

Music for Stage and Screen Through the Ages

Presented October 27, 2024

Sinfonia in D, Op. 18, No. 1

Johann Christian Bach (1735 – 1782)

Saga Drøm (“Dream Saga”)

Carl Nielsen (1865 – 1931)

Suite from *Carmen*

Georges Bizet (1838 – 1875)

Prélude

Aragonaise

Intermezzo

Séguedille

Les Dragons d'Alcala

Les Toréadors

Gypsy Dance

Suite from *Music for the Royal Fireworks*

George Frederic Handel (1685 – 1759)

Overture

Bourée

“Gabriel's Oboe” from *The Mission*

Ennio Morricone (1928 – 2020)

LeAnn Rich, English horn

Menuetto, *Music for the Royal Fireworks*

George Frederic Handel

Selection from *The Phantom of the Opera*

Andrew Lloyd Webber (b. 1948)

Arr. Calvin Custer

*** intermission ***

The majority of works on the Alliance Symphony's October 2024 were not written as standalone instrumental musical works, but as one component of an artistic production that also featured a visual and dramatic aspect. These productions range from European opera and a royal festival to a motion picture and a Broadway-style musical. We did not select these works because of this connection, but this coincidence is not surprising.

Music for the Royal Fireworks, Handel

The earliest composition on our program is selections from Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks*. Handel was born in 1685, the same year as Bach and Scarlatti, in northern Germany, then a collection of duchies and other small regional domains. The son of a well-to-do barber-surgeon who served the local duchy, the young Handel pursued a career in music instead of the law, which allegedly his father would have preferred. Handel studied both close to home and in Italy, becoming proficient in a range of musical styles

In 1710, Handel secured the position of *kapellmeister* to Prince George, the Elector of Hanover, but within a year requested a leave to live and study in London. Whether Handel knew of his

patron's prospects or not is unclear, but in 1714 the English laws of succession promoted German (and importantly, Protestant) Prince George of Hanover to become King George I of England and Scotland. Handel maintained the favor of King George, and many of his most famous works were the outcome of royal commissions.

The *Music for the Royal Fireworks* is a suite commissioned by George I's son, King George II, for an outdoor celebration (with fireworks!) to celebrate the end of the War of the Austrian Succession in 1748. The suite consists of a overture, a bourrée, movements entitled La Paix ("Peace") and La Rejouissance ("Rejoicing"), and two minuets. A bourrée is a lighthearted, simple dance style in duple time. All the movements reflect the confident mood of the day, for a political victory in a faroff war that never threatened the homeland, and cost England little in terms of lives.

The royal household instructed Handel to favor "martial" instruments, winds and drums, and to exclude strings. Accordingly, the original score called for 24 oboes, 24 bassoons, contrabassoon, nine trumpets, nine horns, three pairs of timpani, and side (snare) drum. Handel later reorchestrated it for a more traditional ensemble.

The premiere took place in London's Green Park in April 1749. Not only was it rainy, but there were a number of mishaps with fireworks. The music, however, was considered a hit, and has remained popular through the centuries. You can find recordings using modern instruments and orchestration, like ASO's performance, and ones that attempt to recreate the original sound, with old-style "original instruments". As you listen, think about the original context. How does this affect your experience of the music?

"Gabriel's Oboe" from *The Mission*

Amidst the movements of the *Royal Fireworks* suite, Maestro Benjamin has inserted "Gabriel's Oboe", a hauntingly beautiful theme from the 1986 movie *The Mission*. The film is set in the 1750s, and one of the characters plays this theme on his oboe. Though Gabriel's Oboe was composed in the 1980s, using a musical style that would have surprised Handel's, it uses fairly traditional melodic and harmonic means to evoke beauty and serenity, a modern successor to Handel's "La Paix".

The Mission is also about a war, but one with a tragic result. Based loosely on the events of the Guaraní War of 1756 in present-day Paraguay, *The Mission* stars Jeremy Irons as Father Gabriel, who succeeds in converting some of the indigenous people to Christianity through respect, love, and community collaboration. Robert De Niro co-stars as a Spanish mercenary who converts to being a Jesuit brother. Their sanctuary is short-lived, however, as the political machinations of

the Spanish and Portuguese governments, mediated by the Roman Catholic Church, demand that his mission be shut down, violently if needed.

Gabriel's Oboe is the most lyrical of the musical themes that Italian composer Ennio Morricone created for his award-winning score. Morricone scored over 70 films, mostly European films unknown to American audiences. He came to the attention of the American general public with the release of Clint Eastwood's "spaghetti Westerns": *A Fistful of Dollars*, *For A Few Dollars More*, and *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*. Just mention those films, and many people will emulate the quirky but indelible sounds of those movie scores.

In 1998, English soprano Sarah Brightman worked with an Italian lyricist to add words to Gabriel's Oboe. Thus was born *Nella Fantasia*, one of the most popular "pop opera" songs.

Suite from *Carmen*

Georges Bizet lived just long enough to complete his opera *Carmen*, and to see it through a few dozen performances in 1875 in Paris, where it was greeted with some shock due to its grittiness, before he died later that year at age 37. The title character *Carmen* is flirtatious and a thief, not the virtuous female lead that would have been expected. The opera's characters are in the working class and criminal underworld, again not the norm for opera of the day. And the story ends with murder rather than happiness.

If audiences weren't ready for the story, they were more ready to enjoy Bizet's expressive and romantic music. Bizet's collaborator Ernest Guinard took music from the opera to form two orchestral suites. The ASO performs all of Suite 1 and the final movement of Suite 2. The use of tambourine and triangle in the percussion help to express the Spanish setting for *Carmen*.

Today, music historians see *Carmen* as marking the transition to greater realism in opera. Tragedy and the lives of everyday people would be the norm for late 19th century and early 20th century opera. Bizet opened the door for works such as Puccini's *La Boheme* and *Madame Butterfly*. *Carmen* is now one of the most popular and most performed operas, and the orchestra suites show up regularly on concert programs.

Selections from *The Phantom of the Opera*

Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *The Phantom of the Opera* holds the record for the longest Broadway run, with 13,981 performances over 35 years from 1988 until its recent closing in April 2023. English composer Lloyd Webber had already achieved great success in musical theater with *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Evita*, and *Cats*.

The setting for the story is a Paris opera house in the 1880s, practically the same place that Carmen would have played.

The original West End (London) production used a 27-piece orchestra, large by modern theater standards. The title number, “The Phantom of the Opera,” begins with a rock beat on drum set and synthesizer, lest anyone forget this is modern music.

The music and lyrics are of course catchy and singable, at least by talented singers. In the title song “The Phantom of the Opera”, Christine Daaé, the Phantom’s love interest, soars higher and higher, in a wordless tune, finally reaching a high E6. The part was written for Sarah Brightman, Andrew Lloyd Webber’s spouse at the time (and the same vocalist who premiered Nella Fantasia, the vocal version of Gabriel’s Oboe.)

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