



The Music Department Presents

Skidmore Orchestra

Conducted by Glen Cortese

Friday, December 1st, 7:00 PM
Arthur Zankel Music Center
Helen Filene Ladd Concert Hall

Program

Buckaroo Holiday from “Rodeo”

Aaron Copland
(1900-1990)

Variations on a Rococo Theme

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
(1840-1893)

Thema: Moderato semplice

I. Tempo della Thema

II. Tempo della Thema

III. Andante

IV. Allegro vivo

V. Andante grazioso

VI. Andante

VII. Andante sostenuto

VIII. Var. e Coda: Allegro
moderato con anima

Jameson Platte, cellist

INTERMISSION

Symphony #2 in D major Op. 73

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

I. Allegro non troppo

II. Adagio non troppo

III. Allegretto grazioso

IV. Allegro con spirito

BUCKAROO HOLIDAY from Four Dance Episodes from Rodeo

Aaron Copland is a man who is hard to pin down. Clearly America's most well-known and respected "classical" composer, he was the creator of some of the country's most beloved compositions that brought the "American" style to the concert hall. Yet, for all that, he was a musician with a remarkably broad range of personal interests and musical styles. His deep intellect and discerning tastes probed and were influenced by about all of the important composers and approaches to composition of the twentieth century. He spent time in his early maturity in France, where he immersed himself in the European musical avant-garde; he was interested in and was influenced by jazz; he maintained a life-long interest in the music of Latin America; he participated fully in the burgeoning interest on the part of the arts community in American folk elements and nationalism during the 1930s and 40s; and later in his life explored the dissonant musical idioms of the European avant-garde, yet again. But, he was not an artistic chameleon, rather a man who saw vitality, authenticity, and artistic possibilities in most of what his probing mind and "big" ears encountered.

During the Great Depression difficult economic conditions, as well as other political and social factors, led American artists to ally themselves with public intellectuals in a variety of sectors in celebrating and promulgating the American common experience. It was perhaps the dominating artistic paradigm of the times, and even today remnants may be seen in such unexpected places as Post Office lobbies where the WPA commissioned murals on populist themes. Copland's compositions from this time—the ballet, *Billy the Kid* (1939); *Our Town* (1940); *Fanfare for the Common Man* (1942); and *A Lincoln Portrait* (1942)—all are signature works of the man and the era. And in the same fecund year as the latter two works came the ballet, *Rodeo*.

The American choreographer, Agnes de Mille, was commissioned in that year by the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo (then in the US) for a ballet on cowboy themes of the American west. She responded with an apparently simple story: Awkward Cowgirl strives

for the affections of the Head Wrangler, who is more interested in the winsome and feminine Rancher's Daughter. She tries to be a "real cowboy" by competing with the men on their own grounds, but only attracts the attention of the Champion Roper. Finally, she wins the day with the Head Wrangler by revealing her femininity and donning a dress for the Hoedown.

The first movement—"Buckaroo Holiday"—begins energetically, followed by subdued music for the cowgirl. Real galloping rodeo music ensues, followed shortly by the big entrance of the boisterous cowboys, accompanied by the traditional "Sis Joe" railroad tune. "If He'd be a Buckaroo" figures prominently along with "Sis Joe" as the movement develops. The second movement is quiet reflection by the cowgirl, entitled "Corral Nocturne," in which she considers her frustration at failing to impress the men, and her love interest, specifically. Gentle woodwind solos accompany her contemplation of awkwardness. "Saturday Night Waltz" brings all the principals together in a social showdown to the tune of "I Ride an Old Paint." The Cowgirl loses the affection wars to the Rancher's Daughter and is left with the Champion Roper. Finally, the exuberant and familiar last movement—"Hoedown"—comes, opening with a literal quotation by Copland of the fiddle tune, "Bonaparte's Retreat," made famous by the Kentucky fiddler, William Stepp, in a 1937 Library of Congress recording. Other traditional songs heard are "McLeod's Reel" and "Gilderoy," as the Cowgirl finally wins her man, the Head Wrangler, at the big dance.

