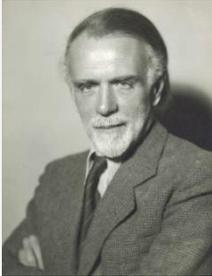


# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## Dancing Across Time – November 3, 4 & 5, 2018

ZOLTAN KODÁLY

### *Dances of Galánta for Orchestra*



Zoltán Kodály was born in Kecskemét, Hungary, on December 16, 1882, and died in Budapest on March 6, 1967. He composed the *Dances of Galánta* (*Galántai Táncok*) in 1933, dedicating them to the Budapest Philharmonic Society on the occasion of its 80th anniversary and conducting the first performance with that orchestra on October 23 that year. The score calls for two flutes (second doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, timpani, small drum, triangle, glockenspiel, and strings. Duration is about 15 minutes.

Like his friend and compatriot Belá Bartók, Kodály devoted much of his energy to the study of Hungarian folk song, and this revealed itself throughout his creative endeavors. Few composers of the twentieth century were so vocally oriented; even his purely instrumental works are imbued with the character of song, the song of the people. Late in his life, Kodály wrote, “Our age of mechanization leads along a road ending with man himself as a machine; only the spirit of singing can save him from this fate.” To project this spirit, Kodály wrote songs and choral works in greater number than perhaps any other twentieth-century composer, and many of them were intended for school use. Indeed, Kodály was one of the great music educators of all time, and the Kodály system is still at the core of Hungary’s strong and almost universal program of music education. But the same spirit found its way into his purely orchestral music, most of which was written in the decade and a half between 1925 and 1940. Kodály inserted the following statement in the score, by way of explanation:

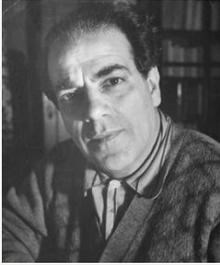
Galánta is a small Hungarian market-town known to the travelers from Vienna to Budapest, where the composer passed seven years of his childhood. There existed at that time a famous gypsy band which has since disappeared. Their music was the first “orchestral sonority” which came to the ear of the child. The forebears of these gypsies were already known more than a hundred years ago. Around the year 1800, some books of Hungarian dances were published in Vienna, one of which contained music “after several gypsies from Galántha.” They have preserved the old Hungarian traditions. In order to continue it, the composer has taken his principal subjects from these old editions.

These old eighteenth-century dances that Kodály has chosen are known as *verbunkos* music, the “recruiting dances” (from the German word *Werbung*, “recruiting”) from the method of enlisting recruits during that century’s imperial wars. The dance was performed by a group of hussars led by their sergeant; it consisted of slow figures alternating with lively ones. The impressive display was apparently designed to arouse enthusiasm among the spectators and encourage some of them to join up to share in the fun. (No doubt a certain amount of alcoholic intake encouraged them as well.) The music that accompanied these events was played by gypsy bands, who often performed breathtakingly elaborate improvisations over the basically simple tunes.

Kodály’s piece is an evocation of that old Hungarian tradition. Having selected his tunes, he arranged them in a rondo-like pattern, with a central *Andante maestoso* recurring twice in the course of the piece. The brilliant orchestration provides a modern orchestral treatment of the colorful old gypsy bands, and has in no small way contributed to the work’s great popularity. Indeed, of Kodály’s purely orchestral works, the *Galánta* dances remain by far the most popular.

## HEITOR VILLA\_LOBOS

### Concerto for Guitar and Orchestra



*Heitor Villa-Lobos was born in Rio de Janeiro on March 5, 1887, and died there on November 17, 1959. He composed his Guitar Concerto in 1951. In addition to the solo Guitar, the score calls for one each of flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, trombone and strings. Duration is about 22 minutes.*

Villa-Lobos learned the cello from his father, and later attained a rare mastery of the guitar. As a composer, he was almost entirely self-taught. A young man intended for the medical profession, he preferred to spend his days in the bohemian life of the street musician, developing the ability to improvise guitar accompaniments to the capricious modulations of the popular instrumental music known as the *chôros*. Between ages 18 and 25, he traveled extensively throughout Brazil, studying the various types of popular music and noting their characteristic features. At first, his music was scorned in his own land for its novelty, but in the 1920s, it was taken up enthusiastically in Paris, where Villa-Lobos attracted wide interest in many circles of the *avant-garde*. He made friends with many leading musicians (such as the pianist Arthur Rubinstein), who not only became devoted admirers, but promoted his music in performance. Throughout his long life, he continued to pour forth an unending stream of new works, almost all of them marked by a freshness of melodic line (often marked by Brazilian popular styles), a rhythmic vitality and imaginative instrumental color.

