



ABOUT THE MUSIC

RACH & THE HOLLYWOOD SOUND

January 11, 12 & 13, 2025

Program Notes by Elizabeth Schwartz

ELMER BERNSTEIN

The Magnificent Seven Symphonic Suite for Orchestra



COMPOSER: Born April 4, 1922, New York City; died August 18, 2004, Ojai, CA

WORK COMPOSED: 1960

WORLD PREMIERE: *The Magnificent Seven* film with Bernstein's score was released on October 12, 1960.

INSTRUMENTATION: 3 flutes, 2 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 2 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, chimes, claves, crash cymbals, gong, snare drum, suspended cymbals, tambourine, tom toms, vibraphone, wood block, xylophone, piano, guitar, harp, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 5 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

In his time, award-winning film and television composer/conductor Elmer Bernstein was as widely recognized for his music as John Williams is today. Over his five-decade career, the versatile Bernstein composed more than 150 original movie scores, including *The Ten Commandments* (1955), *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962), *The Great Escape* (1963), *National Lampoon's Animal House* (1978), *Airplane!* (1980), *Ghostbusters* (1984), and *The Age of Innocence* (1992), among many others. He also wrote the iconic theme for National Geographic's television specials, which aired during the 1960s and 70s. Bernstein garnered 14 Oscar nominations, winning the Academy Award for Best Score for *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (1967). In addition to the Oscars, Bernstein earned two Golden Globes, an Emmy, five Grammy nominations, and two Tony nominations.

"*The Magnificent Seven* was one of the few pictures I wanted to do so badly I really put myself out to get it," Bernstein wrote. "In this and another picture done much at the same time—*The Comancheros*—I think I said almost everything I had to say on the subject of Western Americana. In *The Magnificent Seven*, the purpose of the music was primarily to increase excitement, but is also served in a quite specific way to provide pacing to a film, observe that the music is faster in temp than anything that is actually happening on the screen. The film needed music to help give it drive. In that sense, it is a quite physical score, as much foreground as background. It was a film that also needed music to suit its locale, and in this case, I felt it should have a definite Chicano sound, a blending of many elements of American and Mexican music.

"Every once in a while—it doesn't happen often—you hit on something really quite thrilling. I remember being very excited when I found that opening rhythm. It was like a surge of energy. That's what people really remember."

ERICH KORNGOLD

Concerto in C major for Cello and Orchestra from *Deception*, Opus 37



COMPOSER: Born May 29, 1897, Vienna; died November 29, 1957, Hollywood, CA

WORK COMPOSED: 1946

WORLD PREMIERE: Henry Svedrofsky led cellist Eleanor Aller and the Los Angeles Philharmonic on December 29, 1946.

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

ESTIMATED DURATION: 13 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Erich Korngold was out of sync with time. Had he been born a century earlier, his romantic sensibilities would have aligned perfectly with the musical and artistic aesthetics of 19th century Europe. Instead, Korngold grew up in the tumult of the early 20th century, during a time when his lyrical style had been eclipsed by the horrors of WWI and the stark modernist trends championed by fellow Viennese composers Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg, and Anton Webern.

Korngold's prodigious compositional talent emerged early. At age ten, he performed his cantata *Gold* for Gustav Mahler, whereupon the older composer called him "a genius." Just after his bar mitzvah, the Austrian Imperial Ballet staged Korngold's pantomime *The Snowman*. In his teens, Korngold received commissions from the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra; pianist Artur Schnabel performed Korngold's Op. 2 Piano Sonata on tour, and Korngold also began writing operas, completing two full-scale works by age eighteen. At 23, Korngold's opera *Die tote Stadt* (The Dead City) brought him international renown.

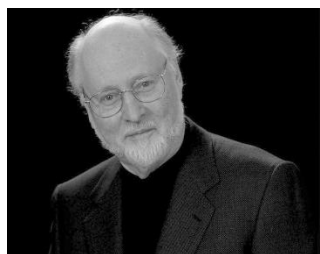
But by the 1920s, composers had fully embraced modernism. The music of Korngold's contemporaries bristled with dissonance, unexpected rhythms, and often little that resembled a recognizable melody. Korngold's music reflected an earlier, bygone era, and his unabashed Romanticism was derided as hopelessly out of date. Fortunately for Korngold, around this same time a new forum for his kind of lush expressiveness emerged: film scores. In 1934, director Max Reinhardt invited Korngold to write a score for his film of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Korngold subsequently moved to Hollywood – a fortuitous decision for a Jewish man living in Nazi Austria – where he spent the next dozen years composing scores for 18 films, including his Oscar-winning music for *Anthony Adverse* (1936) and *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938).

While some composers and critics regarded film music as less significant than concert works, Korngold did not. "I have never drawn a distinction between music for films and for operas or concerts," he stated. Tonight's concerto is a case in point. This one-movement work emerged from Korngold's score for the 1946 film noir *Deception*, starring Bette Davis, Paul Henreid, and Claude Rains. The plot centers on a twisted love triangle featuring Henreid as Karel, a Czech cellist newly arrived in America after WWII; Rains as Hollenius, an arrogant, conniving composer/conductor; and Davis as Christine, a young pianist and composition student who thought Karel, her lover before the war, had died. She is now Hollenius' mistress, but ends that relationship when she discovers Karel is alive. After Karel and Christine marry, Hollenius, attempting to coerce Christine back to him, threatens to tell Karel about their affair. Desperate to keep Hollenius from ruining her life and Karel's career, Christine shoots Hollenius dead.

