

Southwell u3a Music Lovers Group – 4 November 2020 Tone Poems

YouTube links are provided for each item, or the playlist for all the pieces titled Southwell u3a Music 201104 on my YouTube channel can be found from the link.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psCI_CQ9jaU&list=PLQHiO9b3DnIsi90r8pr6jZXQbTFmYfUZu

Incidentally when you find the playlist, use "Play All" to view the whole programme in sequence. If you select an individual item, then it will not play the whole sequence.

My YouTube Channel has playlists for all our programmes from January 2020, and more.

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHmgNAquuyQzuq4yHxm8_Eg

Beethoven invented the proposition that music could represent thoughts and the physical and spiritual World, firstly in the Pastoral Symphony No 6. This led to romanticism and a form of orchestral music quite different from the formal Symphony. Tone poems were the natural development of this trend. The first piece of music specifically designated as a Tone Poem was Franz Liszt's third of his 12 single movement Tone Poems, Les Préludes. The genre was adopted by most composers of the romantic era. A selection of Tone Poems and extracts forms the basis of this programme.

Franz Liszt (1811- 1886) Les Préludes, Symphonic Poem No.3, S.97 17:11

**Symphony Orchestra of the Karol Szymanowski State Music School Poland –
Conductor Wojciech Pławner (Also theme music to Flash Gordon!)**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psCI_CQ9jaU

The full title of the piece, "Les préludes (d'après Lamartine)" refers to an Ode from the Alphonse de Lamartine's *Nouvelles méditations poétiques* of 1823. The proposition is that life is a series of Preludes where the first delights of happiness are interrupted by some storm, time and again. I paraphrase, but the point is only too evident in 2020! The piece is in four parts. Love – Storm - Bucolic calm – Battle and Victory.

The genesis of Les Préludes is rather confusing, and a full account is given in Wikipedia at:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les_pr%C3%A9ludes

Richard Strauss (1864 – 1949) Also Sprach Zarathustra 35:39

Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, Conductor Jakub Hrůša -

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6u36_cJF78&t=584s

Inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical novel Thus Spoke Zarathustra see Wiki

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Also_sprach_Zarathustra

Here are the parts:

- Einleitung, oder Sonnenaufgang (Introduction, or Sunrise): Theme for 2001 Space Od
- Von den Hinterweltlern (Of Those in the Background World):
- Von der großen Sehnsucht (Of the Great Longing)
- Von den Freuden und Leidenschaften (Of Joys and Passions)
- Das Grablied (The Song of the Grave)
- Von der Wissenschaft (Of Science and Learning)
- Der Genesende (The Convalescent)
- Das Tanzlied (The Dance Song): 21:06
- Nachtwandlerlied (Song of the Night Wanderer)

Jean Sibelius (1865 -1957) Valse Trieste Op 44 No 1 **7:10**

Estonian Festival Orchestra, Conductor Paavo Järvi

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lys6ZqDFerA>

Sibelius composed many tone poems including the En Saga we played last year. This is a more simple "Sad Waltz" adapted from the first of six parts of the incidental music he composed for his brother-in-law Arvid Järnefelt's 1903 play Kuolema (Death). This piece was an encore from a concert in 2016 as a tribute to the victims of the lorry terror attack in Nice, which killed 86 people. (Selected before the terror attack in Nice this week.)

Antonin Dvořák (1841 – 1904) Romance in F, op. 11 **13:08**

Niek Baar & Concertgebouw Kamerorkest

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2p8SAbFvjZg>

Dvorak produced many tone poems, but to start, a Romance for Violin and Orchestra based on his string quartet in F Minor.

Antonin Dvořák Die Mittagshexe (Lady Midday or Noon Witch) Op 108 B196 **15:54**

Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra, Conductor Andrés Orozco-Estrada

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfNzYYMw6Y4>

The Noon Witch is a symphonic poem written in 1896 by Antonín Dvořák which was inspired by the Karel Jaromír Erben poem Polednice from the collection Kytice. Polednice is based on the noon demon "Lady Midday" of Slavic mythology. It is one of a set of late orchestral works inspired by national themes which were written after Dvořák's return to his native Bohemia from the United States.

