

Classics 3: Program Notes

Overture to *Candide*

Leonard Bernstein

Born in Lawrence, Massachusetts, August 25, 1918; died in New York, October 14, 1990



After collaborating on *The Lark*, a play with incidental music about Joan of Arc, Leonard Bernstein and Lillian Hellman turned their attention in 1954 to Voltaire's novella *Candide*. They thought it the perfect vehicle to make an artistic statement against political intolerance in American society, just as Voltaire had done in eighteenth-century France. After bringing in poet Richard Wilbur to write the lyrics, they worked intermittently on *Candide* for two years. Enormous amounts of money were spent on the production, which opened in Boston on October 29, 1956. Though many critics called it brilliant, the production failed financially; after moving to New York in December, it was shut down after just seventy-three performances. Everyone had someone to blame, but many thought it failed because of audience confusion about its hybrid nature—was it an opera, operetta, or a musical?

Leonard Bernstein: celebrating his centennial

The story revolves around the illegitimate Candide, who loves and is loved in return by Cunegonde, daughter of nobility. They are plagued by myriad disasters, which lead

them from Westphalia to Lisbon, Paris, Cadiz, Buenos Aires, Eldorado, Surinam, and finally Venice, where they are united at last. Bernstein's often witty, sometimes tender music has been considered the work's greatest asset, both in the initial failed production and in later successful versions.

The Overture, possibly Bernstein's most frequently performed piece, perfectly captures the mockery and satire as well as the occasional introspective moment of Voltaire's masterful creation. In an artfully compact form, Bernstein incorporates tunes from the show, including the instrumental Battle Music, the love parody "Oh Happy We," and Cunegonde's giddy coloratura aria "Glitter and Be Gay," a take-off on "The Jewel Song" from Gounod's *Faust*.

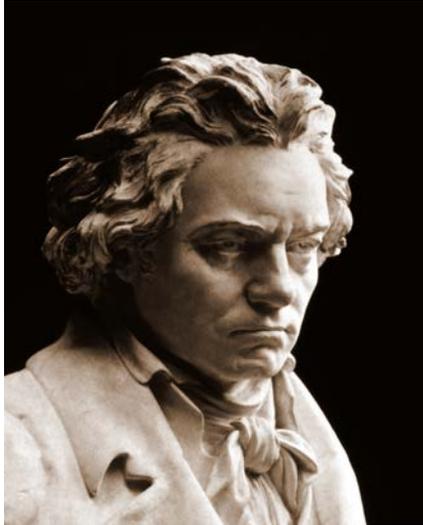
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Scored for 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, E-flat clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, tenor drum, triangle, glockenspiel, xylophone, harp, and strings

Violin Concerto

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born in Bonn, December 16?, 1770 (baptized December 17); died in Vienna, March 26, 1827



Beethoven's Violin Concerto is possibly the most beloved violin concerto of all time. It is one of his most sheerly beautiful compositions, yet it was not a great success at its premiere. Beethoven was notorious for completing compositions at the last possible moment, and the Concerto was no exception. According to his friend and pupil Carl Czerny, he finished the score only two days before the performance, frequently filling all four extra staves that he had left empty on each page in the manuscript with revisions to the solo part.

The oft-repeated assertion that the twenty-six-year-old virtuoso Franz Clement (former child prodigy for whom the work was composed) sightread the first performance from the manuscript rings slightly untrue, since Clement probably had discussed the Concerto as it progressed with Beethoven. Moreover, Clement was noted for his phenomenal memory and had probably played parts of it before. Nevertheless, a hastily prepared performance surely detracted from its merits. The Concerto must also have suffered from comparison with the sensationalism of surrounding numbers on the program. A benefit for Clement himself, the concert included a composition of his own on one string with the violin held upside down.

The version of the solo part generally played today is one that Beethoven sanctioned—Beethoven scholar Alan Tyson has shown that Beethoven corrected proofs for that edition. Yet no manuscript for that version exists; Beethoven left two strikingly different versions: one seemingly more original and untouched by advice from Clement or another party, and one more idiomatic for the violin and less technically difficult. The edition that is usually used lies somewhere in between. One hundred forty-one years after the fact, both manuscript versions were published, which answered many questions, yet the mystery remains about the formulation of the first printed edition.

The beginning of the Concerto is one of Beethoven's most inspired and famous: five soft beats of the timpani usher in the calm, radiant first theme played by the winds. If such a thing is possible, the four unaccompanied, unharmonized repeated D-sharps that follow are even more wondrous. Beethoven's first sketches show that he initially thought of them as E-flats; as D-sharps, however, their function is unusual since the voice-leading avoids traditional resolutions.

The slow movement opens with a simple chordal (almost choral) theme in muted strings. A series of beautiful variations follows, culminating in a cadenza that leads directly into the merry rondo finale. The great English writer on music Donald Francis Tovey called the slow movement a case of "sublime inaction":

The point . . . is that a set of strict variations, confined to a melody with none but its own local modulations, and with no change from major to minor and no change of time, constitutes a scheme in which there is no action; or at all events, which is in so dreamlike a state of repose that it is impossible to bring the movement to any conclusion except that of a dramatic interruption. . . . The whole point of this slow movement is that it cannot end.

