

“Bold As Brass”

Program Notes

People have always liked stories. Back in 1676, Aphra Behn wrote a play called “Abdelazer,” or “The Moor’s Revenge.” It is a tale of betrayal and bad deeds where everyone dies except one Prince. The synopsis reminds a person of a chess game where the board is completely bare except for the one playing piece that captured all the others. English composer **Henry Purcell** (1659-1695) wrote the **Abdelazer Suite** in 1695 for a revival of the play. The **Rondeau** is the second of ten movements from this incidental music, music which connects the poetry to the dance in the play.

In 1946 another English composer, Benjamin Britten, used the Rondeau as the theme for his variations “The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra.” In this larger piece, Britten showcases for children the four groups of instruments in the orchestra: woodwinds, brass, strings, and percussion. The Rondeau was also used in a 1986 video game called *Thunder Castle* and in the 2005 movie *Pride and Prejudice*.

Hidden away in “**A Children’s Medley**” are several children’s songs. See how many you can name. Incidentally, a medley is not the same as a melody. A melody is a singable tune which could be high or low, fast or slow. However, a medley puts together two or more pieces of music to make a new composition. This is challenging for a composer or arranger, and it takes a good imagination to assemble the pieces.

Who hasn’t heard the fable “The Hare and the Tortoise” by Aesop? Well, you probably have not heard this version by **Gwyneth Walker** (b. 1947)! The story is retold as a contemporary road race (“**The Race**”) with extra characters and neighborhood activities like a baseball game, birds singing, and neighbors waving. Dr. Walker composed the piece in 2004 for her friend Moises Evora and his fellow musicians in the Canary Islands (off the northwest coast of Africa), for their school and community concerts. In typical fable fashion, the story teaches a moral – to slow down and appreciate our surroundings.

Dr. Walker is a full-time composer from Vermont who lives on a dairy farm. She is a graduate of Brown University in Rhode Island and the Hartt School of Music in Connecticut, and she has completed over 130 commissioned works for orchestra, band, chorus, and chamber ensembles.

The Mexican Hat Dance, written by **Jesús González Rubio** (d. 1874), was originally a courting dance from the nineteenth century in which a male dancer placed a hat on the ground and the couple danced around it. The woman, first rejecting the man’s advances, eventually accepted them.

Even before this refined version, during the Mexican War of Independence from Spain in the seventeenth century, rebel practitioners of the dance received threats of monetary penalties and “stripes” from the Spanish government for composing or dancing these steps. However, as the dance developed during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), a period of social upheaval in Mexico, the popular dance lost most of its romantic connotation and became a means to achieve national unity. In 1920, it was made the national dance of Mexico.

The costume for women is a loose blouse and a highly embroidered skirt; for men, a silver-trimmed jacket. The dancers are often accompanied by mariachi bands consisting of strings, trumpets, and guitars.

Jesús González Rubio, the composer of the dance, was a professor of music in Guadalajara, Mexico, who ran a private school for talented young musicians.

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Program Notes (continued)

The Chicken Dance originated in Switzerland in 1957 with Swiss accordionist **Werner Thomas** (b. 1928/1929). The music was inspired by the movements of skiers at Swiss resorts, and Thomas called it “The Duck Dance.” In 1981 during Oktoberfest celebrations in Tulsa, Oklahoma, a German band wanted to demonstrate “The Duck Dance” in costume for a local TV station. A duck costume could not be located, so a chicken costume was used instead. This same Chicken Dance is often danced at contemporary weddings and community events.

The Pink Panther was written in 1963 by **Henry Mancini** (1924-1994) for the movie of the same name. The single reached the Top 10 on the U.S. *Billboard* adult contemporary chart and won three Grammy Awards. The Pink Panther is a mostly silent cartoon character who appears in the film series about an inept French detective.

Henry Mancini was an American composer, conductor, and arranger known for his film and television scores. Born in Cleveland, Ohio, he studied at the Juilliard School of Music before serving in the military during World War II. Mancini gained fame for his work on *The Pink Panther* and *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, including the beloved song “*Moon River*.” Over his career, he won four Academy Awards and twenty Grammy Awards, leaving a lasting impact on film music.

- Notes by Rhonda Gowen

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