Peter Warlock: Capriol Suite for String Orchestra

The Capriol Suite in a nutshell: Composed by Peter Warlock, who wasn’t really Peter Warlock, he was Philip Heseltine. Warlock/Heseltine drew upon Renaissance dance tunes from a collection called Orchésographie written and/or compiled by Thoinot Arbeau, whose real name was Jehan Tabourot, whose nom de plume is an anagram of his real name. With me so far? Lest you think this entire work is based upon either espionage or mistaken identity, we’ll sort these aliases out one at a time.

Before there was Arthur Murray, there was Thoinot Arbeau. We don’t know a great deal about him beyond his magnum opus, Orchésographie, and that his real name was Jehan Tabourot. We do know that he was a cleric (possibly a priest), which might explain why he used an alias when writing a book on dancing. Instead of opening a nationwide chain of dance studios, Arbeau (1519 – 1595) combined all of his dancing expertise into a single book, Orchésographie, first published in 1588.

Orchésographie is more than just a collection of dance tunes. It provides a primer on the basic etiquette of social dancing in 16th-century France along with detailed instructions for the dance steps involved. The book goes into considerable detail about all aspects of French social dance in the 16th century, and serves as one of our best sources on the music, choreography and social norms of the time. Typical for pedagogical books of that period, it’s written as a dialogue between Arbeau and a presumably fictional young lawyer named Capriole (hence Warlock’s title), who is eager to learn the art of social dancing.

We don’t know if the tunes Arbeau/Tabourot published are his own original melodies or adaptations of folk music, but we suspect the book contains a combination of the two, much like the tunes that appear in Orchésographie’s English grand-nephew, John Playford’s The English Dancing Master of 1651. Orchésographie contains significant iconography as well as choreography – the woodcut prints throughout the book depict instruments, dance steps and couture of the period.

Philip Heseltine studied at Eton and Oxford (though he never graduated from either) with additional training in Cologne and London. His friends and acquaintances read like a Who’s Who of 20th-century music and literature: D. H. Lawrence, W.B. Yeats, Frederick Delius (a lifelong influence), Sir Thomas Beecham, and Béla Bartók. After a shockingly scandalous youth (he frightened local residents during one summer sojourn by riding his motorcycle while completely naked), he pursued simultaneous careers in journalism, musicology and composition. His pseudonym, Peter Warlock, developed from his somewhat cynical interest in occult studies, but he used it for all of his musical publications. Suffering from what some have diagnosed as a schizophrenic temperament, Warlock died from coal gas inhalation (probably self-induced) just as his career as a composer was starting to flourish. His compositions are few in number, including approximately 150 songs in the style of Delius, Vaughan Williams and Holst, a few choral works, a serenade for strings and the Capriol Suite.

Warlock’s Capriol follows in the footsteps of Respighi’s Ancient Airs and Dances (1917), Prokofiev’s “Classical” Symphony (1917) and Stravinsky’s Pulcinella (1920). It represents an English facet of
neoclassicism, the style of employing elements of aesthetic movements of the past in the artwork of the present. In music, composers embraced the balance, structure and symmetry of the Baroque and Classical periods while retaining their modern harmonic and melodic languages.

While the Capriol Suite borrows melodies from Arbeau, Warlock thoroughly reworks these tunes so that each movement transforms into an original piece and not merely an arrangement. The opening Basse Danse stomps heavily in triple time, accompanied by some very unpredictable accents. The Pavane’s stately tread begins quietly and flowers into a richly scored climax before retreating to the quiet textures of the opening. The light-footed Tordion preserves its long-short-long rhythm throughout, but the movement floats away into the atmosphere as the strings change from arco to pizzicato. The Bransle (pronounced “brawl”) scampers quietly, interrupted by occasional loud outbursts. It gains both speed and rhythmic complexity before the breathless close. Pieds-en-l’air (“Feet in the Air”) is a lilting, graceful movement, underscored with elegant counterpoint. The final Matchins (Sword Dance) is an energetic romp over a bagpipe-like drone. Dancing with large swords (as illustrated in Orchésographie) may have served as the inspiration for the dissonant ending chords, Warlock portraying the sound of the swords clashing over the dancers’ heads in his piquant harmonies.


