

A & E TV SERIES

Season 1 Music

by Nadine Bandler

The first use of non-original music for the series is in *The Doorbell Rang*. Only one song is used, "La Donna e mobile", from *Rigoletto* by Verdi. This is an aria about the fickleness of women, which subject has nothing to do with the storyline. The song is presumably being played on the radio as background noise used to cover the brownstone goings-on in case the F.B.I. is listening in. Certain pieces of so-called "classical" music go through phases of popularity, just as other music and forms of art do. A lot of the pieces in the series are ones that would have been perhaps a little overexposed and familiar to the general populace during the 1950s, the time frame of most of the shows. This is one of them. So it is fitting that it should be a random radio selection. Other pieces used in the series are more obscure and apparently fitted to the situation, as I'll note later, individually.

Starting with *Champagne for One*, the choice of music begins to get quite creative. The use of "Jazz Suite No. 2 (Suite for Promenade Orchestra.): VI Waltz 2" by Dmitri Shostakovich makes the introductory sequence wonderfully memorable and it is delightful to hear it again later in the show as actual dance music. Is it my imagination or does this tune have slightly sinister undertones? This makes it all the more suitable. Note that this waltz was also used in the movie *Eyes Wide Shut*. For anyone wishing to purchase this music I recommend *Shostakovich The Jazz Album* on the London label. And if you would like to know more about Shostakovich, read *Testimony, the Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich*.

"Minuet from String Quintet in E Major op. 13/5" by Luigi Boccherini is used in this program, as it so often was and is, to represent rich, snooty pretentiousness. That is fine for the purposes of this episode. However, I think it's a shame that so many people only know Boccherini by that one tune. Boccherini, Haydn and Mozart were the three great composers of the 18th Century. It is even thought that Mozart was an admirer of and inspired by Boccherini's works. And yet I have at times found it difficult to find recordings of some of his loveliest pieces. Perhaps this is changing as I have heard his quintets used in a number of movies lately including *Goya in Bordeaux*, *Master and Commander*, and *Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Silk Stocking*. You can find the famous minuet on any number of compilation albums. But if you want to hear the two works that I most highly recommend, look for this album on [AliaVox](#), *Luigi Boccherini Fandango, Sinfonie & La Musica Notturna de Madrid*.

The final song in this episode is the most intriguing. This is played during the dinner for the unwed mothers and it is implied that the music is actually playing while they are eating, as one of the girls is moving her head in time to the beat. The song is "Nulla in Mundo Pax Sincera" by Antonio Vivaldi and all I can say about this choice is that someone has a great sense of humor. This is a solo motet, which is the sacred equivalent of the secular cantata for solo voice and instruments. It was meant to be inserted at some point into a religious service. Here are the lyrics translated into English. (Can you imagine Mrs. Robilotti choosing this to play for those hussies?)

"There is no true love in the world without bitterness; in you, sweet Jesus, it is pure and rightful.

Among anguish and torment lives the contented soul, its only hope, chaste love.

The world beguiles our eyes with alluring colors and consumes our hearts with hidden wounds. When it laughs, let us flee from it; when it pursues us, flaunting its delights, let us shun it; for by carefree conduct and amusements it would overcome us.

The serpent slithers through flowers, and whilst it shows the beauty of its colors, it conceals its venom. The serpent slithers, but it conceals its venom.

But he, who is dumbstruck and insane with love, will often lick it as it were honey."

So ladies, be content to love only Jesus and there will be no more unwanted babies.

Johannes Brahms' "Waltz in A Flat Major op. 39/15" shows up in *Prisoner's Base*, but I'm going to wait and discuss this piece as it is used in *Over My Dead Body*.

Eeny Meeny Murder Moe has two of those "everybody's-heard-them", era-appropriate tunes for background Boccherini's "Minuet" and "Spring Song", No. 6, Songs Without Words, op.62 by Felix Mendelssohn both easily found on compilations.

Door to Death introduces the tango--very popular as both song and dance during the 1950s. The program begins with "El Choclo" (Kiss of Fire) drawing Lily and Archie onto the dance floor. This is a traditional tango and it should not be difficult to find the instrumental version. There is also a worded version sung by Louis Armstrong that I find very appealing. It is used in the movie "Russian Doll". The tango has been at the center of controversy and condemnation since it migrated from the slums (some say brothels) of Buenos Aires to the dance floors of more northern climes. It has been described as "the dance of moral death, the creation and manifestation of barbarism", an "abominable dance [that] kills virtue, and gives rein to every appetite", "the dance of foreign origin...which by its lascivious nature offends morality". It has been cited as an example of Darwin's theory by causing man to revert to ape. On the other hand, it has also been touted, by the *New York Times* no less, as a cure for indigestion. (Information on the tango from liner notes of "Tangos & Valses", Steven Novacek, guitar, ARC 1023.)

Christmas Party has a very nice little brass medley of Christmas music as a background for the party itself: "Good King Wenceslas" (traditional English), "Deck the Hall" (traditional Welsh), and the Hallelujah Chorus from "Messiah" by George Frideric Handel. The other tune used in this episode is "Minuet in G" by Ludwig van Beethoven. This is the other minuet, besides the Boccherini one, that is so often played and so very recognizable, quite appropriate for the '50s era.

Now, in the final episode of Season One, *Over My Dead Body*, is the most inspired and beautiful use of music in an introductory sequence. (There should be an award for that.) "Brahms' Waltz in A Flat Major" (previously used in *Prisoner's Base*) sets the mood for the dance-like moves of the fencing students. It is so fitting and lovely that I get teary-eyed every time I watch it. I never tire of this tune. The other song in this program is the aria "Les oiseaux dans la charmille" (The Doll's Song) from *Les Contes D'Hoffmann (Tales of Hoffmann)* by Jacques Offenbach. This is heard in a brownstone scene and since I cannot imagine Wolfe purposely listening to it, I just think of it as background music. The song itself is about love, but in the story of the opera, it is sung by a life-size mechanical doll, who is obviously only singing words that were put into her mouth, as a doll cannot love. The only relevance I could find to the story, and it is a bit far-fetched, is that Anna/Carla can be seen as a doll being wound up to say what her manipulators wish her to say.

From another fan -- toots2:

The 60-second piece of music that precedes the Brahms "fencing scene" at the beginning of "Over My Dead Body I" was written by Michael Small, the composer for "Nero Wolfe." That minute of music is heard over the titles once again at the start of Part Two. I can't tell you how many times I've stopped the DVD and played that one minute of music over again. It's absolutely beautiful, perfect for the story.