**Pulcinella Suite (1920)**

Igor Stravinsky (1882 - 1971)

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, trumpet, trombone, and strings

Pulcinella was originally a 1920 addition to the Sergei Diaghilev-commissioned *Ballets Russes* oeuvre in Paris. Almost a decade after the successes of the Rite of Spring, Firebird, and Petrushka, Stravinsky was again asked by Diaghilev to compose for this ballet - yet this time with a twist. Instead of original Russian-based music, Diaghilev wanted Stravinsky to use the music of Pergolesi, an 18th century Italian composer, as the foundation after securing a score while in Italy. As an aside, it turns out the score was wrongfully attributed to Pergolesi, but was of the same time and place. Modern concert halls rarely see a performance of the full ballet. Ever the entrepreneur though, Stravinsky reworked the ballet into more cost effective performance opportunities - a suite for solo violin and piano (*Suite italienne)* and the *Pulcinella Suite.*

*Pulcinella Suite* is in eight movements - first performed by the Boston Symphony in 1922 (an unintended, but happy centennial-happenstance on the part of HSO). The music is notably different from Stravinsky’s previous entries into the *Ballets Russes*. Whereas Rite of Spring and Petrushka pushed the boundaries of, or in some cases completely broke, tonal harmony and rhythm, Pulcinella marks the start of Stravinsky’s *neo-classical* period - a period in which Stravinsky and other composers sought simplicity and clarity.

In this case, Stravinsky adapted and arranged the music to suit his needs, but largely kept musical ideas intact. He updated the works adding harmonies, textures, rhythms, and other ideas available to him that weren’t available to 18th century composers. What results is something akin to historic preservation, but with modern updates - think the Carl Sandburg Home but now with running water and wifi. It still retains its old charm, but with amenities to suit 21st century palettes.

1. Sinfonia Typical Baroque overture - lively and boisterous
2. Serenata Song or aria - a *siciliana* to be exact
3. Scherzino – Allegretto – Andantino Three-part theme and variations
4. Tarantella Dance originating from Taranto (Puglia)
5. Toccata Virtuosic style with voices imitating one another
6. Gavotta (con due variazioni) “Kissing” court dance, originally from France
7. Vivo Raucous stomping dance for trombone and bass
8. Minuetto – Finale Bowing dance - then a quick finale

**Clarinet Concerto in A Major (1791)**

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 - 1791)

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, strings, and solo clarinet

The clarinet virtuoso, Anton Stadler, for whom the Clarinet Concerto was written, has been described by scholars as Mozart’s “close friend.” That they were both Free Masons and through that relationship had a fruitful artistic partnership is undeniable; but “friend” may be a stretch. Mozart was notoriously bad with money - disinterested in defining his own worth, unable to manage funds when he had them, and seemingly not understanding how it worked. His friend, Stadler, on several occasions borrowed money from Mozart - most of which went unreimbursed.

Mozart seemed to not mind and was more taken by his abilities on the instrument.

Technically speaking, Mozart wrote this concerto for a new instrument in the late 18th century - the *basset* clarinet in A, an instrument Stadler (dubiously) claimed to have invented. The basset clarinet, in the clarinet family, has a lower register that the standard clarinet does not - a set of notes Mozart utilized greatly in the work. Soon after the premiere, however, clarinetists abridged the original to fit the standard clarinet, the version most often performed today. Since then, the basset clarinet in A became virtually extinct. However, within the last half century, some soloists have begun exploring recreated versions of the original instrument for which the piece is intended.

Written over a standard three movement structure (fast - slow - fast), the piece is still considered the pinnacle concerto for the instrument due to its lyrical and expressive qualities. Mozart’s passing only months after finishing it certainly adds to its stature as the final compositions showed the composer coming fully into his genius. We often describe Mozart as a great composer, but while he showed glimmers of prodigiousness far earlier than most, it wasn’t until his final few years that he was exercising the full extent of his talents. Afterall, he was only 35.

The first movement, graceful and exquisite, balances both lyricism and nostalgia. The orchestra and soloist exchange rhetoric that explores the wide range of the instrument, several interesting key areas, and warm textures from the orchestra. The second movement, one of Mozart’s best slow movements, places us in D Major; and it has an effect of time suspending - the aural equivalent of serenity. The finale is a virtuosic display of the instrument - a rondo in form (A-B-A-C-A-B-A).

**Symphony no. 1 in D Major, “Classical” (1917)**

Sergei Prokofiev (1891 - 1953)

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings

Generally speaking, the standard Russian symphonies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were romantic epics filled with lush slavic-centric melodies, sweeping gestures, and grandeur. As such, the training Prokofiev received at the St. Petersburg Conservatory reflected as much. Yet, throughout his time in school, he was known to push the boundaries of his teachers and fellow students. He was younger, more talented, and aware of both. Yet in spite of their eccentricities, his compositions were consistently well received, even though they were on the rebellious side.

Rebellion was on the minds of all Russians in the later part of the twentieth century’s second decade. It was nearly inevitable that some new form of government would replace the Tsarist rule and protests were popping up everywhere, Russia’s part in World War I was deeply unpopular, and there was a sense that Tsar Nicolas II’s time was coming to an end. In fact, while writing the symphony, the Tsar abdicated.

While it seems Prokofiev was generally amenable to a new form of government, he was not politically active. During the lead up to the Tsar’s abdication where daily life in Petrograd (now St. Petersburg) was filled with political action, Prokofiev settled onto a small farm in the countryside in order to focus on writing his first symphony. Additionally, the composer challenged himself to complete this work without the assistance of a piano.

What emerged was his First Symphony in D Major; and, as we should probably expect, it decidedly does not fit any mold. The piece’s nickname, given to it by the composer, was intended to characterize its intention - a reenvisioning of Haydn and Mozart symphonies in modern times. Yet, Prokofiev disliked the *neoclassical* label as his intent wasn’t to start a movement, but to experiment and reframe.

Truly, the similarities of the piece to those of Mozart and Haydn are limited to the smaller size of the orchestra, the abbreviated movements (compared to the highly developed and longer ones of the late Romantic period), and the overall wit that the music contains. The harmonies, textures, timbres, and incredible demands on the orchestra are unique to Prokofiev. As a result, it’s less of a revisiting of a previous era (*neoclassicism)*, but an imagining of what composers of previous generations would have composed with the tools and innovations that 150 years would have offered.