Imagine if your native land considered you its first great literary genius. Now imagine if another country considered you its first great literary genius, even though that country now speaks a different language. Add more fame as one of the greatest playwrights your country has produced, and as someone whose books about natural and common law were used for legal education until about 200 years after your death. Sprinkle in some important essays on history and philosophy, write one of the first science fiction/fantasy novels, and, voilà, you’re Ludvig Holberg.

Holberg (1684 – 1754) lived during the dual Dano-Norwegian dual monarchy, which explains how two countries claim him as their first modern writer. He was well-traveled and well-educated, originally studying theology and history, but he later wrote extensively about law and philosophy. The plays he wrote for the first public theater in Copenhagen are his most enduring legacy, still given in Denmark to this day, and many still actively in print after 250 years. One of his comedies, Maskarade, served as the basis for an opera of the same name by Denmark’s greatest composer, Carl Nielsen. You can still read Holberg’s science fiction novel, Niels Klim’s Journey Under the Ground, both in hard copy and in electronic media. Holberg’s writings brought the spirit of the Enlightenment to Scandinavia, and both Denmark and Norway revere him as a national hero.

By the middle of the 19th century, Norwegian artists and musicians developed their own distinctive styles and voices, distinct from their largely Germanic training. Some of the greatest artists in Norwegian history drew from their past, but in a thoroughly modern fashion. Henrik Ibsen’s claustrophobic family dramas and Edvard Munch’s tortured paintings brought artistic expression to the darker sides of the Scandinavian psyche, mirroring Freud’s exploration of the more sinister corners of the human mind.

In music, Edvard Grieg was more concerned with drawing on Norway’s musical heritage to produce music steeped in the central European tradition, but distinctly Norwegian in sound and expression. He
collaborated with Ibsen on *Peer Gynt*, which became the Norwegian national drama. Grieg’s original incidental music included a part for the Hardanger fiddle, a folk violin with resonating drone strings. The orchestral suites Grieg drew from this music remain his most popular works.

In 1884, Norway celebrated Holberg’s bicentennial, and Grieg contributed a piano suite harking back to the dances of Holberg’s time. Grieg soon revised the work for string orchestra, the version heard most often today. The opening *Praeludium* springs to life with vigorous rhythmic figures reminiscent of Bach’s *Brandenburg Concerto No. 3*. The stately *Sarabande* sings simply and sweetly, and the ensuing *Gavotte* is the epitome of lightness and grace. The *Air* plumbs greater emotional depths, singing its restrained lament over a pulsing accompaniment and building to an impassioned climax. The suite ends with a sprightly *Rigaudon*, combining Baroque elegance with lively folk fiddling from the solo violin and solo cello.

**Yaron Gottfried: Pictures at an Exhibition” Remake** after Mussorgsky for Jazz Trio and Orchestra

Modeste Mussorgsky produced his *Pictures at an Exhibition* to perpetuate the memory of his friend, the artist and architect Victor Hartmann. Mussorgsky was an ardent Russian nationalist, but he was far more interested in folk art than in the grandiose ornamental designs of the aristocracy. Or, as Tchaikovsky put it, “He likes what is coarse, unpolished and ugly.” He devoted himself to seeking truth in art by crafting a natural style without classical artifice.

When Hartmann died in 1874, aged only 39, Mussorgsky was devastated. The following year saw a memorial exhibit of 400 Hartmann works, including sketches, watercolors and costume designs. Deeply moved and seized with sudden inspiration, Mussorgsky reacted to the exhibition by writing a suite of ten piano pieces dedicated to Hartmann. Mussorgsky based his musical material on Hartmann’s drawings and watercolors from the artist’s travels abroad in Poland, France and Italy. The final movement depicts an architectural design for the capital city of the Ukraine.

This remake of *Pictures at an Exhibition* brings a contemporary interpretation to Mussorgsky’s timeless masterpiece. I have taken twelve movements of the original work, arranging and orchestrating them for jazz trio (piano, bass, and drums) and symphony orchestra.

