NEGLECTED NATIONALITIES

NEGLECTED MASTERPIECE OF THE WEEK
To get us into the swing of things, let’s begin with a neglected masterpiece.

WHY NEGLECTED?

NEGLECTED NATIONALITIES
Our topic for today is neglect because of the composer’s nationality. Last week we noted that the birth date of composers helps to determine the degree of neglect their music might suffer. The location of their birth – the country or culture into which they are born – may also result in limiting our access to their music.

Perhaps you noticed a moment in last week’s class when I asked you what country you associate with the greatest classical music. Without hesitation, almost all of you said, “Germany.” When I asked for another country, many of you said, “Austria.” Those are certainly the answers we have learned, over time.

And you are not alone in these beliefs. Many, if not most music tastemakers – the composers, teachers, performers, critics, scholars, conductors, recording and broadcast executives who largely determine our access to classical music carry within them a prejudice – perhaps quite conscious, perhaps not, that when it comes to classical music, some nationalities produce more great music than do others – and Germany and Austria are at the top of the list.

GERMAN, ETC.
This notion about where the greatest music comes from has changed from time to time and from country to country, but for the past 100 years, it seems to go like this:
1. The greatest classical music is German (and since Germany only became a nation in 1870, we mean “German-speaking”), which includes Austria. We say with assurance that there is nothing greater than a Mozart string quartet, a Beethoven piano sonata, a Brahms symphony.

2. The second greatest musical nationality is Russian, The asterisk is there to remind us that this high ranking applies especially music that is strongly influenced by German music, written since about 1880 – think Tchaikovsky, think Borodin, think Mussorgsky. And this high ranking generally does NOT apply to the large amount of Russian music that is influenced by Russian folk music or French music (think Glinka, or Glazunov).

3. The next greatest is Italian – but opera only, please. Think Verdi, Puccini, think Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti – the composers whose works fill the world’s opera houses, opera broadcasts, and whose overtures mark the beginnings of orchestra concerts worldwide. Non-operatic Italian music is little known in America. (Quick – name a great Italian symphony, or string quartet, or piano concerto.)

4. Next is French music – especially French music that is strongly influenced by German music – think Cesar Frank – but also French music by genius composers - think Couperin and Rameau in the 18th Century; think Berlioz and Bizet in the 19th Century; think Debussy and Poulenc in the 20th.

5. And, since we are talking about music in the 20th and 21st Century, the next most important music nationality would be American. And who are all these great American composers? Well, above all, there’s Aaron Copland, of course, and Samuel Barber. And maybe George Gershwin? A very short list for a very large and resourceful country!
6. Next is Scandinavian music – especially music that is strongly influenced by German music – think the Finn Jean Sibelius, the Norwegian Grieg, the Swede ________?, the Dane __________? This is getting more difficult, isn’t it?

7. Near the bottom now, we come to Spanish music, the most popular of which is by French composers – think Bizet’s Carmen dancing with a red rose in her mouth, think Ravel’s Bolero. Think Debussy preludes with the rhythm of Spanish dances.

8. And finally, at the very bottom, is English music. (The great mid-century music theorist David Kraehenbuehl used to say that English Music is an oxymoron.) But we do hear English music occasionally, and more often in choral concerts - think Purcell, think Elgar and Vaughan Williams. In our own lifetimes, think Benjamin Britten.

This morning we are going to focus on the music of three excellent composers whose music is neglected in large part because of their nationalities:

• The English composer Frederick Delius

• The Danish master Carl Nielsen

• The Italian composer Antonio Salieri

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Frederick Delius was a late 19th century and early 20th Century English Composer. Here in the U.S., he is known only for a few orchestral pieces based on English folk songs. Although his name may be known, his music has mostly faded from popularity as interest in folk music has largely waned in the second half of the 20th century.

**SONGS OF FAREWELL**

This morning we’re going to listen to a performance of one of Delius’s finest choral pieces, the “Songs of Farewell.” I chose this piece for its wonderful, impressionistic quality, its soft, gentle, blended sound – just the qualities that audiences of 1923 prized so highly, that reminded them of a simpler, kinder world before World War I, which seemed to be slipping away. Today’s audiences, who have dealt with two world wars, a cold war, atomic weapons, and global terrorism, often find Delius’s music naïve, even corny. Some listeners consider this a beautiful piece of musical nostalgia, with
little relevance to who we are in 2015. It’s a good example of how music goes in and out of style, often based on events that have little to do with music itself.

