
BSO SESSIONS

SEASON 1, EPISODE 1: THE RETURN

Nicholas Hersh, conductor

Jonathan Rush, conductor

LISZT

(arr. Bache)

HINDEMITH

ELGAR

PUCCINI

(arr. Talmi)

Angelus, "Prayer to the Guardian Angels"

Nicholas Hersh, conductor

Five Pieces for String Orchestra

I. Langsam

II. Langsam

III. Lebhaft

IV. Sehr Langsam

V. Lebhaft

Nicholas Hersh, conductor

Serenade for String Orchestra

Allegro piacevole

Larghetto

Allegretto

Jonathan Rush, conductor

I Crisantemi for String Orchestra

Nicholas Hersh, conductor

The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra dedicates this performance
of Puccini's *I Crisantemi* to all family and friends lost in 2020.

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FRANZ LISZT (arr. Bache)

Angelus, “Prayer to the Guardian Angels”

“Truth is a great flirt.” –Liszt

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Born 1811 in Doborján, Kingdom of Hungary; died 1886 in Bayreuth, Germany

- Liszt was a child prodigy, and his father, a contemporary of Beethoven, was his first music teacher. After his debut piano performance at age 9, a group of sponsors agreed to finance his musical education in Vienna.
- At age 15, Liszt’s father passed away, leading Liszt to relocate to Paris to live with his mother. The Paris Conservatoire refused admission to Liszt because he was a foreigner. He became weary of the child-prodigy lifestyle and took a break from playing and composing.
- That all changed when Liszt went to hear the violinist Niccolò Paganini, whose technical virtuosity and flair left such an impression on Liszt that he became determined to further his skills as a pianist.
- “Lisztomania” swept Europe in the mid-1800s. Liszt became a touring sensation and reached such celebrity that his reception has been described as hysteria. Audience members were said to fight over his tossed silk scarves and gloves.
- Liszt’s first love was Countess Marie d’Agoult – a respected author who used a male pen name. She left her husband and children to be with Liszt, and the couple had three children together, one of whom later married the composer Richard Wagner. Liszt then met the Polish Princess Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein. The two wished to marry, but her former husband was a high-ranking Russian military officer and used his power to prevent the marriage, even getting the Pope involved. Despite these affairs, the last years of his life were dominated by his Catholic faith.
- Throughout his lifetime, Liszt gave away much of his proceeds to charities and humanitarian causes.

FUN FACT

Rumor has it: Liszt once fell asleep during a performance by Debussy.

ABOUT THE PIECE

- Written in 1877, *Angelus*, “Prayer to the Guardian Angels” was dedicated to Liszt’s granddaughter, Daniela von Bülow.
- The work is part of a set of three suites for solo piano titled *Years of Pilgrimage*, inspired by Goethe’s novel *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, which tells the story of a hero’s journey of self-realization. *Years of Pilgrimage* is considered the culmination of Liszt’s musical works.
- This piece showcases the style of Liszt’s late piano works, encapsulating a tranquil beauty, whereas his earlier works focus more on technical prowess.

THE WORLD AT A GLANCE

1877

⋮

MUSIC

Brahms’ Symphony No. 2

⋮

SPORT

The inaugural Wimbledon Championship

⋮

LITERATURE

Final installment of Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*

⋮

HISTORY

Frederick Douglass appointed U.S. Marshal of D.C.

⋮

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT

First telephone service

PAUL HINDEMITH

Five Pieces for String Orchestra

“There are only two things worth aiming for, good music and a clean conscience.” - Hindemith

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Born 1895 in Hanau, Germany; died 1963 in Frankfurt, Germany

- Hindemith grew up playing the violin and originally supported himself by performing in dance bands and musical comedy groups before becoming concertmaster of the Frankfurt Opera Orchestra.
- As a young man he was drafted into the Imperial German Army where he served as a musician.
- Hindemith went on to become one of the leading advocates of contemporary music throughout Europe, gaining an international audience for his compositions.
- In the late 1930s, Hindemith started running into frequent trouble with the Nazi party. He was publicly denounced by Joseph Goebbels as an “atonal noisemaker,” and his music was labeled as “degenerate” and banned by the Nazis in 1936. Some of his original scores were burned, and he was pressured to take an indefinite leave of absence from his post at the Berlin Academy. To make matters even more precarious, Hindemith’s wife was of Jewish ancestry. Eventually the couple emigrated to Turkey, Switzerland, and later the U.S. to avoid further persecution.
- Hindemith is regarded as one of the most important composers of the 1900s, influencing most composers for the remainder of the century.

FUN FACT

Hindemith was assigned to play bass drum while in the Imperial German Army band.

ABOUT THE PIECE

- Five Pieces for String Orchestra was written in 1927 as study material for a school orchestra.
- Hindemith believed in “music for use,” preferring to compose for specific purposes rather than for artistic expression. This piece is no exception, having been written with the purpose of introducing young performers to contemporary music.
- The piece is made up of five movements:
 - I. Langsam (slowly)
 - II. Langsam (slowly)
 - III. Lebhaft (lively)
 - IV. Sehr Langsam (very slowly)
 - V. Lebhaft (lively)

(what can we say, composers of Western classical music were not always the most creative when it came to naming things!)