Some of his most popular works attempted to combine Brazilian folk material with the contrapuntal style of J.S. Bach, and to these works Villa-Lobos gave a generic title that might be translated “Brazilian Bach-like Pieces” (*Bachianas brasileiras*); some of them are for full orchestra, others for as few as two instruments. One of the most popular movements in all of this section of the composer's output is a miniature tone-poem, depicting a train that runs through jungle and mountain with evocative sound effects from the instruments.

The public response to his music varied widely throughout his life. Though he was regarded as too advanced for the public in his early Brazilian years, he nonetheless produced, during that period, four string quartets and five symphonies (of which the fifth is completely lost), as well as the delightful nationalistic piano pieces published as *Prole do bebê* (“The baby's family”); these suggest the kind of fusion of folk traditions with modernism that Stravinsky was writing at exactly the same time—but Villa-Lobos had not yet encountered Stravinsky's music, and came upon this approach independently.

The overt and exotic nationalism of the works that Villa-Lobos began to create in his Paris years attracted the greatest and most lasting attention. There are two great cycles of works—the *Chôros* of 1920-1929 and the *Bachianas Brasileiras* that followed from 1930-1945. These explicitly call up the popular music of the Brazilian cities and the folk music of the countryside, gathered and recreated in concert works of astonishing variety. Some of the pieces in each cycle are for large ensembles (including, for example, chorus, band and orchestra for *Chôro* No. 14 of 1928 and *Bachianas Brasileiras* Nos. 2, 3, 7, and 8), while others are for as varied a range in size and instrumentation as one can imagine (the much-loved *Bachiana Brasileira* No. 5 calls for eight cellos and soprano voice; No. 6 for solo flute and bassoon).

During the 1930s, too, Villa-Lobos played an active and vital role in developing music education in his native country, and to this end he composed a great deal of choral music and other works designed for use in schools, just as Kodály did in Hungary and a few other composers have done in their native lands.

From 1945 until his death, Villa-Lobos became more interested in questions of instrumental virtuosity and produced concertos for piano (five of them), cello (two), harp, guitar and harmonica. His piano compositions became longer and more consciously brilliant, though *Rudepoema* (approximately “rough poem”) for solo piano, written for Rubinstein in the 1920s, was already regarded as one of the most difficult works ever created for the instrument). He also continued, with considerable regularity throughout his life, composing string quartets (the final total was seventeen, with an eighteenth left in sketches at his death) and, after a break of a quarter century, he began to write symphonies again, composing his Sixth in 1944 and continuing to his Twelfth in 1957.

As if all this weren't enough, he composed six ballets, film scores, a couple of operas, and even a Broadway show, *Magdalena*, with the team of Robert Wright and George Forrest, who were best known for converting the tunes of deceased older composers into show tunes for hits like *Song of Norway* (Grieg) and *Kismet* (Borodin).

He composed the Guitar Concerto in 1951 for Andrés Segovia, and, since he was himself a virtuoso performer on the instrument, it is a brilliant showpiece filled with evocations of Brazil. The work is cast in the traditional three movements, of which all three are constructed in sectional forms, with little attempt to suggest the classical concerto. The cadenza linking the last two movements was left for the soloist to improvise or choose, Villa-Lobos providing only a series of tempo indications. An experienced showman, he ends the work with fiery virtuosity

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## FRANZ LISZT

Mephisto Waltz No. 1 for Orchestra [from *Episodes from Lenau's Faust*], S. 110, “Der Tanz in der Dorfschenke” [The Dance in the Village Inn]



*Franz (in Hungarian Ferenc) Liszt was born in Raiding, near Sopron, Hungary, on October 22, 1811, and died in Bayreuth, Germany, on July 31, 1886. He composed the work, bringing it to its final form, between 1857 and 1861. The score calls for two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and percussion (triangle, cymbals, suspended cymbal), harp and strings. Duration is about 11 minutes.*

The first major phase of Liszt's adult years was spent in travel and frequent concertizing, in which he displayed his astonishing gifts at the piano. Women fainted or tried to obtain the butts of cigars he had smoked as a romantic souvenir. He traveled as far east as Asia Minor and through western Russia and the Ukraine. But suddenly, a month before this thirty-sixth birthday, he gave his last public recital. He never again accepted a fee for performing. Though he lived forty years longer, only his students, a few intimate friends, and the audiences fortunate enough to gain admission to his occasional benefit concerts ever heard the greatest virtuoso pianist of the century play again.

By this time Liszt had become rich, and he was tired of the non-stop travel. Moreover his musical interests had deepened beyond the glitter of public display and flashy performance. He wished to compose more, and more seriously. He spent 1848 to 1861 in Weimar as director of music. He conducted and he composed. Indeed, virtually all of his orchestral works either took shape at that time (the *Faust Symphony* and many of the symphonic poems, for example) or underwent their final editing there (the piano concertos).

