30 SECOND NOTES: Carl Maria von Weber’s piano piece *Invitation to the Dance* established the style and formal model for what became the most beloved dance of the 19th century: the waltz. The melodious G Minor *Violin Concerto* brought German composer, conductor and teacher Max Bruch his earliest and most enduring fame. The *Symphonic Dances*, Sergei Rachmaninoff’s last work for orchestra, embodies both the residual melancholy and the innate lyricism that characterized his finest works throughout his career.

**CARL MARIA VON WEBER**

Born December 18, 1786 in Eutin, Germany; died June 5, 1826 in London.

**INVITATION TO THE DANCE, J. 260, OP. 65 (1819)**
- Orchestrated by Felix Weingartner (1862-1943) in 1896.
- These concerts mark the first performances of this piece by the Des Moines Symphony.

*(Duration: ca. 9 minutes)*

The mania for the waltz first spread across Europe when the delegates to the Congress of Vienna returned home from that music-mad city in 1814. A motley of *Ländler*, German Dances and original waltz melodies was used to accompany the newly popular dance, and Schubert, Hummel and even Beethoven devised some delightful triple-meter confections that would not have been out of place in the ballroom. The first important step in elevating the waltz into a concert vehicle, however, was taken by that pioneer of German musical Romanticism, Carl Maria von Weber, with his infectious *Invitation to the Dance*, composed for piano during the summer of 1819, when he was easing his way back into creative work after a difficult period of ill health and bereavement. (The *Polacca Brillante* for piano that he wrote at the same time also proved to be historically significant as the model for later works by Chopin and others.) In its organization, the *Invitation to the Dance* is a compact, continuous suite of waltz melodies pleasingly balanced in tempo, character and key in which the opening strain returns, in the manner of a rondo, to buttress the form (Weber subtitled the piece *Rondo Brillante*); thoughtful passages at beginning and end serve as the expressive frame for the principal waltz section. In its mood, the composition evokes subtleties of emotion that had been little broached in earlier music in dance idioms. The style and structure of the *Invitation to the Dance* established the plan which served as the model for the wondrous
flood of waltzes produced by Josef Lanner, the Strauss clan and even Maurice Ravel (La Valse) during the following century. “Weber was the first founder of the dance-music expressive of deep feeling,” wrote the 19th-century scholar Wilhelm Riehl. “He showed how profoundly he was imbued with the spirit of the age. This composition has deep historical significance.”

Though the Invitation to the Dance may be heard simply as a brilliant evocation of the 19th-century’s most popular dance form, the composer provided the following scenario to elucidate the relationship of the slow introduction and postlude of the work to its lilting main section: “First approach of the dancer to whom the lady gives an evasive answer. His more pressing invitation; her acceptance of his request. Now they converse in greater detail; he begins; she answers him with heightened expression; she responds more warmly; now for the dance! His remarks concerning it; her answer; their coming together; their going forward; expectation of the beginning of the dance. The Dance. End: his thanks, her reply and their parting. Silence.”

Despite its historical importance, the Invitation to the Dance is little known in Weber’s original solo piano version. Adolf Henselt and Carl Tausig made keyboard arrangements to embolden its virtuoso pyrotechnics, and Otto Dresel transcribed it for two-pianos, eight hands for use at music parties. The incarnation in which the Invitation to the Dance is best known is the orchestration Hector Berlioz made for it in 1841 as ballet music for the first performance of Der Freischütz at the Paris Opéra, where a dance sequence was mandatory whether one was part of the original score or not. In 1896, Felix Weingartner (1863-1942), remembered primarily as one of the most distinguished conductors of his generation (he was music director of the Vienna Court Opera and Vienna Philharmonic and the first conductor to make commercial recordings of all nine Beethoven symphonies) but who also composed eight operas, seven symphonies, three tone poems, five string quartets and numerous other works, made a new orchestral arrangement of Weber’s Invitation to the Dance for which he gave his reasons in a preface to the score:

“When I was studying the score of Berlioz’s instrumentation of the Invitation to the Dance, it struck me that he wrote the piece for orchestra simply as it stands, without any alteration; that is, he achieved nothing more than a more sonorous interpretation than the pianoforte can compass. Such a complex and expressive apparatus is the orchestra, however, that it challenges us to bring Weber’s themes into a more intimate relation to one another, to let the separate motives ‘invite’ one another ‘to the dance’ until they all whirl together in an artistically graceful measure; that is, to treat Weber’s entirely homophonic piece polyphonically, while completely preserving the melody and working it up to a climax in a combination of all its motives.

