

## **“Portsmouth Point” Overture**

**William Walton (1902-83)**

Imagine the energetic bustle of sailors, navy recruits, merchants, travelers, vendors, prostitutes, and visitors at a busy seaside port. Such was the swirl of life at Portsmouth Point in southern England. Composed in 1925, Walton’s work was inspired by a 19<sup>th</sup>-century print by Thomas Rowlandson depicting a caricature of that lively seaport in Hampshire County in southern England. Walton captures the hectic and rambunctious nature of the bustling port with brief melodies, sometime juxtaposed, and at other times overlapping. The driving pulse that never quite settles into a regular meter contributes to the industrious energy of the busy port.

## **Violin Concerto No. 5 in A major, K. 219 (“Turkish”)**

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91)**

The rising popularity of the solo concerto during the 18<sup>th</sup> century resulted in large part from the continuing public adulation of the virtuoso soloist, many of whom composed concertos for their own use. Thus when Mozart began composing concertos around the age of seventeen, he inherited a genre that was intended for social entertainment, emphasized brilliance, and demanded technical virtuosity. Mozart transcended such sensationalism by infusing the solo concerto with elegant lyricism, profound introspection, and compelling drama.

Mozart composed his five violin concertos in Salzburg around 1775 after returning from his five-year sojourn in Italy. Violin Concerto No. 5 follows the three-movement, fast-slow-fast, format characteristic of the genre, though Mozart includes several extraordinary features. For example, in the first movement, after the orchestra opens with a series of lovely melodies, instead of beginning the presentation of those same themes immediately in a solo entry, Mozart instead interjects a brief Adagio passage in the violin before continuing with the presentation of melodies. Typical of the first movement

of a concerto, there is a solo cadenza near the end, providing an opportunity for the soloist to demonstrate technical accomplishment.

The second movement, which features a succession of tenderly elegant and expressive melodies, also concludes with a solo cadenza. The finale opens with a lilting minuet melody that recurs throughout the movement, as is typical of a rondo. But near the end of the movement, the music is interrupted by a sudden dramatic shift to a minor key and an unexpected stormy section. The violins swirl with unison chromatic scales while the cellos and double basses contribute to the tempestuous mood with *col legno* (“with the wood”) bowing, which means the string players strike the string with the bow stick rather than bowing with the hair. This turbulent section inspired the nickname “Turkish” for this concerto. The lilting minuet melody recurs one last time to close the movement.

## **Pulcinella**

**Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)**

Russian composer Igor Stravinsky is perhaps best known for his three ballets premiered in Paris by the Ballets russes during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. His increasing experimentation with modernistic styles and large orchestras culminated with the third of those works, *The Rite of Spring*, whose harsh dissonances, rhythmic complexities, and savagely pagan subject matter sparked a riot at its 1913 premier. Following World War I and the Bolshevik revolution, as part of a move toward much smaller performing resources, he was commissioned by impresario Sergei Diaghilev to compose music for the ballet *Pulcinella* based on a story taken from commedia dell’ arte, with music presumed at the time to be by 18<sup>th</sup>-century Italian composer Giovanni Battista Pergolesi.

Stravinsky’s rather unenthusiastic reaction to Diaghilev’s vision changed after he perused the 18<sup>th</sup>-century musical scores intended as the foundation for the music. Though he borrowed specific melodies from the earlier works, Stravinsky’s version would never be mistaken for 18<sup>th</sup>-century music since he infused it with much more contemporary rhythms, harmonies, and cadences. But with its

rather transparent texture, small chamber ensemble (including 3 vocalists), obvious melodies, and clear tonal structures, *Pulcinella* marked the beginning of Stravinsky's style change known as his neoclassical period—a significant departure from those early ballets.

The story for the ballet derived from *commedia dell' arte*, which was a type of Italian comedy that began in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and flourished throughout Europe for several hundred years. It featured stock characters representing stereotypical personality types improvised to a predetermined plot. Stravinsky's ballet is based on a play known as *Quatre Polichinelles semblables* ("Four Similar Pulcinellas") found in a manuscript from Naples dating from 1700. The plot quite likely appealed to Stravinsky's refined sense of humor: All the girls are enamored with Pulcinella, which enrages their boyfriends, who threaten to kill Pulcinella, who saves himself by substituting his double and only pretending to be murdered. The two would-be assassins then visit their girlfriends disguised as Pulcinella. When the real Pulcinella appears, he arranges marriages for the couples, as well as with his own girlfriend Pimpinella. (Could you count all the "Pulcinellas"? There are four!)

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