The violin solo from Act III of Swan Lake depicts the Black Swan. It has a beautiful, lyrical melody, but it’s also very fun and technical and exciting.

DOVID FRIEDLANDER, NCS ASSOCIATE CONCERTMASTER

Invitation to the Dance, Op. 65

CARL MARIA VON WEBER

BORN November 18, 1786, in Euten, Germany; died June 5, 1826, in London
PREMIERE Composed 1819, orchestrated by Berlioz 1841; first performance unknown

OVERVIEW
Like Hector Berlioz, the composer, conductor, and pianist Carl Maria Friedrich Ernst von Weber was also a music critic, forerunner of the German Romantic aesthetic movement. His opera Der Freischütz laid the foundation for German romantic opera, paving the way for Wagner. Also like Berlioz, Weber was an innovative orchestrator, discovering and capitalizing on new characteristics and sonorities of many instruments, especially the horn and clarinet.

Composed for piano solo in the summer of 1819 for Weber’s young wife, Invitation to the Dance is an early example of program music (a genre that grew out of the Romantic aesthetic). Weber himself specified the narrative: At a ball, a gentleman approaches a lady who evades him; he presses his invitation and she relents; they converse sympathetically, take their places for the dance, then swirl happily away; at the end, they thank each other and withdraw, leaving only silence and the memory of an exhilarating experience.

In 1841, the Paris Opera decided to produce a French translation of Der Freischütz. According to rigid convention, French grand opera (as opposed to comic
opera) prohibited spoken dialogue and mandated a ballet — whether it was appropriate to the plot or not. Berlioz, Weber’s leading champion in France, was asked to substitute recitative for the spoken dialogue and compose a ballet.

**WHAT TO LISTEN FOR**
Berlioz refused to include any music in the ballet other than Weber’s own. To this end he orchestrated Invitation to the Dance, remaining scrupulously faithful to Weber’s original. The orchestration is a fine example of Berlioz’s mastery in this field — imaginative and varied, it enhances Weber’s original without ever drawing attention to itself.

**INSTRUMENTATION**
*Piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, four bassoons, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, timpani, two harps, strings*

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**On the Beautiful Blue Danube, Op. 314**

**JOHANN STRAUSS, JR.**

BORN October 25, 1825, near Vienna; died June 3, 1899, in Vienna

PREMIERE Composed 1866; first performance February 16, 1867, in Vienna, with the Wiener Männergesangsverein (Vienna Men’s Choral Association)

**OVERVIEW**
Johann Strauss, Jr., by far the best known of 19th-century Vienna’s composers of dance music, was adored by high society and fondly known as the Waltz King. He was by nature shy, self-effacing, and insecure, far removed in nature from the light-heartedness and exuberance expressed in his music. He was a close friend of Brahms, who always
tried to convince him that posterity would remember his music, but to no avail. Brahms, however, got it right.

Strauss originally composed On the Beautiful Blue Danube for a celebration of the Viennese Men’s Choral Society, but when it premiered the response was only lukewarm. It was the orchestral version that sold millions of copies in the composer’s lifetime.

**WHAT TO LISTEN FOR**
The Viennese waltz, as perfected by the Strauss dynasty, consisted of several sections of different melodies, sometimes repeated, sometimes occurring only once. The signature opening of this waltz is never repeated.

**INSTRUMENTATION**

*Piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, strings*

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*Dances of Galánta*

**ZOLTÁN KODÁLY**

BORN December 12, 1882, in Hungary; died March 6, 1967, in Budapest

PREMIERE Composed 1933; first performance October 23, 1933, in Budapest, the Budapest Symphony Orchestra, Erno Dohnányi conducting

**OVERVIEW**

Composers have always loved to integrate folk melodies into their works both for popular appeal and to show their ability to manipulate a simple tune. The practice was already common in the Middle Ages. However, in the 18th and 19th centuries, they often made the mistake of equating the popular music of the day with authentic folk
melodies. The melodies that Brahms and Liszt used in their Hungarian dances and rhapsodies, for example, were not indigenous melodies, but were the popular street and café music of their time — often played by Roma bands.

Zoltán Kodály and his colleague Béla Bartók, both pioneers of modern ethnomusicology, were among the first (in 1907) to use a newfangled invention, the wax cylinder recorder, to collect folk melodies at their source. Like Bartók, Kodály used many of the collected folk melodies as themes for his compositions. Of the two, Kodály was the more conservative and the more Romantic.

Kodály’s ethnomusicological research notwithstanding, the themes for Dances of Galánta did indeed originate from street and café music. Galánta, a small town now in Slovakia, was part of Hungary when Kodály lived there as a child. In the 18th century, Galánta had a large number of Roma musicians who performed from notated scores, rather than from memory, and played in the orchestras of the gentry. The themes for Dances of Galánta came from a historical collection, Selected Hungarian National Dances of Various Gypsies from Galánta. Kodály selected five different melodies and rhythms, giving them a brilliant orchestral dressing that provided a special showcase for the upper winds.

**WHAT TO LISTEN FOR**

The five dances employ different modes, themes and rhythms, but they are strung together in such a way that the final measures of one dance serve as an introduction to the next. The opening dance begins with a long introduction that has the effect of a warm-up or flexing of musical muscles. The first three dances feature an orchestral soloist; in the first movement, the clarinet introduces a slow modal theme, while the second features the flute, finally blending seamlessly into the third, which features the oboe and contains a dialogue between the upper winds and strings. The fourth dance pits the violins against the upper winds as the dance becomes wilder and wilder.
Suddenly everything shifts gear with a pompous interruption from the lower brass, slipping into the final dance. The tempo is fast, with the theme bouncing around the entire orchestra and including quotes from the previous dances.

