

PROGRAM NOTES

by Edward Yadzinsky

Sponsored by Pride Source

Wolfgang Amadeus
Mozart is born

⋮

1756

Giuseppe Verdi
is born

⋮

1813

Giacomo
Puccini is born

⋮

1858

George Gershwin
is born

⋮

1898

⋮

Gioachino
Rossini is born

⋮

Modest Mussorgsky
is born

⋮

Cole Porter
is born

⋮

Leonard
Bernstein is born

Overture to Candide

Leonard Bernstein

Born August 25, 1918; Lawrence, MA

Died October 14, 1990; New York City



Leonard Bernstein was a brilliant lecturer, an author, a man of letters, a keyboard virtuoso equally at home from Mozart to Gershwin, a conductor/crusader for “classical music” of every kind, a composer and publisher, and a political activist with a not-to-be-crossed Liberal disposition. In a word, he was a 20th-century Renaissance man with the charisma of a rock star. On top of this, “Lenny” was the number one box-office attraction for any orchestra lucky enough to have him appear as a guest maestro.

But as we look far ahead, Bernstein will doubtless be remembered first and foremost as a composer: the ballet *Fancy Free*, a concerto for piano and orchestra titled *The Age of Anxiety*, three symphonies, assorted chamber music, the film score for *On the Waterfront* and his theater works including *On the Town*, *Candide* and *West Side Story* (also on this A²SO program, see below).

We might be surprised to learn that *Candide* has a connection to the great German mathematician and philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716). Leibniz claimed that clear reason will show that we all reside “in the best of all possible worlds.” Well – that was simply too much for the French philosopher Voltaire (1694-1778), who in 1759 wrote his theater piece, *Candide*, as a spoof on such a simple-headed folly. Voltaire’s parody countered that, all things considered, it was best “to cultivate one’s own garden,” as we live in a world of endless caprice.

Since its premiere in 1956, Bernstein’s *Candide* has enjoyed wide acclaim as a masterpiece of musical

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Edward Yadzinsky joined the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra as a clarinetist and saxophonist in 1963. As an avant-garde performer, he has appeared across the US, Canada and Europe, and has recordings including *Echoi*, by Lukas Foss, with the composer at the piano. As a composer Yadzinsky has written various chamber music works and a ballet for full orchestra. He is a professor at State University of NY at Buffalo and is the historian of the BPO.

theater. The light-hearted music of the *Overture* is filled with frivolity in 7/4 time, cascades of colorful writing for the orchestral woodwinds and strings, with brazen accents from the percussion and brass.

***Largo al factotum* from *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (*The Barber of Seville*)**

Gioachino Rossini

Born February 29, 1792; Pesaro, Italy

Died November 13, 1868; Passy, France



Figaro is the mischievous, star baritone in two celebrated operas – *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786) by Mozart and *The Barber of Seville* (1816) by Rossini. Separated by only 30 years, the works are distinct in musical style, though each sparkles with color and zest appropriate for opera buffa – the term for “serious fun.” The titles and plots for both operas are borrowed from a triple comedy by Pierre Augustin Beaumarchais, the third of which is titled *The Culpable Mother*.

In dramatic sequence, Figaro makes his first operatic appearance in Rossini’s *Barber*, but is not “happily ever after” until Mozart’s *Marriage*.

Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville* is set in two acts on a libretto by Cesare Sterbini. In sum: the aging Doctor Bartolo tries to flatter himself by marrying his beautiful young ward, Rosina. But Rosina is in love with the young Count Almaviva, who in turn must woo her disguised as a common soldier (Lindoro) to avoid prompting the suspicions of her foolhardy guardian. For his part, Figaro is the town barber whose real business is to know everything about everyone. He plays one side against the other until, just before the close, things are in perfect chaos when Doctor Bartolo hires a Justice of the Peace who “mistakenly” marries Rosina to her beloved Count. On top of that, the maiden’s dowry is transferred to her former guardian, a consolation prize which compromises Bartolo all the more. As for Figaro, he is now poised to set out on his own in pursuit of the world’s fair beauties.

In Act I, Figaro boasts of his success as a busy-body barber, singing *Largo al factotum* (Welcome to the village factotum), among the most-popular arias in the opera repertoire.

