Julia Perry

Born: March 25, 1924, Lexington, Kentucky
Died: April 24, 1979, Akron, Ohio

Julia Perry moved to Akron with her family while a child. She later studied at Westminster Choir College, earning bachelor's and master's degrees in music. Graduate studies continued at the Berkshire Music Center under Luigi Dallapiccola, with whom she also worked in Italy on winning one of her two Guggenheim Fellowships. Further studies took place at the Juilliard School of Music, as well as with Nadia Boulanger in Paris. After returning to the United States in 1959, Perry eventually joined the faculty at the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College. Her music started to be more widely performed and recorded in the years before her death, even as a stroke in 1970 made composition difficult. Her catalog includes twelve symphonies, three concertos, three operas, and more. Some of Perry's works are influenced by African-American music and history, while others embrace a more neoclassical style and even some avant-garde techniques. In 2020, the Akron Symphony began working with the African Diaspora Music Project on the Julia Perry Project, which aims to revive, record, and publish Perry's works.

Short Piece for Orchestra

Composed: 1952

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, timpani, percussion, piano, celesta, harp, strings

After Perry's best-known piece, the *Stabat Mater* of 1951, was performed several times in the United States and Europe, she decided to go to France to work with the legendary pedagogue Nadia Boulanger. It was not long after starting with Boulanger that Perry wrote her *Short Piece for Orchestra*, also sometimes referred to as *Study for Orchestra*. She revised it a couple of times in subsequent years, and created versions for full orchestra and for chamber orchestra. With the increased attention her music received in the 1960s, the *Short Piece for Orchestra* was performed by the New York Philharmonic, making it the first work by an African-American woman, and only the third by a woman, ever performed by the orchestra.

The music begins assertively, with trumpet flurries and aggressive strings; this opening material recurs later. A sinuous, somewhat dissonant line from the flute emerges, gradually entwining with figures from other instruments. Solos from the French horn, oboe, clarinet, and violin ensue, and the mood grows tense. The music roils and rustles, as the opening gestures are recalled. Brass fanfares sound, and repeating string *ostinati* propel the music forward. Suddenly the music stills, with extended notes from the strings. The solo flute, oboe, violin, and more are heard once again, as the music becomes hushed and haunted before one final outburst concludes the work.

David Diamond

Born: July 9, 1915, Rochester, New York
Died: June 13, 2005, Brighton, New York

David Diamond was one of the most prominent American composers of his time. Having started playing the violin and composing at age seven, he eventually studied at the Cleveland Institute of

Music and the Eastman School of Music, also working with Roger Sessions in New York City and Nadia Boulanger in Paris. After several years overseas, funded by one of his three Guggenheim Fellowships, Diamond returned to the United States around the start of World War II. By the late 1940s, his compositions started winning performances and awards. Among his most familiar music was the themes he wrote for journalist Edward R. Murrow's popular programs *Hear it Now* and *See it Now*. Diamond spent much of the 1950s and 1960s in Italy. Starting in 1973, he taught at the Juilliard School for twenty-five years. In his later years he won a host of awards, including the Gold Medal from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1991 and the American National Medal of the Arts in 1995. Largely rejecting the avant-garde experimentation of his day, Diamond composed eleven symphonies, eleven string quartets, concertos, and other vocal and instrumental works.

Concerto for Small Orchestra

Composed: 1940
Duration: 15 minutes
Instrumentation: flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, 2 horns, trumpet, timpani, strings

Diamond spent 1938 and 1939 in Paris on one of his Guggenheim Fellowships. After returning to the United States, he experienced some difficult years as he tried to win attention for his music, attention which did in fact arrive later into the 1940s. One of the colorful early products of those lean years after his return to America was the *Concerto for Small Orchestra*.

