

A & E TV SERIES

Season 2 Music

by Nadine Bandler

Season Two of Nero Wolfe begins with *Death of a Doxy* which steps out of the time line of the previous episodes to take place in the 1960s. The only classical piece in this show is "Humoresque", Op. 101, No. 7 by Antonin Dvorak. This is a light tune that would have been very familiar at that time and can easily be found on CD.

I can't ignore the original song "Cowboys and Indians" by Michael Small. I know, from the A&E message boards that a lot of folks don't care for this number, but I enjoy it immensely. I see it as very "1960s" and tongue in cheek. The perfect vehicle for Julie Jaquette, man.

The Next Witness takes us back to the '50s and employs "Hungarian Dance No. 5" by Johannes Brahms, another easily-recognized number. Some of the music in the series has been used so often in less-than-serious situations, such as cartoons and background music for acrobats and plate-spinners on the Ed Sullivan Show, that it automatically triggers a "something funny is happening" response when we hear it. This tune is a good example.

Die Like a Dog repeats Dvorak's "Humoresque". Used in the introduction, this song, like the "Hungarian Dance", implies that what follows will be in a more light-hearted vein.

"Dance of the Hours" from La Gioconda by Amilcare Ponchielli, shows up in *Murder is Corny*, one more example of a tune equated with the comic.

Some of you may remember parodist Allan Sherman's use of this melody for his "Hello Mudda, Hello Fadda", the humorous letter home from a young boy at "Camp Granada".

There is a greater variety of music in *The Mother Hunt*, nothing really unusual, but some very nice pieces. It begins with an orchestral version of "Valse No. 6 in D flat", Op. 64, No. 1 by Frederic Chopin ("Minute Waltz"), followed by a piano version of the same song. Then we hear more Chopin, "Nocturne in E flat", Op. 9, No. 2, and Johann Sebastian Bach's "Suite Number One for Unaccompanied Cello in G major", BWV 1007, (Prelude). Mostly we get snippets of these tunes as played by Lucy Valdon on piano and cello. I imagine we are being shown what a modern, versatile and properly educated woman she is--an equal match for both Wolfe and Archie.

Chopin is an interesting choice here, as we can read in *A Family Affair* that Lily Rowan also likes to play Chopin on the piano. Dvorak's "Humoresque" again makes an appearance, its third one in the series.

Poison a la Carte gets away from the classical for a bit with an introductory version of "St. Louis Blues", then goes right to "Rondo alla turca" from "Piano Sonata in A major" by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. This is an orchestral version which may be harder to find than the ubiquitous solo piano one. I found a rendition similar to the one used in the show on the CD "Build Your Baby's Brain 2 through the power of Mozart" on the Sony label.

We also get to hear a portion of "Spinning Song", No. 34 in C major, Op. 67, No. 4, "Songs Without Words" by Felix Mendelssohn, performed by a smiling pianist as Carol Annis is entering the restaurant where the denouement takes place. If you purchase a recording of Mendelssohn's "Songs Without Words" you will have both this and the "Spring Song" that was played in *Eeny Meeny Murder Moe*.

Too Many Clients brings back the tango, "El Choclo" previously used in Season One's *Door To Death*. For anyone of you who becomes intrigued by the tango, as I did, I recommend the movies "Tango" and "Flamenco", both by filmmaker Carlos Saura.

I have noted no recognizable music from *Before I Die* or *Help Wanted, Male*. These two episodes go back in time a bit to the 1940s. I don't know if that affected the musical choices.

The Silent Speaker begins with the beautiful "Melody in F" Op. 3/1 by Anton Rubinstein. The lovely and more serious tone of this music befits a story where Archie meets and loses the woman who could have been his most suitable partner, the gorgeous and witty Phoebe Gunther. I have a recording that includes a rendition like the one introducing this episode. It is "Andante Cantabile: Romantic Music for Cello and Orchestra" on the Naxos label.

Cop Killer starts out in a comic mode with "Overture to the Barber of Seville" by Rossini. This

is one of those cartoon staples so we know we're in for some levity. We also hear "Piano Quintet in A major" Op.

114 "The Trout" 4th mov.: Tema con variazioni (Andante) by Franz Schubert. I have it in my head, for some reason, that this piece was intended for *Immune to Murder*, where it would, of course, have been most appropriate. But the notice of the show's cancellation threw things out of kilter and *Immune to Murder* ended up with the Season One intro theme by Michael Small and another, third, use of "El Choclo".

So, from the fickle woman to the kiss of fire, Michael Small has done a wonderful job supplying background music for a man who believes that "...all music is a vestige of barbarism" which can have no intellectual content.