Events of 1816 (*The Barber of Seville* composed)

- Government warehouse built on Wayne Street in Detroit becomes a theater for amateur entertainment
- Treaty of peace concluded with Indian Council; “The Prophet,” brother of Tecumseh, is present
- James Monroe elected President of U.S.
- Indiana becomes 19th state
- *Emma* written by Jane Austen
- *Kubla Khan* written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge
- Sonnets of John Keats are published

O mio babbino caro* from *Gianni Schicchi

Giacomo Puccini

Born December 22, 1858; Lucca, Italy

Died November 29, 1924; Brussels, Belgium



Without question, Giacomo Puccini became the heir to the great tradition of Italian opera in the 19th century. After the triumphs of Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti and Verdi, it was Puccini who scored the most popular opera of all time – *La bohème* of 1896, with Bizet's *Carmen* as a close second. For his part, Puccini is unsurpassed with regard to heartfelt, gorgeous melody, probing harmony and piquant orchestrations, all in service of true-to-life “verismo” storylines.

Gianni Schicchi was scored in 1918, based on the storyline of Canto XXX.1.32 of Dante's *Inferno*. The one-act libretto is by Giovacchino Forzano.

In Florence in about 1275: Gianni Schicchi, an aging but shrewd villager, has a daughter Lauretta who is in love with the very impoverished Rinuco. When the elderly but very wealthy Buoso Donati dies, Schicchi devises a droll scheme to divert the old man's fortune to himself and the happiness of his daughter. In the famous aria, *O mio babbino caro*, Lauretta pleads with Schicchi to approve her love for Rinuco.

Events of 1918 (*Gianni Schicchi* composed)

- War bread appears in Detroit, followed by Detroit Patriotic Fund organization for war relief work
- Detroit Museum of Art becomes a city institution, with new city charter providing for municipal Arts Commission
- Proclamation of United Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (Yugoslavia)
- Air-mail postal service established
- Daylight savings time first put into effect
- Zane Grey's *U.P. Trail* topped the bestsellers
- *Why Marry?* by Jesse Lynch Williams is first play to win Pulitzer Prize for drama

Là ci darem la mano* from *Don Giovanni

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born January 27, 1756; Salzburg, Austria

Died December 5, 1791; Vienna



Romancing rogues get a lot of leading roles – in movies, plays and especially opera (sometimes in real life). One can only puzzle at the success of their swagger, charming bad manners and craft. Of them all, perhaps the greatest is señor Don Giovanni, a.k.a. Don Juan, paramour par excellence. Derived from Spanish legend, the Don's first literary appearance was in the 1630 stage play titled *The Mocker of Seville and the Statue* by the Spanish monk Gabriel Tellez.

In 1787, Mozart based his two-act opera, *Don Giovanni*, on a libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte. The opera's first scene introduces the Don, attended by his weary assistant, Leporello, who is exasperated because his master, in a duel for honor, has just killed the Commendatore, the father of Donna Anna, Giovanni's latest conquest. But in a moment, buffa-comedy maintains as Don Giovanni holds to his rationale: “...to be faithful to one woman is to betray all the rest.” Leporello's famous aria accounts “640 in Italy – in Spain 1003..!”

In the graveyard scene late in Act II, the Don seeks refuge after a bungled adventure. Suddenly, from the tomb of the murdered Commendatore, a stone statue sings out “I await vengeance....” The Don

scornfully invites the statue for supper. In the final scene the “Stone Guest” adjures Don Giovanni to recant, but the latter refuses. With agonizing orchestral chords the “Stone Guest” escorts Giovanni into the flames of hell. The opera closes with a happy resolution for the relieved characters.

In Act I the innocent country girl, Zerlina, is set to marry Masetto. But on her wedding day, the Don cannot resist another escapade, and entices Zerlina in the famous duo, *Là ci darem la mano* (*There we shall hold hands*). Fortunately, Donna Elvira steps in and saves the day.

