Saturday, April 22, 2017
7:00 PM
North Shore Center for the Performing Arts in Skokie

Shall We Dance?
Robert G. Hasty, Guest Conductor

Emperor Waltz, Opus 437 ..................................................................................Johann Strauss Jr.
(1825 - 1899)

Invitation to the Dance ..........................................................Carl Maria von Weber/ Arr. Hector Berlioz
(1786-1826)

Capriccio espagnol ..................................................................................Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov
Alborada
Variazioni
Alborada
Scena e canto Gitano
Fandango Asturias
Alborada

INTERMISSION

Ancient Airs and Dances Suite No. 1 ..............................................................Ottorino Respighi
Balletto “Il Conte Orlando”
Gagliarda
Villanella
Passo mezzo e mascherada

Four Dance Episodes from Rodeo ............................................................... Aaron Copland
Buckaroo Holiday
Corral Nocturne
Saturday Night Waltz
Hoe-Down

This concert is supported in part by
The Village of Skokie, Niles Township, and the Illinois Arts Council
Johann Strauss Jr. – The Emperor Waltz

Known as the Waltz King, Johann Strauss Jr. was the most prominent member of a musical family that had dominated Vienna's popular culture for decades. The eldest son and namesake of Johann Strauss Sr., he first came to prominence as the director of his own dance orchestra that performed nightly in one of the city's numerous salons or dance halls. His popularity quickly spread and by 1854 Strauss and his celebrated orchestra made their first European tour. In 1872 he visited the United States where a reporter commented: "Johann Strauss, the Waltz King, is evidently a good fellow. He talks only German but he smiles in all languages."

Strauss composed and performed a variety of dance music, and even ventured into the realm of operetta (Die Fledermaus being the most popular of his 20 creations), but audiences were most enraptured by his sparkling waltzes. Writing in 1852, a French journalist observed:

"In every house, on every piano in Vienna lie Strauss waltzes. He has written over 200, all are favorites, all are sung and trilled and played throughout Europe. The dancing Viennese carry him on their shoulders and shout 'Strauss forever!'" While many of these works were written strictly for dancing, Strauss, like Weber before him, cultivated the concert waltz, an extended form intended primarily for listening. With the addition of introductions, codas, and numerous contrasting sections, the concert waltz transformed the original dance from something quite simple into a substantial and respectable genre.

The Emperor Waltz (Kaiser-Walzer) was composed in 1889 to commemorate the visit by Austria's Emperor Franz Joseph to Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany. Reflective of this auspicious political event, the work begins with a march-like theme, giving it a regal, even pompous feel. Effortlessly, a cello solo announces the first waltz theme, which is then treated to a variety of moods and orchestrations. Several new themes are introduced before the main tune returns for the sonorous climax.

Carl Maria von Weber – Invitation to the Dance

Though little known today, Carl Maria von Weber was an important scholar, critic, conductor, and one of the first significant composers of the Romantic school. His music, particularly his operas, profoundly influenced a generation of younger composers, including Meyerbeer and Wagner. A brilliant pianist, Weber also left behind an impressive corpus of music for that instrument, including his most popular work, Invitation to the Dance.

The genesis for Invitation to the Dance may be traced to the waltz-mania that spread across Europe in the second half of the 19th century. Originally condemned as vulgar and sinful (due to the close proximity of the dancers to one another), by the 1800s the waltz had become wildly popular in fashionable salons across the continent. Capitalizing on this popularity, but also realizing that the simple dance form was ripe for expansion, Weber took the first important step in elevating the waltz into a concert vehicle with his 1819 publication of Invitation to the Dance. In its organization, the Invitation to the
Dance is a compact, continuous suite of waltz melodies in which the opening strain returns, in the manner of a rondo (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 family, 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, Weber provided the following scenario to elucidate the relationship of the slow introduction and postlude of the work to its lilting main central 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 significance, Invitation to the Dance is little known in Weber’s original version for piano. It is best known in an 1841 orchestration by Hector Berlioz and has been among Weber’s most popular creations ever since.

