PROGRAM NOTES

Hand Across the Sea (1899) **John Phillip Sousa (1854-1932)**

While not as famous as his *Stars and Stripes Forever* march, *Hands Across the Sea* has held its own in popularity since its premiere at the Philadelphia Academy of Music in the same year as its composition. It might well be considered as Sousa's farewell to the nineteenth century which had been so crucial to the evolution of the United States of America. The two final decades of that century had also been very good for Sousa; in those years he emerged as a world-famous music personality. His magnificent band was one of the first American success stories in music, for it captured audiences wherever it played. Sousa, his band, and his thrilling marches spoke for all of us. *Hands Across the Sea* could also have been Sousa's sincerely confident and patriotic view of the years ahead at the dawn of what he hoped might be a bright new era for mankind.

The march was addressed to no particular nation, but to all of America's allies abroad. It has been suggested that Sousa was inspired by an incident in the Spanish-American War (1898) in which Captain Chichester of the British Navy came to the support of Admiral Dewey at Manila Bay. A second (and more likely) source is a line from the 1798 play *The Rovers* (a political burlesque by the English diplomat and author John Hookham Frere), that Sousa had recently read: "A sudden thought strikes me ... Let us swear an eternal friendship." It was reported in an interview with Sousa for the Great Lakes Recruit of March 1918. Sousa discussed the justification of the Spanish-American War, quoted Frere's line, and added, "After the Spanish War (1898) there was some feeling in Europe about our republic regarding this war. Some of the nations ... thought we were not justified while others gave us credit for the honesty of our purpose. One night I was reading an old play and I came across this line, 'A sudden thought strikes me ... Let us swear an eternal friendship.' This almost immediately suggested the title *Hands across the Sea* for that composition and within a few weeks that now famous march became a living fact."

American Patrol March (1885) **Frank W. Meacham (1856-1909)**

Probably the most endearing version of the march American Patrol was recorded by the Glenn Miller Orchestra in 1942, deep in the throes of World War II. It was labeled as a fox trot on the record album, not as a march, and it went to No. 15 on the Billboard charts. But tonight you will hear an original instrumental version, so no dancing in the aisles, please.

Meacham wrote first and then copyrighted a piano version of *American Patrol* in 1885. After the band arrangement was published in 1891, it was first performed by the United States Marine Band on July 2, 1892, in Portland, Oregon. The popularity of the march has increased steadily for several decades. It semi-follows the "patrol" format that was popular in the second half of the 19th century, intending to represent a military band approaching, passing, and fading into the distance. The format typically included a faint introduction in imitation of bugle calls or drums, then themes played progressively louder until the recapitulation of the first theme(s), gradually vanishing. Meacham strayed from the format at the end, but it plays out well and has endured for over a century.

The concert arrangement opens with a hushed and uncomplicated drum cadence, simulating the approach of a military patrol. The first melody, which Meacham composed, begins quietly and gradually increases in intensity. The music then incorporates two recognizable patriotic songs: *Columbia, The Gem of the Ocean (1843),* and *Dixie* (1860). Another drum cadence is heard, followed by the American Patrol theme again, and then the music fades until a final burst of *Yankee Doodle* (1782) concludes the piece.

Lincoln Portrait (1942) **Aaron Copland (1900-1990)**

Aaron Copland is generally considered America's greatest composer. Through his compositions, his essays, books, lectures, and other thoughts on music, he has done more than any other individual to establish a body of "serious" music in this country that has largely defined an "American Sound." He influenced generations of young composers; advanced the cause of art music in this country; and composed music that has delighted millions in the audiences of ballet, chamber music, symphonic music, radio, television, and the movies. The son of Jewish immigrants, he lived for most of his life in or near New York City but incorporated so much of the disparate elements of our culture that he came to be considered as representative of all of it. In his music one finds jazz, ethnic, western, folk, intellectual, and populist elements and references.

During the 1930s his interest in socialist perspectives grew and he developed a more accessible, populist style that has become his hallmark for mainstream America. His ballets, *Billy the Kid*, *Rodeo*, and *Appalachian Spring*, as well as his music for the films, *Of Mice and Men* and *Our Town* and other works all endeared him to a wide audience and made his reputation as composer of "American" music. He continued that trend with music for the film adaptation of Steinbeck's *Red Pony* and even wrote a clarinet concerto for the great Benny Goodman. How mainstream American can you get?

However, the advent of World War II wrought massive changes to American society, and its existential threat to the country stimulated an understandable surge in patriotism. For the 1942-43 symphonic season, the conductor, André Kostelanetz commissioned Virgil Thompson, Jerome Kern, and Copland each to compose a portrait of the "magnificent spirit of our country." For his contribution, Copland had initially chosen the words of Walt Whitman, but he wisely changed to the magnificent, timeless rhetoric of Abraham Lincoln. Those words, combined with Copland's populist "American Style," produced the profound work performed here tonight.

A Lincoln Portrait has two distinct sections. The first is composed of three contrasting musical vignettes of Lincoln and his times. The opening is tranquil, but ominous in its evocation of the constant dangers to our country—then and now. The music slowly grows in intensity, informed by a simple, three-note motive so typical of the composer. The second of the vignettes begins with the solo clarinet and is infused with much of the plain charm of Copland's opera, *The Tender Land*. Finally, the third vignette starts with upbeat folk dances that gradually are eclipsed by a broad, powerful countermelody that leads inevitably to the serious matter of Lincoln's words in the second section. A dramatic smash on the gong, also used in Copland's 1942 *Fanfare for the Common Man,* concludes the first section and sets the tone for the verbally articulated part that follows.

