

Notes on the Program by DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

Suite from *Pulcinella***IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882-1971)***Composed in 1919-1920.**Premiered on May 15, 1920 in Paris, conducted by Ernest Ansermet.*

The appearance of Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* in 1920 caused some consternation among the critics and public of Paris. The musical world had just recovered from the seismic shock of *Le Sacre du Printemps* ("The Rite of Spring") of 1913, the work that caused the most tempestuous opening-night riot in the annals of music. During the intervening years, Stravinsky had come to be viewed not so much as a wild-eyed anarchist as a highly individual aberration of the great and continuing tradition of Russian Romantic music: he employed folk-like themes; he orchestrated in the grand manner of Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov; and he wrote sharply etched rhythms that galvanized the *corps de ballet*, even if they played havoc with the toe-tapping proclivities of the patrons. The musical community allowed that, by 1920, they knew Stravinsky well enough to be able to predict the future of his career. They were wrong.

Stravinsky, though not uninterested in public opinion, was certainly not one to allow it to dictate the course of his music. He realized that *Le Sacre* had carried the techniques of the traditional Russian style about as far as they could go, and his artistic sense impelled him to strike out in new directions. During the First World War, when the logistical problems of assembling a large orchestra were frequently insurmountable, he started to compose for small chamber ensembles. *Les Noces*, *The Soldier's Tale* and the *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments* date from that time. Those works were not well known in Paris, however, and when *Pulcinella* appeared there was general surprise at what many perceived to be a stylistic about-face by Stravinsky. Gone were the massive orchestras of the early ballets, the hectic rhythmic patterns, the riveting dissonances. In their place, Stravinsky offered a ballet, scored for small orchestra with three solo voices, whose melodies, sonority and ethos were built on the Baroque models of Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, a musical meteor who flashed briefly across the Italian artistic firmament during the early years of the 18th century (1710-1736) and created several important instrumental and operatic pieces that laid the foundations of the Classical style. Once the novelty had passed from *Pulcinella*, however, the public was delighted with the new piece, and Stravinsky reaped much approval for lighting out on a different path, one carefully attuned to the time. The ballet became a success, and its style led the way to a new attitude about the relationship between 20th-century music and that of earlier eras, a trend that became known as "Neo-Classicism."

The idea for *Pulcinella* originated with Serge Diaghilev, the legendary impresario of the *Ballet Russe*, who had also engaged Léonide Massine to choreograph the piece and devise the scenario and an appropriate text for the three vocal soloists, and Pablo Picasso to do the decor and costumes. For the work's musical substance, Diaghilev suggested the music of Pergolesi to Stravinsky. The composer, perhaps with Diaghilev's help (Stravinsky's writings are unclear on this matter), selected from Pergolesi's works several movements from the trio sonatas and arias from two operas. To these he added a generous gaggle of musical bits by other 18th-century composers. In general, he kept the bass lines and melodies of his models intact, but added to them his own spicy harmonies and invigorating rhythmic fillips, and then illuminated the whole piece with a brilliant, translucent orchestration. Stravinsky's role in *Pulcinella*, however, was far more than that of simply transcriber or arranger. He not only created a cogent work of art from a wide variety of previously unrelated pieces, but he also gave a new perspective to both his own and Pergolesi's music. "*Pulcinella*," he recalled in *Dialogues and a Diary*, "was my discovery of the past — but it was a look in the mirror, too." With this music, Stravinsky found a manner in which to apply earlier styles and techniques to his own compositional needs, a discovery that was to provide the inspiration for his works for the next thirty years. "Art about art" is American composer and critic Eric Salzman's perfect phrase describing the essence of Stravinsky's neo-classical aesthetic during the ensuing three decades.

