



Milwaukee Symphony Musical Journeys

WEEKLY STREAMING PROGRAMS
Episode 1 Notes

AARON COPLAND

Born 14 November 1900; Brooklyn, New York
Died 2 December 1990; New York, New York

Quiet City

Composed: 1939; revised 1940

First performance: 28 January 1941; New York, New York

In 1939, Aaron Copland was called upon to provide incidental music to Irwin Shaw's *Quiet City*—for his cash-strapped friends in the Group Theatre. The play's leftist political leanings—and the opportunity to work with talented, cutting-edge artists on socially relevant issues—drew Copland to the project. Though the production failed, the following year the composer fashioned portions of the score into a ten-minute orchestral piece. Decades later, in conversation with oral historian Vivian Perlis, the composer recalled:

Quiet City was billed as a “realistic fantasy,” a contradiction in terms that only meant the stylistic difference made for difficulties in production. The script was about a young trumpet player who imagined the night thoughts of many different people in a great city and played trumpet to express his emotions and to arouse the consciences of the other characters and of the audience. After reading the play, I composed music that I hoped would evoke the inner distress of the central character. [Group Theatre co-founder Harold] Clurman and Elia Kazan, the director, agreed that *Quiet City* needed a free and imaginative treatment. They and the cast... struggled valiantly to make the play convincing, but after two try-out performances in April [1939], *Quiet City* was dropped.

From its 1941 premiere, Copland's nighttime urban pastorate has needed no programmatic context, except perhaps its title, to make it one of his most popular scores. “Since it is mostly quiet, it fills a niche in concert programs,” the composer modestly remarked. But we know better: Along with Barber's *Adagio for Strings* and Ives's *The Unanswered Question*, it ranks as one of America's most contemplative musical meditations.

Recommended recording: Leonard Bernstein, New York Philharmonic
(Deutsche Grammophon) 

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN

Born 31 March 1732; Rohrau, Austria
Died 31 May 1809; Vienna, Austria

Sinfonia Concertante in B-flat major

Composed: 1792

Premiere: 9 March 1792; London, England

For nearly 30 years, beginning in 1761, Prince Nikolaus Esterházy was Haydn's patron and employer. The Esterházy family was among the richest and most influential of the Hungarian nobility, and Nikolaus's musical tastes and requirements shaped the traditions at the Esterházy court. Across the years, at various times and in various combinations, Haydn's duties—both as composer and music director—included instrumental music (symphonies, concerti, divertimenti, chamber music, etc.), church music, opera, and cantatas to commemorate special occasions.

Prince Nikolaus died on 28 September 1790. Prince Anton, his son and successor, did not share his father's love of music. He dismissed the orchestra, retaining only the *Feldmusik* (wind band for out-of-doors music). Haydn was kept on at full salary, as the titular Kapellmeister. Lacking obligations of any kind, he decided to move from Eszterháza to Vienna, where he intended to live a quiet life.

His plans quickly changed when J.P. Salomon, a German-born violinist turned London impresario, showed up on Haydn's doorstep unannounced. "I am Salomon from London and have come to fetch you. Tomorrow we shall reach an agreement." And so it went. By 15 December, Haydn and his new "manager" were on their way to England, where they arrived on New Year's Day 1791.

The master's so-called "London" symphonies (No. 93-104) were composed for Salomon's concert series, as was the *Sinfonia Concertante*. It's quite likely that Haydn was encouraged by the impresario to write such a piece, due to the popularity of a similar concerto by Ignace Pleyel. As with these MSO performances, the parts for solo violin (Salomon himself), oboe, cello, and bassoon were played by members of the orchestra, rather than guest artists. The primary idea is one of chamber music, and the spirit is one of sharing.

In the opening Allegro, the four solo instruments take the spotlight almost immediately. The orchestra takes a backseat as the soloists engage in a spirited conversation; the jovial cadenza is democratically distributed among them. The songful Andante, set in the dominant key (F major), affords each of the principals an opportunity to embellish the basic thematic material while their colleagues add filigree around them. Mock-serious, opera-inspired *recitativo* passages for the solo violin open the finale, then Haydn brings back the mirthful exchange among the solo performers. Another operatic outburst, a surprising harmonic detour, and an equally unexpected pause bring us up short before this delightful work hastens to its sparkling conclusion.

Recommended recording: Christopher Hogwood, Basel Chamber Orchestra (Arte Nova Classics) 

FRANZ SCHUBERT

Born 31 January 1797; Vienna, Austria

Died 19 November 1828; Vienna, Austria

Symphony No. 8 in B minor, D. 759 "Unfinished"

Composed: 1822

Premiere: 17 December 1865; Vienna, Austria

Franz Schubert is the only great Viennese composer native to the city. He produced peerless masterpieces in orchestral, piano, and chamber music as well as song. His pre-eminence in the latter genre is especially noteworthy; Schubert's melodies and expressive harmonies portrayed the text's true meaning in a way that music before had not known.

Schubert was only 25 when he composed the two movements of the Symphony in B minor. To this day, musicologists disagree as to why he failed to complete the symphony. Some have speculated that he stopped work in the middle of the scherzo in the fall of 1822 because he associated it with his initial outbreak of syphilis—or that he was distracted by the inspiration for his *Wanderer Fantasy* for solo piano, which occupied his time and energy immediately afterward. Others have theorized that Schubert may have sketched a finale that instead became the big B minor entr'acte for his incidental music to *Rosamunde*, but all evidence for this is circumstantial. Then again, says another, Schubert may have left the symphony incomplete because of the predominance of triple meter. The first movement is in 3/4, the second in 3/8, and the incomplete scherzo is also in 3/4. Rarely, if ever, does one find three consecutive movements in basically the same meter in symphonies, sonatas, or chamber works of the Viennese composers.

