QCSO Program Notes Masterworks V: Beethoven Second Symphony

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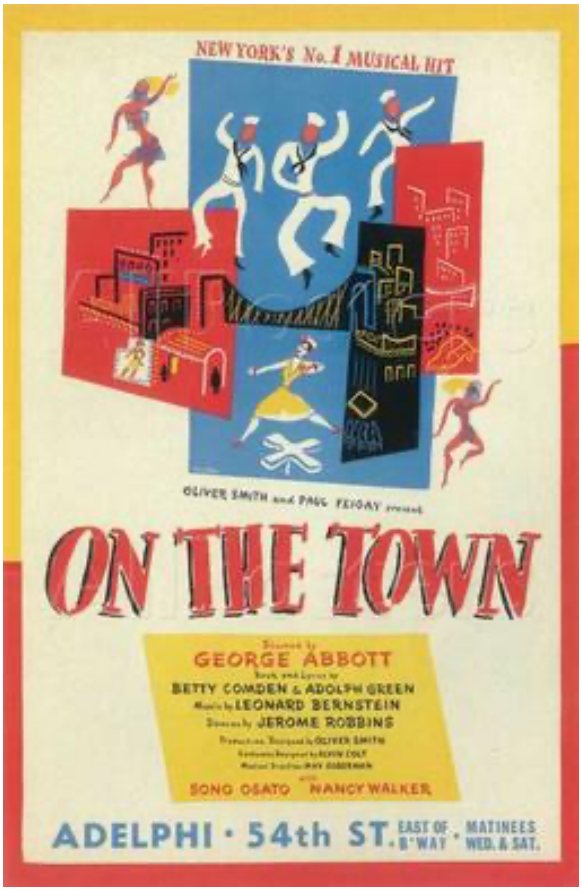
Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990)
Three Dance Episodes from On the Town



Instrumentation: Flute (doubling piccolo), oboe (doubling English horn), three clarinets (first doubling E-flat clarinet, third doubling bass clarinet), alto saxophone, two horns, three trumpets, three trombones, timpani, two percussion, piano, and strings.

QCSO Performance History: These are the first QCSO Masterworks performances of *Three Dance Episodes*. The third movement ("Times Square: 1944") was performed on the 1995 Riverfront Pops concert (Kim Allen Kluge conducting) and on the 2011 Patriotic Pops concert (Mark Russell Smith conducting).

The multifaceted persona of Leonard Bernstein lives large in American music history. We see him now as a world-renowned conductor, a composer of profound and innovative concert works, a television celebrity, a socialite, a multi-millionaire, and an activist. But before November 1943, he was as yet none of these things. Bernstein had graduated from Harvard College in 1939 and went on to study at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia with Fritz Reiner, completing his studies there in 1941. The years immediately following his time at Curtis were uncertain times; Bernstein continued serving as assistant conductor to Serge Koussevitzky at Tanglewood during the summers, but the rest of the year was spent struggling in New York, where his odd jobs included accompanying dancers, teaching, and transcribing popular piano music for $25 per week.

Everything changed for Bernstein during the 1943-44 season. His last-minute debut with the New York Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall on November 14, 1943 was a massive sensation; Bernstein received widespread acclaim, even appearing on the front page of *The New York Times* the following day. This triumph was followed by two highly successful premieres of his own music: Symphony No. 1, "Jeremiah" with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in January of 1944, and the ballet *Fancy Free,* with choreography by Jerome Robbins, at the Metropolitan Opera House in April. He capped his successes of the 1943-44 season with a celebrated conducting debut at the Hollywood Bowl in August.

It was following this astonishingly successful season that Bernstein's musical *On the Town* opened on Broadway. The ballet scenario for *Fancy Free* concerned three Navy sailors on leave; the production's illustrious and enterprising set designer Oliver Smith liked the story so much he suggested adapting it into a full-length musical. Working with witty lyrics fashioned by his friends Betty Comden and Adolph Green, Bernstein decided to avoid repurposing any of the music from *Fancy Free*, instead fashioning an exuberant, jazz-infused original score. Considered an investment risk due to the youth and inexperience of its composer and lyricists, *On the Town* turned out to be a smash hit, running for 462 performances. "The freshest and most engaging musical show to come this way," wrote *The New York Times*, "since the golden day of *Oklahoma!*"

Not everyone appreciated the sophisticated nature of Bernstein's score. When MGM Studios took up the film version, storied producer Arthur Freed (with musicals like *The Wizard of Oz* and *Singin' in the Rain* to his name) objected. He considered Bernstein's music too refined and operatic for most film audiences, and retained only four of the Bernstein/Comden & Green songs for his film. Bernstein was furious at having his work decimated, and loudly boycotted the film's premiere.

