

# notes

May 18/19

SEASON FINALE: WEST SIDE STORY

By Dr. Richard E. Rodda

**30 SECOND NOTES:** The Des Moines Symphony's season-long Bernstein Centennial Tribute concludes with the brilliant Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story*, regarded by many as his creative masterpiece. Complementing *West Side Story* on this concert are two compositions Bernstein recorded with the New York Philharmonic in the 1960s: Rossini's Overture to *The Italian Girl in Algiers* and Respighi's *The Pines of Rome*. Though he never conducted Korngold's *Violin Concerto*, Bernstein did appear with the virtuoso for whom it was written, when he conducted the touring New York Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl on September 1, 1963 in the Brahms *Double Concerto* with violinist Jascha Heifetz and cellist Gregor Piatigorsky as soloists. 🎵



## GIOACHINO ROSSINI

Born February 29, 1792 in Pesaro, Italy;  
died November 13, 1868 in Paris.

### OVERTURE TO *L'ITALIANA IN ALGERI* (“*THE ITALIAN GIRL IN ALGIERS*”) (1813)

- First performed on May 22, 1813 in Venice, conducted by the composer.
- The first and only previous performance by the Des Moines Symphony was on November 24, 1968 with Robert Gutter conducting.  
(Duration: ca. 8 minutes)

*L'italiana in Algeri* and *Tancredi* of 1813 were Rossini's first full-length operas, his creativity having been previously confined to such one-act farces as *La Scala di Seta* and *Il Signor*

*Bruschino*. His fabled compositional celerity is exemplified by *L'italiana*: a report in the Venetian press after the opera's premiere held that he devoted all of 27 days to preparing the score. (The composer himself, however, told a German correspondent that he had polished it off in a mere eighteen.) The zany plot of the opera presents Isabella, an Italian lady of respectable lineage, who sails to Algeria to rescue her lover, a captive of the Bey of Algeria. Isabella bedevils the Bey with her machinations, including one to persuade him to join the Pappatacci, a secret society dedicated to absolute luxury and complete indifference to the activities of spouses or lovers. Rossini calculated that this silly story would prove irresistible to the opera lovers of Venice at its premiere at the Teatro San Benedetto. He was right. Amid the lavish praise the composer's biographer Stendhal had for *L'italiana*, he noted that “never has a public enjoyed a spectacle more harmonious with its

character, and, of all the operas that ever existed, this is the one destined to please the Venetians most.”

The *Overture* reflects the opera’s vivacity and high spirits. It begins with a slow introduction incorporating a languid melody sung by the solo oboe above a background of pizzicato strings. The main body of the *Overture* commences with a lively tune strutted out by the woodwinds and punctuated by chords from the full orchestra. The oboe gives the lyrical second theme before one of Rossini’s characteristic crescendi is unleashed to close the exposition. Rather than working up any more serious feelings in a development section, the music plunges directly into the recapitulation of the opening themes, using the crescendo to build to the brilliant closing pages.

**The score calls for flute, pairs of oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns and trumpets, trombone, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle and the usual strings consisting of first violins, second violins, violas, violoncellos and double basses.**



## **ERICH WOLFGANG KORNGOLD**

**Born May 29, 1897 in Brunn, Austria (now Brno, Czech Republic); died on November 29, 1957 in Hollywood, California.**

### **VIOLIN CONCERTO IN D MAJOR, OP. 35 (1947)**

- First performed on February 15, 1947 in St. Louis, conducted by Vladimir Golschmann with Jascha Heifetz as soloist.
- The first and only performance by the Des Moines Symphony was on March 27 & 28,

2004 with Joseph Giunta conducting and Corey Cerovsek as soloist.

*(Duration: ca. 23 minutes)*

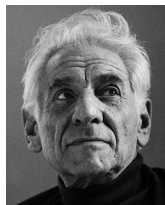
Erich Wolfgang Korngold (his middle name honored Mozart) was the younger son of Julius Korngold, one of Vienna’s most influential music critics at the turn of the 20th century. By age five, Erich was playing piano duets with his father; two years later he began composing, and at nine, he produced a cantata (*Gold*) that convinced his father to enroll him at the Vienna Conservatory. When Gustav Mahler heard Erich play his own cantata the following year, he proclaimed the boy “a genius” and arranged for him to take lessons with Alexander Zemlinsky. Korngold made remarkable progress under Zemlinsky — his *Piano Sonata No. 1* was published in 1908, when he had ripened to the age of eleven. The following year he wrote a ballet, *Der Schneemann* (“*The Snowman*”), which was staged at the Vienna Royal Opera at the command of Emperor Franz Josef. In 1911, the budding composer gave a concert of his works in Berlin, in which he also appeared as piano soloist. Korngold was an international celebrity at thirteen.