The dancelike finale, a so-called sonata-rondo because it incorporates elements of both forms, closes the Concerto with infectious merriment. The contrast afforded by the episodes includes the unusual combination of bassoon and solo violin taking turns playing a minor-key folklike melody. We also find luscious little arching phrases—each time with the second higher than the first—which change colors between major and minor. Beethoven provided a space for a cadenza in all three movements, though he did not write out any himself. Those most frequently played are by Ferdinand David, Joseph Joachim, and Fritz Kreisler.

An interesting historical footnote is that Beethoven arranged the Violin Concerto for piano and orchestra after much badgering by Muzio Clementi, and for this version he *did* write out all the cadenzas. The cadenza for the first movement is particularly striking in that it is written for piano with “timpani obbligati,” a novelty without precedent, but which is surely an outgrowth of the importance of the timpani at the opening of the Concerto.

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Scored for flute, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings

Selections from *Romeo and Juliet*, Suites Nos. 1 and 2, op. 64a and b

Sergei Prokofiev

Born in Sontsovka, Ekaterinoslav district, Ukraine, April 23, 1891; died in Moscow, March 5, 1953

Prokofiev had already achieved considerable success in Paris as a ballet composer, but it took some time after strengthening ties to his native Russia in 1932 and making Moscow his primary residence in 1936 for him to have a ballet produced there. The composer, quite matter-of-factly and without complaint, recounted the



severe trials and tribulations that beset *Romeo and Juliet* in his autobiography, from its inception in 1934 for the Kirov Theater—which backed out—to the Bol’shoy Theater rejecting it in 1935 as too difficult, and the Leningrad Ballet School breaking their contract to perform the work in 1937. At last the Brno Opera (in former Czechoslovakia) agreed to stage *Romeo and*

Juliet, and the premiere took place there in December 1939. The Kirov did perform the ballet in 1940 and the Bol'shoi mounted a new production in 1946 that became widely known in the West owing to their 1956 tour. Numerous other productions followed, and *Romeo and Juliet* finally took its place among the great full-length ballets.

The composer also reported the fuss over his and his choreographers' attempts to give *Romeo and Juliet* a happy ending—purely practical because, as he said, “living people can dance, the dying cannot.” He marveled that whereas the idea of a happy ending “was received quite calmly in London, our own Shakespeare scholars proved more papal than the pope and rushed to the defense of Shakespeare.” He was eventually convinced to write a tragic ending when someone suggested to him that the music he had already written “does not express any real joy at the end.” Wrote Prokofiev, “That was quite true. After several conferences with the choreographers, it was found that the tragic ending could be expressed in the dance and in due time the music for that ending was written.”

Prokofiev went on to describe his first two orchestral suites from the ballet, each consisting of seven parts: “They do not follow each other consecutively; both suites develop parallel to each other. Some numbers were taken directly from the ballet without alteration, others were compiled from diverse other material. These two suites do not cover the entire music and I shall perhaps be able to make a third [which he did in 1941]. . . . The suites were performed before the ballet was produced.”

The premiere of the First Suite took place in Moscow on November 24, 1936, conducted by N. S. Golovanov; Prokofiev himself conducted the U.S. premiere with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra on January 21, 1937. The Second Suite followed soon on its heels, first performed in Leningrad on April 15, 1937, with numerous other performances ensuing in Paris, Prague, London, and Boston, where the composer himself led the U.S. premiere on March 25, 1938. Thus the music had already gained an enthusiastic audience before the full ballet had its first performance in Brno that December. Concert performances typically include selections from the first two suites ordered to suit different tastes and circumstances.

This evening's selections begin with the **Montagues and Capulets** (Suite 2, no. 1)—a composite movement drawn from the slow introduction from Act I in which the Duke forbids further fights between the two families, the ballroom scene (Act I, Scene 2) in which the heavy-footed “Dance of the [Capulet] Knights” theme dominates (arpeggiated ascents and descents in heavy dotted rhythms), and a contrasting middle section in which Juliet is represented by solo flute. **The Young Girl Juliet**, from Act I, Scene 2, reflects Juliet's kaleidoscopic thoughts on her impending marriage and on the ball that evening—nervous excitement, elegance, innocence, and introspection surface in rapid succession.

Masks depicts the stealthy arrival of the masked Romeo, Mercutio, and Benvolio at the “enemy” ball in Act II. **Romeo and Juliet** is made up of the Balcony Scene and Love Dance, both from the end of Act I. Juliet, alone at first, dreams of Romeo; his appearance is marked by a passionate cello and English horn theme. In stark contrast, the **Death of Tybalt** (Suite 1, no. 7)

draws on music from the end of Act II, including the duel between Tybalt and Mercutio with the fatal wounding of Mercutio, Romeo and Tybalt's duel, Tybalt's death, and the lead-in to Tybalt's funeral procession.

With the **Tableau** we glance backward to Act I, Scene 1—The Street Wakens—which depicts a busy but still peaceful Verona street before a quarrel breaks out between the warring families. This evening's selections conclude with **Romeo at the Tomb of Juliet**, taken from the final scene of the ballet, which depicts Juliet's funeral procession coming into view, Romeo's arrival, and his anguish on finding her "dead," though at this point she has only taken a death-simulating potion.

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