

Portland Columbia Symphony Orchestra

Listening Guide for the concert on October 15 & 17, 2010

MADE in the USA

Stravinsky: Circus Polka



Who was Stravinsky? Igor Fyodorovich Stravinsky (17 June 1882 – 6 April 1971) was a Russian composer, pianist, and conductor. He is widely acknowledged as one of the most important and influential composers of 20th century music. He became a naturalized US citizen in 1946.

Circus Polka: For a Young Elephant was written in 1942. Stravinsky composed it for a ballet production the choreographer George Balanchine did for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. The ballet was performed by fifty elephants and fifty ballerinas. Stravinsky was contacted by phone on January 12, 1942. Balanchine would later recount the conversation as follows: Balanchine: "I wonder if you'd like to do a little ballet with me." Stravinsky: "For whom?" Balanchine: "For some elephants." Stravinsky: "How old?" Balanchine: "Very young." Stravinsky: "All right. If they are very young elephants, I will do it." Although Stravinsky was busy with other projects at the time, he negotiated a high fee with the Ringling Brothers & Barnum & Bailey Circus for a short instrumental, which he composed within a few days.

The piano version of *Circus Polka*, subtitled "For a Young Elephant" as an allusion to the phone conversation with Balanchine, was finished on February 5, 1942.

Britten: Matinées musicales

Who was Britten? Benjamin Britten (22 November 1913 – 4 December 1976) was an English composer, conductor, and pianist. Britten's interests as a composer were wide-ranging; he produced important music in such varied genres as orchestral, choral, solo vocal, chamber and instrumental, as well as film music. He also took a great interest in writing music for children and amateur performers, and was a fine pianist and conductor.



Matinées musicales In 1935, for the GPO Film Unit animated short *The Tosters*, Britten was asked to arrange music by Rossini for small orchestra. From Rossini's set of songs called *Soirées musicales*, published in 1835, Britten borrowed three of the songs, and the work's title. To complete his five-movement work, Britten added an arrangement of the *Soldier's March* from Rossini's *William Tell* and a tarantella Britten heard his mother sing. As Britten's *Soirées musicales*, the piece was published as his Op.9. In 1941, he created a second set of Rossini arrangements, calling them *Matinées musicales*. Together, they became the music for a ballet created by George Balanchine, *Divertimento*.

Copland: Clarinet Concerto



Who was Copland? Aaron Copland (14, 1900 – December 2, 1990) was an American composer of concert and film music. Instrumental in forging a distinctly American style of composition, he was widely known as "the dean of American composers."

Clarinet Concerto was written between 1947 and 1949 although and was commissioned by jazz clarinetist Benny Goodman. The concerto would later be choreographed by Jerome Robbins for the ballet *Pied Piper* (1951). Copland says about the piece, "The instrumentation being clarinet with strings, harp, and piano, I did not have a large battery of percussion to achieve jazzy effects, so I used slapping basses and whacking harp sounds to simulate them. The Clarinet Concerto ends with a fairly elaborate coda in C major that finishes off with a clarinet glissando - or "smear" in jazz lingo."

Dvorak: Symphony No. 9 (New World)

Who was Dvorak? Antonín Leopold Dvořák (September 8, 1841 – May 1, 1904) was a Czech composer of Romantic music, who employed the idioms of the folk music of Moravia and his native Bohemia. His works include operas, symphonic, choral and chamber music.

Symphony No 9 was composed in 1893 during Dvorak's visit to the Iowa and the United States from 1892 to 1895. The symphony was commissioned by the New York Philharmonic, and premiered on December 16, 1893 at Carnegie Hall conducted by Anton Seidl. Dvořák was interested in the Native American music and African-American spirituals he heard in America. Upon his arrival in America, he stated: "I am convinced that the future music of this country must be founded on what are called Negro melodies. These can be the foundation of a serious and original school of composition, to be developed in the United States. These beautiful and varied themes are the product of the soil. They are the folk songs of America and your composers must turn to them."

