

**Notes on the Program by DR. RICHARD E. RODDA**

***Capriccio Italien*, Op. 45 ..... Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky  
(1840-1893)**

*Composed in 1880.*

*Premiered on December 18, 1880 in Moscow, conducted by Nikolai Rubinstein.*

For nearly a decade after his disastrous marriage in 1877, Tchaikovsky was filled with self-recrimination and doubts about his ability to compose anything more. He managed to finish the Violin Concerto during the spring of 1878, but then had to wait more than three years for someone to perform it, and did not undertake another large composition until the *Manfred Symphony* of 1885. His frustration was only increased by staying at home in Moscow, and he traveled frequently and far during those years for diversion. In November 1879, he set off for Italy. Though Tchaikovsky was never long parted from his residual melancholy, his spirits were temporarily brightened by some of the local tunes he heard in Rome, and he decided to write an orchestral piece that would incorporate several of them.

The *Capriccio Italien* opens with a bugle call sounded every evening from the barracks of the Royal Italian Cuirassiers, which was adjacent to the Hotel Costanzi where Tchaikovsky was staying. This is followed by a dolorous melody intoned above an insistent accompanimental motive and a swinging tune given first by the oboes in sweet parallel thirds and later by the full orchestra in tintinnabulous splendor. A brisk folk dance comes next, then a reprise of the dolorous melody and finally a whirling *tarantella*.

***An American in Paris* ..... George Gershwin  
(1898-1937)**

*Composed in 1928.*

*Premiered on December 13, 1928 in New York, conducted by Walter Damrosch.*

In 1928, George Gershwin was not only the toast of Broadway, but of all America, Britain and many spots in Europe, as well: he had produced a string of successful shows (*Rosalie* and *Funny Face* were both running on Broadway that spring), composed two of the most popular concert pieces in recent memory (*Rhapsody in Blue* and the Piano Concerto in F), and was leading a life that would have made the most glamorous socialite jealous. The pace-setting *Rhapsody in Blue* of 1924 had shown a way to bridge the worlds of jazz and serious music, a direction Gershwin followed further in the exuberant yet haunting Concerto in F the following year. He was eager to move further into the concert world, and during a side trip in March 1926 to Paris from London, where he was preparing the English premiere of *Lady Be Good*, he hit upon an idea, a “walking theme” he called it, that seemed to capture the impression of an American visitor to the city. He worried that “this melody is so complete in itself, I don’t know where to go next,” but the purchase of four Parisian taxi horns on the Avenue de la Grande Armée inspired a second theme for the piece. Late in 1927, a commission for a new orchestral composition from Walter Damrosch, music director of the New York Symphony and conductor of the sensational premiere of the Concerto in F, caused Gershwin to gather up his Parisian sketches, and by January 1928, he was at work on the score: *An American in Paris*.

From March to June, Gershwin was in Europe, renewing acquaintances in London, hobnobbing with Milhaud, Prokofiev, Poulenc, Ibert, Ravel and Boulanger in Paris (Ravel turned down Gershwin’s request for some composition lessons, telling him that anybody making as much money as he did hardly needed instruction), meeting Berg, Lehár and Kálmán in Vienna, and working on *An American in Paris* as time allowed. He returned to New York in late June to discover that the New York Symphony had announced the premiere for the upcoming season. The two-piano sketch was finished by August 1st, and the orchestration completed only a month before the premiere, on December 13, 1928. *An American in Paris*, though met with a mixed critical reception, proved a great success with the public, and it quickly became clear that Gershwin had scored yet another hit.

***The Fountains of Rome* ..... Ottorino Respighi**

**(1879-1936)**

*Composed in 1916.*

*Premiered on March 11, 1917, conducted by Antonio Guarnieri.*

*The Fountains of Rome* is the earliest of the Roman trilogy of symphonic poems by which Respighi is primarily represented in the world's concert halls. (*The Pines of Rome* followed in 1924, *Roman Festivals* in 1929.) Respighi told his wife that he thought it strange no one had ever depicted the famous Roman fountains in music, that no one had ever made them sing, "for they are the very voice of the city," he said. This sparkling work paints colorful pictures of four of these famous landmarks as seen through the dawn-to-dusk cycle of a single day. Respighi prefaced the orchestral score of *The Fountains of Rome* with the following description of the music: "The first part of the poem, inspired by the fountain of Valle Giulia, depicts a pastoral landscape at dawn. The second part, *The Triton Fountain*, is like a joyous call, summoning troops of naiads and tritons. Next there appears a solemn theme borne on the undulations of the orchestra. This is the *Trevi Fountain at Noon*. The fourth part, *The Villa Medici Fountain*, is announced by a sad theme which rises above a subdued warbling. It is the nostalgic hour of sunset. The air is full of the sound of tolling bells, birds twittering, leaves rustling. Then all dies peacefully into the silence of the night."

***Cockaigne (In London Town)*, ..... Edward Elgar**

**Concert Overture, Op. 40**

**(1857-1934)**

*Composed in 1900-1901.*

*Premiered on June 20, 1901 in London, conducted by the composer.*

"Cockaigne" (or, often, "Cockayne") is the imaginary land of Medieval lore where life is an idler's paradise: the rivers run with wine, the houses are built from sugar cakes, roast geese wander about waiting to be made a meal, buttered larks fall from the sky, shopkeepers pass out their goods for free. The word apparently originated in the Latin *coquere* — "to cook" — and survives in the German term for "cake" — *Kuchen*; thus, "Cockaigne," or "the land of cakes." (Despite its similarity, the name of the addictive drug, which derives from the coca plant, is unrelated in origin.) Though the word "Cockney" apparently came from an altogether different source (the Middle English *cokeney*, or "foolish person"), Cockaigne became associated with the residents of London's East End (i.e., those born and raised, according to Cockney tradition, within the sound of the Bow Church bells), and, by extension, with the whole city of London. Though Elgar did not offer any specific program for his *Cockaigne Overture*, he told Joseph Bennett, who was preparing a program note for the Overture's premiere, "It calls up to my mind all the good humour, jollity and something deeper in the way of English good fellowship (as it were) abiding still in our capital."

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