

PROGRAM NOTES | February 3, 2024

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Carl Maria von Weber: Overture to *Oberon* (1826)

Oberon is a *Singspiel*, which uses spoken dialogue between the musical numbers, and along with the earlier work *Der Freischütz*, established Carl Maria von Weber as a pioneering force in the development of German Romantic opera. Both have exotic and magical elements and owe a debt to another *Singspiel* from one generation earlier: Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Comparing the Overture to *Oberon* to that of *The Magic Flute* illustrates some of the differences between the Classical Mozart and the Romantic Weber. The Overture to *The Magic Flute* has three *allegro* themes that are not part of the opera itself, and despite their differing characters, are connected in a tightly logical way. In contrast, the *Oberon* Overture has themes drawn from choruses and arias in the opera itself, creating the greater mood swings that are typical of the Romantic style. For Mozart, the ideal was cohesion, while for Weber it was color and emotion. It is interesting when talking about musical style change to note that Beethoven, who represented the final flourishing of the Classical tradition, died later than Weber, a leading force of the early Romantic tradition.

The Overture to *Oberon* begins with three notes from the magic horn that Oberon gives the protagonist of the opera; these are also heard later in the overture and throughout the opera. A slow, rhapsodic introduction gives way to a rushing melody played by the strings, followed by a calmer melody in the solo clarinet and then a passionately swooping melody from one of the opera's arias. These themes are tossed around in a fairly conventional development section before returning in an exciting recapitulation, where the momentum gathers toward the final measures.

Marcel Grandjany: Aria in Classic Style (1951)

Marcel Grandjany was born in Paris and appeared as a solo harpist internationally with major orchestras, including a notable 1913 appearance with Maurice Ravel. In 1936, he became head of the harp department at the Juilliard School, where he continued until his death in 1975. *Aria in Classic Style* is an example of a 20th-Century music trend in which composers consciously adopt an earlier style. Stravinsky and Respighi had mined Baroque compositions in their so-called "Neoclassical" compositions, and violinist Fritz Kreisler even tried to pass off pieces by composers Pugnani and Vivaldi as his own. There was no such deception in Grandjany's work, which is dominated by a gentle Baroque-inspired *Sicilienne* rhythm. First played by the solo harp, the string orchestra picks up the material around which the harp plays a delicate filigree.

Alexander Glazunov: Concert in E-flat (1934)

Alexander Glazunov represents a bridge between Russian Romantics like Tchaikovsky and Borodin and later generations of Soviet-era composers (like Shostakovich, who was one of

his students). He was a brilliant musician and prodigious composer, his works including eight symphonies and an often-performed violin concerto.

His saxophone concerto was written near the end of his life at the urging of saxophonist Sigurd Raschèr (the composer describing Raschèr's entreaties more as "attacks" than "requests."). Adopting a model developed by Romantic composers like Franz Liszt, Glazunov incorporates the elements of a multi-movement form into a single movement. The first section begins with an imposing theme introduced by the orchestra and soon taken up by the saxophone. After a lighter, more rapid section, the music settles into a slower, lyrical waltz. The tempo eventually quickens, and after an unaccompanied *cadenza*, the saxophone introduces a skipping melody which is imitated in fugal style by the sections of the orchestra. Elements of the first section overlay the bustling counterpoint and the work ends with a final flourish from the alto saxophone.

Robert Schumann: Symphony No. 3, Op. 97, "Rhenish" (1851)

In the fall of 1850, Robert and Clara Schumann moved their family to Düsseldorf, where Robert had accepted the position of Municipal Music Director. Situated on the Rhine River not far downstream from Cologne, the new environment allowed Robert to quickly complete his third and final symphony (the work published as his Fourth Symphony was actually written earlier). Working titles of the individual movements suggest connections with both the Rhine River and the under-construction Cologne Cathedral, but these were discarded before publication, and the subtitle "Rhenish" was likely added by the Düsseldorf orchestra's concertmaster.

As Beethoven did in his "Pastoral" Symphony, Schumann included five movements in his Symphony No. 3 instead of the customary four. The first movement ("Lively") has a confident surge and flow, and if we adopt the river connections, also explores some eddies along the way. The second movement ("Very moderate") leaves the midstream current for the gentle waves lapping at the shore (Schumann's working title was "Morning on the Rhine"). The third movement is an Intermezzo ("Not fast") which provides a brief bit of contrast with what follows. It is the fourth movement ("Solemn") that is the most distinctive departure from the norms of symphonic form. The working title was "In the Character of an Accompaniment to a Solemn Ceremony," and many have suggested that it was inspired by Schumann's two visits to the Cologne Cathedral during the fall of 1850. The somber counterpoint intoned by the trombones sounds like one of J. S. Bach's organ fugues and perhaps reflects the rediscovery of the Baroque master in mid-nineteenth century Germany. It was a particular favorite of Tchaikovsky, who declared that "Never has anything more powerful or more profound been created by human artistic endeavor." The fifth movement is a boisterous finale that leaves watery images behind, but it does include references to the wavy melody from the second movement, and a motive from the fourth movement returns triumphantly in the final pages.