The plot of *Pulcinella* was based on an 18th-century manuscript of *commedia dell'arte* plays that Diaghilev discovered in Naples. Stravinsky provided the following synopsis: "All the local girls are in love with Pulcinella; but the young men to whom they are betrothed are mad with jealousy and plot to kill him. The minute they think they have succeeded, they borrow costumes resembling Pulcinella's to present themselves to their sweethearts in disguise. But Pulcinella — cunning fellow! — has already changed places with a double, who pretends to succumb to their blows. The real Pulcinella, disguised as a magician, now resuscitates his double. At the very moment when the young men, thinking they are rid of their rival, come to claim their sweethearts, Pulcinella appears and arranges all the marriages. He himself weds Pimpinella, receiving the blessing of his double, who in his turn has assumed the magician's mantle."

In 1922, Stravinsky extracted an orchestral suite from *Pulcinella* whose movements serve as a précis of the ballet's music and story. The exuberant *Sinfonia (Overture)*, based on the opening movement of Pergolesi's Trio Sonata No. 1 in G major, serves as the curtain-raiser for Stravinsky's insouciant tale. The movements that follow accompany the entrances of the Neapolitan girls who try to attract Pulcinella's attention with their dances. (The *Serenata* derives from a pastorale in Act I of Pergolesi's opera *Flaminio*; the *Scherzino*, *Allegro* and *Andantino* are all borrowed from trio sonatas by the Venetian violinist and composer Domenico Gallo.) The *Tarantella* (from the fourth movement of Fortunato Chelleri's Concertino No. 6 in B-flat major) portrays the confusion when Pulcinella is apparently restored to life. The five movements that close the suite serve as background for the events from the point at which the young men claim their sweethearts until the end of the ballet. The *Toccata* and *Gavotte* are based on anonymous harpsichord pieces; the *Vivo* on Pergolesi's F major Cello Sonata; the *Minuetto* on a canzone from his comic opera *Lo frate 'nnamorato*; and the *Finale* on a trio sonata by Gallo.

Le boeuf sur le toit* ("The Ox on the Roof")*DARIUS MILHAUD (1892-1974)***Composed in 1919.**Premiered on February 21, 1920 in Paris, conducted by Vladimir Golschmann.*

Darius Milhaud, the descendant of a Jewish family whose roots in southern France stretched back over many centuries, took his earliest musical training as a violinist. Milhaud (pronounced mee-OH) first entered the Paris Conservatoire at the age of seventeen as a performer, but, inspired by the exciting new music of Debussy, Stravinsky, Mussorgsky and, especially, the iconoclast Erik Satie, he soon switched his major to composition. Plagued throughout his life by rheumatoid arthritis, he was unable to join the military during the First World War, so he was assigned as secretary to the poet and dramatist Paul Claudel and served with him at the French embassy in Brazil during those years. After the war, Milhaud returned home from Brazil by way of New York, where he was greatly taken with the jazz clubs in Harlem — the music of the New World was a lasting influence on his compositions. Milhaud became recognized as one of the leading modern composers during the time between the World Wars. He composed incessantly and his catalog came to contain over 400 opus numbers — opera, ballet, symphony, concerto, chamber works, film scores, songs and a wealth of miscellaneous music — making him one of the 20th century's most prolific composers. He returned to the United States during World War II to teach at California's Mills College, and divided most of his remaining thirty years between his native France and America. Milhaud was one of the band of important French composers during the middle third of the 20th century known as "Les Six." (Francis Poulenc and Arthur Honegger were the other well-known members of the group, which also included Georges Auric, Louis Durey and Mlle. Germaine Tailleferre.) Though each member of "Les Six" wrote in a distinctive style, their music collectively strove to uphold the ideals of their progenitor, Erik Satie, who advocated clarity, wit, rhythmic vitality and direct expression without excessive emotionalism. These elements remained the essential components of Milhaud's musical language for the sixty years of his career.