The second section introduces the narration of Lincoln's words, accompanied by stirring recitative-like accompaniment from the orchestra. Lincoln's words include excerpts from the Gettysburg Address, the Lincoln-Douglas debates, and one of his State of the Union speeches. In the best tradition of music and words, the notes and the text mutually enhance each other, and the union is a work that never fails to engender both pride and reflection regarding our great experiment in democracy.

The work truly was an inspiration for the difficult times of the war, but about 1950 both Copland's musical style and his popular place in society took a distinct turn. His earlier support of socialist causes made him a target of Red Hysteria and Senator Joseph McCarthy. The Republican Party cancelled a performance of his *Lincoln Portrait* for Dwight Eisenhower's inauguration, and other indignities followed him for a few years. By 1972, in his own words, it was "as if someone had simply turned off a faucet," and he gave up composition completely. He died in 1990 of Alzheimer's disease.

Marche Slave, in B-flat minor, Op. 31 (1876) **Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)**

When I was about six, I saw this title and heard the music, and assumed it was a dirge for doomed prisoners becoming slaves to their captors. No, not at all. *March Slav* is written with or without "e" on the end and refers to the ethnic people of Eastern Europe. Now you know what took me a long time to unlearn.

The story is depressingly familiar: In 1876 the Christians and the Muslims were once again slaughtering each other in a war, this time between the Turks of the Ottoman Empire and the Slavs of Serbia. Naturally, Russia supported its fellow Slavs, and in the general patriotic fervor, Tchaikovsky was commissioned by the director of the Russian Musical Society to immediately contribute a composition to a benefit concert for the Red Cross Society. By October of that year, his "Serbo-Russian" march was complete. Tchaikovsky's own hand on the manuscript refers to the composition's basis on "Slavonic folk themes."

The work is a dynamic and colorful thumper of a march, quoting Serbian folk tunes and incorporating the Russian Imperial Anthem. While using a traditional march form that provides balance and symmetries, the work nevertheless is somewhat programmatic, depicting the story of Turkish atrocities against the Serbs, vigorous battles, and the inevitable triumph of the Slavs in sequential fashion. The tragic opening is based upon two Serbian folk songs of contrasting natures, leading to a tumultuous section that depicts the suffering of the Serbs at the hands of the Turks. Next comes a sense of optimism as the Russians muster themselves to come to the aid of their compatriots. The Serbs suffer a bit more, and then the Russians are heard marching to the fray. An ear-splitting rendition of the Russian Imperial Anthem—"God Save the Tsar"—brings the piece to a triumphant conclusion. The whole concept proved so popular that Tchaikovsky used it again in another nationalist composition that became even more globally popular, and you will hear it next tonight.

1812 Overture in E-flat Major, Op. 49 (1880) **Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky**

This work's official title is *The Year 1812, a Festival Overture to Mark the Consecration of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior*. But that never quite fits into the programming space, so it's simply known as the *1812 Overture*, even though it's not an introduction to anything more.

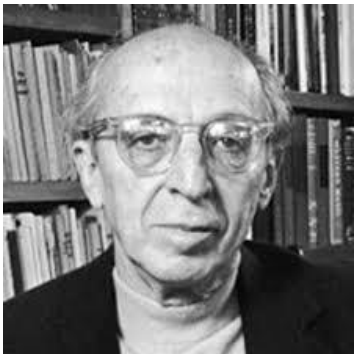
In 1880 the great Russian composer Tchaikovsky was commissioned by his old friend and mentor Nikolay Rubenstein, who was in charge of organizing music for an exhibition that took place in 1882, to write a piece of music to mark the consecration of the new Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, which was finally built to give thanks for the Russian victory over Napoleon's French forces in 1812. Note the lag in time: the church was commissioned after the battle in 1812 yet was not completed or consecrated until 1882. The resulting work was Tchaikovsky's Opus 49, rapidly written in just a few weeks.

The composition tells the musical story of Napoleon's invasion of Russia. It begins with a plaintive hymn, "God Save Thy People," played by strings, to represent the Russian people's prayers for deliverance from the invasion by the hitherto invincible French army. The Russians are so ill-prepared and poorly equipped that all the people can do is pray for help. The French national anthem, "La Marseillaise," ominously enters, representing Napoleon's advancing army. Traditional folk music emerges as the Tsar desperately appeals to the Russian people to defend the motherland. The French army is ultimately defeated and forced to retreat in the freezing winter, symbolized by Russian folk songs "chasing" the French anthem away. What most remember about the Overture, however, is Tchaikovsky's use of cannons and church bells, first to mark the French defeat, then during the final, celebratory dance that follows the second, triumphant statement of "God Save the Tsar," the Russian Imperial anthem at the time. (For safety and practicality, Maestro Ming has opted for a bass drum instead of a cannon and is not pilfering bells from any church.)

The 1812 Overture instantly became popular and has remained so to this day. It is accompanied by the sound of real cannons and is often used as background music to large firework displays. Surprisingly, or perhaps not surprisingly, Tchaikovsky despised his composition. He considered it very loud and noisy and without artistic merit, "written without warmth or love". He thought music written for and to commemorate occasions was "banal with a lot of noise." When he finally turned it in, Tchaikovsky wrote: "I don't think the piece has any serious merits, and I shan't be the slightest bit surprised or offended if you find it unsuitable for concert performance." This is truly something he wrote for the paycheck. And it did make vast amounts of money for him and his descendants. Which raises the question, how did this Russian piece become so heavily associated with American culture anyway? The short answer is Maestro Arthur Fielder, of the Boston Pops, added it to his 1974 televised Fourth of July special. People loved it, and it was heavily used in the Bicentennial Celebrations of 1976. Now it's classic Americana.

P. I. Tchaikovsky

John Phillip Sousa



Aaron Copland

Frank W. Meacham