Each of the work's two movements features a Prelude and Fugue. The first movement's Prelude section begins with a jaunty strut and plentiful syncopation. The trumpet fanfare heard early on, backed by the timpani, returns at the end of the work. Woodwinds, then strings, are the focus in the next, more lyrical and wistful idea. That tune comes to a full stop, and the trumpet takes the lead again as the work's first Fugue, with a nervous sort of energy, spins itself out, growing in complexity as it progresses. The tempo switches to Andante for the closing recollection of the lyrical material from earlier.

The Prelude to the second movement, appropriately marked *Maestoso* (majestic), alternates quiet and grand, assertive passages. The Fugue, lively and once again highly syncopated, is led first by the violins, then the rest of the strings. Once again there's a full stop, as a heartfelt interlude, labeled “with great expression,” takes over. That music builds, then quiets. After a fast-paced, rather dramatic transition, the trumpet fanfare from the beginning of the work returns for the work's powerful conclusion.

Aaron Copland

Born: November 14, 1900, Brooklyn, New York
Died: December 2, 1990, North Tarrytown, New York

Dubbed “the dean of American composers,” Aaron Copland was one of the first American composers to enjoy worldwide fame. He studied piano, composition, and theory in the United States, then went to Paris to work with the famous teacher Nadia Boulanger. Copland’s early works betray a love of both jazz and the modernist sounds he encountered in France. By the mid 1930s, Copland embraced a more consciously “American” style, marked by the use of folk songs and folklore (evident in his famous ballets *Billy the Kid*, *Rodeo*, and *Appalachian Spring*) and greater melodic and harmonic accessibility. By the 1950s Copland was the most popular of American composers, even as he returned to more dissonant writing, including the use of twelve-tone techniques. His compositional output declined in

the 1970s, but he continued to conduct his works around the world. Along with his music, Copland was the author of several books, including the bestseller *What To Listen For In Music*.

Concerto for Clarinet and String Orchestra (with Piano and Harp)

Composed: 1947-1948
Duration: 17 minutes
Instrumentation: solo clarinet, piano, harp, strings

Aaron Copland wrote his Clarinet Concerto for clarinetist and bandleader Benny Goodman (1909-1986), who from the mid 1930s was one of the most popular musicians in the United States. Although he had thoroughly embraced jazz in his teens, Goodman did have some classical training, and around 1940, he decided that he wanted to establish himself in the classical realm. He took lessons from the famous British clarinetist Reginald Kell, and approached some of the most famous composers of the day – Copland, Béla Bartók, Darius Milhaud, Paul Hindemith, and Morton Gould – to write new works for him. He subsequently made recordings of several of those newly commissioned pieces, as well as works by Mozart, Nielsen, Brahms, and others.

After receiving his commission from Goodman, Copland set to work on the Clarinet Concerto in the fall of 1947 while touring Latin America. By August 1948 the Concerto was complete. Dedicated to Goodman, the work was premiered by him, accompanied by Fritz Reiner and the NBC Symphony, in a broadcast on November 6, 1950. The following year Goodman and Copland recorded the Concerto – a recording Copland regarded as one of his finest – and since then the work has since established itself in the standard clarinet repertoire.

The Concerto is in two movements, separated by a lengthy cadenza for the soloist. The first movement is an extended song in waltz time, in Copland's most evocative pastoral vein. The clarinet's long, expressive, sinuous solo line, occasionally punctuated by wide leaps, is accompanied sparely and transparently by strings and harp. There is a short, more agitated central section, but the tranquil mood of the opening is quickly restored.

As Copland himself wrote, the extended cadenza "gives the soloist considerable opportunity to demonstrate his prowess, while at the same time introduces fragments of the melodic material to be heard in the second movement." That second movement moves into livelier, jazz-inflected territory. The piano, silent in the first movement and cadenza, has a prominent role to play here. Again quoting Copland, "some of the second movement material represents an unconscious fusion of elements obviously related to North and South American popular music: Charleston rhythms, boogie woogie, and Brazilian folk tunes. The instrumentation being clarinet with strings, harp, and piano, I did not have a large battery of percussion to achieve jazzy effects, so I used slapping basses and whacking harp sounds to simulate them. The Clarinet Concerto ends with a fairly elaborate coda in C major that finishes off with a clarinet glissando – or 'smear' in jazz lingo."