In 1915 and 1916, Korngold wrote the first two of his five operas: *Der Ring des Polykrates*, a comedy, and *Violanta*, a tragedy. Following a two-year stint in the Austrian army playing piano for the troops during World War I, Korngold turned again to opera, producing his dramatic masterpiece, *Die Tote Stadt* (“*The Dead City*”), which was premiered simultaneously in Hamburg (where he served as conductor for three years after the World War I) and Cologne on December 4, 1920; *Die Tote Stadt* was the first German opera performed at the Met following the war. After Korngold returned to Vienna in 1920, he was appointed professor of opera and composition at the Staatsakademie.

In 1934, the Austrian director Max Reinhardt was conscripted by Warner Brothers in Hollywood to film a version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He chose to use Mendelssohn's incidental music as background, and took Korngold along to arrange the score. Korngold, who, as a Jew, felt increasingly uneasy in Austria, accepted other offers in Hollywood, and, when the Nazi Anschluss in 1938 prevented him from returning home, he settled permanently in California. (He became a United States citizen in 1943.) For the next seven years, he devoted his talents to creating a body of film music unsurpassed by that of any other composer in the genre, and won two Academy Awards (for *Anthony Adverse* and *The Adventures of Robin Hood*). His father's death in 1945, however, caused him to re-evaluate his career, and he returned to writing concert music with concertos for violin and cello, and a large symphony. Korngold died on November 29, 1957, and his remains were interred in the Hollywood Cemetery, within a few feet of those of Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., D.W. Griffith and Rudolf Valentino.

Korngold borrowed themes for his *Violin Concerto* from four of his best film scores. The haunting first theme of the opening movement is from the 1937 picture *Another Dawn*, a desert-outpost drama whose most memorable component is Korngold's music. To provide a contrasting element in this loosely woven sonata form, the composer used the gently yearning love theme from *Juarez*, the 1939 film biography of the Mexican statesman and hero. The *Romance* is initiated by a poignant melody from the Academy Award-winning score for *Anthony Adverse*, the 1936 film about an orphan who struggles to overcome the adversities of life in early-19th-century America. The finale is a sparkling rondo whose witty main theme is from *The Prince and the Pauper*, the 1937 screen recreation of Mark Twain's well-known story.

**The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, trombone, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, bells, xylophone, vibraphone, harp, celesta and the usual strings.**



## LEONARD BERNSTEIN

**Born August 25, 1918 in Lawrence, Massachusetts; died October 14, 1990 in New York City.**

### **SYMPHONIC DANCES FROM *WEST SIDE STORY* (1957, arr. 1961)**

- *West Side Story* was first performed on Broadway on September 26, 1957; *Symphonic Dances* first performed on February 13, 1961 in New York, conducted by Lukas Foss.
- First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on December 31, 1985 with Yuri Krasnapolsky conducting. Two subsequent performances occurred, most recently on May 12 & 13, 2012 with Joseph Giunta conducting.  
(Duration: ca. 21 minutes)

*West Side Story* was one of the first musicals to explore a serious subject with wide social implications. More than just the story of the tragic lives of ordinary people in a grubby section of New York, it was concerned with urban violence, juvenile delinquency, clan hatred and young love. The show was criticized as harshly realistic by some who advocated an entirely escapist function for the musical, depicting things that were not appropriately shown on the Broadway stage. Most, however, recognized that it expanded the scope of the musical through references both to classical literature (*Romeo &*

*Juliet*) and to the pressing problems of modern society. Brooks Atkinson, former drama critic of *The New York Times*, noted in his book *Broadway* that *West Side Story* was “a harsh ballad of the city, taut, nervous and flaring, the melodies choked apprehensively, the rhythms wild, swift and deadly.” Much of the show’s electric atmosphere was generated by its brilliant dance sequences, for which Jerome Robbins won the 1958 Tony Award for choreography. In 1961, Bernstein chose a sequence of dance music from *West Side Story* to assemble as a concert work, and Sid Ramin and Irwin Kostal executed the orchestration of these “*Symphonic Dances*” under the composer’s direction. Bernstein said that he called these excerpts “symphonic” not because they were arranged for full orchestra but because many of them grew, like a classical symphony, from a few basic themes transformed into a variety of moods to fit the play’s action and emotions. *West Side Story*, like a very few other musicals — *Show Boat*, *Oklahoma*, *Pal Joey*, *A Chorus Line*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Rent*, *Hamilton* — provides more than just an evening’s pleasant diversion. It is a work that gave an entirely new vision and direction to the American musical theater.