Events of 1787 (*Don Giovanni* composed)

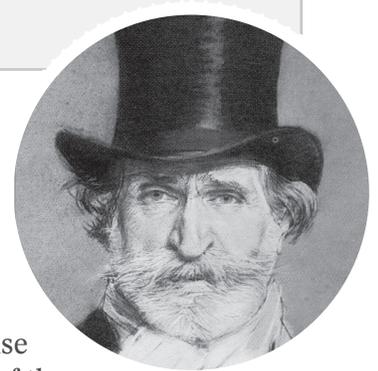
- Michigan included in Northwest Territory organized under Ordinance of 1787
- Society for the Suppression of the Slave Trade founded
- U.S. Constitution drawn up in Philadelphia
- First hydrogen balloon to carry people aloft
- University of Pittsburgh is founded
- First performance of Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*
- *Lady Heathfield* painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds

Di Provenza il mar and *Addio del passato* from *La traviata* (*The Wayward Woman*)

Giuseppe Verdi

Born October 10, 1813; Le Roncole, Italy

Died January 27, 1901; Milan



La traviata was premiered in March of 1853 at La Fenice, the famous opera house in Venice. The libretto is based upon the play *La dame aux camélias* (The Lady of the Camellias) of 1852 by Alexandre Dumas, fils.

In three acts, the melodrama takes place in Paris in about 1850. Violetta, a beautiful courtesan, suffers from consumption yet falls in love with the young and idealistic Alfredo. She gives up her life in high society to live with him at a country estate. But for the reputation of his family, Alfredo's father, Germont, pleads with Violetta to abandon his son – which she does with profound sadness. Ignorant of her reason to leave, Alfredo confronts Violetta at a salon in Paris and throws money at her feet for “services rendered.” But when Violetta turns deathly ill, Alfredo's father admits his cruel intervention. In anguish, Alfredo rushes into Violetta's arms at her final moment.

Well into the drama, in Act II, Scene 1, Germont sings the touching aria *Di Provenza il mar*, pleading with Alfredo to honor his family. In Act III, Scene 4, Violetta laments her sadness. Bound by sad reality, she sings farewell to the past in *Addio del passato*.

Events of 1853 (*La traviata* composed)

- State normal school opens in Ypsilanti as Michigan State Normal College (now Eastern Michigan University)
- Company for manufacture of railways cars organized by George B. Russel in Detroit
- New York Central Railroad established
- University of Florida founded at Gainesville
- *My Old Kentucky Home* written by Stephen Foster
- Saint Patrick's Cathedral built in New York
- Concord grapes introduced in Massachusetts
- Potato chips invented
- Charles Dickens writes *Bleak House*

Overture to West Side Story

Leonard Bernstein

Embraceable You from East is West

George Gershwin (1898-1937)

Summertime from Porgy and Bess (Gershwin)

Oh, Lady Be Good from Lady, Be Good (Gershwin)

Wunderbar from Kiss Me Kate

Cole Porter (1891-1964)



Gershwin



Porter

Music from Broadway is perhaps the most endearing aspect of American culture. Moreover, the composers and lyricists who created the musical wealth are very familiar around the world: Rodgers and Hammerstein, Lerner and Loewe, George M. Cohan – among many. But it is likely that none are more revered than the trio featured on this A²SO program – Porter, Gershwin and Bernstein.

For his part, Leonard Bernstein scored several masterpieces for musical theater, including *On the Town*, *Candide* and the award-winning *West Side Story* of 1957 (the film version won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1961). The storyline is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, cast in the ethnic tenements on the West Side of New York, bordered by the Hudson River. Arranged for orchestra by Maurice Peress, the *Overture* offers an up-beat prelude to the marvelous tunes and dances. The featured selections include the *Jets-Sharks* as rivals, followed by the songs *Tonight*, *Somewhere* and *Mambo*.

About the place of popular music in the artistic world, the late piano virtuoso Artur Schnabel remarked: "There are only two kinds of music – good and bad. And Gershwin's makes me cry." Indeed, George Gershwin is revered for his sassy *Rhapsody in Blue* and *Concerto in F*, the American opera *Porgy and Bess*, and a treasury of heartfelt songs. And virtually all of the latter emerged from Gershwin's spectacular shows on Broadway.

Gershwin originally wrote the music to *Embraceable You* in 1928 for his operetta *East Is West*. The well-known lyrics were from the pen of the composer's brother, Ira Gershwin (1896-1983). The song was then featured in the Broadway musical *Girl Crazy* (1930) and soon became a mainstay on broadcasts and recordings. Now, 90 years later, *Embraceable You* is one of the great "standards" in the world of jazz.

Without a doubt, America's favorite lullaby is *Summertime*, written by Gershwin in 1935 for his opera *Porgy and Bess*. In the opening scene, Clara sings to her new-born infant: "Hush, little baby, don't yo' cry. Daddy and Mammy are standin' by." The lovely lines and nuance are worthy of Chopin, with a trace of elegant jazz. Gershwin emulated the moment a few years earlier in his own *Prelude No. 2* for solo piano, which he described as "a lullaby in blues."