Many believe Schubert regarded the work as complete. "I am convinced," said conductor Nicolas Harnoncourt in a 2015 interview, "that Schubert found it impossible to continue after the second movement. Which is not to say he didn't try. There are sketches for a few bars of a scherzo. But after Schubert finished the first two movements, and wrote out a neat copy, there came a time where he thought this cannot be continued. The form is perfect; there is simply nothing else to say."

Nearly 120 years ago, the great Austrian conductor Felix Weingartner (1863-1942) stated the case for this view in his monograph *The Symphony Since Beethoven* (1898): "I feel it is fortunate that it remained unfinished. The first movement is of a tragic dimension such as was attained by no symphonist except Beethoven and by Schubert himself only in his songs. The second theme, played by the cellos, contains one of the noblest inspirations a musician was ever given to utter. That which moved us deeply as an emotional struggle in the first movement dies away transfigured in the second. This conclusion is so satisfying that a desire for additional movement can hardly arise."

Likewise, the fate of the manuscript has been plagued by theories based on flimsy facts. A few decades ago, the disclosure of documents from the Hüttenbrenner family archives shows that Schubert gave the manuscript of the Unfinished Symphony to Josef Hüttenbrenner in 1823, to pass on to his brother Anselm as a private gift. This may have been in payment for a debt or an obligation. In any case, Anselm had a perfect right to retain the score. In 1865, it was given to the conductor of the orchestra of the Vienna Musikverein and performed for the first time in December of that year, 37 years after Schubert's death.

Allegro moderato

The first movement, cast in sonata form, opens softly in the strings, followed by a theme shared by oboe and clarinet. Then the *Unfinished* brings us one of the most famous tunes in all of classical music, stated first by the cellos and then by the violins, to a gently syncopated accompaniment. No less remarkable than the tune itself is that it, too, is unfinished—broken off in extraordinary gestures of pathos and drama. It is also a rare moment of sweet lyricism in a movement otherwise dark and troubled.

Andante con moto

The second movement, set in the somewhat unexpected key of E major, is calmer in spirit but not without moments of drama. It alternates two contrasting themes in sonatina form. In this lovely movement, a few eloquent details stand out: the first theme's lyrical dialogue between low strings/brass/winds and high strings; the serene woodwind solos that soar over shifting chords; the plaintively still passage for violins, outlining a minor chord, which introduces the second theme. It is upon this inspired moment, though with strange keys and chromatic harmonies, that Schubert later builds his gently lingering coda.

Recommended Recording: George Szell, Cleveland Orchestra (Sony) 🎧

MAURICE RAVEL

Born 7 March 1875; Cibouire, France

Died 28 December 1937; Paris, France

***Daphnis et Chloé* Suite No. 2**

Composed: 1909-12

First performance: 8 June 1912; Paris, France (complete ballet)

30 April 1914; Paris, France (Suite No. 2)

Maurice Ravel penned the music for *Daphnis et Chloé* at the behest of the venerable impresario of the Ballet Russe, Sergei Diaghilev (1872-1929). Premiered in Paris in 1912, it's a compelling study in contrast to two other ballets written for Diaghilev about the same time—Stravinsky's *The Firebird* (1910) and his riot-inducing *The Rite of Spring* (1913).

Ravel called the Suite No. 2 (1914) his most important score. Indeed, the work of one of the greatest orchestrators of all time is on full display here, rife with “extremely subtle gradations of timbre and shading” (Robert P. Morgan). Here are just few things to listen for. In its unforgettable opening bars, the sun rises and bathes the music in warmth and light; a piccolo and three solo violins invoke awakening birds. Later, as Daphnis (portraying Pan) constructs a flute, we hear one of the most beautiful solos ever written for that instrument. In the “Danse générale” that concludes the work, Ravel ratchets up the excitement by setting the music in 5/4 meter, with the accent on beat two. For the complete ballet, Ravel uses a wordless chorus to stunning coloristic effect. This element is usually excluded in performances of Suite No. 2, but we are fortunate to hear it in this recording.

Choreographer Michel Fokine’s (1880-1942) shepherd-boy-meets-shepherd-girl story is set in ancient Greece. The score of Suite No. 2 includes a helpful synopsis, translated by Philip Hale as follows:

No sound but the murmur of rivulets fed by the dew that trickles from the rocks. Daphnis lies stretched before the grotto of the nymphs. Little by little the day dawns. The songs of birds are heard... Herdsmen enter... They find Daphnis and awaken him. In anguish he looks about for Chloé. She at last appears encircled by shepherdesses. The two rush into each other’s arms. Daphnis observes Chloé’s crown. His dream was a prophetic vision; the intervention of Pan is manifest. The old shepherd Lammon explains that Pan saved Chloé, in remembrance of the nymph Syrinx, whom the god loved.

Daphnis and Chloé mime the story of Pan and Syrinx, Chloe impersonates the young nymph wandering over the meadow. Daphnis, as Pan, appears and declares his love for her. The nymph pushes him away; the god becomes more insistent. She disappears among the reeds. In desperation he plucks some stalks, fashions a flue, and on it plays a melancholy tune. Chloé comes out and by her dance imitates the accents of the flute.

The dance grows more and more animated. In mad whirlings, Chloé falls into the arms of Daphnis. Before the altar of the nymphs he swears his fidelity. Young girls enter; they are dressed as bacchantes and shake their tambourines... a group of young men comes onstage. Joyous tumult.

Recommended recording: George Szell, Cleveland Orchestra (Columbia Odyssey) ↻

Program notes by J. Mark Baker.