



Raleigh, *Civic*
Symphony
Chamber
Orchestra

MUSIC FOR
THE
THEATRE



Raleigh Civic Chamber Orchestra
Randolph Foy, Conductor

Wednesday, February 19, 2003
8:00 P.M.

Talley Student Center Ballroom
NC State University, Raleigh

Program

Suite from the opera *Platée* (1745) Jean-Philippe Rameau
(1683-1764)

1. Overture
2. Tamborins
3. Air, pour des fous tristes
4. Orage
5. Musette-Gracieux
6. Minuet
7. Chaconne

Music from the play *Rosamunde* (1823) Franz Schubert
(1791-1828)

1. Ballett
2. Entr'act
3. Overture

————— *Intermission* —————

Music for the Theatre (1925) Aaron Copland
(1900-1990)

1. Prologue
2. Dance
3. Interlude
4. Burlesque
5. Epilogue

Notes

MUSIC FOR THE THEATRE

The use of music to enhance storytelling runs deep in the history of many of the world's cultures. Song, ceremonial music, and dance music have been interwoven for millennia, in both simple and quite complex forms such as opera and dance in Western and other cultures.

Tonight's program focuses on orchestral music connected to the theater in three different ways: (1) a suite derived from instrumental music played during an opera (Rameau), (2) incidental music written to be performed between parts of a play (Schubert), and (3) a group of pieces that suggested to the composer a "theatrical atmosphere" (Copland).

Since these three works were composed in 1745, 1823, and 1925 respectively, the differences in historical styles are much more striking than any differences due to function. But there are some similarities among these three pieces: these are all collections of shorter works closely associated with dance and song. And unlike the longer symphony or concerto movements from the same time periods for example, these shorter pieces are not essays in extended development of ideas. Instead, they are focused character pieces, each setting a distinctive tone or mood – immediately evocative, often delightful, sometimes surprising.

Jean-Philippe Rameau – Plateé

Long recognized as the leading French composer of the 18th century, Jean-Philippe Rameau is known for his highly inventive harpsichord works, but he also contributed greatly to the French opera. The style of course is late French Baroque – light, ornamental, and decorative, in which the emotion is often portrayed in brief transitory glimpses.

Rameau's orchestral music is connected to the operas, and it is here that he shines the brightest:

"It is in the purely instrumental movements [from the operas] – dances and the various sorts of dramatic *symphonie* – that Rameau's orchestral virtuosity is at its greatest. In its freshness and variety his ballet music is second to none. Diderot exaggerated, of course, when he claimed that before Rameau 'no one had distinguished the delicate shades of expression that separate the tender from the voluptuous, the voluptuous from the impassioned, the impassioned from the lascivious'. But the composer's ability to capture a huge range of moods – from the aching nostalgia of his pastoral music to the



*Jean-Philippe Rameau –
painting by Jean-Baptiste Chardin*

Dionysiac frenzy of his tambourins – is indeed one of his most remarkable gifts, the more so given the limitations of form, phrase-structure and rhythm imposed by contemporary choreography." (Sadler, New Grove)

Platée was called both *comédie lyrique* (meaning ‘musical comedy’) and *ballet bouffon* by Rameau. The opera was written for the wedding festivities of the dauphin and Spanish princess Maria Teresa at Versailles in 1745. “Its theme, derived from the ancient Greek writer Pausanias, is the mock marriage between Jupiter

and an ugly marsh-nymph (Plataea). As such, it appears grotesquely ill-suited to the occasion, especially as the bride, the Spanish princess Maria Teresa, was evidently unattractive. This aspect of the work, however, seems to have provoked little contemporary comment.” (Sadler, New Grove)

Franz Schubert - Rosamunde

“The richness and subtlety of his melodic and harmonic language, the originality of his accompaniments, his elevation of marginal genres and the enigmatic nature of his uneventful life have invited a wide range of readings of both man and music that remain among the most hotly debated in musical circles.”