Toward the end of that period, Liszt composed two orchestral works inspired by *Faust*, but not the great philosophical drama by Goethe, who had spent his last decades in Weimar, but by the gloomy poet Nicolas Lenau (1802-1850), who wrote a long dramatic Faust poem containing many elements of the legend not used by Goethe. Two of these served Liszt as the basis for one of the last of his orchestral works of the Weimar period, *Two Episodes from Lenau's Faust*. Both of them are fine examples of prime Liszt, but the first ("The Nocturnal Procession") is hardly ever heard, while the second, "The Dance in the Village Inn," is one of Liszt's best-known orchestral pieces under the alternate title *Mephisto Waltz* No. 1. (It is often spoken of as *the Mephisto Waltz*, though there are in fact four works with that title.)

In Lenau's poem, Faust and Mephistopheles come to a country inn and enter, seeking diversion. Mephistopheles loudly criticizes the "sleepy" playing of the musicians, and the leader hands his violin to this huntsman (as he thinks), to give him a chance to show what he is made of. His playing seduces all listeners, who abandon themselves to lust. Two by two they slip out the door into the night, Faust with one of the tavern girls, to dedicate themselves to lovemaking. The nightingale sings.

Liszt's music, essentially an intoxicating waltz, is flavored with the sound of the tritone, that musical interlude that came to be called *diabolus in musica* ("the devil in music"), obviously inspired by the presence of Mephistopheles among the revelers. A quiet, sensuous, syncopated waltz theme in the middle of the movement is harmonically adventurous and serves as an effective foil to the more vigorous and assertive surroundings.

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## LEONARD BERNSTEIN

### Symphonic Dances from West Side Story



*Leonard Bernstein was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts, on August 25, 1918, and died in New York on October 14, 1990. He composed the score to West Side Story in 1957-58, in collaboration with choreographer Jerome Robbins, who had the basic idea for a modern version of Romeo and Juliet, dramatist Arthur Laurents, who wrote the book, and lyricist Stephen Sondheim, whose first produced Broadway show this was. The show opened in New York on September 26, 1958, with Max Goberman conducting. The concert selection of Symphonic Dances from West Side Story was first performed by the New York Philharmonic under the direction of Lukas Foss on an all-Bernstein program given in February 13, 1961. The score calls for two flutes and piccolo, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets, E-flat clarinet, and bass clarinet, alto saxophone, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (a large and varied collection), harp, piano, celesta and strings. Duration is about 22 minutes.*

At its appearance in 1958, the musical *West Side Story* was immediately recognized as a new high-water mark for the American musical theater, an extraordinarily powerful amalgam of Leonard Bernstein's brilliantly unified, nervously jazzy score, Arthur Laurents's book, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, and Jerome Robbins's electrifying dances. Though Bernstein had written successful shows before—*On the Town* in 1944 and *Wonderful Town* in 1953—this was his first show to produce songs that immediately became standards (though that happened only after it was filmed and seen by millions), and the dance music was sophisticated enough to find its way directly into the concert hall. This was in itself a remarkable feature. Ballet music from operas or excerpts from the scores of classical ballets have often become concert material. But the dance music of Broadway shows was almost never written by the composer of the main show. Perhaps the last composers to write their own dance music were Victor Herbert, at the turn of the century, and Kurt Weill, toward the middle.

Most composers for the musical theater were songwriters who, whatever their gifts in that area, simply did not have the training to conceive and score an elaborate dance number, so they turned the ballet music over to assistants. Bernstein, a fully-trained composer, could conceive music on a scale larger than the thirty-two bars of the average popular song and had already written two formal ballets as well as elaborate dance music for his earlier shows, *On the Town* and *Wonderful Town*. So it was no surprise that he would craft remarkable dances for *West Side Story*.

As laid out in the Symphonic Dances, we hear the Prologue (rivalry between the Jets and Sharks); "Somewhere" (a visionary dance sequence in which the two gangs are friendly); Scherzo (a continuation of the vision, as they break out of the city into a world of open spaces); Mambo (a competitive dance between the gangs); Cha-Cha (Tony and Maria see one another for the first time); Meeting scene (a short musical underscoring for their first words together); "Cool" Fugue (the Jets practice controlling their hostility—and the fugue theme is a twelve-tone row!); the Rumble (in which the two gang leaders are killed); Finale (love music and a procession that recalls "Somewhere," but now in a tragic mood).

What was perhaps a surprise at the premiere is that the elaborate treatment of some of the songs in the show (especially *Maria*, which forms the emotional high point of the scene at the gym when Tony and Maria meet) passes far beyond the level of simple orchestral arrangement to become part of the dramatic unfolding of the tragic tale, the means through which the two rival gangs show off their style and challenge one another with aggressive vigor until the fateful meeting of Tony and Maria sparks a doom-laden love.

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