

Hermann Scherchen Born: June 21, 1891 – Berlin, Germany Died: June 12, 1966 – Florence, Italy

The eminent German conductor, Hermann Scherchen, was mainly self taught in music. He learned to play the viola and was a violist from 1907 to 1910 in the Berlin Blüthner Orchestra and on a temporary basis at the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. He met Arnold Schoenberg and made his debut with A. Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire* in 1912.

In 1914 Hermann Scherchen became conductor of the Riga Symphony Orchestra. He was interned in Russia during the First World War. In 1918 he returned to Berlin and founded the New Music Society and a string quartet that bore his name. One year later he created *Melos*, a journal devoted to contemporary music. In 1920 he was reader at the Berlin Music College. He took over the Leipzig Concert Association Orchestra in 1921 and succeeded Wilhelm Furtwängler as conductor of the Frankfurt Museum concerts. From 1923 (until 1947) he worked regularly with the Winterthur Orchestra and was director of the Winterthur Collegium Musicum for a time. In 1923 he was a founder member of the International Society for Contemporary Music, on whose behalf he also appeared as conductor. In 1928 he moved to Königsberg where he was chief musical director (until 1931) and principal conductor (until 1933) of the Eastern Radio Symphony Orchestra. In 1933 he left Germany and worked as guest conductor in various countries. He created orchestras and journals in Brussels, Vienna and Switzerland, all with the name *Ars Viva* or *Musica Viva* and all devoted to contemporary music. From 1944 to 1950 he was conductor of the Zurich Radio Orchestra, which was renamed Beromünster Radio while he was working there. After the

Second World War he gave classes at the Venice Biennale and in Darmstadt. In 1950 he founded the *Ars Viva* publishing house in Zurich, publishing forgotten or unknown works by classical and contemporary composers. He was also interested in electro-acoustic music and with the support of UNESCO founded a sound studio in 1954 in Gravesano (Switzerland). From 1959 to 1960 he was conductor of the North-West German Philharmonia, his last permanent post. Scherchen is certainly one of the most important figures in the world of music in the twentieth century. He unearthed new talents but without neglecting old traditions. Even today, his interpretations of Mozart and the Romantics are unequalled. Scherchen was one of the few conductors who conducted without a baton.



## SCHERCHEN conducts Music of



**Herold • Reznicek • Auber • Weber • Falla**

Louis Joseph Ferdinand Hérold (January 28, 1791–January 19, 1833), better known simply as Ferdinand Hérold, was a French composer of early romantic operas who stands midway between Daniel Auber and Jacques Offenbach in the development of the opéra comique. Of Alsatian descent, he also wrote many pieces for the piano, orchestra, and the ballet but is best known today for the ballet *La fille mal gardée* and the overture to the opera *Zampa*. Hérold was born in Paris, France, on January 28, 1791, the only child of François-Joseph Hérold, a pianist and composer, and Jeanne-Gabrielle Pascal. He was the grandson of Nicolas Hérold, an organist. At the age of six, he attended the Hix Institute and excelled in his studies. While there, he also took musical theory with François-Joseph Fétis, who later edited the periodical *La Revue Musicale*. At the age of seven, he played piano and composed some piano pieces.

Emil Nikolaus von Reznicek (1860–1945) was an Austrian composer who was enormously popular in his time, but who outlived his time by at least a generation. Best known during his lifetime as a composer of operas, Reznicek already had three operas when he wrote his comic masterpiece *Donna Diana*. Written while Reznicek was the military band master in Prague, the work was premiered to great success in that city in 1894. Reznicek went on to write ten more operas through 1934 and to revise *Donna Diana* twice, once in 1908 and again in 1933, but musical styles had so completely changed by that time that the opera and its composer were all but forgotten. Although central European conductors kept the overture alive as a concert favorite, the opera had all but dropped out of the repertoire before Reznicek's death. Oddly, a section of the overture was used as the theme music for a popular radio show called *Sergeant Preston of the Yukon* (1947–1955), which was later turned into a television show of the same name (1955–1958).

*Fra Diavolo*, ou *L'hôtellerie de Terracine* (*Fra Diavolo*, or *The Inn of Terracina*) is an opéra comique in three acts by the French composer Daniel Auber, from a libretto by Auber's regular collaborator Eugène Scribe. It is loosely based on the life of the Itrani guerrilla leader Michele Pezza, active in southern Italy in the period 1800–1806, who went under the name of *Fra Diavolo* ("Brother Devil").

The opera was first performed by the Opéra-Comique at the Salle Ventadour in Paris on 28 January 1830 and an Italian version was prepared by Auber and Scribe for performance in London in 1857. This contained new recitatives and arias, as well as expanding the roles of *Fra Diavolo*'s accomplices.

The opera was Auber's greatest success, one of the most popular works of the 19th century and

was in the standard repertory in its original French as well as German and Italian versions. An English translation was also prepared. Hugh Macdonald has characterised this comic opera as "the most successful work of its kind before Offenbach"

Weber composed *Der Freischütz* between 1817 and 1821, and the opera received its premiere in Berlin on June 18, 1821. Weber's overture to his opera *Der Freischütz* is one of the most famous nineteenth century works in this form. The opera breaks with the eighteenth century style of overtures that contained only suggestions of the motives that would follow. This work is also larger in scope and scored in broader, more romantic strokes that the equally satisfying, yet clearly more classical *Leonore* overtures of Beethoven.

The *Ritual Fire Dance* is taken from Falla's ballet *El Amor brujo* (1914 – 1915). And just like those other pieces, it has been arranged for all sorts of instruments and ensembles. Falla's original scoring, in the first version of the ballet, was for a small ensemble of 14 or so instruments. He later extracted a piano suite from the ballet and in 1925, revised it for a larger orchestra. The *Ritual Fire Dance* since, then, has taken on a life of its own. The dance is mesmerizing and whirling, performed by the gypsies to exorcise a ghost; but it is also, like those other famous encores, a dramatic, exciting piece with a recognizable melody. In the opening, between the slower-paced bass line (originally in the piano) and the twice-faster melody (first in the oboe, then the violins), there is a driving, curling, repetitive figure, almost a rumbling (in the piano and strings). In the second section, the piano and lower strings resolutely bounce, while the brass and woodwinds take up the charge. Both sections are repeated before the coda, entirely expressed in full chords, to drive the ghost away once and for all. Alongside the many orchestral recordings, there are arrangements for the more typical ensembles: violin and piano, cello and piano, guitar or guitars, brass ensemble, two pianos, trumpet and piano. And there are arrangements for the atypical ensembles and instruments: trombone and piano, harmonica and piano, eight pianos, eight cellos, recorder and accordion, vibraphone. The piece works well on the piano or pianos because the instrument played an important role in Falla's original scoring. The guitar is also a natural, given the overall Spanish and folk flavor of the work. The effectiveness of the arrangement or performance is tied to conveying the fiery energy of the dance with proper reverence for the ritual.

# **SCHERCHEN** conducts Music of **Herold • Reznicek • Auber • Weber • Falla**

- 1 Herold - Zampa Overture**
  - 2 Reznicek - Donna Diana Overture**
  - 3 Auber - Fra Diavolo Overture**
  - 4 Weber - Der Freischutz Overture**
  - 5 Falla - Ritual Fire Dance / Dance of Terror**
- Total Time: 41:38**