home in Richmond, Virginia. He earned degrees in both English literature and music composition in the joint program of Columbia University and the Juilliard School, where his composition teachers included John Corigliano, David Del Tredici and Samuel Adler, and received his doctorate in composition from the University of California, Berkeley in 2008 as a student of Edmund Campion and Jorge Lidermann. Bates was Resident Composer with the California Symphony from 2008 to 2011, Project San Francisco Artist-in-Residence with the San Francisco Symphony in 2011-2012, and Composer of the Year with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in 2012-2013; he began a continuing residency with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in September 2010. The San Francisco Symphony gives a “Beethoven & Bates” festival during its 2013-2014 season. Bates’ rapidly accumulating honors include a Charles Ives Scholarship and Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Guggenheim Fellowship, Jacob Druckman Memorial Prize from the Aspen Music Festival, ASCAP and BMI awards, a Fellowship from the Tanglewood Music Center, Rome Prize, Berlin Prize and a two-year Composer Residency with Young Concert Artists.

Bates is also an ardent and effective advocate for bringing new music to new spaces, “whether,” he explained, “through institutional partnerships such as the residency with the Chicago Symphony’s MusicNOW series, or through the project *Mercury Soul*, which has transformed spaces ranging from commercial clubs to Frank Gehry-designed concert halls into

exciting, hybrid musical events drawing over a thousand people. *Mercury Soul*, a collaboration with director Anne Patterson and conductor Benjamin Schwartz, embeds sets of classical music into an evening of DJing and beautiful, surreal visuals.”

Bates wrote of *Alternative Energy*, composed in 2001 as part of his Chicago Symphony Orchestra residency, “*Alternative Energy* is an ‘energy symphony’ spanning four movements and hundreds of years. Beginning in a rustic midwestern junkyard in the late-nineteenth century, the piece travels through ever greater and more powerful forces of energy — a present-day particle collider, a futuristic Chinese nuclear plant — until it reaches a future Icelandic rainforest, where humanity’s last survivors seek a return to a simpler way of life.

“The *idée fixe* [a recurring motto] that links these disparate worlds appears early in *Ford’s Farm, 1896*. This melody is heard on the fiddle — conjuring a figure like Henry Ford — and is accompanied by junkyard percussion and a ‘phantom orchestra’ that trails the fiddler like ghosts. The *accelerando* cranking of a car motor becomes a special motif in the piece, a kind of rhythmic embodiment of ever-more-powerful energy. Indeed, this cranking motif explodes in the electronics in the second movement, *Chicago, 2012*, where we encounter my recordings from the Fermilab particle collider. Hip-hop beats, jazzy brass interjections, and joyous voltage surges bring the movement to a clangorous finish.

“Zoom a hundred years into the dark future of the *Xinjiang Province, 2112*, where a great deal of the Chinese energy industry is based. On an eerie wasteland, a lone flute sings a tragically distorted version of the fiddle tune, dreaming of a forgotten natural world. But a powerful industrial energy bubbles to the surface, and over the ensuing hardcore techno sounds, wild orchestral splashes drive the music to a catastrophic meltdown. As the smoke clears, we find ourselves even further into the future: *Reykjavik, 2222* — an Icelandic rainforest on a hotter planet. Gentle, out-of-tune pizzicatos accompany the fiddler, who returns over a woody percussion ensemble to make a quiet plea for simpler times. The occasional songs of future birds whip around us, a naturalistic version of the cranking motif. Distant tribal voices call for the building of a fire — our first energy source.”

Boléro (1928)

Maurice Ravel

(Born March 7, 1875 in Cibouire, France;
died December 28, 1937 in Paris)

Ravel originated what he called his “*danse lascive*” at the suggestion of Ida Rubinstein, the famed ballerina who also inspired works from Debussy, Honegger and Stravinsky. Rubinstein’s balletic interpretation of *Boléro*, set in a rustic Spanish tavern, portrayed a voluptuous dancer whose stomps and whirls atop a table incite the men in the bar to mounting fervor. With growing intensity, they join in her dance until, in a brilliant *coup de théâtre*, knives are drawn and violence flares on stage at the moment near the end where the music modulates, breathtakingly, from the key of C to the key of E. So stirring was the music and the ballerina’s suggestive dancing at the premiere that a near-riot ensued between audience and performers, and Miss Rubinstein narrowly escaped injury.

Ravel wrote, “*Boléro* constitutes an experiment in a very special and limited direction. It consists wholly of ‘orchestral tissue without music’ — one long, very gradual crescendo. There are no contrasts, there is practically no invention except the plan and the manner of execution. The themes are altogether impersonal ... folk tunes of the usual Spanish-Arabian kind, and (whatever may have been said to the contrary) the orchestral writing is simple and straightforward throughout, without the slightest attempt at virtuosity.”

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