



ABOUT THE MUSIC

RACH & The Hollywood Sound

January 21, 22 & 23, 2023

Program notes by Elizabeth Schwartz

FRANZ WAXMAN

Suite from *The Nun's Story*



COMPOSER: born December 24, 1906, Königshütte, Upper Silesia (then Prussia, now Chorzów, Poland); died February 24, 1967, Beverly Hills, California

WORK COMPOSED: 1958-1959

WORLD PREMIERE: The film premiered on June 18, 1959, at Radio City Music Hall in New York City

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, glockenspiel, chimes, xylophone, muffled "Mahler" chime, celesta, piano, 2 harps, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 11 minutes

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Composer, arranger, conductor, artistic director: Franz Waxman excelled at them all, but he made a lasting name for himself through the film scores he composed in Hollywood from the 1930s until his death in 1967.

In 1950, Waxman won the first of his two Academy Awards for Best Score for Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard*, starring William Holden and Gloria Swanson. The following year, Waxman took home his second Academy Award, for George Stevens' *A Place In The Sun*, a cinematic version of Theodore Dreiser's 1925 novel *An American Tragedy*, starring Elizabeth Taylor, Montgomery Clift, and Shelley Winters. Including his two wins, Waxman was also nominated for 12 Academy Awards, for *Suspicion*, *Rebecca*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and *A Nun's Story*, among others. Waxman also composed scores for *The Bride of Frankenstein*, *Stalag 17*, *To Have and Have Not*, *Rear Window*, *Mister Roberts*, *Peyton Place*, and *Taras Bulba*.

In addition to his work in Hollywood, Waxman founded and directed the Los Angeles Music Festival from 1947 until his death. During his tenure, the festival hosted the world and American premieres of some 80 works by Igor Stravinsky, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Dmitri Shostakovich, and Arnold Schoenberg, among others.

In some ways Waxman was an unlikely choice as a composer for a film based on true events about a Catholic nun in 1920s Belgium who struggles with her vocation. As a German Jew, Waxman had no love for the Catholic Church, particularly because of its official “neutrality” during World War II, and Pope Pius VII’s refusal to condemn the persecution and genocide of European Jews under Hitler. Waxman and Fred Zinneman, director of *The Nun’s Story*, also clashed over Waxman’s score. Zinnemann recalled, “While Franz Waxman was scoring the picture, I discovered he had a deep dislike for the Catholic Church, and this was coming across in his music. The theme he wrote for the convent scenes would have been more appropriate for scenes set in a dungeon, so I got him to write another.” Despite his personal feelings about the Church, however, Waxman did more than due diligence with the score, basing the music on Gregorian chants he had researched in the Papal Library in Rome.

In 1959, after it premiered, *The Nun’s Story* became Warner Brothers’ most financially successful film, grossing more than seven million dollars. Audrey Hepburn, who starred as Gabrielle van der Mal/Sister Luke, was nominated for an Academy Award for her performance. “The music which Franz Waxman has composed for *The Nun’s Story* bears the same kind of overflowing honesty and womanly emotion that characterizes Audrey Hepburn herself in the role of Sister Luke,” remarked Henry Blanke, the film’s producer. “Waxman’s music tells the story with warmth and understanding. Just as Sister Luke seeks a level of unquestioning obedience and discipline, so has Waxman sought and found the various moods of happiness, dedication, indecision, and agonizing failure in her struggle for perfection. He has carried Ms. Hepburn through her novitiate to the accompaniment of the powerful music of the church, through her hazardous assignment as a nurse in an insane asylum with the music of madness tempered by the dutiful serenity of the nuns.”

The Suite on tonight’s program includes a Finale that Zinnemann ultimately cut from the score. The final scene shows Sister Luke leaving the convent and returning to the world. When Jack Warner asked Zinnemann why he removed the music, Zinnemann shrewdly responded, “What kind of music do you want at the end of the picture? If the music expresses gloom, it will imply that it is too bad that Sister Luke left the convent. If it is joyful, people will think that Warner Bros. is encouraging nuns to leave the convent. And so the movie ends in silence, the way I wanted it to.”

MAX STEINER

Symphonic Suite from *Gone with the Wind*



COMPOSER: born May 10, 1888, in Vienna; died December 28, 1971, Hollywood, California

WORK COMPOSED: March through May 1939

WORLD PREMIERE: *Gone With The Wind* was first screened in Atlanta, at Loew's Grand Theatre, on December 15, 1939

INSTRUMENTATION: 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, piano/celesta, 2 harps, and strings

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The life of pioneering film composer Max Steiner would make a terrific biopic; the only problem is that the only person who could do justice to the score for such a project is Steiner himself. Then again, a typical two-hour movie could hardly encompass the events of Steiner's long life, which stretched from the Vienna of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the sun-drenched Hollywood of the 1960s.

Steiner, dubbed "the father of film music," was born into a well-connected theatrical family with deep roots in Vienna. Steiner demonstrated prodigious musical talent as a child, and he took piano and music lessons from both Johannes Brahms and Gustav Mahler; Richard Strauss was the boy's godfather. Steiner's father Gabor, a theater manager and inventor (he built Vienna's iconic Riesenrad, an enormous Ferris wheel in Vienna's Prater amusement park), encouraged his son's abilities; when Max became bored with piano, he started improvising, which eventually evolved into full-fledged composing.

Steiner started his professional music career as a teenager conducting operettas in London and moved to that city in 1906. Over the next eight years, he began composing his own works as well as conducting others, including Lehar's *The Merry Widow*. When World War I began in August 1914, Steiner was classified as an enemy alien and interred in a camp with other German and Austrian citizens. Fortunately, Steiner had influential friends who were able to get him the documents he needed to move to the United States.