Concert audiences, however, would come to appreciate Bernstein's original musical far more than the short-sighted Hollywood types ever would. In 1945, Bernstein published *Three Dance Episodes from On the Town*, re-orchestrated for full symphony orchestra, which has become one of the composer's most-performed concert works.

Listening Guide

The Great Lover (Allegro pesante)

- **Rhythm:** Bernstein is almost maniacally focused on emphasizing his offbeats, placing strong notes in rhythmic positions away from the beat.
- **Instrumentation:** The original Broadway score for *On the Town* would have been written for a standard pit orchestra, where woodwind players played multiple instruments. Though these concert excerpts are orchestrated for a much larger ensemble, the combinations of various woodwinds harkens back to the original, more limited ensemble.

Lonely Town: Pas de Deux (Andante sostenuto)

- **Harmony:** Always the master of American popular musical styles, Bernstein infuses this movement with chords and melodies drawn from the blues.

Times Square: 1944 (Allegro con spirito)

- **Rhythm:** Bernstein interrupts the more driving passages of this movement with relaxed interludes. He does so by using a rhythmic pattern called a "jazz two-feel", where only beats 1 and 3 are emphasized.
- **Style:** Several years after writing *On the Town*, Bernstein would dedicate his work *Prelude, Fugue, and Riffs* to clarinetist Benny Goodman; passages of this movement show he had already internalized Goodman's signature style.

Rebecca Burkhardt (b. 1957)
Ballet for Cello and Orchestra

Instrumentation: solo cello, three flutes (third doubling piccolo), two oboes (second doubling English horn), two clarinets (second doubling bass clarinet), two bassoons (second doubling contrabassoon), two horns, two trumpets, two trombones, tuba, timpani, three percussion, harp, piano, and strings.

World Premiere Performances.

Composer Rebecca Burkhardt writes:

> When cellist Hannah Holman asked me to write a concerto for her, I asked what was important about where she lived and worked. I wanted this piece to reflect her life and the lives of other women in those places. The locales she thought were most important to her life were: a suburb near Detroit where she grew up, Iowa where she lived, raised her son and still works, and New York City where she currently resides and plays in the NYC Ballet. *Ballet for Cello and Orchestra* is a tribute to her and to those like her who walk, dance, survive, fail, create, toil and aspire to achieve wonderful things. Sometimes we take on this dance alone, and sometimes with a partner or a community. The three movements reflect the sounds, landscapes and essences of Iowa, Detroit, and New York City.
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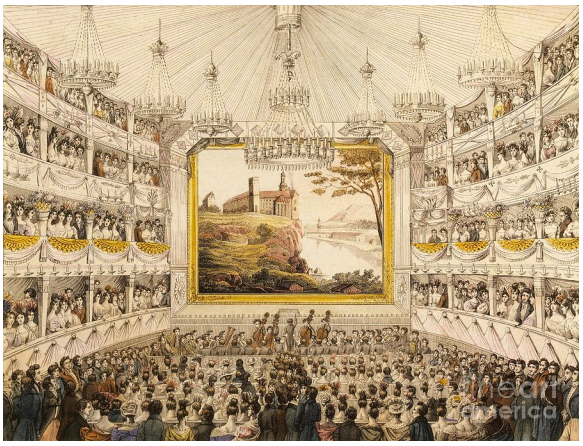
> Movement I, Walking, conjures the cry of indigenous ancestors who walked the plains of this country, the migration of settlers, the harshness of conflict between peoples and the starkness of a life enveloped by wilderness and winter.
>
> Movement II, Working, begins with a day breaking into the howl of a factory whistle. Motives of the Motown sound mix with the low grind of factory mechanisms and end in a continuously rising treble shout between the cello and the orchestra.
>
> Movement III, Wondering, continues from movement II with an exploration of dance in the performance wonderland of Manhattan. The sounds of early Harlem and Puerto Rican rhythms combine with classical balletic melodies to invoke the euphoria of creative success, the exasperation of inequity and failure, and a hope and wonder for what might come next.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 36



Instrumentation: Two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings.

QCSO Performance History: Ludwig Becker conducted the first performances of Beethoven's second symphony in January 1922, and performances conducted by Frank Kendrie followed in November 1934. The work was then dormant for over five decades, until James Dixon led performances in November 1986 as part of a two-year cycle of all nine Beethoven symphonies. The most recent performances were conducted by guest conductor Gustav Meier in December 1996.