~Wm. E. Runyan

Variations on a Rococo Theme

Though one would not infer it from the music, Tchaikovsky wrote his Variations on a Rococo Theme in grievous depression. His fourth opera, *Vakula the Smith*, one of the series of works between the Fourth and Fifth symphonies, had just enjoyed what he called "a brilliant failure" at the Mariinsky Theater in Saint Petersburg; Sergei

Taneyev had reported from Paris that Jules-Étienne Pasdeloup had “shamefully bungled” *Romeo and Juliet* and that the work had not pleased; and he had learned that in Vienna, Hans Richter had had no success with *Romeo* either and that the feared Eduard Hanslick had written one of his most abusive reviews. All this happened within two weeks at the beginning of December 1876. But Tchaikovsky was learning to escape depression through work. Though ill, he pursued a project begun a couple of months earlier (and to be abandoned soon after), an opera based on *Othello*, and he rapidly composed the *Rococo Variations*.

These he wrote for his friend Wilhelm Karl Friedrich Fitzenhagen, then twenty-eight and for the past six years principal cellist of the Orchestra of the Imperial Russian Music Society in Moscow as well as professor at the Imperial Conservatory. Fitzenhagen intervened considerably in the shaping of “his” piece, so much so that we really ought to bill it as being composed by both men. The cellist changed the order of the variations, omitting one altogether, making other cuts and restitchings as he went, and he is responsible for much of the detail in the solo part, actually entering his alterations in Tchaikovsky’s autograph. Tchaikovsky did not explain Fitzenhagen’s role to his publisher, Jürgenson, and the latter wrote to him: “Horrible Fitzenhagen insists on changing your cello piece. He wants to “cello” it up and claims you gave him permission. Good God! Tchaikovsky *revu et corrigé* par Fitzenhagen!” But Tchaikovsky, in another fit of unsureness about his own work, yielded authority to his German-trained friend and acquiesced in Jürgenson’s publication of the work as recomposed by Fitzenhagen—with piano in 1878 and in full score eleven years later. Moreover, in 1887 Tchaikovsky made sure to send his next piece for cello and orchestra, the *Pezzo capriccioso*, Opus 62, to Fitzenhagen for vetting.

One can easily argue that Tchaikovsky’s original is better than Fitzenhagen’s recension, yet it is beyond dispute that Fitzenhagen himself enjoyed immense success with this grateful, gracious, and charming piece whenever he played it, and so have most of his successors. The theme, so far as we know, is Tchaikovsky’s own. Its

invention and what he builds upon it form one of his most warm-hearted declarations of love to what he perceived as the lost innocence of the eighteenth century.

—Michael Steinberg

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, op. 73

Simply put, the composers of the nineteenth century after Beethoven tended to divide themselves into two groups. The progressives were true “Romantics,” and were greatly influenced by the extra-musical ideas that were the subjects of contemporary literature, poetry, and painting, among others. They devised new genres, such as the tone poems of Smetana and Liszt, the music dramas of Wagner, and the characteristic piano pieces of Chopin. This music, to use a phrase still common among seekers of meaning in music, was about “something”-meaning something familiar to human existence

Others, Brahms most significantly, still adhered strongly to the musical philosophy that great music was simply about “itself,” and required no extra-musical references for complete and satisfying meaning. So, he and his ilk continued to write “pure” or “abstract” music, like sonatas and symphonies (a so-called symphony is just a sonata for orchestra). The example of Beethoven’s music (in this tradition) loomed almost as overwhelming for Brahms, and he waited for decades after reaching musical maturity to essay his first symphony, completing it in 1876, when he was forty-three years old. It garnered sufficient success to be deemed the “Tenth,” referencing Beethoven’s nine in that genre, although it bears more comparison with Beethoven’s fifth symphony.

Well, it didn’t take Brahms nearly so long to write his second symphony as it did the first, and the mood of the work is a strong contrast to that of the mighty seriousness of the first. That is not to say that the second is not without a *gravitas* that is an essential part of the composer’s musical (and his own, for that matter) personality. But, if anything, one could characterize this important work as “sunny.” It’s

common to call it his “pastoral” symphony. That being said, it’s still Brahms, and therefore infused with melancholy—not tragedy, not sadness, just deep reflection upon the human condition. It was composed during the summer of 1877, while Brahms was vacationing in a particularly beautiful part of southern Austria, surrounded inspiring mountains and tranquil lakes. He certainly understood the work’s general cheerfulness, but playfully teased his publisher about the nature of the symphony by claiming that it was such a dark and gloomy work that the score should be edged in black. We know better, of course.