“The bewitching thematic relation of the first and second themes (in contrapuntal combination) forced itself upon my notice. By retaining and logically further developing this and other combinations, the broadening-out at the close for the sake of presenting all the themes simultaneously, the filling-out of the pause before the postlude, and the slight harmonic changes are completely justified. The little flute cadenza before the Allegro is my addition. Liszt always played a cadenza at this place, as he himself told me.”

The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, E-flat clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones,
tuba, timpani, harp and the usual strings consisting of first violins, second violins, violas, violoncellos and double basses.

MAX BRUCH
Born January 6, 1838 in Cologne;
died October 20, 1920 in Friedenau, near Berlin.

VIOLIN CONCERTO NO. 1 IN G MINOR, OP. 26 (1866)
• First performed on April 24, 1866 in Coblenz, with Otto von Königslöw as soloist and the composer conducting.
• First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on January 25, 1942 with Frank Noyes conducting and Amy Neill as soloist. Nine subsequent performances occurred, most recently on October 27 & 28, 2012 with Joseph Giunta conducting and Benny Kim as soloist. (Duration: ca. 23 minutes)

Max Bruch, widely known and respected in his day as a composer, conductor and teacher, received his earliest music instruction from his mother, a noted singer and pianist. He began composing at eleven, and by fourteen had produced a symphony and a string quartet, the latter garnering a prize that allowed him to study with Reinecke and Hiller in Cologne. Bruch held various posts as a choral and orchestral conductor in Cologne, Coblenz, Sondershausen, Berlin, Liverpool and Breslau, and in 1883, he visited America to conduct concerts of his own compositions. From 1890 to 1910, he taught composition at the Berlin Academy and received numerous awards for his work, including an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University.

Though Bruch is known mainly for three famous compositions for string soloist and orchestra (the G Minor Concerto and Scottish Fantasy for violin, and Kol Nidrei for cello), he also composed two other violin concertos, three symphonies, a concerto for two pianos, various chamber pieces, songs, three operas and much choral music.

The G Minor Violin Concerto is a work of lyrical beauty and emotional sincerity. The first movement, which Bruch called a “Prelude,” is in the nature of an extended introduction leading without pause into the slow movement. The Concerto opens with a dialogue between soloist and orchestra followed by a wide-ranging subject played by violin over a pizzicato line in the basses. A contrasting theme reaches into the instrument’s highest register. A stormy section for orchestra recalls the opening dialogue, which softens to usher in the lovely Adagio. This slow movement contains three important themes, all languorous and sweet, which are shared by soloist and orchestra. The music builds to a passionate climax before subsiding to a tranquil close. The finale begins with eighteen modulatory bars containing hints of the upcoming theme before the soloist proclaims the vibrant melody itself. A broad theme, played first by the orchestra before being taken over by the soloist, serves as the second theme. A brief development, based on the dance-like first subject, leads to the recapitulation. The coda recalls again the first theme to bring the work to a rousing close.

The score calls for flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons in pairs, four horns, two trumpets, timpani and the usual strings.
SERGEI RACHMANINOFF
Born April 1, 1873 in Oneg (near Novgorod), Russia; died March 28, 1943 in Beverly Hills, California.

