

Hofmannsthal had the idea of reviving Molière's 1670 play *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*, simplifying its plot, introducing a commedia dell'arte troupe, adding incidental music, and concluding what would be a long evening with a newly written one-act opera called *Ariadne auf Naxos*. This idea did materialize, as planned, in Stuttgart on 25 October 1912. But it was apparent that the result was too long and expensive and that many in the audience for the play were uninterested in the opera, and vice versa. Strauss and Hofmannsthal accordingly opted to separate the two works entirely. In the case of the opera, this meant Strauss composing a new "Prologue" for it to explain the presence of the comedians. (The revised *Ariadne auf Naxos* premiered four years later and has been a success ever since.) As regards the play, Hofmannsthal devised an ending closer to Molière's original, with Strauss adding to his existing incidental music to support the new conclusion. This premiered in 1917.

It was from the now-lengthened incidental music that Strauss compiled his orchestral suite. He finished this task on Christmas Day 1917, and the resulting concert work received its premiere in Berlin on 9 April 1918 with Strauss himself conducting. The suite lasts half an hour and is in nine sections:

Omitted from the suite were ballets added for the 1917 version of the play: one for sylphs, another for pretend-Turks. Strauss's Opus 60 is unusual among his works in having a distinct Baroque flavor. In fact he based sections 5 to 7 on music by Jean-Baptiste Lully, who had provided the original incidental music in 1670 and was as much a collaborator with Molière as Strauss and Hofmannsthal were centuries later. The few other so-called Neo-Classical works by Strauss also found inspiration in the French Baroque: his 1923 *Dance suite* after keyboard pieces by François Couperin and his 1942 *Divertimento* for chamber orchestra after keyboard pieces by Couperin, Opus 86.

Bartok

Concerto for Orchestra

Richard Strauss

Suite From *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*

Fritz Reiner conducting the Chicago Symphony Orchestra



In 1943, after a year of precipitously declining health, Bartók was diagnosed with leukemia. He had been in the United States for nearly three years, a period in which he had to endure financial hardship, artistic isolation and separation from the source of his inspiration, Hungary, and its wealth of folk music. What income and recognition he did receive came mostly from his appearances as a pianist (or sometimes as duo-pianist with his wife Ditta Paszty), but poor health prevented him from performing after January 1943. It seemed as if his life had come to a standstill when he received a commission for a large orchestral work from Serge Koussevitzky, music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The funds for the commission came, unbeknownst to Bartók, from his close friends and fellow Hungarian émigrés Joseph Szigeti and Fritz Reiner. Bartók traveled to Saranac Lake, NY, and worked on the Concerto for Orchestra between August and October 1943. The work was first heard in 1944, and though Bartók was unable to attend the Boston premiere, he did hear a subsequent performance in New York City.

Like the fourth and fifth string quartets (1928 and 1934), the Concerto for Orchestra is in five movements, arranged in what is called an "arch" form, in which the first and fifth movements are related, as are the second and fourth, with the third movement functioning as the keystone of the arch. The Concerto's opening bars present a theme of rising fourths in cellos and basses, answered by tremolando strings and fluttering flutes in Bartók's characteristic "night music" style. Trumpets, pianissimo, chant a pungent, short-phrased chorale on which the theme of the main *Allegro vivace* is based. A lyrical second theme is introduced by the oboe, but the mood remains dark as the material is developed. Only when brass erupt in a modal fugato section is there the suggestion

that things may lighten. Bartók noted that the progress of the concerto was toward light from initial darkness, and that the thematic material of the fugato will return in modified form as the basis of the joyous *moto perpetuo* finale.

The second movement is titled "Games of Couples," and presents woodwinds in successive pairs, with close intervallic relationships derived from Dalmatian folk music. The syncopated rhythm that accompanies these games -- performed by side drum without snares -- carries over into the middle section, a soft chorale for brass. Bartók described the keystone third movement, "Elegia," as a "lugubrious death-song," in which unsettled "night music" effects alternate with intense, prayerful supplications (again related to the chorale-like material that pervades the first half of the work). The subsequent "Interrupted Intermezzo" presents the first real carefree moments of the work, with its satiric treatment of the march theme from Shostakovich's "Leningrad" Symphony, which Bartók heard in a radio broadcast. Bartók scholar Elliott Antokoletz notes that the movement's warm, cantabile melody for violas quotes a popular song by Zsigmond Vincze, "You are Lovely, You are Beautiful, Hungary," bringing an unmistakable note of homesickness to the music. The finale opens with a leaping call to order for all four horns unison, followed by a wild *moto perpetuo* dance, in which the succeeding episodes hardly stop for breath. Bartók provided two endings, the first rather abrupt, the second more traditionally climactic, and making use of the upward-moving minor third motif that served as an intervallic motto for Bartók in many works. The alternate ending is the one that is usually played.

Le bourgeois gentilhomme (in German, *Der Bürger als Edelmann*), Op. 60
The work has a complex genesis. Originally, Strauss collaborator Hugo von

Bartók Concerto for Orchestra

Richard Strauss Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme

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Bartok Concerto For Orchestra

1 Introduzione: Andante Non Troppo; Allegro Vivace 9:56

2 Giuoco Delle Coppie; Allegretto Scherzando 5:59

3 Elegia: Andante, Non Troppo 7:55

4 Intermezzo Interrotto; Allegretto 4:14

5 Finale: Pesante; Presto 9:00

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6 Overture 3:49

7 Minuet 1:27

8 The Fencing Master 1:45

9 Entrance And Dance Of The Tailors 4:41

10 Entrance Of Cléonte 4:54

11 Prelude To Act II 3:13

12 The Dinner 10:07

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Strauss transferred from a 15ips 2-track tape



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