

Program Notes for Sept. 12, 2022 Concert

Overture to *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (1842) Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857)

The famous Russian writer Alexander Pushkin penned a poem in 1820 entitled “Ruslan and Lyudmila,” which Glinka turned into an opera. The rollicking overture is an orchestral favorite, with nothing out of the ordinary musically; however, the rest of the opera incorporated Russian folk music, some chromaticism and dissonance, and the use of a whole-tone scale to represent the villain. If you played video games in the 1990’s, you will recognize the overture as the title theme to Tetris Classic

O Carlo, ascolta, from *Don Carlos* (1867-1886) Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) Jonathan Patton, *baritone*

No composer of opera can wring the emotional anguish and pain of human tragedy like Giuseppe Verdi. The opera setting is in 16th Century Spain during the Inquisition. This aria is sung by Rodrigo, the confidant of protagonist Don Carlo, who has gone to visit Carlo in prison. Agents of the Inquisition enter and shoot Rodrigo. As he lies dying, he declares that he is happy to sacrifice his life for Carlo, hoping that Carlo will become the savior of Spain.

Come scoglio, from *Così fan tutte* (1789-90) Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) Adía Evans, *soprano*

It is speculated that Mozart didn’t like the singer who was hired to play the role of Fiordiligi in his new opera buffa, *Così fan tutte* (*Women Are Like That*), because he made this aria particularly difficult for a soprano to sing – a range of notes from very low to extremely high. “Come scoglio,” (“I am like a rock”) is Fiordiligi’s aria professing her loyalty to her fiancé, Guglielmo, who has set a trap to see if indeed she remains faithful to him while he’s supposedly called to war.

Dance of the Hours—*allegro vivacissimo*, from *La Gioconda* (1876) Amilcare Ponchielli (1834-1886)

Recognizable thanks to Walt Disney’s *Fantasia* movie of 1940, Ponchielli’s “Dance of the Hours” was originally a short ballet inserted into his opera *La Gioconda*. Considered musical fluff, the ballet portion actually had serious elements such as murder, suicide, and lust which are usually found in a grand opera; however, thanks to Walt Disney, today we all remember the dancing hippos, alligators, elephants, and ostriches from *Fantasia*.

Nedda! Silvio!, from *Pagliacci* (1892) Ruggiero Leoncavallo (1857-1919) Mr. Patton, *baritone* and Ms. Evans, *soprano*

Pagliacci (The Clowns) is a popular and oft-performed opera. There is some truth to the storyline, as it was based on a criminal case Leoncavallo’s father presided over as the judge. In the opera, Nedda is the wife of Canio, but the lover of Silvio. While the tragic aria of Canio is the most famous (as sung by greats such as Enrico Caruso, Luciano Pavarotti, and Plácido Domingo), this duet between the lovers is fraught with emotion as they discuss how and what they should do to avoid the jealous Canio and escape together.

Intermission

Overture to *Orpheus in the Underworld* (1858)
Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880)

Offenbach's comedic operettas skewered French social conventions, politics, and cultural icons with sparkling and witty caricatures, with this one targeting Gluck's 18th century" opera, *Orpheus and Euridice*. The overture opens with a dramatic fanfare, followed by various instrumental solos, then a waltz. You will recognize the final theme, *Galop Infernal*, as the shameless Can-Can made popular at the Moulin Rouge in Paris.

Klänge der Heimat (Csárdàs), from *Die Fledermaus* (1874)
Johann Strauss Jr. (1825-1899)
Ms. Evans, soprano

Csárdàs is a traditional Hungarian folk dance, often turned into song. Beginning slowly, sorrowfully, and pensively, the character Rosalinde gradually picks up the pace of the music until it becomes a lively toe-tapping song of exuberance. In the opera plot, multiple characters pose as other personalities; here, Rosalinde convinces partygoers at a prestigious ball that she is a Hungarian Countess who is singing about her "homeland."

Avant de quitter ces lieux, from *Faust* (1856-1859)
Charles Gounod (1818-1893)
Mr. Patton, baritone

This beautiful aria for baritone voice was not a part of the original opera until 1864, when baritone Charles Santley complained to Gounod that the role of Valentin had no significant aria. The composer took a theme from the overture and created this lyrical work, which quickly became very popular. Sung by the soldier Valentin, he laments having to go to war and leaving his sister Marguerite alone.

Intermezzo from *Fedora* (1898)
Umberto Giordano (1825-1899)

The brief, but amorously dreamy Intermezzo from Act II of the opera *Fedora* conjures up visions of a couple in love, enjoying a romantic evening with no thought as to the tragic events that unfold in the next act. The opera was based on the novel by Victorien Sardou written in 1882, but he initially refused to give Giordano the right to compose an opera because he didn't think Giordano was popular enough. He eventually relented. The opening night was very successful, and having Enrico Caruso and Gemma Bellincioni in the lead roles surely helped.

Quando m'en vo' soletta, from *La bohème* (1895)
Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)
Ms. Evans, soprano

Puccini's great opera *La bohème* is noted for not just gorgeous music, but also for the power of the story and the universality of its characters. Known as "Musetta's Waltz," this aria from Act II is sung in a café to friends and patrons as well as to the audience. The coquettish Musetta is trying to reconnect with her former boyfriend, Marcello, also present in the café. She is shamelessly self-promoting, with lyrics about her beauty and how others admire her.

Largo al factotum, from *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (1813)
Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)
Mr. Patton, baritone

Sung by the title character, Figaro, "Largo al factotum" ("Make way for the servant who does everything"), he sings his own praises – "bravo Figaro, bravo, bravissimo!" It is charming and devilishly difficult to get all of the words out clearly and on time. Since its disastrous première in 1816, the Barber of Seville *opera buffa* has only gained in popularity and this is perhaps the most parodied aria ever, endearing it to the masses.