

Program Notes

Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 is the second in a set of 19 Hungarian Rhapsodies by composer **Franz Liszt** (1811-1886) and is by far the most famous of the set. In both the original piano solo form and in the version this composition has enjoyed widespread use in animated cartoons. Its themes have also served as the basis of several popular songs. The Hungarian born composer and pianist was strongly influenced by the music heard in his youth, particularly Hungarian folk music. Composed in 1847, *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2* was first published as a piano solo in 1851. Its immediate success and popularity on the concert stage led to an orchestrated version.

Ernst von Dohnanyi (1877-1960) was a Hungarian composer, pianist, and conductor. He first studied music with his father and others, and at age 17 moved to Budapest and enrolled in the Royal National Hungarian Academy of Music. He studied hard and obtained his diploma before age 20. Influential teachers at the Academy were Istvan Thoman (a favorite student of Franz Liszt) and Hans von Koessler (a devotee of Johannes Brahms's music). These two influences played an important role during Dohnanyi's entire life: Liszt in his way of playing piano, and Brahms in his compositions. Dohnanyi's first published composition, his *Piano Quintet in C minor*, earned the approval of Johannes Brahms, who promoted the work in Vienna. He became a very successful musician and influenced the lives and music of several of his contemporaries, including Bartok and Kodaly, by promoting their music. *The Veil of Pierrette* was a ballet (still occasionally performed in Europe) written while Dohnanyi was in Berlin 1905-1915. It was about the Commedia dell'Arte characters and was his first notable success as a composer.

Bela Bartok (1881-1945) was a Hungarian composer, pianist, and ethnomusicologist. He is considered one of the most important composers of the 20th century; he and Franz Liszt are regarded as Hungary's greatest composers. His *Playing In Pairs : Concerto for Orchestra* challenges the educated listener on several fronts, starting with the title itself. A concerto is a work for soloist and orchestra, yet here, the orchestra is also supposed to double as the soloists. Bartok, in titling the work, looked at how the instruments were treated within the orchestra. Each section trades off becoming "the soloist" - with writing that makes the section show off as both a soloist and a virtuosic player. The work was commissioned by the Koussevitzky Music Foundation in 1943 and given its premiere with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, led by Sergey Koussevitzky, in December 1944. The *Concerto for Orchestra* was one of Bartok's last works before his death of leukemia in September 1945. The second movement is familiarly called the "Game of Pairs". Starting with a stately drum beat, different pairs of instruments enter sequentially. The first section moves up through the woodwind section: bassoon to oboe to clarinet to flute. The second section starts with the trumpets, (first with, then without mutes), the trombones, and then the horns. The bassoon begins again to start the third section, and, although much of the music is the same as the first section, the accompaniment changes and nearly the whole orchestra gets involved. The soloing pairs always remain at the forefront until the movement closes with the return of the stately drum beat.

Zoltan Kodaly (1882-1967) was a Hungarian composer, ethnomusicologist, pedagogue, linguist, and philosopher. He is well known internationally as the creator of the Kodaly Method. In 1926, Kodaly composed *Hary Janos*, a Hungarian folk opera (that is, a spoken play with songs) in four acts. It is based on the comic epic *The Veteran* by Janos Garay. The story is of a veteran hussar in the Austrian army in the first half of the 19th century who sits in the village inn regaling his listeners with fantastic tales of heroism. His supposed exploits include winning the heart of the Empress Marie Louise, the wife of Napoleon, and then single-handedly defeating Napoleon and his armies. Nevertheless, he finally renounces all riches in order to go back to his village with his sweetheart. That his stories are not true is irrelevant, for they are the fruit of a lively imagination, seeking to create, for himself and for others, a beautiful dream world.

From the music of the opera, Kodaly extracted the orchestral *Hary Janos Suite*, a popular piece in the classical repertoire. This notably includes the cimbalom, a traditional Hungarian variant of the hammer dulcimer. Both the opera and the suite begin with an orchestral "musical sneeze", best explained in Kodaly's own words: "According to Hungarian superstition, if a statement is followed by a sneeze of one of the hearers, it is regarded as confirmation of its truth. The suite begins with a sneeze of this kind! One of Hary's group of faithful listeners....sneezes at the wildest assertions of the old tale-spinner.