

Notes on the Program by DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

Jeux d'enfants ("Children's Games"), Georges Bizet

Petite Suite for Orchestra (1838-1875)

Composed in 1871.

Premiered on March 2, 1873 in Paris, conducted by Édouard Colonne.

Little is known about the inspiration or creation of Bizet's *Jeux d'enfants*. The published score bears a dedication to "Mesdemoiselles Marguerite de Beaulieu et Fanny Gouin," daughters of his wife's cousin (with whom she lived before marrying Georges) and a close friend of the family, and the music may well have been created for their entertainment or participation. From the original twelve numbers of the piano collection, Bizet selected five to set for orchestra as a "Petite Suite." The opening movement is a nursery march titled *Trumpet and Drum*, the featured instruments in the piece. The *Berceuse* ("The Doll") is a gently rocking cradle song. Rounding out this delightful collection of *morceaux* is a quicksilver *Impromptu* depicting a whirling top, a sweetly sentimental *Duo* evoking two youngsters playing house ("Little Husband, Little Wife"), and a sparkling *Galop* ("The Ball").

Concert Champêtre Francis Poulenc

for Harpsichord and Orchestra (1899-1963)

Composed in 1927-1928.

Premiered on May 3, 1929 at the Salle Pleyel in Paris, conducted by Pierre Monteux with Wanda Landowska as soloist.

In the 1910s, one of the 20th-century's most remarkable and influential performers started concertizing in France and throughout Europe. Dissatisfied with the manner in which the keyboard works of Bach and other Baroque composers were ubiquitously performed on the modern piano — the quintessential instrument of the Romantic composers, but a sound source unknown to Baroque musicians — she undertook a crusade to revive that most endemic timbre of 18th-century music: the harpsichord. Her name was Wanda Landowska, and she was a pioneer in the stylistically correct modern performance of early music. Not content with simply reviving old music, she also commissioned and inspired from several of contemporary composers some of their finest work. Among the first to write music for her was the Spaniard Manuel de Falla, who produced the sparkling musical entertainment *Master Peter's Puppet Show* for harpsichord, chamber orchestra and singers between 1919 and 1922. (Falla completed his starkly beautiful Harpsichord Concerto four years later.) The *Puppet Show* was commissioned by the Princess Edmond de Polignac, an American by birth and the inheritor of the Singer Sewing Machine Company fortune. The premiere of Falla's new piece was set for the Princess's Parisian palace on June 25, 1923. Francis Poulenc, then in his mid-20s, came to the rehearsals to lend a hand with the puppets, which were being operated by his piano teacher, Ricardo Viñes. Viñes introduced his student to Mme. Landowska, and a warm friendship, enriched with high professional regard, sprang up between them almost immediately. From those early meetings came her commission for a harpsichord concerto from the young composer.

In explaining the title of the *Concert Champêtre*, Poulenc wrote, "For a boy who, up to the age of eighteen, had known no other countryside than the Bois de Vincennes and the hillsides of Champigny, 'Champêtre' signified suburbia. Since Landowska was living at Saint-Leu, not far from Ermenonville, it was in a very 18th-century country atmosphere that I located the work. This Concerto is 'rural' as understood by Diderot and Rousseau. The countryside of the *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*.... This explains the refined character of certain melodic patterns. For me, the complete townsman, the bugles of the fort of Vincennes, heard from the neighboring wood, were as poetic as hunting horns heard in a vast forest had been for Weber."

As befits its "rustic" appellation, Poulenc makes no attempt at involved structures and extensive thematic manipulation in the *Concert Champêtre*. The work is, rather, simple and clear in form, built of sections and episodes that complement and contrast to produce a satisfying whole. The opening movement contains five such sections, prefaced by a somewhat-too-austere introduction that serves more as a foil to the merry chase of the main theme than as a grand preparatory

statement. The second movement is in the swaying rhythm of a *Sicilienne*. The bittersweet opening melody is succeeded by a section based on a French Christmas carol, here sung by the double reed instruments and the violins above the accompanimental arpeggios of the harpsichord. The movement closes with a brief solo cadenza built on snapping rhythmic figures and the return of the opening theme in altered form. The finale begins with a spirited melody that resembles Handel's famous *Harmonious Blacksmith* too closely to have been pure coincidence. The movement develops into a frisky romp featuring scintillating dialogue between the harpsichord and the orchestra, with much of its last half recalling themes from the first movement in jolly, rousing transformations.

Symphony No. 7 in A major, Op. 92.....Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Composed in 1811-1812.

Premiered on December 8, 1813 in Vienna, led by the composer.

The Seventh Symphony is a magnificent creation in which Beethoven displayed several technical innovations that were to have a profound influence on the music of the 19th century: he expanded the scope of symphonic structure through the use of more distant tonal areas; he brought an unprecedented richness and range to the orchestral palette; and he gave a new awareness of rhythm as the vitalizing force in music. It is particularly the last of these characteristics that most immediately affects the listener, and to which commentators have consistently turned to explain the vibrant power of the work. Perhaps the most famous such observation about the Seventh Symphony is that of Richard Wagner, who called the work "the apotheosis of the Dance in its highest aspect ... the loftiest deed of bodily motion incorporated in an ideal world of tone."

A slow introduction, almost a movement in itself, opens the Symphony. This initial section employs two themes: the first, majestic and unadorned, is passed down through the winds while being punctuated by long, rising scales in the strings; the second is a graceful melody for oboe. The transition to the main part of the first movement is accomplished by the superbly controlled reiteration of a single pitch. This device both connects the introduction with the exposition and also establishes the dactylic rhythm that dominates the movement. The *Allegretto* is a series of variations on the heartbeat rhythm of its opening measures. The third movement, a study in contrasts of sonority and dynamics, is built on the formal model of the scherzo, but expanded to include a repetition of the horn-dominated Trio (Scherzo – Trio – Scherzo – Trio – Scherzo). In the finale, Beethoven not only produced music of virtually unmatched rhythmic energy ("a triumph of Bacchic fury," in the words of Sir Donald Tovey), but did it in such a manner as to exceed the climaxes of the earlier movements and make it the goal toward which they had all been aimed.

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