

John Corigliano SUITE FROM THE FILM THE RED VIOLIN

Composing the music for the film *The Red Violin* gave me an opportunity to visit my own past, for my father, John Corigliano (I was a "Jr.") was a great solo violinist and the Concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic for almost a quarter of a century. My childhood years were punctuated by snatches of the great concertos being practiced by my father, as well as scales and technical exercises he used to keep in shape. Every year, he played a concerto with the Philharmonic (as well as in other venues), and I vividly remember the solo preparation, violin and piano rehearsals, orchestral rehearsals, and the final tension-filled concerts (where I would sit backstage, listening to my father over a small speaker, breathlessly playing the work in my head and listening to make sure everything came out all right). *The Red Violin* galvanized my energies into producing several further works derived from the film score, including a Chaconne for Violin and Orchestra, a *Suite for Violin and Orchestra*, a set of Caprices for solo violin, and my *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*. In these works, as in composing the music for the film, I had the great good fortune to have the sub-lime young virtuoso Joshua Bell as the voice of the violin. Josh's playing resembles that of my father; he is an artist in the grand tradition.

Program note by John Corigliano

Darius Milhaud LA CRÉATION DU MONDE (THE CREATION OF THE WORLD)

European art music has always thrived, both artistically and financially, on importing non-European artistic traditions to be broken up, rearranged, and hawked to the novelty-hungry public as exotica. The 17th century found the French public obsessed with what they dubbed *chinoiserie*; by the 1920s, however, the intelligentsia of Paris had found a new obsession in the music, art and mythology of Africa.

Darius Milhaud was particularly receptive to influence, and particularly interested in expanding his musical language. He spent the years 1917-1919 in Brazil, serving as secretary to the French ambassador; upon his return he composed a piece titled *Le Bœuf sur le toit*, with inspiration from Brazilian popular music. So perhaps it was inevitable that, when he visited New York, he returned obsessed with the jazz music of Harlem. He was particularly struck by Maceo Pinkard's *Liza*, the first musical by a black composer to play on Broadway during the regular season. When he returned home, he fused his recollections of his American vacation with his city's obsession with (largely white-produced) *Africana*. *La création du monde* is a ballet in six scenes, using nearly the same instrumentation as Pinkard's hit, based on Swiss-born novelist Blaise Cendrars' anthology of African creation myths.

The work runs together but is separated chronologically into five sections: *The Chaos before Creation*, *The Birth of Plants and Animals*, *The Birth of Man and Woman*, *The Desire* (of said Man and Woman, one presumes), and *Spring or Healing*. Although it is clearly jazz inspired, it makes no attempt to reproduce the effect of the music Milhaud had heard in America; Milhaud himself described it as "making wholesale use of the jazz style to convey a purely classical feeling."

Whether the ballet is a triumph of cross-cultural pollination or merely of cultural appropriation is certainly up for debate; at the outset, however, it was not the question of authenticity that most plagued the ballet, but a simple one of practicality. The costumes and set design were both done by Fernand Léger, a French artist whose personal brand of cubism was derogatorily branded by critics as "tubism" for its emphasis on the cylindrical. True to his moniker in lieu of his surname, Léger designed costumes for the ballet that were so tubular and heavy that they made it nearly impossible to dance.

Likely because of the unwieldiness of the ballet, *La création du monde* has become primarily a concert piece, one that has stood the test of time and endured beyond its initial genesis in the cultural atmosphere of 1920's Paris. Although it was at first derided by critics as frivolous, Milhaud had the last word: "Ten years later," he later said, "those same self-anointed critics were discussing the philosophy of jazz and learnedly declaring that *La création du monde* was the best of my works."

Program Note by Anna Norris

Charles Ives RAGTIME DANCES

Charles Ives is often thought of as a quintessentially American composer, and indeed his life combined many of America's most beloved pastimes: gridiron football, Ivy League secret societies, and estate planning.

He also found time, somewhere, to compose music. His *Four Ragtime Dances* were composed between 1902 and 1911, a fact which bears examination. In 1911, Mahler had just premiered his *Eighth Symphony*, Stravinsky's explosive *Rite of Spring* was still several years away, and Schoenberg had not yet conceived of the twelve-tone technique of composition. Ives stands apart as leagues more radical than any of them. Indeed, Ives was very literally apart from the rest: he was a first-rate baseball and football player, church organist, and insurance agent of significant reputation, but his music earned almost no attention at all during his lifetime. Only much later did his fellows look back and realize what had been among them the whole time: shortly after Schoenberg's death, his widow found among his papers a note to himself that read, "There is a great Man living in this Country – a composer. He has solved the problem how to preserve one's self-esteem and to learn. He responds to negligence by contempt. He is not forced to accept praise or blame. His name is Ives." Schoenberg's enigmatic praise suggests that Ives' uniqueness took shape not in spite of his isolation but because of it. His isolation from the world of music critics allowed him to live in the world of the American people-- and in 1911, that meant ragtime.

Scott Joplin, whose *Maple Leaf Rag* and *The Entertainer* were major hits at the turn of the century, said in a 1913 interview that American ragtime had been around since there were black people in America, but that "the white people took no notice of it until about twenty years ago." By 1911, white people-- including Ives-- had definitively taken notice. Ives' relationship to ragtime, however, was neither uncomplicated nor entirely surprising of a wealthy white Yale man. "Ragtime has its possibilities," he wrote. "But it does not 'represent the American nation' any more than some fine old senators represent it. Perhaps we know it now as an ore before it has been refined into a product. It may be one of nature's ways of giving art raw material." If there were ways in which being isolated and out of touch were advantageous for Ives, surely this was the downside: that he could delude himself into believing that a musical form with as long and accomplished a history as Joplin knew ragtime to have, was merely ore waiting inertly for Ives to come along and refine it into art.

Whether Ives' Ragtime Dances are more "refined" than ragtime itself is a matter of opinion, they are most certainly something altogether different. The four dances, meant to be performed consecutively, each use the verse-chorus form of the Protestant hymns that Ives learned in his career as a church organist. Each one begins in a duple meter, but the meter shifts wildly around, destabilizing the music too far for any intimations of dancing. Since the name of the genre literally refers to "ragged" or syncopated rhythm, it is safe to say that the rhythmic innovation of ragtime music was its chief attraction for Ives; and, whether he intended it or not, it was that spirit of rhythmic innovation that would help to define Ives' work for the rest of his career.

Program Note by Anna Norris