Before this melodramatic ending, in an attempt to humiliate Karel, Hollenius asks the cellist to perform his new concerto, all the while secretly planning to have another cellist premiere the work. In the film, the concerto scene lasts approximately five minutes. To make the original concerto music into a viable stand-alone work, Korngold expanded the music from five to 13 minutes, and it becomes a micro-concerto with contrasting sections. The agitated opening shifts seamlessly into a contrasting slow interlude that features a gorgeous melody for the soloist. This is the Korngold sound most familiar to audiences: opulent harmonies and all-out romantic expression. The agitation returns, jumping restlessly from one idea to the next, and the concerto ends with a cadenza and a triumphant flourish.

JOHN WILLIAMS

Escapades from *Catch Me If You Can* for Alto Saxophone and Orchestra



COMPOSER: Born February 8, 1932, Flushing, Queens, NY

WORK COMPOSED: 2002

WORLD PREMIERE: The film *Catch Me If You Can* with Williams' score premiered on December 25, 2002.

INSTRUMENTATION: 3 flutes, 2 oboes, 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 2 trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, percussion, piano/celeste, harp, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 13 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The name John Williams is synonymous with movie music. He became a household name with the Academy Award-winning 1977 score he wrote for *Star Wars* and has defined the symphonic Hollywood sound ever since.

Over his career, Williams has garnered a record 54 Oscar nominations for Best Original Score, including the one he wrote for longtime collaborator Steven Spielberg's 2002 film *Catch Me If You Can*. The movie is based on Frank Abagnale's eponymous autobiography, which details his criminal activities during the 1960s, as well as the FBI's years-long campaign to apprehend him. Over seven years, Abagnale impersonated an airline pilot, a doctor, and a public prosecutor during his successful efforts as a master conman and forger.

"The film is set in the now nostalgically tinged 1960s," Williams writes about 'Escapades,' "and so it seemed to me that I might evoke the atmosphere of that time by writing a sort of impressionistic memoir of the progressive jazz movement that was then so popular. The alto saxophone seemed the ideal vehicle for this expression ... "In 'Closing In,' we have music that relates to the often-humorous sleuthing, which took place in the story, followed by 'Reflections,' which refers to the fragile relationships in Abagnale's family. Finally, in 'Joy Ride,' we have the music that accompanies Frank's wild flights of fantasy that took him all over the world before the law finally reined him in."

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

Symphonic Dances for Orchestra, Opus 45



COMPOSER: Born April 1, 1873, Oneg, Russia; died March 28, 1943, Beverly Hills, CA

WORK COMPOSED: The summer and autumn of 1940. The published score bears the inscription: "Dedicated to Eugene Ormandy and The Philadelphia Orchestra."

WORLD PREMIERE: Eugene Ormandy led the Philadelphia Orchestra on January 3, 1941.

INSTRUMENTATION: Piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, alto saxophone, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, chimes, cymbals, drum, orchestra bells, tam-tam, tambourine, triangle, xylophone, piano, harp, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 35 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Sergei Rachmaninoff had great regard for the Philadelphia Orchestra and its music director, Eugene Ormandy. As a pianist, he had performed with them on several occasions, and as a composer, he appreciated the full, rich sound Ormandy and his musicians produced. Sometime during the 1930s, Rachmaninoff remarked that he always had the unique sound of this ensemble in his head while he was composing orchestral music: "[I would] rather perform with the Philadelphia Orchestra than any other of the world." When Rachmaninoff began working on the *Symphonic Dances*, he wrote with Ormandy and the orchestra in mind. Several of Rachmaninoff's other orchestral works, including the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* and the *Piano Concerto No. 4*, were also either written for or first performed by Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra.

The *Symphonic Dances* turned out to be Rachmaninoff's final composition. Although not as well-known as the piano concertos or the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, Rachmaninoff himself and many others regard the *Symphonic Dances* as his greatest orchestral work. "I don't know how it happened," the composer remarked. "It must have been my last spark."

Nervous pulsing violins open the Allegro, over which the winds mutter a descending minor triad (three-note chord). The strings set a quickstep tempo, while the opening triad becomes both the melodic and harmonic foundation of the movement as it is repeated, reversed, and otherwise developed. The introspective middle section features the first substantial melody, sounded by a distinctively melancholy alto saxophone. The Allegro concludes with a return of the agitated quickstep and fluttering triad.

Muted trumpets and pizzicato strings open the Andante con moto with a lopsided stuttering waltz, followed by a subdued violin solo. This main theme has none of the Viennese lightness of a Strauss waltz; its haunting, ghostly quality borders on the macabre suggestive of Sibelius' *Valse triste* or Ravel's eerie *La valse*. Rachmaninoff's waltz is periodically interrupted by sinister blasts from the brasses.

In the Lento assai: Allegro vivace, Rachmaninoff borrows the melody of the *Dies irae* (Day of Wrath) from the requiem mass. Rachmaninoff had used this iconic melody many times before, most notably in *Isle of the Dead* and the Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini. In the Symphonic Dances, the distinctive descending line has even more suggestive power; we can hear it as Rachmaninoff's final statement about the end of his compositional career. This movement is the most sweeping and symphonic of the three and employs all the orchestra's sounds, moods, and colors. In addition to the *Dies irae*, Rachmaninoff also incorporates other melodies from the Russian Orthodox liturgy, including the song "Blagosloven Yesi, Gospodu," describing Christ's resurrection, from Rachmaninoff's choral masterpiece *All-Night Vigil*.

On the final page of the Symphonic Dances manuscript, Rachmaninoff wrote, "I thank Thee, Lord!"

© Elizabeth Schwartz

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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