

stimulated by its sights and sounds. (His Symphony No. 3 in A Minor, Op. 56, was also known as the Scottish Symphony.) While on a ferry voyage in western Scotland, Mendelssohn was so struck by the misty scene and the crashing waves that a melody came into his mind, a melody with all the surge and power of the sea itself. In an exuberant letter, he described the experience to his sister Fanny, and, wishing to convey to her how deeply he was moved, he wrote down for her a few bars of the melody that he later used at the beginning of his overture.

Strauss first saw Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* in a German translation in Berlin in November 1902. He adapted his own libretto from that translation, and the opera that resulted scandalized Europe and America. The first *Salomé*, Marie Wittich, refused to perform the "Dance of the Seven Veils," declaring that no respectable woman would strip on stage; J.P. Morgan's daughter led a crusade against the work in New York, which meant that all further performances were cancelled after the Metropolitan Opera unveiled the work in 1907; and Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany worried that *Salomé* would do Strauss' career a lot of damage. "The damage," the composer remarked later, "enabled me to build my villa at Garmisch."

In *Salomé*, we find Strauss revisiting the precedent established by Wagner in works like *Tristan und Isolde* and *Götterdämmerung* of including a monumental final scene for soprano. The tone of *Salomé's* finale is quite different, though. Our heroine is transfigured, to be sure, but into a demented, depraved necrophiliac. Love and death recur here, but *Isolde's* transcendent vision is replaced here with *Salomé's* horrific nightmare.

Overtures and Dances

Fritz Reiner Chicago Symphony



Early in his career, Smetana enjoyed success in two capacities: As a pianist he was reputed to be an especially fine Chopin interpreter; as a conductor, he headed Sweden's Göteborg Philharmonic Society for several years. Leaving the latter post and returning to Prague, he aided the cause of Czech musical art first by supporting the movement to build an opera house, second by writing truly Bohemian operas to put on its stage. *Bride's* homely story of village life is cloaked in bright music that has enough melodic and rhythmic folk flavoring to make the Bohemian heart beat faster, and enough pure musical value to agitate the non-Czech pulse.

The music of the Overture is drawn largely from the finale of Act II. In this scene, the hero signs a contract relinquishing his claim to his fiancée, and the legal sale is witnessed by the townspeople. The Overture begins with full orchestral thrust, out of which a scherzo-ish figure accumulates in the strings, and then a syncopated dance figure makes its vigorous appearance. These materials are developed with great instrumental brilliance – the Overture's high spirits are activated as much by virtuosic orchestration as by vital, folkish picturesqueness.

Schwanda the Bagpiper (Czech: *Švanda dudák*), written in 1926, is an opera in two acts (five scenes), with music by Jaromír Weinberger to a Czech libretto by Miloš Kareš, based on the drama *Strakonický dudák aneb Hody divých žen* (The Bagpiper of Strakonice) by Josef Kajetán Tyl.

Its first performance was in Prague at the Czech National Opera on 27 April 1927; and the first German production followed (in the translation by Max Brod as *Schwanda der Dudelsackpfeifer*), at Breslau on 16 December 1928. After that success, German-language productions proliferated around the world, with over 2000 performances taking place during the next decade.

In the spring of 1891 Dvorak set about writing a cycle of three concert overtures which were originally known by their collective title, *Nature, Life and Love*. Later on, however, the composer decided to split them up, giving them each an independent opus number and title: *In Nature's Realm*, Op. 91, *Carnival*, Op. 92 and *Othello*, Op. 93. Given that their subject matter lies outside musical contexts, they might be regarded as part of the programmatic line of Dvorak's oeuvre, which was not – and is probably still not – considered typically Dvorakian, but which threads its way right through the composer's musical career.

The *Hebrides*, Op. 26, German *Die Hebriden*, also called *Hebrides Overture*, *Fingal's Cave*, *Ossian in Fingal's Cave*, *Overture to the Isles of Fingal*, and *Overture to the Lonely Isle*, concert overture (resembling an operatic overture, though intended for concert performance rather than as a prelude to a theatrical work) by German composer Felix Mendelssohn, a tempestuous one-movement work in sonata form, inspired by the composer's visit to the Hebrides islands off the west coast of Scotland. First performed in 1830, the piece was revised many times by its composer and premiered (as *Overture to the Isles of Fingal*) in London on May 14, 1832.

In 1829 the 20-year-old Mendelssohn visited Scotland with a childhood friend, Carl Klingemann. The two roved among the lakes and moors of the Scottish Highlands, and Mendelssohn wrote colourful letters home about their adventures. He described the "comfortless, inhospitable solitude," which stood in contrast to the entrancing beauty and wildness of the countryside. Here was a place very different from Berlin, where the young composer had grown up. Mendelssohn loved Scotland, and he was

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- 1 Smetana The Bartered Bride Overture 6:31
- 2 Weinberger Schwanda The Bagpipe Player Polka And Fugue 9:20
- 3 Dvorak Carnival Overture 8:55
- 4 Mendelssohn-Bartholdy Fingals Cave Overture 9:32
- 5 Richard Strauss Salome Dance Of The Seven Veils 9:06

Smetana The Bartered Bride Overture Recorded 12/1955

Weinberger Schwanda The Bagpipe Player Polka And Fugue Recorded 01/1956

Dvorak Carnival Overture Recorded 01/1956

Mendelssohn-Bartholdy Fingals Cave Overture Recorded 01/1956

Richard Strauss Salome Dance Of The Seven Veils Recorded 03/1954

All recorded by RCA



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