Georges Bizet

Born: October 25, 1838, Paris, France
Died: June 3, 1875, Bougival, France

Best remembered for *Carmen*, perhaps the world's most popular opera, Georges Bizet grew up in a musical family and started studying at the Paris Conservatoire at age nine. During his ten years there he

won multiple awards, including the prestigious Prix de Rome in 1857. That prize allowed him to spend almost three years in Italy, the only significant period of time that he spent outside of Paris. Bizet's compositional life was largely one of failure, and he was forced to make his living as a teacher, accompanist, and arranger. Some works, like the opera *Les pecheurs de perles* (*The Pearl Fishers*) received some slight attention, but many others, like the now-familiar Symphony in C major, were never heard during his lifetime. After many struggles with theater directors and singers, as well as some controversy regarding its subject matter, *Carmen* finally made it to the stage in 1875. While fellow composers like Massenet and Saint-Saëns loved the work, audiences were lukewarm, and only later – after Bizet's death from a heart attack at age 36 – did the opera really catch on with the public.

Symphony in C major

Composed: 1855
Duration: 30 minutes
Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings

"You were the beginning of my life as an artist. I spring from you. You are the cause, I am the consequence." Toward the end of his short life, Bizet wrote this effusive tribute to his teacher Charles Gounod, the composer of the famous opera *Faust*. Gounod was also a teacher at the Paris Conservatoire, which Bizet entered as a precocious nine-year-old and where he studied for some nine years. Bizet started the Symphony in C major on October 29, 1855, four days after his seventeenth birthday, and finished it in about a month, probably as an assignment toward the end of his studies at the Conservatoire.

Bizet was obviously greatly influenced by his work with Gounod, and more or less modeled his Symphony on the Symphony No. 1 in D major that Gounod had composed at the end of the previous year, even going so far as to quote his teacher's work on more than one occasion. Although he borrowed melodies from it for later compositions, Bizet perhaps deliberately suppressed his symphony because of its numerous similarities to Gounod's. It wasn't performed during his lifetime, and remained totally unknown even to scholars until 1933. Apparently Bizet's widow, Geneviève Halévy, gave the score of the work to composer Reynaldo Hahn, who donated it among many other manuscripts to the Paris Conservatoire library. There the score was rediscovered by French musicologist Jean Chantavoine.

On finding out about the work, Bizet's biographer Douglas Charles Parker showed the manuscript to conductor Felix Weingartner, who led the first performance in Basel, Switzerland, on February 26, 1935. The work was an immediate hit, quickly becoming a part of the standard orchestral repertoire, and was even turned into a famous ballet by George Balanchine in 1947. Although Bizet thought much more highly of his later Symphony in C major (1871), subtitled "Roma," over which he labored for many years, the student work he created in a few weeks has remained by far the more popular work, praised by one commentator for its "spontaneity, freshness, charm, melodiousness, elegance, and technical skill."

The first movement opens with a three-note motto that pervades much of what follows. Oboe and flutes present a contrasting, more relaxed melody that also features heavily in much of the ensuing development section. After the second movement's introduction, the oboe takes up a lovely, sinuous melody. Strings then take up a song-like melody of their own. A slow contrapuntal section is among the debts Bizet pays to his teacher Gounod's Symphony No. 1, which features a similar interlude. Then the oboe theme returns before the movement's gentle close.

We move, figuratively speaking, to the British Isles in the third movement, its main melody having a distinctly Scottish flavor. That melody remains as counterpoint as a new idea is introduced by the strings. A new version of that opening melody is featured in the movement's central section, presented over a folksy drone. A flurry of string activity gets the final movement off to a flying start. Woodwinds and brass then present a lively march. After a short lyric interlude for the strings, the scurrying movement of the opening returns, and the Symphony concludes energetically.

Program notes by Chris Morrison