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov – Capriccio espagnol

Known primarily as a Russian nationalist composer, Rimsky-Korsakov was, nevertheless, fond of “ethnic” pieces, creating works with Central Asiatic, Italian, and Spanish castes. In fact, many contemporary artists demonstrated this same fascination with locales that were, to them, exotic, and the Mediterranean region was a favorite. Despite a rather limited knowledge of Spain – Rimsky-Korsakov spent three days there as a young naval cadet – he felt comfortable enough with its folk idioms to compose the Capriccio espagnol, an orchestral suite based on Spanish melodies. In 1886 he wrote, “I took it into my head to write a virtuoso piece for violin and orchestra, this time on Spanish themes. However, after making a sketch of it I gave up that idea and decided instead to compose an orchestral piece with virtuoso instrumentation. The Spanish themes, of a dance character, furnished me with rich material… [This piece] was to glitter with dazzling colors.” The result was dazzling, indeed: a brilliant orchestral showpiece calling for considerable virtuosity from each player and featuring several improvisatory-like solos. During rehearsals, the grateful musicians interrupted frequently to applaud the composer.
The *Capriccio*, composed in 1887, was given its premiere in St. Petersburg on October 31 of that year, with Rimsky himself conducting. The work is made up of five brief movements, beginning with “Alborada,” a festive dance from the province of Asturias that celebrates the rising of the sun. Its melody, which features the clarinet and a solo violin, becomes the primary unifying theme of the entire work, serving as the musical glue that holds the composition together.

The second movement, “Variazioni,” is a set of slow variations. The simple melody is repeated several times with varying instrumental combinations. We hear, in turn, a quartet of horns, strings, English horn and French horn in alternation, and finally, the full orchestra. A return of the “Alborada” – this time with slight changes in instrumentation – marks the beginning of the third movement.

The fourth movement “Scena e canto gitano” (Scene and Gypsy song), is a series of cadenzas for various solo instruments or small groups; the first for horns and trumpets, and then one each for violin, flute, clarinet, and harp. An impassioned and soaring Gypsy song follows. The song is interrupted by the assertive arrival of the “Fandango asturias,” another energetic dance from the Asturias region. Themes from the preceding sections are recalled along the way to a glittering finale which is capped by a return of the now-familiar Alborada.

At the work’s premier, the audience demanded a full encore immediately after the performance was completed. Tchaikovsky sent Rimsky-Korsakov the gift of a silver laurel wreath and wrote: “Your ‘Spanish Capriccio’ is a colossal masterpiece of instrumentation, and you may regard yourself as the greatest master of the present day.”

**Ottorino Respighi – Ancient Airs and Dances, Suite I**

Italian composer Ottorino Respighi was something of an anomaly among 20th century musicians; like Copland, he steered clear of the harsh modernism embraced by most of his contemporaries in favor of a more traditional Romantic style. He once wrote, “The Italian genius is for melody and clarity.” So strong were his inclinations that he, along with ten other Italian composers, signed a manifesto berating esoteric tendencies in modern composition, emphasizing, instead, a commitment to ‘human content’ in music. He was also an accomplished scholar and musicologist and, as such, was one of the first symphonic composers to have a strong interest in early music. He was actively involved in the preparation of modern editions of works by Monteverdi, Frescobaldi, Tartini and other 17th- and 18th-century masters, and was fascinated by music from the Renaissance and early Baroque. He turned to this repertoire several times; in the delightful *Gli Uccelli* (*The Birds*), and again in his three suites of *Ancient Airs and Dances*. Based on lute music of the 16th and 17th centuries, these elegant works are a beautiful marriage of Respighi’s scholarly pursuits with his compositional ideology. Here we have centuries-old pieces recast for a modern orchestra in Respighi’s uniquely hybrid style. Here we have evidence of a composer born too late; of a composer who reveled in the past and might well have been at home in an earlier time. Composed in 1917, the first suite of *Ancient Airs and Dances* comprises four short movements. The first, “Balletto detto ‘Il Conte Orlando,” is based on a 16th century composition by Simone Molinaro. The sprightly quick-time
dance begins quietly but grows in volume and weight. A contrasting middle section introduces a more somber theme in the minor mode, before the initial tune resurfaces. The second movement, “Gagliarda,” was originally composed by Vincenzo Galilei, father of the famous astronomer Galileo Galilei. Characterized by a unique rhythm pattern, the 16th century gagliarda was, at the time, considered a lewd dance by many because it was rather indulgent and showy; full of leaps, hops, and exaggerated movements. A middle section that is slightly subdued in tone, but still very measured tempers the rhythmic opening. A return to the opening section brings this dance to a rollicking close. “Villanella,” the longest of the four movements, is a slow and delicate air (song). The Renaissance villanelle was a rustic Italian song, typically utilizing simple peasant texts and providing a contrast to the more formal madrigal. This particular example, however, was originally a setting of the dying words of a character in Ariosto’s Orlando furioso. The sadness of this music is only briefly relieved by a slightly faster section in the middle. The original composer is unknown.