In 1953, Milhaud published (in English) a witty and fascinating autobiography under the title *Notes without Music*. Concerning *Le boeuf sur le toit*, he wrote the following: “Still haunted by my memories of Brazil [in 1919, after returning to Paris], I assembled a few popular melodies, tangos, maxixes, sambas and even a Portuguese fado, and transcribed them with a rondo-like theme recurring between each two of them. I called this fantasia *Le boeuf sur le toit*, the title of a Brazilian popular song. I thought that the character of this music might make it suitable for an accompaniment to one of Charlie Chaplin’s films.... [Jean] Cocteau disapproved of my idea, and proposed that we should use it for a show, which he would undertake to put on.... Cocteau produced a pantomime scenario that could be adapted to my music. He imagined a scene in a bar [called ‘*Le boeuf sur la toit*’] in America during Prohibition. The various characters were highly typical [!]: a Boxer, a Negro Dwarf, a Lady of Fashion, a Redheaded Woman dressed as a man, a Bookmaker, a Gentleman in evening clothes. The Barman, with a face like that of Antinoüs [a beautiful youth who was a favorite of the Roman Emperor Hadrian], offers everyone cocktails. After a few incidents and various dances, a Policeman enters, whereupon the scene is immediately transformed into a milk-bar. The clients play a rustic scene and dance a pastoral as they sip glasses of milk. The Barman switches on a big fan, which decapitates the Policeman. The Redheaded Woman executes a dance with the Policeman’s head, ending by standing on her hands like the Salome in Rouen Cathedral. One by one the customers drift away, and the Barman presents an enormous bill to the resuscitated Policeman.

“Jean engaged the clowns from the Cirque Médrano and [the acrobats] the Fratellinis to play the various parts.... In contrast to the lively tempo of the music, Jean made all the movements slow, as in a slow-motion film. This conferred an unreal, almost dreamlike atmosphere on the show.... This isolated demonstration was taken by both critics and public as a declaration of aesthetic faith. The lighthearted show, presented under the aegis of Erik Satie and treated by the newspapers as a practical joke, was regarded by the public as symbolizing the music-hall and circus system of aesthetics, and for critics it represented the so-called postwar music. Both critics and public agreed that I was a clown and a strolling musician — I, who hated comedy and in composing *Le boeuf sur le toit* had only aspired to create a merry, unpretentious divertissement in memory of the Brazilian rhythms that had so captured my imagination and which never — no, never! — made me laugh.”

Symphony No. 7 in A major, Op. 92

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Composed in 1811-1812.

Premiered on December 8, 1813 in Vienna, under the composer’s direction.

In the autumn of 1813, Johann Nepomuk Mälzel, the inventor of the metronome, approached Beethoven with the proposal that the two organize a concert to benefit the soldiers wounded at the recent Battle of Hanau — with, perhaps, two or three repetitions of the concert to benefit themselves. Beethoven was eager to have the as-yet-unheard A major Symphony of the preceding year performed, and he thought the financial reward worth the trouble, so he agreed. The concert consisted of this “Entirely New Symphony” by Beethoven, marches by Dussek and Pleyel performed on a “Mechanical Trumpeter” fabricated by Mälzel, and an orchestral arrangement of *Wellington’s Victory*, a piece Beethoven had concocted the previous summer for yet another of Mälzel’s musical machines, the “Panharmonicon.” The evening was such a success that Beethoven’s first biographer, Anton Schindler, reported, “All persons, however they had previously dissented from his music, now agreed to award him his laurels.”

The orchestra for that important occasion included some of the most distinguished musicians and composers of the day: Spohr, Schuppanzigh, Dragonetti, Meyerbeer, Hummel and Salieri all lent their talents. Spohr, who played among the violins, left an account of Beethoven as conductor.

“Beethoven had accustomed himself to indicate expression to the orchestra by all manner of singular bodily movements,” wrote Spohr. “So often as a *sforzando* [a sudden, strong attack] occurred, he thrust apart his arms, which he had previously crossed upon his breast. At *piano* [soft] he crouched down lower and lower as he desired the degree of softness. If a *crescendo* [gradually louder] then entered, he slowly rose again, and at the entrance of the *forte* [loud] jumped into the air. Sometimes, too, he unconsciously shouted to strengthen the *forte*.”