A mother warns her son that if he does not behave she will summon the Noon Witch to take him away. He does not behave, and the witch arrives at the stroke of noon. The witch, described as a horrible creature, demands the child. The mother, terrified that the witch has actually come, grabs her son, and the witch begins chasing them. Finally, the mother faints, grasping her child. Later that day, the father arrives home, and finds his wife passed out with the dead body of their son in her arms. The mother had accidentally smothered their son while protecting him from the witch. The story ends with the father's lament.

Maurice Ravel - Tzigane, Rapsodie de concert (arrangement Michael Waterman) 11:44

Niek Baar & Concertgebouw Kamerorkest

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-IQji596Qg>

French composers took up the tone poem with an impressionist flavour, such as Debussy's *Après Midi dun Faun*. *Tzigane* is a rhapsodic composition by the French composer Maurice Ravel (1875 – 1937). It was commissioned by and dedicated to Hungarian violinist Jelly d'Arányi, great-niece of the influential violin virtuoso Joseph Joachim. The original instrumentation was for violin and piano (with optional luthéal attachment).

(The luthéal was, in Ravel's day, a new piano attachment (first patented in 1919) with several tone-colour registrations which could be engaged by pulling stops above the keyboard. One of these registrations had a cimbalom-like sound, which fitted well with the gypsy-esque idea of the composition. The attachment has long since disappeared from use.)

Jules Massenet (1842 – 1912) Meditation from the opera Thaïs 6:18
Radio Filarmonisch Orkest – Conductor Marcus Stenz, Mike Baar violin
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCP4DTcOGj4>

By the same violinist we have the original version of Meditation from the Opera Thaïs, which includes a choir. The piece is the entr'acte for violin and orchestra played between scenes in act 2 and is an often-performed concert music piece.

Igor Stravinsky (1882 – 1971) 'The Song of the Nightingale', symphonic poem 22:29
France Music Conductor Pascal Rophé
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D51te3svOjI>

For those with staying power try this Stravinsky symphonic poem adapted from the opera. It is well worth a listen.

In 1908, the 26-year-old Igor Stravinsky, still a student of Rimsky-Korsakov at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, completed the first act of an opera, *Le Rossignol* (“The Nightingale”), based on the fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen. When Sergei Diaghilev commissioned Stravinsky to write the ballet score for *The Firebird*, the work was set aside. Only in 1914, after the completion of *The Firebird*, *Petrushka*, and *The Rite of Spring*, did Stravinsky return to the project. Listening to the complete opera, you can hear the striking evolution of Stravinsky’s harmonic language. The tonal Romanticism of Rimsky-Korsakov is still perceptible in the first act. The second and third acts enter a new world, entirely.

In 1917, Stravinsky transformed the opera into an orchestral tone poem, *Le chant du rossignol* (“The Song of the Nightingale”), based almost entirely on the music of the final two acts. Diaghilev transformed the score into a ballet in 1919, with designs by Henri Matisse.

Set in three sections, *The Feast in the Emperor of China’s Palace*, *The Two Nightingales*, and *Illness and Recovery of the Emperor of China*, the tone poem is based on the original fairy tale, an allegory in which the seduction of falsity is set against truth and beauty. Here is a summary by Maya Pritsker:

It opens with a picture of the Chinese Emperor’s Court with its lavish décor and noisy bustle. The next episode brings the first sharp contrast: a small bird, invited by ministers to please their emperor, sings its gentle, touching song (flute cadenza, then a violin’s melody, accompanied by piano, harp, and celesta). Suddenly there is another nightingale—a gilded and sparkling mechanical gift from the Emperor of Japan. It repeats the same primitive tune repeatedly (piccolo, flute, oboe), but the court is charmed. The real bird, saddened, flies away to the forest and a fisherman, and the angry emperor names the mechanical one the First Singer of the Imperial Court. But when Death arrives to take the emperor (dark timbres and slow tempo), the real bird returns and saves the ailing emperor with the beauty of its song. However, it rejects the invitation to stay forever: the bird wants the freedom to sing for anyone in need. The melancholic song of a fisherman concludes the poem.

Stravinsky’s *The Song of the Nightingale* is filled with shimmering impressionist colours, the exotic sounds of the East, and a visceral sense of motion. You can hear it as a vibrant, swirling conversation between the voices of the orchestra, each with its distinct persona. Occasionally, we are swept into glistening ostinati (repeating figures) that might remind you of *Petrushka*. The plaintive solo trumpet emerges in the final bars and the strings fade into a timeless serenity.