**The score calls for piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, two B-flat clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, alto saxophone, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, tenor drum, tom-toms, triangle, woodblock, tambourine, tam-tam, bells, xylophone, vibraphone, chimes, maracas, finger cymbals, cowbells, congas, bongos, timbales, guiro, police whistle, drum set, harp, piano, celesta and the usual strings.**



## OTTORINO RESPIGHI

**Born July 9, 1879 in  
Bologna;  
died April 18, 1936 in  
Rome.**

### **I PINI DI ROMA (“THE PINES OF ROME”) (1924)**

- First performed on December 14, 1924 in Rome, conducted by Bernardino Molinari.
- First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on May 3, 1959 with Frank Noyes conducting. Five subsequent performances occurred, most recently on October 25 & 26, 2014 with Joseph Giunta conducting.

*(Duration: ca. 20 minutes)*

Ottorino Respighi, born in 1879 into the family of a piano teacher in Bologna, was introduced to music by his father and progressed so rapidly that he began his professional training in violin, piano and composition at age thirteen at the city’s respected Liceo Musicale; his principal teacher was the school’s director, Giuseppe Martucci, then Italy’s leading composer of orchestral music. Respighi was granted a leave from the Liceo in 1900 to play as a violist with the orchestra of the St. Petersburg Opera, and he took advantage of his time in Russia to arrange what he called “a few, but for me very important” lessons with Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, whose brilliant orchestral technique would prove to be a lasting influence. Respighi returned to Bologna the following year to complete his degree and then went to Berlin to study violin and composition with Max Bruch. After spending another season in St. Petersburg, he settled in Bologna in 1903, earning his living as a free-lance violinist and receiving his earliest notice as a composer. He was back in Berlin in 1908, teaching piano at a private school there

and promoting his work so effectively that the renowned conductor Arthur Nikisch included his transcription of Monteverdi's *Lamento d'Arianna* on a Berlin Philharmonic concert. Respighi went home to Bologna in 1909 and four years later was appointed to the faculty of Rome's Santa Cecilia Academy. He found his first great success, and his musical voice, with the atmospheric tone poem *The Fountains of Rome* of 1916. He was appointed director of the Academy in 1923 but found the administrative duties too intrusive on his creative work and resigned from the position three years later, though he did continue teaching privately for several years. He toured internationally during the following years to conduct and occasionally appear as piano soloist in his works, but his demanding career took a toll on his health and a heart murmur was diagnosed in 1931. Respighi died of a heart attack in Rome on April 18, 1936; he was 56.

*The Pines of Rome* is the second work of Respighi's trilogy on Roman subjects. The first was *The Fountains of Rome* of 1916; the last, *Roman Festivals*, dates from 1928. These compositions depict various aspects of the city through Respighi's musical impressions. He wrote that *The Pines of Rome* "uses nature as a point of departure, in order to recall memories and visions. The centuries-old trees that dominate so characteristically the Roman landscape become testimony for the principal events in Roman life. *I. The Pines of the Villa Borghese*. Children are at play in the pine grove

of the Villa Borghese, dancing the Italian equivalent of Ring around the Rosy; mimicking marching soldiers and battles; twittering and shrieking like swallows at evening; and they disappear. Suddenly the scene changes to ... *II. The Pines near a Catacomb*. We see the shadows of the pines, which overhang the entrance of a catacomb. From the depths rises a chant that re-echoes solemnly, like a hymn, and is then mysteriously silenced. *III. The Pines of the Janiculum*. There is a thrill in the air. The full moon reveals the profile of the pines of Gianicolo's Hill. A nightingale sings. *IV. The Pines of the Appian Way*. Misty dawn on the Appian Way. The tragic country is guarded by solitary pines. Indistinctly, incessantly, the rhythm of innumerable steps. To the poet's fantasy appears a vision of past glories; trumpets blare, and the army of the Consul advances brilliantly in the grandeur of a newly risen sun toward the Sacred Way, mounting in triumph the Capitoline Hill."

**The score calls for piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, four trombones (tuba usually replaces the fourth trombone), timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, tambourine, tam-tam, bells, ratchet, harp, piano, celesta, organ, six off-stage "bucinae" or ancient Roman war trumpets (played by four trumpets and two trombones), the usual strings and a recording of a nightingale.**