Steiner spent the next 11 years in New York conducting, directing, orchestrating, and arranging music for Broadway. In 1915 he became one of the first music directors for an independent film studio, Fox Films (now 20th Century-Fox). There he wrote what might be the first score to use original music specially written to accompany a film, for 1916's *The Bondman* (Steiner's score required 110 musicians who performed live at each screening). Steiner continued working on Broadway until 1929 when he was hired by RKO to head their music department. In 1933, Steiner's score for *King Kong* became his first breakout success; the score's emotional power dramatizes the admittedly thin plot in a way never seen or heard before in film. Producers who had been unwilling to spend a lot of money on music saw how much Steiner's score enhanced *King Kong's* blockbuster success; soon films in all genres included original music heard throughout the majority of the film's running time.

For Steiner, *King Kong* afforded an opportunity to create specific musical themes for each character, a technique he admired in the music of Richard Wagner. These themes, or leitmotifs, became the basic principle around which he composed all his film music over the next four decades.

When producer David O. Selznick asked Steiner to write the music for *Gone With The Wind* in March 1939, he gave Steiner just three months for the job. Steiner, who was writing scores for several other films at the time, worked upwards of 20 hours a day, popping Benzedrine pills to keep going. The music features leitmotifs for the main characters, but the most memorable music in the film is the theme Steiner wrote for Scarlett O'Hara's home, Tara; thanks to Steiner, Tara becomes an additional character in the story. The "Tara" theme begins the film, is heard throughout the story and sounds over the final scene and credits. In addition to the original music, Steiner also quotes fragments from "Taps," "Dixie," and other music from the Civil War period.

Steiner won three Academy Awards for Best Film Score (for *The Informer*; *Now, Voyager*, and *Since You Went Away*). *Gone With The Wind* was nominated in 13 categories and won eight; perhaps the only reason Steiner's music didn't earn him a fourth Oscar is that one of the other films nominated in 1939 was *The Wizard of Oz*. The American Film Institute ranks Steiner's music for *Gone With The Wind* as the second-best film score of all time, behind John Williams' *Star Wars*.

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27



COMPOSER: born April 1, 1873, Oneg, Russia; died March 28, 1943, Beverly Hills, California

WORK COMPOSED: 1906-1907. Rachmaninoff dedicated it to his composing teacher, Sergei Taneyev

WORLD PREMIERE: February 7, 1908, in St. Petersburg, with Rachmaninoff conducting

INSTRUMENTATION: 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, glockenspiel, snare drum, and strings.

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Artists of all types have a love-hate relationship with critics: they need the exposure criticism brings to their work, but often scorn the critiques themselves. Other artists take criticism too much to heart and let it affect them to a debilitating degree, which was the case with Sergei Rachmaninoff. After the premiere of Rachmaninoff's first symphony, he was so savaged by critics that he did not dare compose a note for three years. Eventually, Rachmaninoff consulted a doctor, Nicolai Dahl, who used hypnotism to bolster Rachmaninoff's flagging confidence. Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto was dedicated to Dahl, and it vindicated Rachmaninoff as a composer by becoming one of his most popular works.

After the success of the Second Piano Concerto, Rachmaninoff felt ready to tackle another symphony, and in 1906 he began work on his second. The writing was difficult for him, as he reported in a letter to a friend, and the work proceeded slowly. The final version lasted over an hour, although Rachmaninoff later suggested a number of performance cuts that shorten it by as much as 20 minutes; these cuts have become standard when programming this symphony today. Although Rachmaninoff, out of necessity, agreed to the cuts, which amounted to some 300 measures of music, he later confided to conductor Eugene Ormandy, “You don’t know what cuts do to me. It is like cutting a piece out of my heart.” Rachmaninoff might have appreciated the words of one critic, who wrote at the symphony’s premiere, “After listening with unflagging attention to its four movements, one notes with surprise that the hands of the watch have moved sixty-five minutes forward. This may be slightly overlong for the general audience, but how fresh, how beautiful it is!”

The symphony opens with a darkly murmuring theme played by the lower strings, a theme that forms the basis for the remainder of the first movement, as well as much of the rest of the symphony. The violins contrast with a lyrical melody, followed by a plaintive solo for the English horn. Throughout this movement, Rachmaninoff uses solo instruments as structural signposts, indicating changes in mood or harmonic foundations.

The horns launch the Scherzo with a bold, energetic theme, and the strings continue with a bouncier, skipping melody. These are contrasted by a series of interludes, one unabashedly romantic, and others feverishly intense. As was his wont in many of his orchestral works, including the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, Rachmaninoff includes the *Dies irae* melody (Day of Wrath) from the Requiem Mass; it appears here in the coda to the trio.

In the Adagio, Rachmaninoff’s signature romanticism is heard in the violin’s opening melody, which could easily serve as the love song in a cinematic romance. In fact, 1970s pop singer Eric Carmen wrote a hit song based on this theme, “Never Gonna Fall in Love Again.”

For the Finale, Rachmaninoff unleashes a whirlwind of vibrant joy. Buoyant strings recall the Scherzo, but this music is abruptly interrupted by the stark call of muted horns. We then hear snatches of music from previous movements, especially the Scherzo and the Adagio. The strings, playing in the style of the Italian *tarantella*, are the foundation for this movement, and its energy drives the symphony forward to a triumphant conclusion.

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Elizabeth Schwartz is a writer and music historian based in the Portland area. She has been a program annotator for more than 20 years, and works with music festivals and ensembles around the country. Schwartz has also contributed to NPR’s “Performance Today,” (now heard on American Public Media).

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