The first time George and Ira collaborated on a major work was in 1924 for the musical comedy *Lady, Be Good*. The storyline concerns a brother and sister who create unlimited mischief trying to help each other out of poverty. The marvelous title tune *Oh, Lady Be Good* has become a favorite for cabaret and jazz singers.

After the premature passing of George Gershwin, the baton was passed to a gifted few, and none had more savvy than Cole Porter. His many Broadway hits included *Kiss Me Kate* of 1948, a show that was doubly welcome on the heels of World War II. The droll and sassy storyline is based on Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, which offered many possibilities to a master tunesmith like Porter. Among the entertaining numbers is *Wunderbar*, featured in Act I. But while the storyline is rich with British allusion, *Wunderbar* is scored like a Viennese waltz from the signature era of Johann Strauss, Jr.

Pictures at an Exhibition

Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky, orchestrated by Maurice Ravel
Mussorgsky born March 9, 1839; Karevo, Russia
Died March 16, 1881; St. Petersburg



Mussorgsky

Mussorgsky's original set of ten musical images was composed for solo piano in homage to the memory of the Russian architect and painter Victor A. Hartmann, who had been one of the composer's closest friends. Deeply distressed by Hartmann's passing (in 1874 at the age of 39), and after attending a memorial gallery exhibit of the artist's works, Mussorgsky conceived the idea of a sonic exhibition via the gallery walls of a concert hall.

Included in the scheme are several promenades, spaced quite naturally as one might walk into a large exhibit room and progress from one tableau to the next. Mussorgsky's settings are a literal series of miniature poems representing the specific Hartmann sketches and watercolors which had been displayed in the exhibit. The original canvases were purportedly destroyed in a fire. However, reproduced in black and white, the images can be seen in the journal *Musical Quarterly* (Volume 125, 1939) in an excellent essay by Alfred Frankenstein.

Although Mussorgsky's original setting for piano had gained considerable popularity, the brilliant orchestral transcription in 1922 by Maurice Ravel catapulted the music into the high-currency limelight. It has ever since been one of the most-performed orchestral show-pieces in the symphonic repertoire.

As a "walk-by" reference for the musical pictures, Mussorgsky's use of the variable *Promenade* serves to escort the viewer/listener from one canvas to the next. *Gnomus* is a comical but grotesquely carved nutcracker, a favorite icon in Eastern Europe; *The Old Castle* was a watercolor of a chateau in the Middle Ages, here portrayed by a lyrical and plaintive alto saxophone; *Tuileries* represents children playing hide and seek in the well-known Parisian gardens situated between the Louvre and the Champs-Élysées; *Bydlo* depicts a scene from the ancient village of Sandomierz, showing a cart with over-size wooden wheels drawn by two oxen, lyrically represented by a mournful, high tuba; *Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks* conjures Hartmann's sketch for a children's ballet scene where canaries are gleefully trying to hatch.

Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle represent two old Jewish gentlemen who meet in the street, one rich and pompous in furs, the other humbled in tatters; for *Marketplace at Limoges*, Mussorgsky wrote that the music represents French "bavardes" (gossips) chatting about Monsieur's lost cow, Madame's false teeth, and Monsieur's big nose; *Catacombs: Roman Sepulchre* is an evocation of the open, public vaults of Paris, with skeletons revealed by light from a leering lantern; about *Cum mortuis in lingua mortua* "With the dead, in the language of the dead," Mussorgsky noted that "...the skulls glow under the soft light"; *The Hut of Baba Yaga* is a witch in Russian folklore who terrified children from her hut built on chicken legs; *The Great Gate of Kiev* is a sonic caption of Hartmann's design (never built) for a commemorative, Russian-styled Arc de Triomphe.



Ravel

Events of 1874 (*Pictures at an Exhibition* composed)

- Detroit Conservatory of Music established
- New York City annexes the Bronx
- Levi Strauss patents blue jeans with copper rivets
- The first public zoo in the U.S. opens in Philadelphia
- Gold is discovered in the Black Hills
- Mussorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov* premieres in St. Petersburg
- Johann Strauss's opera *Die Fledermaus* premieres in Vienna
- Game of lawn tennis introduced
- National Woman's Christian Temperance Union organizes