The Seventh Symphony is a magnificent creation in which Beethoven displayed several technical innovations that were to have a profound influence on the music of the 19th century: he expanded the scope of symphonic structure through the use of more distant tonal areas; he brought an unprecedented richness and range to the orchestral palette; and he gave a new awareness of rhythm as the vitalizing force in music. It is particularly the last of these characteristics that most immediately affects the listener, and to which commentators have consistently turned to explain the vibrant power of the work. Perhaps the most famous such observation about the Seventh Symphony is that of Richard Wagner, who called the work “the apotheosis of the Dance in its highest aspect ... the loftiest deed of bodily motion incorporated in an ideal world of tone.” Couching his observation in less highfalutin language, John N. Burk believed that its rhythm gave this work a feeling of immense grandeur incommensurate with its relatively short forty-minute length. “Beethoven,” Burk explained, “seems to have built up this impression by willfully driving a single rhythmic figure through each movement, until the music attains (particularly in the body of the first movement and in the Finale) a swift propulsion, an effect of cumulative growth which is akin to extraordinary size.”

A slow introduction, almost a movement in itself, opens the Symphony. This initial section employs two themes: the first, majestic and unadorned, is passed down through the winds while being punctuated by long, rising scales in the strings; the second is a graceful melody for oboe. The transition to the main part of the first movement is accomplished by the superbly controlled reiteration of a single pitch. This device not only connects the introduction with the exposition but also establishes the dactylic rhythm that dominates the movement.

The *Allegretto* scored such a success at its premiere that it was immediately encored, a phenomenon virtually unprecedented for a slow movement. Indeed, this music was so popular that it was used to replace the brief slow movement of the Eighth Symphony at several performances during Beethoven’s lifetime. In form, the movement is a series of variations on the heartbeat rhythm of its opening measures. In spirit, however, it is more closely allied to the austere chaconne of the Baroque era than to the light, figural variations of Classicism.

The third movement, a study in contrasts of sonority and dynamics, is built on the formal model of the scherzo, but expanded to include a repetition of the horn-dominated Trio (Scherzo – Trio – Scherzo – Trio – Scherzo).

In the sonata-form finale, Beethoven not only produced music of virtually unmatched rhythmic energy (“a triumph of Bacchic fury,” in the words of Sir Donald Tovey), but did it in such a manner as to exceed the climaxes of the earlier movements and make it the goal toward which they had all been aimed. So intoxicating is this music that some of Beethoven’s contemporaries were sure he had composed it in a drunken frenzy. An encounter with the Seventh Symphony is a heady experience. Klaus G. Roy, the distinguished musicologist and former program annotator for the Cleveland Orchestra, wrote, “Many a listener has come away from a hearing of this Symphony in a state of being punch-drunk. Yet it is an intoxication without a hangover, a dope-like exhilaration without decadence.” To which the composer’s own words may be added. “I am Bacchus incarnate,” boasted Beethoven, “appointed to give humanity wine to drown its sorrow.... He who divines the secret of my music is delivered from the misery that haunts the world.”

THE IRIS ORCHESTRA
2016-2017 Season

April 29-30, 2017

Michael Stern, Conductor

STRAVINSKY *Suite from Pulcinella*
Sinfonia (Overture): Allegro moderato
Serenata: Larghetto —
Scherzino — Allegro — Andantino
Tarantella —
Toccata: Allegro
Gavotta con due variazioni: Allegro moderato
Vivo
Minuetto: Molto moderato —
Finale: Allegro assai

MILHAUD *Le boeuf sur le toit*

— INTERMISSION —

BEETHOVEN *Symphony No. 7 in A major, Op. 92*
Poco sostenuto — Vivace
Allegretto
Presto
Allegro con brio