THE WORLD AT A GLANCE

1927

⋮

MUSIC

Louis Armstrong's
Hot Seven

⋮

ART

Edward Hopper's
Automat

⋮

FILM

First movie with sound,
The Jazz Singer

⋮

HISTORY

Formation of the
Communist Chinese
People's Liberation Army

⋮

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT

First transatlantic phone
call: New York to London

EDWARD ELGAR

Serenade for String Orchestra

“My idea is that there is music in the air, music all around us. The air is full of it, and you must simply take as much as you require.” – Elgar

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Born 1857 in Worcester, U.K.; died 1934 in Worcester, U.K.

- Elgar is one of England’s most admired composers, although in his lifetime, he often felt like an outsider both musically and socially. As a Roman Catholic and self-taught musician with a humble background, Elgar often felt out of place in academic musical circles and in the predominantly Protestant and classist Britain.
- Elgar studied music on his own, playing the violin and reading music theory books. At the age of 22, Elgar took a position as a conductor of the attendant’s band at an asylum. He arranged and composed music for the group, which is largely where he learned how to compose for each instrument. It is said that Elgar’s lack of formal music education allowed him to develop a truly unique voice.
- Elgar did not gain recognition until he was in his 40s after the release of his *Enigma Variations*, which received critical acclaim throughout England. Before making it big, Elgar married Caroline Alice Roberts, the daughter of an aristocratic General, and her family disinherited her for marrying Elgar.
- After the acclaim of the *Enigma Variations*, Elgar enjoyed a successful musical career becoming known as one of the preeminent composers in the country, eventually being knighted and awarded honorary degrees from Oxford and Yale. His famous “Pomp and Circumstance” can be heard at nearly every graduation ceremony in the U.S.
- Elgar became the first composer to embrace the gramophone and recorded a large number of his works, setting a path for many other composers and orchestras to come.

FUN FACT

It is said that Elgar wrote the main theme for his famous cello concerto on a napkin after waking up from dental surgery.

ABOUT THE PIECE

- Serenade for String Orchestra was composed in 1892 and is based on musical material that Elgar wrote many years earlier – prior to pursuing a career as a composer.
- It is one of the most frequently performed pieces Elgar wrote and remained Elgar’s favorite of his own works throughout his life.
- The piece has 3 movements:
 - Allegro piacevole (fast with a pleasant, agreeable style)
 - Larghetto (slowly with great expression)
 - Allegretto (moderately fast)

THE WORLD AT A GLANCE

1892



MUSIC

Tchaikovsky’s
The Nutcracker



ART

Monet’s *Rouen Cathedral series*



FASHION

First issue of *Vogue*



HISTORY

Opening of Ellis Island



TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT

Thomas Edison’s patent for the two-way telegraph

GIACOMO PUCCINI

I Crisantemi for String Orchestra

“I lived for art; I lived for love.” - Puccini

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Born 1858 in Lucca, Italy; died 1924 in Brussels, Belgium

- Puccini is regarded as one of the greatest composers of Italian opera of all time. His most famous works, such as *La bohème*, *Madame Butterfly*, and *Tosca*, are some of the most performed works across opera stages around the world.
- Puccini, one of nine children, was born into a local musical dynasty. He was the last descendent of a family that for two centuries provided music directors to the main cathedral in Lucca, Italy. Puccini was expected to take over the role, though he was only 5 years old when his father passed. The cathedral held the role open for him until he came of age, but by then Puccini had developed a flourishing career elsewhere.
- Puccini fled Lucca with a married woman, Elvira Gemignani, which erupted into a huge scandal. When her husband passed away, Elvira and Puccini married, although it was a tumultuous relationship fraught with jealousy — ending with a woman, who was suspected to be involved with Puccini, poisoning herself!
- Puccini’s final opera, *Turandot*, was left incomplete at his death. One of Puccini’s students finished the work based on his sketches, and it continues to be one of the most popular operatic works of all time, including the famous aria “Nessun dorma.”
- At the time of his death, Puccini was the most successful commercial opera composer in the world with an estimated net worth of \$200m.

FUN FACT

Puccini was passionate about technology and was good friends with Thomas Edison.

ABOUT THE PIECE

- Puccini was mainly an opera composer. As someone who claimed his “true talents lay only in the theater,” he wrote very few non-operatic works in his life, making this piece a rarity.
- Composed in 1890, *I Crisantemi* was written in one night after Puccini learned about the sudden death of his friend the Duke of Savoy, an abdicated King of Spain who settled in Turin.
- He named the piece *I Crisantemi* (“The Chrysanthemums”) because the flowers are associated with mourning in Italy.

THE WORLD AT A GLANCE

1890

⋮

MUSIC

Birth of Jelly Roll Morton

⋮

ART

Death of
Vincent van Gogh

⋮

LITERATURE

Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

⋮

HISTORY

Empire of Japan’s first
general election

⋮

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT

Invention of the
diesel engine

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