

Program Notes

By Composer in Residence Bruce Brown
[November 11, 2017]

The JSO's November concert, "Italy," will celebrate the tremendous contributions of *Il bel paese*, "the beautiful country." It is almost impossible to imagine the world of music without Italy's inestimable contributions.

The great flowering of literature, art and music called the Renaissance burst out in Italy, and great Italian composers like Josquin des Prez and Palestrina were the model and inspiration for generations of musicians that followed.

Opera was invented in Florence and became the rage in theaters around the world. Operas were performed in Italian everywhere. Composers like Handel, Mozart and many others wrote operas in Italian, and only later in other languages. Italians led the way as opera evolved, and composers like Donizetti, Rossini, Verdi, and Puccini wrote Romantic operas that have thrilled countless audiences through the years.

Lustspiel Overture, Opus 38, BV 245

Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924) achieved great fame as a pianist and composer during his lifetime and worked alongside many of the greatest musicians, artists and writers of his time.

He was born in Empoli, near Florence, to musical parents who promoted his career relentlessly. He later complained: "I never had a childhood." He studied at the Vienna Conservatory from the ages of nine to eleven, and in 1890, he won the composition prize in the first Anton Rubinstein Competition. He taught in Helsinki, then in Moscow, and even for a brief stint at the New England Conservatory in Boston, before settling in Berlin.

Busoni reportedly wrote his *Lustspiel* Overture, literally "Comedy Overture," in a single night in the summer of 1897. He polished the work with some revisions in 1904. The overture is dedicated to Wilhelm Gericke (1845-1925), an Austrian conductor and composer who conducted the Boston Symphony from 1884 to 1889, and again from 1890 to 1906.

Divertimento for Orchestra

The gifted composer and conductor Anthony Iannaccone (born in 1943) has achieved international fame and many prestigious awards for his nearly fifty published works.

The family name Iannaccone originated in the Tuscan region of Italy, but Anthony Iannaccone grew up in Brooklyn, New York, before studies at the prestigious Manhattan School of Music and the Eastman School of Music. He studied privately with some of the most important composers of our time, including David Diamond and Aaron Copland. Iannaccone joined the faculty of Eastern Michigan University in 1971, and served there for over forty years, before he retired in 2013.

Iannaccone's *Divertimento for Orchestra*, commissioned in 1983 by the American String Teachers Association, has enjoyed more than fifty performances, a landmark achievement for a contemporary work. The *Divertimento* is "based on three interwoven ideas: 1) a lullaby, 2) a dance-inspired theme, and 3) Boccherini's popular *Minuet*," from his *String Quintet in E Major*.

Critics have hailed Iannaccone's *Divertimento* "for its melodic freshness and structural brilliance" and "found it to be delightfully light and lyrical."

Fountains of Rome

Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936) rose to fame with three colorful tone poems, *The Fountains of Rome*, *The Pines of Rome*, and *Roman Festivals*. These stunning works vividly depict the sights, sounds and rich history of one of the world's most fascinating places. Their glorious orchestral color, beautiful melodies and bold rhythms make hearing one seem like a mini-vacation in the ancient city.

Respighi was a very active conductor, teacher and world traveler. He was born in Bologna and spent time in Russia and Germany before returning to his native land for good. In 1913, Respighi joined the faculty of the Conservatory of St. Cecelia in Rome, where he lived for the rest of his life.

The composer relates that he wrote the music "to give expression to the sentiments and visions suggested to him by four of Rome's fountains contemplated at the hour in which their character is most in harmony with the surrounding landscape, or in which their beauty appears most impressive to the observer."

The first movement, *The Fountain of Valle Giulia at Dawn*, depicts a peaceful daybreak with cattle roaming by. In the second, *The Triton Fountain in the Morning*, we are encouraged to imagine Naiads and Tritons in a frenzied dance. Respighi pictured a triumphal procession honoring Neptune in the third movement, *The Trevi Fountain at Noon*. A more melancholy mood takes over as the sun fades in the finale, *The Villa Medici Fountain at Sunset*.