**TEXT**
The texts for Songs of Farewell are poems by Walt Whitman. Here is the first one, “How Sweet the Silent, Backward Tracings.”

**How sweet the silent backward tracings**

How sweet the silent backward tracings!
The wanderings as in dreams - the meditation of old
times resumed their loves, joys, persons, voyages.
Apple orchards, the trees all cover'd with blossoms;
Wheat fields carpeted far and near in vital emerald green;
The eternal, exhaustless freshness of each early morning;
The yellow, golden, transparent haze of the warm afternoon sun;
The aspiring lilac bushes with profuse purple or white flowers.

Let’s listen.

**FREDERICK DELIUS WORKS**
And here are some other pieces by Delius, including his fine piano concerto of 1906, which you can access from performance links on our class website. The Delius Piano Concerto was written in 1906, Rachmaninoff’s Second Concerto, in 1900. As you listen this week, compare and contrast these two – the Rachmaninoff is an altogether more energetic, more singable piece with a more impressive, more virtuosic piano part. Such is the fate of two composers, due in part to their different personalities and different pianistic talents.
Carl Nielsen was a late 19th century and early 20th century composer from Denmark, another country low on the nationality appreciation list. Nielsen was a successful, prolific composer who wrote two operas, six symphonies, and many songs, choral and piano works, as well as a great deal of chamber music. Long revered in the Scandinavian countries, he is known to us today primarily for his symphonies, which have increased in popularity in the past ten years due to the advocacy of Alan Gilbert, conductor of the New York Philharmonic, who became acquainted with them during his tenure as conductor of the Stockholm Symphony Orchestra.

**NIELSEN SYMPHONY NO. 3**

I chose Nielsen’s third Symphony because of its rugged energy, singable melodies, and skillful orchestration. It’s not a mystery to me that these symphonies have become increasingly popular throughout Europe and now in America, even though they have to compete for performance time with a crowded field of better-known works. Rather than seeming dated and old fashioned, to many they seem fresh and ruggedly energetic.
CARL NIELSEN WORKS
I’ve also given you links to other Carl Nielsen works – an excellent violin concerto and a Woodwind Quintet that has been his most popular work in America. The Bowdoin Festival has programmed the Quintet more than once in recent years.

ANTONIO SALIERI
Our third neglected composer today is Antonio Salieri, an 18th century Italian who is most famous to American movie-goers from the film, “Amadeus.” In the film, the character of Salieri combines both fact and fiction. The fact is that he was an excellent and successful composer, a prominent and highly respected figure in Viennese music life during Mozart’s lifetime. The fiction was that he was insanely jealous of Mozart’s superior talents and plotted Mozart’s death. Although there is no historical evidence to support this, it did make a great movie drama!

PIANO CONCERTO IN C MAJOR
I chose this piece as an excellent example of a late-18th century piano concerto. The young Chinese pianist Heeguin Kim plays the solo brilliantly, with great clarity and enjoyment. The style of the whole piece is very similar to that of Mozart’s piano concertos, with singable melodies and clever, delicate interactions between piano and orchestra.

As you listen, note that the orchestra is small – 9 violins, one double bass, 2 cellos, 2 violas, a single flute in the back row, with 2 horns. Unfortunately, there was no live performance on You Tube that featured the fortepiano, so we have a large, modern Steinway, which is too brilliant and a bit too loud.

SALIERI WORKS
I’ve given you links to performance of two other Salieri works, an interesting symphony and a mass in D Minor. You’ll find the links on our class web site.

WEB RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT
This week’s assignment is to find and listen to is another classic-era masterpiece, the very last of Franz Joseph Haydn’s 52 piano sonatas. I chose this 1794 composition to show how far the piano sonata had developed by this date, just a few years before Beethoven began composing his long string of better-known piano sonatas. Listening to this piece helps us understand how strongly
Beethoven was influenced by Haydn, whose music he heard frequently and with whom he studied in Vienna.