



Milwaukee Symphony Musical Journeys

WEEKLY STREAMING PROGRAMS
Episode 14 Notes

ALEXANDER ARUTIUNIAN

Born 23 September 1920; Yerevan, Armenia
Died 28 March 2012; Yerevan, Armenia

Trumpet Concerto in A-flat major

Composed: 1949-50

First performance: Moscow, Russia

Continuing the Armenian-Soviet expression of Khachaturian, Alexander Arutiunian emerged as an important force in his region's music after World War II. Both as a composer and as the director of the Armenian Philharmonic Society (1954-1990), he infused Russian music with the characteristic bold elements of his homeland. From among his many compositions, he is particularly celebrated for his concertos, especially this Trumpet Concerto.

Addressing herself to the essence of Arutiunian's success, Soviet musicologist Svetlana Sarkisian cites his use of the *ashug*, "an 18th-century Armenian minstrel comparable to the Western Meistersinger, [which] is made to symbolize the originality of the national poet-musician. The *ashug* tradition, based on freely varied development, has been important to Arutiunian's work in general. His lyrical idiom is rooted in a specific national melodic character, while the Romantic side of his sensibility finds expression in an emotional radicalism and a predominantly lyrical impulse, producing music that is at once expressive, sentimental, nostalgic, and ironic."

Originally planned in 1943 for the composer's friend, Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra's Principal Trumpet Zsolak Vartasarian, this concerto project was shelved when the trumpeter died in World War II. Later completed in 1949-50, Arutiunian's sixth major composition was first performed by Soviet trumpet player Aykaz Messiaian, who performed it in Moscow's Tchaikovsky Hall.

Cast in a single span, the Trumpet Concerto begins with a dramatic Andante introduction, before the soloist presents a melody of Armenian inflection. (Arutiunian asserts that he used no actual folk melodies.) A sprightly dance tune emerges (*Allegro energico*) and is then contrasted by a romantic melody reminiscent of Borodin. These ideas develop while progressing to a central section in which muted trumpet voices a reflective tango. The sprightly opening materials return, then are treated with syncopated development. The work culminates with a brief, but demanding, cadenza written in 1977 by the Soviet Russian virtuoso Timofei Dokschitzer, who made the first recording of this music. An exhilarating closing section completes the concerto. ☺

Program notes by Roger Ruggeri.

AARON COPLAND

Born 14 November 1900; Brooklyn, New York
Died 2 December 1990; Tarrytown, New York

Symphony No. 3

Composed: 1944-46

First performance: 18 October 1946; Boston, Massachusetts

Written between summer 1944 and summer 1946, Copland's Symphony No. 3 is the best-known American symphony of the 20th century; it has been performed and recorded more often than any other. Commissioned – and premiered – by Serge Koussevitsky, the composer attributed the singular character of his longest orchestral work to the revered maestro, explaining, "I knew exactly the kind of music he enjoyed conducting and the

sentiments he brought to it, and I knew the sound of his orchestra [Boston Symphony Orchestra], so I had every reason to do my darnedest to write a symphony in the grand manner."

For many listeners, Copland's use of his popular *Fanfare for the Common Man* in the final movement is one of the work's most fascinating characteristics. However, it is important to note that the composer did not choose this much-loved melody for lack of a better idea: It was his intention all along to employ a noble theme that would recall the Allied victory in World War II. The *Fanfare* was the perfect decision.

Copland's "fantastic piece" (Bernstein) was, according to its composer, "intended to reflect the euphoric spirit of the country at the time." And in his analysis of the Third, William Austin speaks of "its rather New-Dealish spirit of hopeful resolution and neighborliness."

Flutes open the final movement with a pianissimo anticipation of the *Fanfare*. Later, after the brass have fully proclaimed the *Fanfare*, Copland introduces a new motif, one that evokes both chirping birds and the rhumba. Still later, there's a noble hymn-like theme that features, as Austin notes, conga-like rhythms. This "Great American Symphony" concludes with statements of the Third's very opening theme and the hymn, accompanied by fragments of the *Fanfare*.

Though not programmed as often as, say, *Appalachian Spring* or *Rodeo*, the Third is now firmly established as a part of the American symphonic canon. "The Symphony has become an American monument," declared Leonard Bernstein, "like the Washington monument or the Lincoln Memorial." ☺

Program notes by J. Mark Baker.

ALEXANDER SCRIBIN

Born 6 January 1872; Moscow, Russia

Died 27 April 1915; Moscow, Russia

Poem of Ecstasy

Composed: 1905-08

First performance: 10 December 1908; New York, New York

The Russian composer Alexander Scriabin studied at the Moscow Conservatory, where Sergei Rachmaninoff was a fellow classmate. Like his better-known colleague, he was a concert pianist. Unlike Rachmaninoff, however, he was diminutive in stature: his smallish hands could barely stretch an octave on the keyboard.

His was an interesting personality. Having been raised by his aunt, his grandmother, and his great aunt – all of whom waited on him hand and foot – Scriabin was effete in his mannerisms. By all reports, he was conceited, egomaniacal, and possessed a Messiah complex. He dabbled in Nietzschean superman philosophy, but later renounced it for Madame Blavatsky's theosophy. He filled notebooks with rambling philosophical musings and with a lengthy poem called *Poema extaza*, which provided the inspiration for his Piano Sonata No. 5 (1907) and for the work on today's program.

Of Scriabin's 74 published works, all but seven are for solo piano. He was always something of a miniaturist, favoring Chopin-like preludes and mazurkas, but he also composed ten sonatas, the last six of which are set in a single movement. Like his Polish-born model, Scriabin's harmonic language was innovative, extending the boundaries of dissonance and key into new, unexplored realms – through melodic clashes, unresolved added-tone chords, modulations to remote keys, and excursions into modality or extreme chromaticism. His later works eschewed key signatures altogether, employing accidentals throughout.

Though Scriabin sometimes referred to *Poem of Ecstasy* as his fourth symphony, it – like the last six piano sonatas – was conceived as a single movement. The piece shows the influence of sonata form, but nevertheless relies more on its highly chromatic, Wagner-influenced harmonies and on its dense orchestral textures than on a traditional thematic structure. It calls for a huge orchestra and displays his great skill, often overlooked, as an orchestrator. In it, writes musicologist Hugh MacDonald, "he brought to life the fluttering, volatile figures that permeate his piano textures, as well as catching the sensuous flavor of lush, complex harmony."

Poem of Ecstasy had its premiere in New York City in 1908. (Two years earlier, Scriabin had appeared there in a series of piano recitals.) For the first Russian performance, in 1909, the composer approved the following note for the program book:

Poem of Ecstasy is the Joy of Liberated Action. The Cosmos, i.e., Spirit, is Eternal Creation without External Motivation, a Divine Play of Worlds. The Creative Spirit, i.e., the Universe at Play, is not conscious of the Absoluteness of its creativeness, having subordinated itself to a Finality and made creativity a means toward an end. The stronger the pulse beat of life and the more rapid the precipitation of rhythms, the more clearly the awareness comes to the Spirit that it is consubstantial with creativity itself. When the Spirit has attained the supreme culmination of its activity and has been torn away from the embraces of teleology and relativity, when it has exhausted completely its substance and its liberated active energy, the Time of Ecstasy shall arrive. ☺

Program notes by J. Mark Baker.