SYMPHONIC DANCES, OP. 45 (1941)
• First performed on January 4, 1941 in Philadelphia, conducted by Eugene Ormandy.
• First performed by the Des Moines Symphony March 8 & 9, 1997 with Joseph Giunta conducting; subsequent performances occurred on November 10 & 11, 2007 with Joseph Giunta conducting.
(Duration: ca. 34 minutes)

World War I, of course, was a trial for Rachmaninoff and his countrymen, but his most severe personal adversity came when the 1917 Revolution smashed the aristocratic society of Russia — the only world he had ever known. He was forced to flee his beloved country, leaving behind family and financial security. He pined for his homeland the rest of his life, and did his best to keep the old language, food, customs and holidays alive in his own household. “But it was at best synthetic,” wrote musicologist David Ewen. “Away from Russia, which he could never hope to see again, he always felt lonely and sad, a stranger even in lands that were ready to be hospitable to him. His homesickness assumed the character of a disease as the years passed, and one symptom of that disease was an unshakable melancholy.” By 1940, when he composed the Symphonic Dances, he was filled with worry over his daughter Tatiana, who was trapped in France by the German invasion (he never saw her again), and had been weakened by a minor operation in May. Still, he felt the need to compose for the first time since the Third Symphony of 1936. The three Symphonic Dances were written quickly at his summer retreat on Long Island Sound, an idyllic setting for creative work, where he had a studio by the water in which to work in seclusion, lovely gardens for walking, and easy access to a ride in his new cabin cruiser, one of his favorite amusements. Still, it was the man and not the setting that was expressed in this music. “I try to make music speak directly and simply that which is in my heart at the time I am composing,” he once told an interviewer. “If there is love there, or bitterness, or sadness, or religion, these moods become part of my music, and it becomes either beautiful or bitter or sad or religious.”

It is nostalgic sadness that permeates the works of Rachmaninoff’s later years. Like a grim marker, the ancient chant Dies Irae (“Day of Wrath”) from the Roman Catholic Requiem Mass for the Dead courses through the Paganini Rhapsody (1934), the Second (1908) and Third (1936) Symphonies and the Symphonic Dances (1941). The Symphonic Dances were his last important creation, coming less than three years before his death from cancer at age 70. There is nothing morbid about them, however. They breathe a spirit of dark determination against a world of trial, a hard-fought musical affirmation of the underlying resiliency of life. Received with little enthusiasm when they were new, these Dances have come to be regarded as among the finest of Rachmaninoff’s works.

The first of the Symphonic Dances, in a large three-part form (A–B–A), is spun from a tiny three-note descending motive heard at the beginning that serves as the germ for much of the opening section’s thematic material. The middle portion is given over to a folk-like melody initiated by the alto saxophone. The return of the opening section, with its distinctive falling motive, rounds out the first movement. The waltz of the second movement is more rugged and
deeply expressive than the Viennese variety, and possesses the quality of inconsolable pathos that gives so much of Rachmaninoff’s music its sharply defined personality. The finale begins with a sighing introduction for the winds, which leads into a section in quicker tempo whose vital rhythms may have been influenced by the syncopations of American jazz. Soon after this faster section begins, the chimes play a pattern reminiscent of the opening phrase of the Dies Irae. The sighing measures recur and are considerably extended, acquiring new thematic material but remaining unaltered in mood. When the fast, jazz-inspired music returns, its thematic relationship with the Dies Irae is strengthened. The movement accumulates an almost visceral rhythmic energy as it progresses, virtually exploding into the last pages, a coda based on an ancient Russian Orthodox chant (which he had earlier used in his All-Night Vigil Service of 1915) whose entry Rachmaninoff noted by inscribing “Alliluya” in the score. Was a specific message intended here? As the Alliluya succeeds the Dies Irae, did the composer mean to show that the Church conquers death? Optimism, sadness? Rachmaninoff was silent on the matter, except to say, “A composer always has his own ideas of his works, but I do not believe he ever should reveal them. Each listener should find his own meaning in the music.”

The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, alto saxophone, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, snare drum, triangle, tambourine, tam-tam, glockenspiel, xylophone, chimes, harp, piano and the usual strings.