

Spanish- and French-Inspired Showpieces

ONE-MINUTE NOTES

Rimsky-Korsakov: *Capriccio espagnol*

During his service in the Russian navy, Rimsky-Korsakov visited one Spanish port. Enchanted with this taste of Iberian culture, he wrote *Capriccio espagnol* as an orchestral showpiece, replete with Spanish touches.

Qigang Chen: *Le joie de la souffrance* for Violin and Orchestra

Qigang Chen's luscious violin concerto, *The Joy of Suffering*, belies its title with swaths of romantic themes and delicate orchestration. Cast in one extended movement, an ancient Chinese melody figures prominently as the concerto builds gradually to a powerful climax. A peaceful postlude brings us gently back to earth.

Saint-Saëns: Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso

Saint-Saëns wrote this showpiece for the brilliant Spanish violinist Pablo de Sarasate. His musical style salutes Sarasate's heritage and virtuosity; sultry gestures in the first section lead to dazzling fireworks in the rondo.

Falla: Suite No. 2 from *The Three-Cornered Hat*

Falla composed *The Three-Cornered Hat* as a ballet for Diaghilev's famed Ballets Russes. This suite captures the sultry essence of Spain's landscape and folk culture. Lively, seductive Spanish dances occur throughout the score.

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV: *Capriccio espagnol*, Op. 34

NIKOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

Born: March 18, 1844, in Tikhvin, near Novgorod, Russia

Died: June 21, 1908, in Liubensk, near St. Petersburg, Russia

Composed: Summer 1887

World Premiere: October 31, 1887, in St. Petersburg. The composer conducted.

NJSO Premiere: 1937–38 season. Rene Pollain conducted.

Duration: 15 minutes

Rimsky-Korsakov turned his attention to the *Capriccio espagnol* while orchestrating his friend Alexander Borodin's opera *Prince Igor* (which includes the famous "Polovtsian Dances"). During his early years in the Russian navy, Rimsky had sailed the Mediterranean. Although his ship only dropped anchor in one Spanish port, he wished to capture his impressions of the country, in part to capitalize on the Russian vogue for all things Spanish. His first thought was a violin fantasy on Spanish themes. Instead, the piece developed into an orchestral showpiece.

In his autobiography, the composer states:

The opinion formed by both critics and the public, that the *Capriccio* is a *magnificently orchestrated piece*, is wrong. The *Capriccio* is a brilliant *composition for the orchestra*. The change of timbres, the felicitous choice of melodic designs and figuration patterns, exactly suiting each kind of instrument, brief virtuoso cadenzas for instruments solo, the rhythm of the percussion instruments and so on, constitute here the very *essence* of the composition and not its garb or orchestration. The Spanish themes, of dance character, furnished me with rich material for putting in use multiform orchestral effects.

Capriccio espagnol divides into five sections, unified by the recurring music of the opening Alborada. In the third section, for example, Rimsky-Korsakov repeats the music of the Alborada, changing the orchestration and adding a brilliant violin solo, a vestige of the violin fantasy from which the entire work originated.

The composer dedicated *Capriccio espagnol* to the orchestra of the Imperial Russian Opera. The orchestra apparently took to the piece immediately. Late in life, when discussing conductors and conducting, Rimsky-

Korsakov often referred to this work. As he saw it, having the orchestra favorably disposed toward a work was of primary importance, and he held that his own premiere of *Capriccio* went superlatively not because of him, but simply because the players liked the work. Audiences have shared the same opinion for more than 130 years.

Instrumentation: woodwinds in pairs plus piccolo and English horn, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, harp, timpani, castanets, triangle, tambourine, cymbals, bass drum, snare drum and strings.

QIGANG CHEN: *La joie de la souffrance (The Joy of Suffering)* for Violin and Orchestra (US Premiere and NJSO Co-Commission)

QIGANG CHEN

Born: August 28, 1951, in Shanghai, China

Currently residing in Paris

Composed: 2016–17

World Premiere: October 29, 2017, in Beijing. Maxim Vengerov was the soloist; Long Yu conducted the China Philharmonic Orchestra.

NJSO Premiere: These are the US and NJSO premiere performances.

Duration: 24 minutes

Like his contemporaries Tan Dun, Bright Sheng and Chen Yi, Qigang Chen came of age during the Cultural Revolution that China's Chairman Mao implemented in 1966. Because Qigang Chen's family were intellectuals, he was confined to a barracks and given an ideological reeducation. In 1977, he was finally able to resume study of music at Beijing Conservatory and, in the early 80s, secured permission to study abroad. He went to Paris in 1984, becoming Olivier Messiaen's last student.

His violin concerto, *La joie de la souffrance*, was an unusual international consortium commission by the Beijing Music Festival, Shanghai Isaac Stern International Violin Competition, Melbourne Symphony, New Jersey Symphony Orchestra and Orchestre Nationale du Capitole de Toulouse. The piece consists of one extended movement that the composer describes as waves of emotion. "It takes time for emotion to build," he told an interviewer in 2018. A solo cadenza midway through concludes with a cameo duet for clarinet and the soloist, prior to the orchestra's re-entry. The first 20 minutes build to a heart-pounding climax, which

subsides in the concerto's final moments.