The final movement, “Passo mezzo e mascherada,” uses two anonymous tunes. The passo mezzo or passamezzo was an Italian folk dance for couples in which the gentleman sometimes carried out more vigorous steps than his partner, while the mascherada was a jovial dance often performed at Carnival or at masked balls. Here the two tunes interrupt one another until the mascherada ultimately triumphs, bringing the suite to a close with brilliant fanfare figures.
Aaron Copland – Four Dance Episodes from *Rodeo*

By the 1940s, Aaron Copland had begun to eschew the complex, avant-garde style that marked his early works, in favor of a simpler means of expression that was more accessible to his American audience. One of his earliest successes in this new idiom was the score for the ballet *Billy the Kid*, which brought him to the attention of choreographer Agnes de Mille. Relatively unknown at the time, de Mille had been commissioned by the American-based Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo to create a new work entitled *Rodeo*. Initially reluctant to compose another cowboy ballet, Copland was finally persuaded and work was begun. De Mille herself played the lead, and the premiere at the Metropolitan Opera House on October 16, 1942, received 22 curtain calls. Owing to this popularity, Copland made a symphonic arrangement of select pieces from the ballet, the *Four Dance Episodes*, in 1945.

The ballet’s scenario takes place at Burnt Ranch, where a Cowgirl – suddenly aware of men and romance for the first time – finds herself competing with visiting city girls for the attention of the local cowboys, especially the Head Wrangler. “Buckaroo Holiday” introduces the work. With its open harmonies and jaunty rhythms, it immediately captures the spirit of the Western scene. The mood quickly shifts to a lilting melody, which announces the Cowgirl making her bid for the Head Wrangler, who pays her no attention. The American folk song, “If He’d Be a Buckaroo by His Trade” (first heard as a trombone solo) is quoted by Copland in this dance to depict the exuberant antics of the Head Wrangler and his fellow ranch hands. As the cowboys ride away, the jaunty “Holiday” ends as vigorously as it began.

The moody, yearning, melancholy music of “Corral Nocturne,” which quotes the ballad “Sis Joe,” invokes the lovesick musings of the Cowgirl, who cannot compete with the feminine frills of the city girls. In writing this scene, de Mille noted, “She runs through the empty corrals intoxicated with space, her feet thudding in the stillness.” The moodiness continues in “Saturday Night Waltz,” as couples pair-off for a barn dance. The Cowgirl, still in dungarees and boots, sits alone watching the festivities. Her sadness is conveyed by the tune, “I Ride an Old Paint.” The dancing reaches a boisterous climax in “Hoe-Down.” Copland borrows two square dance tunes, “Bonyparte” and “McLeod’s Reel,” to aid in this romp. The effervescence of the music signals the Cowgirl’s rebirth: she has suddenly put aside her blue jeans and reappeared as the prettiest girl in the room. She wisely rejects the newly focused attentions of the Head Wrangler in favor of those given by Another Cowboy who has shown her respect and kindness.

Program notes by Dr. Michael Vaughn
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Dr. Robert G. Hasty is the Music Director of the Kenosha Symphony Orchestra and the conductor of the Chamber Orchestra and the Philharmonia at the Henry and Leigh Bienen School of Music at Northwestern University where he also serves as the Associate Director of Orchestras. He is also Artistic Director of the orchestra division of the International Schools Choral Music Society.

Dr. Hasty began his career teaching music in the public schools in Southern California; this included tenure in administration as the District Music Coordinator of the Capistrano Unified School District where he supervised the K-12 music education program and its staff of 39 teachers. He also served an elected term as Vice President in charge of String Education for the Southern California School Band and Orchestra Association.

A noted researcher in music cognition, Dr. Hasty has been an author for two publications delivered at the 7th International Conference on Music Perception and Cognition in Sydney, Australia. A book on his research on conducting has recently been published: “Critical Listening While Conducting”. The European Society for Cognitive Sciences of Music invited him to speak at their conference in Portugal on these studies.

As a conductor, Dr. Hasty has appeared with the All-American College Orchestra at Walt Disney World, Beijing Youth Orchestra, Elmhurst Symphony Orchestra, Grant Park Symphony Orchestra, Highland Park Symphony Orchestra, Irvine Youth Symphony, La Primavera Orchestra, Merit Symphony Orchestra, Metropolis Youth Symphony, National High School Music Institute Orchestra, Northwestern University Symphony Orchestra, NU Opera Theater, NU Contemporary Music Ensemble, and the Skokie Valley Symphony Orchestra. His performances have been broadcast on WFMT radio in Chicago and on the Big Ten Network. Dr. Hasty’s international engagements include two sold-out performances at the National Concert Hall of Taipei, Taiwan, the Forbidden City Concert Hall in Beijing, China, the Shanghai Oriental Arts Center Concert Hall in Shanghai, China, and the Busan Cultural Center Main Theater in Busan, South Korea. He is sought-after as an honor orchestra conductor, conducting honor groups across the United States. He is a member of the conducting and music education faculties at the Bienen School of Music.

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