Beyond the Double Bar

Dr. David Cole

Many listeners will hear a piece of music in concert and think “That’s great! I wonder if there are other pieces like it that I might enjoy.” Beyond the Double Bar makes suggestions for listening based on the music of each Masterworks and Small Stage concert, along with links to YouTube videos of recommended performances. If you have questions, comments, or suggestions about Beyond the Double Bar, please e-mail Dr. David Cole at dccole@swflso.org.

Masterworks I – November 12, 2016

If you enjoyed Shostakovich’s Festive Overture, then you might like:

- Carl Nielsen: Overture to Maskarade (1906)
  Nielsen’s comic opera Maskarade is much beloved in his native Denmark and rarely heard elsewhere. This sparkling overture bursts forth with irrepressible joie de vivre to set the stage for the high-spirited shenanigans in the opera to follow. More lyrical, folk-like material provides a welcome contrast, but the energetic music wins the day in the race to the final cadence.
  Nielsen: Overture to Maskarade – Royal Danish Radio Symphony, Raphael Frühbeck de Burgos
  Nielsen: Overture to Maskarade

- Leonard Bernstein: Overture to Candide (1956)
  While Bernstein’s Candide has only recently succeeded in the theater, the bubbly champagne fizz of the overture has always been a favorite in the concert hall. Bernstein’s potpourri of tunes from his “operetta” is in the form of a Classical opera overture (Mozart’s Marriage of Figaro Overture being the obvious model) and perfectly matches the satirical wit of Voltaire’s novel.
  Bernstein: Overture to Candide – New York Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein
  Bernstein: Overture to Candide

  A manic free-wheeling musical joyride in a souped-up orchestral hot rod. Adams’ four-minute tour-de-force takes the minimalist melodic and rhythmic techniques of Philip Glass and Steve Reich and gives them both a streetwise funkiness and a (neo) Romantic heart welded together by a firm sense of structure and direction.
  Adams: Short Ride in a Fast Machine – San Francisco Symphony, Edo de Waart
  Adams: Short Ride in a Fast Machine

If you enjoyed Rachmaninoff’s Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, you might like:

- Franz Liszt: Totentanz for Piano and Orchestra (1859)
Instead of providing a sinister counterpoint to variations on a different tune (as in the Rachmaninoff), here the Dies Irae plainchant is itself the subject for Liszt’s set of demonic (and fiendishly difficult) variations (“Totentanz” means “Dance of Death”). Some of the variations are surprisingly dissonant and the entire work is brimming with the barn-burning keyboard pyrotechnics which provoked many of Liszt’s female fans to swoon at his concerts.

Franz Liszt: Totentanz -- Krystian Zimerman, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Seiji Ozawa

Liszt: Totentanz

Ernő (Ernest) von Dohnányi: Variations on a Nursery Theme for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 25 (1914)

The “nursery theme” in question is none other than “Ah, vous dirai-je maman,” known in the English-speaking world as “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” and for which Mozart wrote a set of variations for solo piano. Dohnányi’s multi-faceted eleven variations and coda are both seriously challenging for the pianist and seriously fun at the same time. Dohnányi subtitled the work For the enjoyment of humorous people and for the annoyance of others.

Dohnányi: Variations on a Nursery Tune -- Cristina Ortiz, London Symphony, André Previn

Dohnányi: Variations on a Nursery Tune

Witold Lutoslawski: Paganini Variations for Two Pianos (1941)

Paganini’s caprice in gritty wartime mode. Polish composer Lutoslawski wrote these variations for two pianos during the Nazi occupation of Poland so that he and a friend could play them in cafés. Lutoslawski’s variations have echoes of Paganini’s own, but piquantly flavored with a little 20th-century dissonance. The composer later created a version (1978) for piano and orchestra.

Lutoslawski: Paganini Variations -- Martha Argerich and Nelson Friere

Lutoslawski: Paganini Variations

If you enjoyed Saint-Saëns’ Symphony No. 3, then you might like:

César Franck: Symphony in D minor (1888)

Written only a two years after the Organ Symphony, Franck’s only symphony employs the same Lisztian motivic transformations as Saint-Saëns’ earlier work, and follows a similar path from Romantic brooding to ultimate triumph. The plaintive English horn theme of the second movement may become your newest earworm.

Franck: Symphony in D minor -- New York Philharmonic, Kurt Masur

Franck: Symphony in D minor

Albéric Magnard: Symphony No. 4 in C minor, Op. 21 (1914)

The symphonic masterpiece of a largely forgotten Belgian composer, who lost his life while defending his home against the invading German army in 1914. While in the form of a traditional four-movement symphony, Magnard’s work is constructed from material heard in
the opening bars which is modified and transformed throughout the four movements. Beautifully and distinctively orchestrated and richly satisfying in its melodic sophistication and cyclical structure, it is a work that deserves to be heard far more often.

Magnard: Symphony No. 4 – Orchestre du Capitole de Toulouse, Michel Plasson

Olivier Messiaen: *Turangalîla-Symphonie* (1948)

Messiaen melded his research into birdsong, Indian *ragas*, Indonesian gamelan music and exotic scales into this sprawling paean to love. Eighty minutes in length and written for an enormous orchestra, including solo piano, *ondes Martenot* (an electronic instrument similar to a theremin), and up to 11 percussionists, Messiaen’s symphony contains melodic and harmonic ideas that are transformed throughout the work, often in astonishing ways. While it is a far cry from any of these other French symphonies in terms of its melodic and harmonic language, the overall effect of the work is overwhelming in its sonic sensuality and sheer volume level. The title is roughly translated as “love song and hymn of joy, time, movement, rhythm, life, and death”.

Messiaen: *Turangalîla-Symphonie* – Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Verbier Festival Orchestra, Charles Dutoit

Messiaen: *Turangalîla-Symphonie*