In 1791, near the end of his short life, Mozart premiered his masterpiece of German opera, *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute)* at the Theater auf der Wieden ("Theatre on the Vienna River") in the suburbs of the imperial capital. Notwithstanding the composer's untimely death, *The Magic Flute* was a tremendous public success, earning a fortune for Mozart's collaborator Emanuel Schikaneder, who had written the opera's libretto and created the unforgettable comic role of Papageno. Schikaneder used the proceeds from his success to build an opulent new theatre to replace the somewhat modest venue where *The Magic Flute* had premiered. The new, confusingly-named Theater an der Wein (i.e., "at" the river, not "on" the river this time) opened its doors in 1801. Public and critical responses were effusive. "Schikaneder is up to his old tricks in the suburbs on the Wien River," wrote author Johann Gottfried Seume, "where he has built himself a very stately house, the furnishings of which many a theater director could and should visit with benefit." Critic Adolf Bäurle suggested that "visitors might have paid simply to look at the theatre's splendors", and the influential publication *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* deemed it "the most comfortable and satisfactory" performing venue "in all German-speaking lands."

Immediately following the death of Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven had moved to Vienna from the western German city of Bonn at the age of 21. The young Beethoven attended performances of *The Magic Flute* at the older Theater *auf* der Wieden (it was his favorite Mozart opera), and he would certainly have been aware of the buzz around Schikaneder's new venue. Just as the Theater an der Wien was opening, Beethoven began work on his Symphony No. 2, and would eventually arrange for its premiere at the opulent new hall.

The second symphony was composed primarily at the retreat town of Heiligenstadt (literally "Holy City"; now part of the city of Vienna) between April and October of 1802. Anyone familiar with Beethoven's biography will immediately recognize the name of Heilegenstadt; it was there that he wrote his *Testament*: an excruciating letter to his brothers written amid the swelling grief over his deafness.

"For six years I have been a hopeless case," he wrote his brothers. "I was compelled early to isolate myself, to live in loneliness, when I at times tried to forget all this, O how harshly was I repulsed by the doubly sad experience of my bad hearing, and yet it was impossible for me to say to men, 'Speak louder, shout, for I am deaf.'" Beethoven conveyed his profound embarrassment at losing his hearing ("the one sense which should have been more perfect in me than in others"), and confessed to contemplating ending his own life. "Divine One," he wrote in a prayerful interlude, "thou lookest into my inmost soul, thou knowest it, thou knowest that love of man and desire to do good live therein." His anguished postscript includes the autumnal lament "even the high courage — which often inspired me in the beautiful days of summer — has disappeared." Beethoven would return to Vienna that month, his newly-completed second symphony ready for performance.

The audience that gathered in Schikaneder's beautiful new Theater an der Wien the following April for the premiere might not have guessed the agony that Beethoven had confessed the previous summer. Indeed, they would likely have felt that they were beholding a confident, rising musical superstar. This marathon concert included the world premieres of Symphony No. 2, Piano Concerto No. 3, the oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives*, and a performance of Beethoven's previously-premiered Symphony No. 1. And the second symphony itself, with its energy, vigor, and humor, betrayed none of the personal torment Beethoven had written about to his brothers while he completed the work.

Beethoven would return many times to perform at the Theater an der Wien, and he premiered many of his most well-known works there, including Symphony No. 3, "Eroica" (1805), his only opera *Fidelio* (1805), his Violin Concerto (1806), and, in another colossal production reminiscent of the concert of 1803, his Symphonies Nos. 5 and 6, the *Choral Fantasy*, and his Piano Concerto No. 4, all in a single evening. Unlike many theatres from this era, Schikaneder's venue is still an active performance hall, having seen various additions and renovations, most recently in 2024.

Listening Guide

First Movement: Adagio molto – Allegro con brio

- **Texture:** Beethoven's slow introduction is a study in orchestral contrasts, with highly varied textures and moods; it seems almost as if Beethoven is trying out various ideas before deciding on which to move forward with. Having decided, his transition into the main Allegro section is seamless.

Second Movement: Larghetto

- **Melody:** As is typical for symphonies in Beethoven's time and place, the slow movement includes a simple melody that Beethoven transforms in various ways. It is fairly easy to identify the main tune when it returns; its first four notes are the same as the opening of the song "Home on the Range" ("Give me a home…").

Third Movement: Scherzo (Allegro – Trio)

- **Tempo:** This particular movement marks an important moment in symphonic history. The dance movement of most symphonies before Beethoven were stately, elegant minuets. But Beethoven felt the urge for something more exciting, so he started writing faster-paced, less genteel scherzos instead. He would return to the minuet years later in his eighth symphony.

Fourth Movement: Allegro molto

- **Dynamics:** For further thrills, Beethoven uses an extraordinarily high level of dynamic contrast in this closing movement.