

Musical Treasure Chest #4

This week's Musical Treasure is a little different in nature than the last three, which have featured well-known works and composers. This edition I share what I hope will be some musical gems that will be mostly unfamiliar to you, pieces that have undeservedly never established themselves in the regular performing repertory.

When I first graduated from college (what seems like many centuries ago now) I returned to Schenectady, where I grew up. I had won a position in the Albany Symphony, and at that time, all of the musicians in the orchestra were living here (no longer the case), so it made sense to return home. While establishing myself in the area as a musician I needed to supplement my income, and I auditioned to be an announcer at WMHT-FM. There were several musician/announcers on the staff at that time, maybe some of you will remember David Scott Allen (he was principal bass of the ASO) and Scott Cantrell (who is now the music reviewer for the Dallas Morning News). I started as an announcer in the fall of 1982, my shift was from midnight to 6am, which worked perfectly with my orchestra schedule (I could easily finish an evening rehearsal or concert and be at the station well before midnight). For several years I worked six nights a week. At first I was completely alone from 1-5am in the station (WMHT-TV was not yet 24 hour programming), later there would be one TV engineer on at the same time. While this might sound horrible, I really didn't mind the schedule. I have always been a late night person and the overnight shifts certainly did not interfere with my performances. Also, at my personal disposal were nearly 20,000 LPs and CDs-- talk about a musical treasure. I had tremendous flexibility to program what I wanted, and I devoured that music library, playing all kinds of unusual and unfamiliar works. I pored over the record jackets and liner notes, having access to this material was like being in grad school for musicology.

I worked at the station for about 8 years, eventually getting a morning shift (5:45am – noon, this didn't agree with my biorhythms quite as much!), and then doing work as a producer. I look back fondly on my days at the radio station, not only was it a tremendous learning opportunity, my "bosses" were enthusiastically supportive of

continuing my education and receptive to ideas I had for programming and concert series. One of those programming ideas they allowed me to pursue was a series of broadcasts recreating the concerts performed at Esterhaza (the castle where Haydn was employed for most of his life) in the summer of 1783. What a blast it was to work on these programs. I already had a tremendous interest in Haydn and researching for these programs fanned that interest into a passion. Being young and naïve and enthusiastic I reached out to H.C. Robbins Landon for help with verifying the symphonies played in the palace that summer. Robbins Landon was the leading scholar on Haydn at the time, he almost singlehandedly sparked the resurgence of interest in Haydn that has continued to this day. I remember coming into work one night and Scott Cantrell, who was on the shift before me, said there was a special letter waiting for me. It was from Robbins-Landon, who had taken the time to write a beautiful, very detailed and helpful letter. I was stunned and delighted. As I have gotten older, I realize what a gift he gave me. My years at the station were filled with similar experiences. But I mention all of this because of the musical discoveries I made in that amazing record library, and today's musical treasures are some of the wonderful pieces I listened in the middle of the night those many years ago.

Since I brought up my love for **Haydn**, I will offer as the first piece an early string quartet that I adore, **op 20/5**. Today's ensembles tend to program the later works of Haydn more often, but the op 20 are a very special group of quartets. No 5 from this group is in f minor, a special key for Haydn, I think he writes incredibly expressively in this key. You will hear from the opening melody of the first violin the pathos of the quartet, but continue on to the third movement, which is just glorious. This work is on my list for a desert island. I have selected a performance by the Ebene Quartet which matches the beauty of the composition. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nk6VhkBuRIQ>

Staying with the string quartet medium I present next the almost never performed **Quartet No 2 of Hungarian composer Ernst (Ernö) von Dohnányi**. This lovely work is filled with lush, romantic melodies, tremendous urgency, exciting interplay between all of the voices and this wonderful arc of unity over the entire four movements, with quotations from the first three movements reoccurring in the finale, which ends on a soft, poignant note. (I feel like I am describing some

type of fine vintage wine!). Enjoy this live performance by the Kodaly Quartet: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKVeGUda73I>

Another chamber music piece I revel in every time I hear it is the ***Notturmo of Franz Schubert***. Written in the fall of 1827 and scored for piano trio, this is a neglected masterpiece. By the time Schubert composed this work, he had already written most of his string quartets (including *Death and the Maiden*) and the *Arpeggione* sonata and was at work simultaneously on the great B-flat major piano trio-- this *Notturmo* may have been a rejected slow movement of that trio. What I love about the work is its gradual unfolding of the musical material, there is a sense of inexorable motion, of great melodic delicacy suddenly transformed to great passion. It's so engaging, you keep wondering how Schubert is going to steer the musical rudder. This version by the Beaux Arts Trio is the first one I heard, I think you will find it quite lovely. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xenZwHKYAmk>.

One of my favorite composers is **Erich Wolfgang Korngold**. He is perhaps remembered best today for his film music (he was sort of the John Williams of the 1930s and 40s), but he was so much more than a movie scorer. I adore his music. One of my favorite pieces is his opera ***Die Tote Stadt***. This work is monumental and features moments of sublime beauty. I will probably write more about Korngold in future Musical Treasures, but I conclude today's with this stunning aria, Marietta's Lied from the opera. Just listen, and you will see why I love this aria so much. This performance features Julia Keiter and Jonas Kaufmann. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBCV5yIGhfI>