Robert Winter in New Grove

In the Western tradition, incidental music in drama can be traced as far back as the 5th c. bce, in Greek choric odes in Athenian drama. “These odes (sung and danced by a male chorus supported by an aulos) were sited between the several extended episodes of linear, argumentative spoken dialogue in a play, and supplied a perspective on its events and ideas...” (New Grove) This model existed sporadically for centuries in western music, and is the approach adopted by Schubert in his incidental music to *Rosamunde*.

Rosamunde - Princess of Cypress was a hastily-arranged commission for a ‘Romantic play with music,’ the text of which was perhaps written in only five days. The whole affair was a miserable failure, closing after two performances, and would be totally forgotten except for Schubert’s captivating music. Indications are that Schubert delivered most of the music only 48-hours before the opening, and the premier was described by



Franz Schubert

critics as woefully under-rehearsed. Much of Schubert’s music comes from other sources, quickly re-worked for this occasion. The *Ballet* has strong connections with an “Air Russe,” no. 3 of his *Moments Musicaux* for piano, already published. The overture performed at the opening was from his opera *Alfonso und Estrella*. With hopes of a revival of *Rosamunde*, Schubert later substituted another overture, this one from his melodrama *Die Zauberharfe* – the piece now popularly known as *Overture to Rosamunde*.

Aaron Copland - Music for the Theatre

In 1925, Copland had just returned from three years of compositional study with Nadia Boulanger in Paris, and had achieved his first major success with the performance of his Organ Symphony by the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Serge Koussevitzky. He was approached by the newly-established League of Composers to write another work for the BSO to premier in New York. Copland decided on 'a series of pieces to be called *Incidental Music for an Imaginary Drama*, later renamed *Music for the Theatre*.

Encouraged by Boulanger to look to authentic American sources, Copland turned to jazz and popular music as a kind of folklore worth incorporating in concert music. His jazz influenced works of the 1920's received both praise and criticism: "He weaves into his writing as naturally as one employs the rhythms and accents of one's childhood" (Isaac Goldberg, 1927), and "He ended up sounding more American when he forgot about jazz." (David Ross Baskerville).

Music for the Theatre is scored for a small orchestra, reminiscent of small pit bands and close to the size, scope, and sound of Darius Milhaud's jazzy *La création du monde* (1923). It is subtitled "Suite in Five Parts", and the construction of each of the individual sections and the work as a whole form an arch: *Prologue, Dance, Interlude, Burlesque, Epilogue*.

The *Prologue* features trumpet fanfares, marked "sharp, fast, clear, nervous" and a snazzy middle section. The lively *Dance* movement is what critic Warren Storey Smith called "super jazz." The movement also includes a quotation of the popular tune "Sidewalks



Aaron Copland, July 1921

of New York." (in 5/8). The *Interlude* introduces what Howard Pollack calls Copland's characteristic "bluesy, lonely night-in-the-city ambience."

The *Burlesque* sounds as if it comes directly from 42nd Street of the roarin' '20's, with a bawdy comic section opposed with a sexually suggestive, vulgar middle section for trumpets (marked 'grotesco'). Copland admitted that the *Burlesque* was partly inspired by Fanny Brice, a star attraction in American vaudeville and burlesque. The *Epilogue* freely recapitulates the music from both the *Prologue* and the *Interlude*, now more hollow and simple.

Although Copland made it clear that *Music for the Theatre* "was written with no specific play in mind," the strong influence of the American theater of the 1920's in general can be felt throughout. (Pollack)

— Program notes by Dr. Randolph Foy

Resources

Pollack, Howard. *Aaron Copland: Life and Work of an Uncommon Man*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999.

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Sadler, Graham. 'Jean-Philippe Rameau', *The New Grove Dictionary of Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed Jan 20, 2003), <http://www.grovemusic.com>.

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Ted Wagner

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Erik Johnson
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Jeremy Gibbs, principal
Josh Hines

Flute / Piccolo

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Oboe

Paul Baerman, principal
Cathy Phipps

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James Williams, principal
Brian Muñoz

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Cynthia Harris, principal
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