

PROGRAM NOTES – May 5, 2024

REPERTORY ORCHESTRA

Program notes by Nancy Campbell

Esprit by Shirl Jae Atwell

At times hard-hitting and rhythmic, at times flowing and fanciful, Esprit is an exhilarating work for orchestra. The Repertory Orchestra students had the unique opportunity to work directly with the composer. Shirl Jae Atwell is an award winning Kentucky composer who resides in Louisville.

Solo de Concours for Clarinet by Andre Messager

André Messager (1853-1929) composed Solo de Concours for Clarinet in 1899, as a Paris Conservatoire Contest piece. Composed in three sections, the cheerful first part contains triplet figures by the Clarinet that can easily be heard over the Orchestra. The second part has a strong French melody that can be heard as an exchange between the Clarinet and the Orchestra. A cadenza followed by trills ends this section and leads to the final part, where the Clarinet stands out from the Orchestra, with a rich melodic energy.

André Messager is a previous student of Gabriel Fauré and Camille Saint-Saëns who wrote numerous operas, operettas and ballets. He was later appointed Commander of the Legion d'Honneur.

Berceuse and Finale from The Firebird Suite by Igor Stravinsky, arranged by Merle Isaac

The Firebird ballet premiered in 1910 in Paris with the Ballet Russes. The ballet is based on the Russian legend of the Firebird, whose magical feathers offer protection upon the earth. In the story, Prince Ivan, protected by a feather from the Firebird, must rescue his beloved princess from the evil sorcerer, Katschei. The Infernal Dance at the climax of the ballet, casts a spell on Katschei and his minions, who dance themselves into exhaustion. The Berceuse is the lullaby that keeps them asleep while Prince Ivan sneaks into his lair to obtain the object that will destroy them. The Finale is the joyful celebration of the rescue of the Princess.

CONCERT ORCHESTRA

Program notes by Marcello Cormio

Franz Schubert (1797-1828), Symphony no. 8 D.759, "Unfinished", Allegro moderato

Many questions are still open on the genesis of Schubert's most celebrated symphonic masterpiece. The autograph score, dated October 30, 1822, was delivered, at the composer's request, to his friend Anselm Hüttenbrenner, a member of the Styrian Music Society, probably as a sign of appreciation for having appointed Schubert an honorary member of that association. We do not know why Schubert did not finish the score, nor why did Hüttenbrenner hide it for more than forty years, until December 17, 1865, when Johann Herbeck conducted the premiere of the piece in Vienna. The existence of extensive sketches for a third movement (Scherzo) contradicts the suggestive hypothesis that Schubert really considered the symphony as a complete creation in only two movements. But the mystery of its failed completion will probably never be solved in a definitive way.

The "Unfinished" leads us to the heart of the Schubertian poetics, to its core of romantic yearning, desolation, and familiarity with death: between dreams and memories, and the contemplation of pure beauty, on one side, and the sudden emerging of anguished depths, on the other.

In the first movement, performed at tonight's concert, the classic scheme of the sonata form is only respected as an external shell, as the container of a free and restless path. In this utterly poetic narration, the two main themes appear almost as monads, enclosed in the enchanting and magical charm of their melodic beauty. Even before the appearance of those themes, cello and double bass sing eight opening measures: they are not merely an introduction, but a motto that leads the listener into a dreamlike dimension. This motto is in fact an integral thematic component of the musical material of the Allegro moderato, becoming the protagonist of the development, full of tragic gestures, dramatic tensions and almost unrestrained intensity of expression.

Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880), Intermezzo & Barcarolle from *The Tales of Hoffmann*

The Tales of Hoffmann (1881) is the last and unfinished opera by composer Jacques Offenbach, on a libretto by Jules Barbier, drawn from the novel of the same title. The story, framed by a prologue and an epilogue, stems from a theatrical work of 1851, by the same Barbier, in which the poet E.T.A. Hoffmann, the protagonist of some of his own tales, narrates through three of his love stories.

The "Barcarolle", one of the most famous melodies by Offenbach, was in fact not intended for this opera by the composer, but for a previous work called *The Rhine Fairies*; ironically, it is now universally known and associated with *Hoffmann* as one of its highlights. It was on the initiative of Ernest Guiraud (the composer assigned to complete and orchestrate Offenbach's unfinished masterpiece) that the celebrated piece was included in the Venetian act of the opera, as the opening song "Belle nuit, ô nuit d'amour".

The concert piece presented in this program is a compilation of three instrumental pieces from the opera: the very opening, a short and energetic orchestral introduction in E minor; a graceful and charming minuet, which in different versions of the opera is placed in different acts; and finally, the sublime barcarole. The arrangement was made from early orchestral materials, and its authorship is not even certain, but likely it was Guiraud himself who compiled and arranged this brief symphonic "homage", which has become a favorite of the audiences ever since.

Georges Bizet (1838-1875), *Farandole* from *L'Arlésienne* Suite no. 2

The pair of suites entitled "L'Arlésienne" was originally composed as the incidental music for Alphonse Daudet's play *L'Arlésienne*, a romantic drama set in Provence. The play opened in 1872 to mixed reviews, however the music greatly appealed to audiences. Bizet decided to convert this piece into two suites for symphony orchestra, removing the choral and vocal elements. Suite No. 1 premiered in 1872 and became an immediate success; after Bizet's untimely death in 1875, Ernest Guiraud, Bizet's close friend, adapted Suite No. 2 for orchestra.

L'Arlésienne (The Girl from Arles) is an adaptation of Daudet's short story of the same name. Over the course of the play, a young peasant named Frédéri falls in love with the title character (l'Arlesienne), but madness overcomes him after he discovers that his fiancée has been unfaithful.

The Suite No. 2 combines themes from *L'Arlésienne* and some of Bizet's operatic works. The Suite is divided into four movements. The closing movement, performed in tonight's program, is the energetic *Farandole*, an exciting whirlwind of rhythmic vitality propelled by an ostinato in the percussion. It features two primary themes, a traditional folk-dance tune and the recurring melody of "the March of the Three Kings", prominently featured in Suite no. 1. The two themes combine and overlap in a final explosion of joy, concluding the piece with a definite sense of the spirited Provençal community in which *L'Arlésienne* is set.