

Notes on the Program by DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

**Overture, *The Roman Carnival*, Op. 9..... Hector Berlioz  
(1803-1869)**

*Composed in 1843.*

*Premiered on February 3, 1844 in Paris, conducted by the composer.*

The failure of Berlioz's opera *Benvenuto Cellini* at its premiere in September 1838 was nearly complete. Except for the original overture to the opera, everything else, Berlioz reported, "was hissed with admirable energy and unanimity." Five years later, he mined the opera for thematic material for a new overture that he could use either as an independent concert work or as the introduction to the second act of *Benvenuto*. With the flavor of the opera's setting and his own Italian travels as guides, he named it *Roman Carnival*. The two large formal sections of the *Roman Carnival Overture* are based on melodies from the opera. The first, presented by the solo English horn, borrows Benvenuto's aria *O Teresa, vous que j'aime* ("O Teresa, whom I adore"). The other theme is a bubbling *saltarello* reminiscent of the folk dances Berlioz heard in Rome.

***Symphonie Espagnole* ..... Edouard Lalo  
for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 21 (1823-1892)**

*Composed in 1873.*

*Premiered on February 7, 1875 in Paris, with Pablo de Sarasate as soloist.*

Edouard Lalo's early musical training was at the Conservatoire in his native Lille, before he transferred to the Paris Conservatoire to study composition and violin. He started composing in the 1840s, but, discouraged by the lack of performances and publications of his music, he abandoned his creative work for almost a decade to play viola in the Armingaud-Jacquard Quartet. His muse was rekindled in 1865 upon his marriage to the contralto Bernier de Maligny, who inspired him to produce his first opera, *Fiesque*. Lalo's eminent position in French music was recognized when the government awarded him the Legion of Honor in 1888, the same year his opera *Le Roi d'Ys* was premiered.

The *Symphonie Espagnole*, despite its name, is a true concerto in which the soloist is called upon to display significant feats of violinistic prowess, especially in quick shifts between the highest and lowest registers. The first movement is cast in a carefully developed sonata form, with a main theme employing bold upward leaps and a legato second theme in a contrasting major tonality. The nimble, dance-like second movement, in rounded three-part form, calls for both lyricism and flexibility from the soloist. The next movement is characterized by the extensive use of the Spanish rhythmic device of alternating groups of two and three notes. In the fourth movement, a somber introduction leads to the melancholy theme for the soloist which the composer said "soars above the rigid form of the old symphony," the form here being a rounded three-part one. The finale, ushered in by the sound of distant bells, is a rondo based on the bubbling rhythm of the *saltarello*.

**Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 43..... Jean Sibelius  
(1865-1957)**

*Composed 1901-1902.*

*Premiered on March 8, 1902 in Helsinki, conducted by the composer.*

At the turn of the 20th century, Finland was experiencing a surge of nationalistic pride that called for independence and recognition after eight centuries of domination by Sweden and Russia. Jean Sibelius became imbued with the country's spirit, lore and language, and several of his early works — *En Saga*, *Kullervo*, *Karelia* and *Finlandia* — earned him a hero's reputation among his countrymen. Sibelius became an emblem of his homeland in 1900 when conductor Robert Kajanus and the Helsinki Philharmonic featured his music on a European tour whose purpose was less artistic

recognition than a bid for international sympathy for Finnish political autonomy. The young composer went along on the tour, which proved to be a success for the orchestra and its conductor, for Finland, and especially for Sibelius, whose works it brought before an international audience.

A year later Sibelius was again traveling. Through a financial subscription raised by his friend Axel Carpelan, he was able to spend the early months of 1901 in Italy away from the rigors of the Scandinavian winter. So inspired was he by the culture, history and beauty of the sunny south (as had been Goethe and Brahms) that he envisioned a work based on Dante's *Divine Comedy*. However, a second symphony to follow the First of 1899 was gestating, and the Dante work was eventually abandoned. Sibelius was well launched on the new Second Symphony by the time he left for home. He made two important stops before returning to Finland. The first was at Prague, where he met Dvořák and was impressed with the famous musician's humility and friendliness. The second stop was at the June Music Festival in Heidelberg, where the enthusiastic reception given to his compositions enhanced the budding European reputation that he had achieved during the Helsinki Philharmonic tour of the preceding year. Still flush with the success of his 1901 tour when he arrived home, he decided he was secure enough financially (thanks in large part to an annual stipend initiated in 1897 by the Finnish government) to leave his teaching job and devote himself full-time to composition. Though it was to be almost two decades before Finland became independent of Russia as a result of the First World War, Sibelius had come into his creative maturity by the time of the Second Symphony. So successful was the work's premiere on March 8, 1902 that it had to be repeated at three successive concerts in a short time to satisfy the clamor for further performances.

The Second Symphony opens with an introduction in which the strings present a chordal motive that courses through and unifies much of the first movement. A bright, folk-like strain for the woodwinds and a hymnal response from the horns constitute the opening theme. The second theme comprises a long-held note that intensifies to a quick rhythmic flourish. This theme and a complementary one of angular leaps figure prominently in the ensuing development. A stentorian brass chorale leads to the recapitulation, a compressed restatement of the earlier themes. The second movement, though closely related to sonatina form (sonata without development), is best heard as a series of dramatic paragraphs whose strengths lie not just in their individual qualities but also in their powerful juxtapositions. The opening statement is given by bassoons in hollow octaves. The upper strings and then full orchestra take over the solemn plaint, but soon inject a new, sharply rhythmic idea of their own that calls forth a halting climax from the brass choir. After a silence, the strings intone a mournful motive which soon engenders another climax. A soft timpani roll begins the series of themes again, but in expanded presentations with greater emotional impact. The third movement is a three-part form whose lyrical, unhurried central trio, built on a repeated note theme, provides strong contrast to the mercurial surrounding scherzo. The slow music of the trio returns as a bridge to the sonata-form closing movement, which has an uplifting spirituality that make it one of the last unadulterated flowerings of the great Romantic tradition.

©2010 Dr. Richard E. Rodda