



## 2012 SUMMER SOLSTICE FESTIVAL

### INTERSECTIONS: MUSIC FOR FILM & CONCERT STAGE

SATURDAY, JUNE 23, 2012

8 PM

CONVOCATION HALL, UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

#### PROGRAM NOTES

BY DAVID BERG

#### **A pre-concert recital begins at 7:15 PM**

ECMS Scholarship recipient Yoana Kyurkchieva performs *Pictures at an Exhibition* by Modest Mossorgsky

Host-narrator for the first half of the program: D.T. Baker

The moving picture art form has been with us for nearly a century and a half. Inconspicuously or sometimes quite conspicuously accompanying this medium has been its audible partner: music. Silent films, of course, were seldom silent in public: pianists improvised or played from "cue sheets" distributed by the studios. (In this evening's *Sherlock, Jr.*, we can see Keaton's movie within the movie, "Hearts and Minds," being accompanied on the screen by a violinist and pianist.)

Some films are unthinkable without their music, whether it is original to the film or borrowed to amplify the emotional impact. The shower scene for Hitchcock's "Psycho" was storyboarded and filmed without any intention of a musical score. Bernard Hermann wrote the music, which the director agreed improved the scene, and the end result is a classic moment of cinematic terror.

The role of music in the cinema has developed hand-in-hand with film, from the introduction of the medium (at the premiere of the Lumière brothers' first films, a pianist or harmonium player was present) to the ubiquity of modern scoring rhetoric.

Aaron Copland, who composed five major film scores, provided a comprehensive description of the role of music in cinema: "Music serves the screen. . .creating a more convincing atmosphere of time and place, . . .underlining psychological refinements--the unspoken thoughts of a character or the unseen implications of a situation, . . . serving as a kind of neutral background filler, . . . building a scene of continuity, . . . underpinning the theatrical build-up of a scene and rounding it off with a sense of finality."

Directors, composers and editors integrate the sight and sound with such mastery that the cinemagoer is often unaware of the degree to which music binds the fundamentally piecemeal visual experience of a conventional film. This evening we'll hear examples of music composed by film composers and music that has been appropriated for films.

Our first selection is the meditative *Spiegel im Spiegel* by Estonian composer **Arvo Pärt** (b. 1935), here arranged for alto flute and piano. Pärt is known for his Eastern Orthodox mysticism, which manifests itself in works of profound, timeless reflection. Something of a neoclassical composer in his early years, he underwent a radical change of style in the early 1970s, which led to a music built upon extremely simple elements.

While he is not a film composer per se, Pärt's music has found its way into numerous films. The aptly named *Spiegel im Spiegel* ("Mirror in the Mirror") has provided filmmakers with a device for creating a sense of solitary reflection. The simple, long phrases of the stepwise melody, sustained above simple triads produce timeless fabric for a cinematic scene. This exquisitely contemplative piece has been woven into such movies as "Mother Night" with Nick Nolte, the television movie "Wit," with Emma Thompson, as well as Tom Tykwer's "Heaven," starring Cate Blanchett.

**Lalo Schifrin** (b. 1932) is best known for his television scores, in particular, the theme for "Mission Impossible," with its catchy use of 5/4 meter. The Argentine composer received training in his home country at an early age. He was accepted to study at the Paris Conservatoire, taking the courses of Olivier Messiaen and studying with a disciple of Ravel. Outside the conservatory, Schifrin honed his skills as a jazz pianist. In the late 1950s, he became Dizzy Gillespie's pianist. In the 1960s, he moved to Hollywood, where he began to compose music for movies and television.

Schifrin's concert compositions are usually jazz works, touched by the music of his homeland. The rhapsodic *Pampas* (2009), for cello and piano, was commissioned by the cellist Antonio Lysy. The work is based on the theme from the slow movement of Schifrin's "Sinfonia Concertante for Guitar and Orchestra." In *Pampas*, Schifrin was attempting "to convey the vastness of the plains . . . called the Pampas."

Italian composer, **Nino Rota** (1911-1979) wrote music for the films of such directors as Franco Zeffirelli, Federico Fellini and Francis Ford Coppola, including the celebrated theme for *The Godfather*. A child prodigy from a musical family, the young Rota completed his conservatory training, studying with Alfredo Casella, by the time he was eighteen. A scholarship to the Curtis Institute of Music brought him to the United States in 1930. Rota composed music for all genres. He began composing for film in the 1940s and began his association with Fellini in the 1950s. Rota's musical language mined a plethora of resources, demonstrated by his lyrical Italian style (influenced by Verdi and Puccini), the French and Russian masters, café music, folk music, and jazz.

The compositions this evening display Rota's assured mastery. The *Intermezzo per viola e pianoforte* (1945) explores the possibilities in working through and juxtaposing two themes, the first somewhat elegiac and sentimental, followed by a majestic (though light-footed) idea. The *Improvviso per violino e pianoforte (Un diavolo sentimentale)* (1969) is dedicated to the Italian virtuoso, Alberto Curci. The mischievous scherzo's first theme yields to a broader theme of considerable intensity, especially when it returns in full octaves in the violin. With finesse, Rota is able to give this lighthearted work real depth. The *Improvviso en re minore* (1947) is based on Rota's score for *Amanti senza amore* ("Lovers without love"). This mostly forgotten film is an adaptation of Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata*, which features an unhappily married pianist as well as a violinist.

The absence of sound in silent movies - apart from the clattering of early film projectors - left an unnatural void for early audiences. As with early theater melodramas and pantomimes, the power of musical accompaniment was recognized as both an enhancement to the scene and a unifying thread to an art form made up of sudden changes in perspective and point of view.

Local musicians provided improvised music or arrangements of familiar music to accompany the silent films. Eventually, larger theaters installed organs, some of which, such as the Mighty Wurlitzer, could provide castanets, drums, cymbals, and other sound effects. As filmmakers produced longer works, the accompanist was faced with greater challenges and opportunities. While studios provided "cue sheets" which supplied musical suggestions as well as the scenario of the film, we don't have a very good idea of what transpired musically at these performances.

One such "longer work" is Buster Keaton's *Sherlock, Jr.* *Sherlock, Jr.* is not only a comic masterpiece, but a surreal love letter to the young medium of film. Keaton's film within a film platform allows the artist to play with the conventions of theatrical romance, dreams, as well as to exploit the technical dimensions of perspective, reality versus illusion - all as a springboard for a remarkable comedy, rich in hilarity and sensitivity.

Since the 1980s, composers have begun to take an interest in supplying music for silent films. There are as many approaches to scoring these films as there are composers. Renowned pianist and composer **Stephen Prutsman** has applied his rich, eclectic style to scoring films. In addition to *Sherlock, Jr.*, he has scored two Chaplin masterpieces and the expressionist classic, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. Drawing on styles ranging from ragtime to Strauss, Prutsman applies wit and sympathy to enhance the impact of this early 20<sup>th</sup> century cinematic masterpiece.