The first movement opens with a simple little four-note motive in the low strings that absolutely forms the core of the piece. Only a consummate craftsman like Brahms could do so much with such a simple idea. The motive pervades the movement, and it’s a cheerful and rewarding process to spot as many variants of it as the music unfolds. As soon as we hear that motive, romantic horns—evoking the bucolic setting—play another essential motive. We’ll hear a lot of each. The warmth and optimism of the opening has no sooner started, than unexpectedly there is a soft, menacing timpani roll and quiet, sinister passage in the trombones. Brahms explained, though he had intended to do without the trombones in the first movement, he couldn’t resist depicting the “black wings” constantly flapping above us all. Soon thereafter, the alert listener will spot Brahms’ famous “Cradle Song” melody appearing as a major melodic element in the movement. The middle of the movement is a vigorous working out of all that we have heard, including some startling real nastiness in the trombones, that remind us that all is not happiness and light. A varied review of all the familiar wraps up the movement, and we end calmly and securely in a soft chord of affirmation.

The second movement is one of Brahms’ loveliest creations, beginning with the cello section spinning out a long-breathed, elegant line. The lyricism continues with other equally attractive tunes, and after a short development, the movement ends as tranquilly and softly as does the first. The third movement is a graceful evocation of a lighthearted walk and scamper through the out of doors, to my

mind. There are two contrasting sections that alternate: the first a gentle stroll—but almost slowly waltzing, and the second a rough, rather Beethoven-like scurry. Yet, for all the motion, this movement, too, like the first two, ends quietly.

After all of this placidity, the time has come to “let’er rip,” and the last movement opens in the strings with the quiet intensity of summer lighting on the horizon. We just know that this is going to be a romp, and it is. A few simple, memorable themes carry this thing along, and while it is tempting to track them as Brahms works them around and about—it’s not really about that process at all. It’s about his uncanny ability to build and release tension, to kick you about with unexpected accents, to cross and re-cross the meters as he builds a tight, and remarkable architecture that drives in a fury to the end. The so-called second theme becomes the primary element that relentlessly carries us to the final magnificent statement in the trumpets, and a blaze of a D major chord in the now optimistic trombones brings it all to a conclusion. There are few moments in all of music so glorious.

~Wm. E. Runyan

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Personnel

FLUTE/PICCOLO

Lydia Watkins
Mackenzie Wicks
Yvonne Chavez Hansbrough

OBOE

Eli Huttman
Jacqualine Burk

CLARINET/BASS CLARINET

Joel Egozy
Emma Lloyd
Brett Wery

BASSOON

Daniel Liu
William Safford

HORN

Joshua Feldman
Micah Malone
Addie Oliphant
Amy Baker
Patrice Malatestinic

TRUMPET

Wyn Jarvinen
Linden Amster
Eric Latini

TROMBONE

Andrew Feldman
Amanda Middleton
Daniel Cordell

VIOLIN I

Marlowe Jacques
Michael Emery
Jeff Cheung
Michelle Stewart
Jessica Bellflower
Rebecca Merber
Julia Johnson McGuigan
Aili Teittinen-Gordon
Brooke Vincent
Sruti Ramaswamy
Olev Viro

VIOLIN II

Isabella Harellick
Josh Rodriguez
Alyson Slack
Kari Flowers
Della Huntley
Zach DeGennaro
Elena Mathis
Ava Albano
Betsy Kagey

VIOLA

Jack Crisan
Stephani Emery
Keegan Donlon
Skye Thomson
Sue Nazzaro
Ray Bunkofske

TUBA

Benjamin Lowder

TIMPANI AND PERCUSSION

James Holmes

Jackson Giumarro

Joshua Lucey

Michael Christy

PIANO

Brian Axford

HARP

May Braaten

VIOLONCELLO

Anna Cates

Jameson Platte

Zack Barnett

Evan Weatherwax

Kara Duffy

Maxwell Plenby

Maddie Sokołowski

CONTRABASS

Noanddi Manigat

Luke Baker

Evan Runyon

Charles Seely

Skidmore in Concert

Senior Voice Recital: Jessica Byers
Saturday, December 2, 4:00pm

Small Jazz Ensembles
Saturday, December 2, 7:00pm

Concert Band
Sunday, December 3, 1:00pm

String Ensembles
Sunday, December 3, 4:00pm

Big Band
Monday, December 4, 7:00pm

Guitar Ensemble
Tuesday, December 5, 7:00pm

Global Music Showcase
Wednesday, December 6, 7:00pm