**INSTRUMENTATION**

*Piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, timpani, percussion, strings*

**Selections from *Swan Lake*, Op. 20**

**PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY**

BORN May 7, 1840, in Votkinsk, Russia; died November 6, 1893, in St. Petersburg

PREMIERE Composed 1875; first performance March 4, 1877, in Moscow, at the Bolshoi Theatre

**OVERVIEW**

In the summer of 1871, Tchaikovsky spent some time at his sister’s family home. For the entertainment of the children, he composed and staged a scena called Swan Lake for a cast consisting of his niece and nephew; his brother, Modest; and wooden toy swans. The source of the story and of the scenario is unknown, although it contains archetypical elements recognizable throughout European folk literature. Virtually nothing is known about the music from the scena, but family lore claims that it contained the principal “swan motive” that eventually made its way into the now-iconic ballet commissioned in the spring of 1875.

Short of money and still struggling for recognition in his own country — although rapidly gaining a reputation abroad — Tchaikovsky returned to the story of Swan Lake, in whose somber ending he saw a reflection of his own dark moods. Its premiere in
March 1877 was an unmitigated disaster, partly because of Bolshoi political infighting and partly because of the inadequacy of the choreographer, conductor, dancers, and orchestra.

But the ballet was a revolutionary work. Its intensely dramatic score was so demanding on all involved that music from other composers was increasingly substituted for Tchaikovsky’s original score. It was finally dropped from the Bolshoi repertoire after 1883. Tchaikovsky himself never saw a satisfactory performance of the complete work, although he was present at a production of the second act in 1889 in Prague that gave him “one brief moment of unalloyed happiness.”

**INSTRUMENTATION**

*Piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, two cornets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, piano, strings*

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**Dances from *Powder Her Face***

**THOMAS ADÈS**

BORN March 1, 1971, in London

PREMIERE Composed 1995; first performance July 1, 1995, Cheltenham Music Festival

**OVERVIEW**

Sex and scandal retain perpetual fascination, even decades after those directly involved have sunk into obscurity. *Powder Her Face*, Thomas Adès’ chamber opera for four singers and 15 players, composed in 1995, is loosely based on the once notorious “Dirty Duchess” Margaret Campbell, Duchess of Argyll (1912-1993). The daughter of a Scottish millionaire raised in New York, she was debutante of the year in 1930 and became a well-known socialite. Her divorce trial in the 1960s revealed her scandalous bedroom
behavior with members of the British government — supported with Polaroids. The trial and scandal, however, did not deter her from continuing her extravagant lifestyle. Eventually she was forced to sell her home and live in a hotel suite. She ended her days penniless in a nursing home. The opera is a fictionalized pastiche of events in Margaret’s “career.” Adès’ score combines stylistic elements of Alban Berg, Astor Piazzola’s tangos, and mid-century popular music.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR
In 2007, Adès expanded the orchestration of the Overture, Waltz, and Finale from Powder Her Face for full symphony orchestra. It represents a miniature of the Duchess’ world. The overture, a tango dominated by sneering, often guffawing, glissandi, evokes the hotel staff mocking the Duchess and her promiscuous past. The following waltz suggests her faded glory, now reduced to a hallucinogenic dreamscape. The syncopated finale further distorts the waltz, breaking down the dreamscape until finally turning off her lights, literally in mid-phrase.

Born in London, British composer, conductor, and pianist Thomas Adès graduated from King’s College, Cambridge. He is currently the Britten Professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music.

INSTRUMENTATION
Piccolo, three flutes, three oboes, three clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, piano, strings
La Valse, poème chorégraphique

MAURICE RAVEL

BORN March 7, 1875, in Ciboure, France; died December 28, 1937, in Paris
PREMIERE Composed 1919-1920; first performance December 12, 1920, Paris, the Lamoureux Orchestra, Camille Chevillard conducting

OVERVIEW

Ravel is said to have described La Valse as “a fantastic and fatefully inescapable whirlpool.” On the score he added the stage direction: “An Imperial Court, about 1855.” The date was chosen deliberately. At the time Ravel took up his pen to complete his work, begun before the war, the Austro-Hungarian Empire had just suffered its final defeat. In the Vienna of 1855, the Hapsburg court maintained a show of glittering joie de vivre. The city, dancing on a volcano, swayed to the waltzes and operettas of the Strauss family. Economically, this was the most brilliant and prosperous period of the monarchy. With the hindsight of 1919, however, Ravel had a clear picture of the Empire’s decadence.

La Valse was premiered as an orchestral work in 1920 to great success. Sergey Diaghilev, the impresario of the Ballets Russes, had urged Ravel to complete the work, but was unhappy with it and never staged it. It was finally staged in Paris in 1928 in the style of an elegant festive ball set in the Paris of the Second Empire during the 1860s. Finally, in 1951, George Balanchine gave it the choreographic interpretation that expressed Ravel’s original intention of the “inescapable whirlpool.”

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The atmosphere of the music is thoroughly Viennese, although Ravel composed it before he ever visited the city. The opening follows closely the scenic directive Ravel added to the score: “Clouds whirl about. Occasionally they part to allow a glimpse of
waltzing couples. As the clouds lift, one can see a gigantic hall, filled by a crowd of moving dancers. The stage gradually brightens and the glow of the chandeliers breaks out fortissimo.” The dance becomes wilder and wilder, a rhythmic and dynamic tour de force; the dancers lose control and are swept in a terrific whirlwind. It is a frightening, deathly riot, cut off at the end as if by a bolt of lightning.

**INSTRUMENTATION**

*Piccolo, three flutes, three oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, two harps, strings*

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