Overture to La Gazza Ladra

La Gazza Ladra ("The Thieving Magpie") by Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868) is a *melodramma* in which a young servant, Ninetta, is accused of stealing silverware. Ninetta is saved from the gallows when a pesky bird proves to be the real thief, and she gets to marry Giannetto, the man of her dreams.

Rossini always wrote his music quickly, but this overture might have set a new record. According to legend, Rossini procrastinated writing the overture so long that the producers locked him in a room on May 30, 1817, the night before the premiere. As he finished each page of the score, Rossini had to toss it out the window to copyists who were waiting below to write out the parts.

"Ah! mes amis!" from La fille du regiment

The premiere of *La fille du regiment* ("The Daughter of the Regiment"), by Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848), was "a barely averted disaster," but the opera became a roaring success and enjoyed its 1000th performance in Paris by 1908.

One of the keys to its popularity is *Ah! mes amis, quel jour de fête!*, ("Ah, my friends, what an exciting day"), in which Tonio, sings of his joy at joining the regiment. This thrilling aria is so challenging it is often called the "Mount Everest" for tenors.

As you probably guessed, Tonio is destined to marry Marie, the regiment's canteen girl. She has also been the regiment's adopted "daughter" since they found her, abandoned as a baby, on the battlefield.

"O mio babibo caro" from Gianni Schicchi

Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924) wrote *Gianni Schicchi* as the finale of *Il trittico* ("The Triptych"), a group of three short operas intended for performance on a single program. *Il trittico* premiered at New York's Metropolitan Opera in December 14, 1918.

In the hugely popular aria *O mio babibo caro*, Laretta is pleading with her father, Gianni Schicchi, to let her marry Rinuccio. If he will not let her, she says, she will throw herself into the River Arno! She clearly has her father wrapped around her finger as she sings this gorgeous music: “Oh, dear daddy ... I am pining and I am tormented, Oh God! I would want to die! Daddy, have mercy, have mercy!”

Anvil Chorus from *Il Trovatore*

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) wrote *Il Trovatore* ("The Troubadour"), between 1850 and 1853. The stunning success following its premiere at the *Teatro Apollo* in Rome on January 19, 1853, cemented its place as one of the most popular operas of all time.

The complicated plot of *Il Trovatore*, full of duels, battles and deceptions, is set in 15th century Spain near the Bay of Biscay. The invigorating *Anvil Chorus* is heard at the opening of the second act, as a band of Spanish gypsies strike their anvils at dawn and sing the praises of hard work, good wine and gypsy women.

“Nessun dorma” from *Turandot*

Puccini left his opera *Turandot* unfinished when he died in 1924. Composer Franco Alfano completed the work two years later, and Arturo Toscanini conducted the first performance at the *Teatro alla Scala* in Milan on April 25, 1926.

The story, set in Peking, China, is based on a work by the 12th-century Persian poet Nizami. Prince Calaf falls in love with the Princess Turandot, but a suitor must answer three riddles or be put to death. Calaf passes the test, but Turandot still refuses to marry him. He says if she can learn his name by morning, he will die willingly. The Mandarin orders that no one may sleep until the name is discovered. In the end, Calaf persuades Turandot he truly loves her and reveals his name, putting his fate in her hands. She tells her father she has learned her suitor’s name, and “it is love.”

Calaf’s aria “*Nessun dorma*,” (“None Shall Sleep”) became the theme song of the BBC’s television coverage of the 1990 World Cup after a legendary performance by “The Three Tenors,” Luciano Pavarotti, José Carreras and Plácido Domingo. The soccer players joyously took up the prince’s words: “*Vincerò! Vincerò!*” – “I will win! I will win!”

“Brindisi” from *La Traviata*

A *brindisi* is an Italian toast, and this wonderful scene provides a cheerful, carefree moment in Verdi’s *La Traviata*, “The Fallen Woman.” The opera’s poignant story revolves around the title character, Violetta, who earns redemption through sacrifice.

This festive toast begins at a lavish party when Alfredo, a young man in love with Violetta, encourages everyone to raise their glasses. “Let’s drink,” he sings, “let’s drink from the joyful glass, resplendent with beauty ... Drink to the thrilling sweetness brought to us by love.”

Violetta and the company join in enthusiastically.