

Program Notes
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By Composer in Residence Bruce Brown

Le tombeau de Couperin

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) was thirty-nine years old when he enlisted in the French army. He had always been considered too small and frail for military service, but when the First World War broke out, and his brother Edouard enlisted, he didn't feel he could stand on the sidelines.

Ravel had already achieved considerable success as a composer, but he left his music behind and gamely took on a role of a nurse's aide and, later, an ambulance driver. He mentioned to a former student that he had thoughts of writing a piano piece. "No, it isn't what you think," he wrote, "*la Marseillaise* will not be in it, but it will have a *forlane* and a *gigue*; no tango, however." His mother died in 1917, and he left the army a few months later, thoroughly exhausted.

His compositions took a much more serious tone after the war, and when he finished the piano suite, he dedicated each of the movements to the memory of a friend who died in the Great War: the *Prélude* to Lieutenant Jacques Charlot, the *Fugue* to Jean Cruppi, the *Forlane* to Lieutenant Gabriel Deluc, the *Rigaudon* to Pierre and Pascal Gaudin, (two brothers killed by the same shell), the *Menuet* to Jean Dreyfus, and the *Toccata* to Captain Joseph de Marliave.

The word *tombeau* in the title literally means "tomb," but in this context it also means "a tribute." The music overtly honors the great French composer François Couperin (1668–1733), but clearly, it also expresses his love for his France.

Some criticized Ravel for writing music that wasn't more somber, but he replied "The dead are sad enough, in their eternal silence."

Ravel orchestrated four of the six movements in 1919, and the orchestral version was first performed on February 28, 1920, in Paris.

Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis

The prolific English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) wrote symphonies, chamber music, opera, choral music and film scores, and his scholarly work included important collections of English folk music. As one of the two editors of the English Hymnal, along with Percy Dearmer, he contributed many folk song arrangements as well as a number of tunes he had written himself.

Vaughan Williams *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*, sometimes called "The Tallis Fantasia," was composed in 1910 for the Three Choirs Festival and was one of Vaughan Williams first big hits. He revised the music in 1913 and again in 1919.

The music of Thomas Tallis (c. 1505 –1585) plays a very important role in anthologies of early English music, and Tallis and his Renaissance contemporaries were a significant source of inspiration for Vaughan Williams.

Vaughan Williams' tribute to Tallis calls for a large string orchestra divided into three parts: the full string choir, a single desk from each section (often on a separate part of the stage) and a solo string quartet.

The Tallis melody that is the basis for the *Fantasia* is one of nine he contributed to the Psalter of 1567 for the first Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury. The tune, "Why fum'th in fight the Gentiles spite, in fury raging stout?" (based on the first two verses of Psalm 2) was number 92 in Vaughan Williams' English Hymnal. The theme is heard in its complete form three times in the *Fantasia* and serves as the source for a wonderful myriad of variants, motives and developments in this rich orchestral composition.

Tchaikovsky's Suite No. 4, "Mozartiana," op. 61 (1887)

In May of 1884 Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) wrote in his diary: "Played Mozart and was in raptures. Thought about a suite from Mozart."

Tchaikovsky always held Mozart in the very highest esteem. Once, when he had an opportunity to see the manuscript of Mozart's great opera *Don Giovanni* first hand, he said he felt like he was "in the presence of divinity."

Tchaikovsky wrote his suite honoring Mozart in 1887, the centennial of *Don Giovanni's* première, at a spa in the Caucasus, where he was seeking treatment for a liver ailment. He debated about the title, not wanting it to be reminiscent of the well known *Kreisleriana* by Robert Schumann, but he eventually settled on "*Mozartiana*." He didn't think the piece was like his other string suites, but it has generally been considered his fourth.

Tchaikovsky adapted three piano pieces and a choral work for the suite. The first movement is based on Mozart's *Little Gigue* for piano, K. 574, the second on a *Minuet* for piano, K. 355, and the fourth on the *Variations on a Theme by Gluck*, K. 455. The third movement, *Preghiera* ("Prayer") is an adaptation of Mozart's late choral masterpiece *Ave Verum Corpus*, but Tchaikovsky based his version on a piano transcription by Franz Liszt known as *À la Chapelle Sixtine*. Liszt's and Tchaikovsky's arrangements are both more ornate than Mozart's beautifully austere original.

Tchaikovsky conducted the première performance of the suite on November 14, 1887 at a concert of the Russian Musical Society.

Tchaikovsky wrote his publisher, Petr Jürgenson, that he hoped to recreate "the past in a contemporary world." He tried to be very faithful to the original except for "minute enhancements and modifications to the harmony ... which I considered necessary."

Tchaikovsky once said "Mozart is the highest, the culminating point that beauty has attained in the sphere of music." His treatment of Mozart's music in this suite shows how much respect he had for the great master of Classicism, but it also reveals his admiration and affection for him.