In American in Paris, it is always exciting to make sure the taxi horns play when needed. Sometimes the notes don’t sound — it’s always an adventure!

RICK MOTYLINSKI, NCS PRINCIPAL PERCUSSION
THE MARGERY AND EARL JOHNSON, JR. CHAIR

Roman Carnival Overture, Op. 9
HECTOR BERLIOZ
BORN December 11, 1803, in La Côte Saint André; died March 8, 1869, in Paris
PREMIERE Composed 1843; first performance February 3, 1844, at the Salle Herz in Paris

THE STORY
Hector Berlioz was a gifted and innovative orchestrator. He freed the brass from its role as mere accompaniment, making it the equal of the other orchestral sections. He experimented with new instruments, such as the bass clarinet and the valve trumpet. And he virtually put the English horn on the map as the solo instrument par excellence for conveying musical melancholy. He was equally innovative in musical form and in stretching the limits of classical tonal harmony.

But one of Berlioz’s great fiascoes was his opera Benvenuto Cellini. A brilliant musical score could not hide an impossible libretto with fatal dramatic flaws. The premiere at the Paris Opera in 1838 survived for just three performances and an attempt at a revival a few years later failed as well. Only its lively overture, using themes from the opera, has survived in the repertoire.

Never one to waste good music, six years later Berlioz took two of the most fetching musical segments of Act I of the opera and fashioned from them the Roman Carnival Overture, originally meant as the introduction to the opera’s second act. In
contrast to the opera, the premiere of the overture, under the composer’s baton, was an instant success and had to be encored.

LISTENING TIPS
This overture is an orchestral showpiece beloved by orchestra players, especially the brass. Berlioz took the gentle love duet between Benvenuto Cellini and Teresa, here played by the English horn, and pitted it against the irresistible choral carnival scene with its saltarello dance rhythm. The dance becomes wilder and wilder as the overture progresses. Only in the last few bars, with brilliant and unpredictable brass, did Berlioz digress significantly from the opera theme.

INSTRUMENTATION
Two flutes (one doubling piccolo), two oboes, (one doubling English horn), two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, two cornets, three trombones, timpani, percussion, strings

Suite No. 2 from *Bacchus and Ariadne*, Op. 43

ALBERT ROUSSEL
BORN April 5, 1869, in Tourcoing, France; died August 23, 1937, in Royan, France
PREMIERE Composed 1931; first performance of Suite No. 2 February 2, 1934, at the Salle Pleyel, Pierre Monteux conducting

THE STORY
While many composers owed their careers to the early support and teaching of a close family member, Albert Roussel was orphaned by the age of ten and continually shifted to the care of other family members. Born into a wealthy family of manufacturers of
home decorating textiles, he showed early musical talent but also loved the sea, finally deciding on a naval career. He graduated in 1889 and served the navy for five years, mostly in North Africa and Indochina. While on shipboard, he wrote his first composition, *Fantasie* for violin and piano, and some short pieces reflecting an interest in Indian music that remained with him throughout his career. In 1894, he resigned his commission in order to pursue his interest in music — a career change enabled by his inherited wealth.

A student of Vincent d’Indy, he took over his teacher’s counterpoint classes from 1902 to 1914, where he taught future composers as divergent as Eric Satie and Edgar Varèse. World War I interrupted the composition of two of his major works, the ballet *Le Festin de l’araignée* (The Spider’s Banquet) and the opera *Padmāvatī*, based on a Hindu legend. With the end of the war, he began to “modernize” his style, producing a variety of orchestral, operatic, ballet, and chamber works that brought him international recognition.

The ballet *Bacchus and Ariadne*, composed in 1930, tells the story of Theseus’ landing on Naxos, after rescuing Ariadne from the Minotaur in the Labyrinth. The god Bacchus appears and abducts the sleeping Ariadne, beginning a passionate dance around her sleeping body. When she awakens alone, she sees Theseus’ departing ship and in panic, flings herself into the sea, but lands in the arms of Bacchus instead. He kisses her and the whole island around them is transformed. In the end, Bacchus leads her to the top of the mountain, crowning her with stars.

**LISTENING TIPS**

Roussel extracted two orchestral suites from the ballet, each encompassing the music of one of the two acts. Suite No. 2 opens with a viola solo portraying Ariadne’s awakening, followed by Bacchus’ dance, the dramatic kiss, and *pas de deux*. It concludes with the expected bacchanal and Ariadne’s coronation. The suite progresses without pause, so it
is important to use your imagination to follow the trajectory of the story. Note, however, that the sections involving the god are always — well — Bacchic.

**INSTRUMENTATION**

*Two flutes (one doubling piccolo), piccolo, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celesta, two harps, strings*

**An American in Paris**

**GEORGE GERSHWIN**

BORN September 26, 1898, in Brooklyn; died July 11, 1937, in Los Angeles

PREMIERE Composed 1928; first performance December 13, 1928, by the New York Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall, Walter Damrosch conducting

**THE STORY**

Gershwin composed *An American in Paris* in 1928 on a commission from the Philharmonic-Symphony Society of New York. It is a jazz-based tone poem inspired by the composer’s trip to France, where he attempted to study with, among others, Maurice Ravel and Igor Stravinsky. Both declined, with Ravel saying, “Why be a second-rate Ravel when you are a first-rate Gershwin?”

*An American in Paris* has had a strong influence on a certain type of American music. (Leonard Bernstein’s musical *On the Town* is an expanded version chronicling a day in the lives of two American sailors on leave in New York during World War II.) Gershwin’s hustle-bustle evocation of busy Parisian life has been used so often in film scores, TV, and advertising that it has become iconic “city” music.
LISTENING TIPS

The work captures the sound and spirit of post-World War I Paris, where such American bohemians as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway — and their fictional characters — went to lose (and rediscover) themselves.

According to the composer, “The piece is really a rhapsodic ballet, written very freely ... to portray the impressions of an American visitor as he strolls around the city ... the individual listener can read into the music such episodes as his imagination pictures for him.” For the program book at the premiere, with Gershwin’s approval, composer Deems Taylor wrote a different scenario involving a detailed description of the tourist’s day adrift in the City of Light, proving that the music came first, the explanation later.

One of the work’s best-known effects is its taxi-horn blows; to add authenticity to the sound, Gershwin purchased Parisian taxi horns for the New York premiere.

INSTRUMENTATION

Three flutes (one doubling piccolo), two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celesta, strings

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