The melodies and themes of Mussorgsky’s original version are dressed in new colors and serve to inspire new forms on which the jazz trio improvises. Each movement treats the original material differently, transforming the work into a live authentic encounter between classical and jazz, between written notation and improvisation. The remake preserves the overall character of each picture and Mussorgsky’s naturalistic approach.

The order of the movements:

1. **Promenade** The work opens with the brilliant famous theme that appears throughout as a transition amid the changing moods of the various pictures. Mussorgsky depicts himself "roving through the exhibition, now leisurely, now briskly in order to come close to a picture that had attracted his attention, and at times sadly, thinking of his departed friend."

2. **Gnomus** (swing-rock groove) Hartmann's sketch, now lost, possibly represented a design for a nutcracker with large teeth. The lurching music, in contrasting tempos with frequent stops and
starts, suggests the movements of the gnome. I added new two sections of improvisation with contrasting character.

3. **Promenade theme** (soft swing ballad tune with warm jazzy harmonies). A placid statement of the promenade melody depicts the viewer walking from one display to the next.

4. **Il vecchio castello** (The old castle) The picture by Hartmann depicts a medieval castle before which a troubadour sings. I used the original themes with a shift into a Middle Eastern/oriental desert-like character, with a meditative percussion and bass groove.

5. **Promenade** A brief majestic statement of the promenade melody (8 measures) gives it more extroversion and weight than before.


7. **Bydlo** A Polish cart on enormous wheels, drawn by two oxen. This heavy movement starts very quietly, based on two repeated bass notes as background to the theme. The music slowly builds, growing wilder and wilder, reaching a climax and then cooling back down to a mysterious drum solo, taking us to the whispering end.

8. **Samuel Goldberg und Schmuyle** "Two Jews: Rich and Poor" The movement is thought to be based on two separate extant portraits. The first theme represent the rich Jew and is played by the piano in the style of the “hazanut,” free in tempo and full of expression and emotion as if sung by a cantor in the synagogue. The second contrasting theme represent the poor Jew – piercing, troubled-sounding melody in 5/8 meter in the style of Georgian folk dance alternating with Spanish flamenco.

9. **Limoges, le marché** (The Marketplace at Limoges) A Latin groove with scherzo character, written as a jazz-Latin tune in ABA form. The solo part changes to an R&B feel for more edge.

10. **Promenade** Free contemplations create a mix of fragments and ideas which reflect the changing of moods and the vagueness of the viewer.

11. **The Hut on Fowl's Legs (Baba-Yaga)** Baba-Yaga is the witch of death from Russian mythology. Hartman painted a design for a clock based on her hut. This is quite a violent and rocky section; motives in this movement evoke the bells of a large clock and the whirlwind sounds of a chase. The B part is in Reggae feel and leads back to a closing section similar to the A part.

12. **The Great Gate of Kiev** Hartmann’s sketch was his design for city gates at Kiev in the ancient Russian massive style with a cupola shaped like a Slavonic helmet. The movement features a grand main theme that exalts the opening promenade but in strict, 4/4 meter. I took a bluesy “New Orleans” twist on the theme. The work ends with a grandioso finale, imitating victorious bells ringing.

### The Making of the Remake

The idea of combining Mussorgsky’s original with jazz had been vibrating in my mind for several years. At my China début concert in 2008, I presented part of the project at the Forbidden City Concert Hall. In 2010, I returned and performed five movements as part of a complete program. The reaction from the audience and the management of the Forbidden City Concert Hall was incredibly good and I immediately received an invitation to come back with the complete work.

The world premiere took place in September 2011 with my trio and the UNO orchestra from Beijing. Since the premiere, the work has been performed worldwide with leading orchestras such as the WDR Funkhauseorchester, Israel Philharmonic, Tbilisi Symphony Orchestra, and the Portland Chamber Orchestra. Both the GPR label and NAXOS have released a CD of the work.
I would like to thank the management of the Forbidden City concert hall for this ongoing collaboration and for making this world premiere a memorable event for me.

YARON GOTTFRIED