Chen's musical material incorporates an old Chinese melody, "Yangguan Sandie," which is traditionally played on the guqin, a zither with seven open strings. That melody gives much of the concerto a pentatonic harmonic foundation; however, Chen's later education in France has also given him a superlative command of Western idioms. He handles the orchestra with delicacy and finesse, and the soloist's bowing techniques are fully explored. The Asian inflections are serene and magical; the livelier passages sometimes capricious, sometimes dramatic. Always, they engage the ear.

Instrumentation: two flutes, piccolo, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, E-flat clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, two tenor trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, glockenspiel, marimba, vibraphone, xylophone, two snare drums, bass drum, suspended cymbal, maracas, tambourine, harp, piano, strings and solo violin.

SAINT-SAËNS: Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso, Op. 28

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS

Born: October 9, 1835, in Paris, France

Died: December 16, 1921, in Algiers, Algeria

Composed: 1863

World Premiere: April 4, 1863, in Paris.

NJSO Premiere: 1959–60 season. Louis Gabowitz was the soloist; Matys Abas conducted.

Duration: 10 minutes

When Camille Saint-Saëns died in 1921, he was considered an outmoded conservative in Paris' trendy musical circles. French critics damned his works with faint praise, calling them "la mauvaise musique bien écrite"—bad music that was well-written. During Saint-Saëns' heyday, however, he enjoyed enormous popularity both as a virtuoso pianist and as a champion of pure instrumental music.

Spanish virtuoso Pablo de Sarasate (1844–1908) was Saint-Saëns' inspiration to compose his Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso. The Introduction opens with a sentimental melody, but Saint-Saëns doesn't waste much time before providing the soloist with an opportunity to dash off a few virtuosic teasers as a hint of what is

coming. Saint-Saëns makes a superb coloratura soprano of his violin soloist, yet he does so in a way that is unfailingly violinistic.

The rondo is a full-blown show-off vehicle. Saint-Saëns introduces two delicious, memorable themes before the fireworks commence. Rondo form, with its periodic restatement of the main theme, provides a convenient reminder that this composer was a master melodist. During the interludes separating the rondo statements, the violinist dazzles us with technical wizardry. We never lose sight of the principal theme. At the same time, Saint-Saëns seems to constantly introduce new ones, in a profligacy of melodic richness that recalls Mozart. A brief cadenza-like passage near the end heralds a spectacular coda in major mode.

Instrumentation: woodwinds, horns and trumpets in pairs; timpani; strings and solo violin.

FALLA: Suite No. 2 from *The Three-Cornered Hat*

MANUEL DE FALLA

Born: November 23, 1876, in Cádiz, Spain

Died: November 14, 1946, in Alta Gracia, Argentina

Composed: 1916–19

World Premiere: July 22, 1919, at the Alhambra Theatre, London

NJSO Premiere: 1988–89 season. Hugh Wolff conducted.

Duration: 12 minutes

Along with his older countrymen Isaac Albéniz and Enrique Granados, Manuel de Falla helped to restore Spanish music to a level it had not enjoyed since Renaissance times. Enormously gifted, he was drawn to music early. He decided on composition after developing a passion for the works of the Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg, vowing to achieve a comparable legacy for Spanish music.

In 1907, at the age of 31, he went to Paris, where he benefited by his association with a number of French composers, particularly Dukas, Debussy and Ravel. Falla's was an original voice, however, and he learned from them without imitating. On the contrary, both Debussy and Ravel were drawn to the sensuous harmonies and compelling rhythms of Falla's native Spain, revealing more of Spain in their French music than Falla did of France in his own.

Falla composed some 20 operas, only one of which, *La vida breve*, has achieved any kind of secondary niche in the standard repertoire. He is best known for his symphonic impressions for piano and orchestra, *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, and the two ballet scores—*Love the Magician* and *The Three-Cornered Hat*, from which this evening's suite is drawn.

The Three-Cornered Hat originated as a comic pantomime about flirtation, temptation, attempted seduction and mistaken identity. The Russian impresario Serge Diaghilev convinced Falla to develop Alarcon's folk tale into a ballet. The work is suffused with musical humor, relying heavily on folk dances of Murcia, Navarre and Falla's native Andalusia. The Second Suite consists of the three major numbers in the ballet's second scene: "The Neighbour's Dance (Seguidillas)," "The Miller's Dance (Farruca)" and "Final Dance (Jota)." Falla's vibrant score breathes the perfumes of Spain, with arresting melodies and foot-tapping (sometimes foot-stomping) rhythms.

Instrumentation: two flutes (second doubling piccolo), three oboes (third doubling English horn), two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, a large percussion battery (castanets, triangle, bass drum, snare drum, xylophone and cymbals), harp, piano, celeste and strings.