

The Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra
William Schrickel, Music Director

Sunday, November 24, 2019—4:00 PM
St. Philip the Deacon Lutheran Church, Plymouth, Minnesota

William Schrickel, conductor

Program

Georges Bizet Selections from Incidental Music to *L'Arlésienne*

- I. *Pastorale*
- II. *Menuet*
- III. *Farandole*

Stephen Heinemann *Metropassacaglia*
Commissioned by the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra
in 2009 to celebrate William Schrickel's 10th season as Music Director

Intermission

Dominick Argento *Royal Invitation (Homage to the Queen of Tonga)*

- I. Allegro
- II. Moderato, tempo di marcia
- III. Maestoso assai
- IV. Allegretto piacevole
- V. Allegro non troppo

Georges Bizet Selections from *Carmen*

- I. *Prélude—Aragonaise*
- II. *Intermezzo*
- III. *Séguedille*
- IV. *Les Toréadors*

Program Notes

Georges Bizet (1838-1875) was enrolled in the Conservatory of his native Paris when he was only nine years old. Over the ensuing nine years, the brilliant prodigy won prizes in piano, solfege, organ, and fugue. He was a composition student of Charles Gounod, who engaged Bizet to assist in his own musical projects. Though he won the coveted Prix de Rome at the age of nineteen, Bizet had difficulty establishing himself as a composer, and in his mid-20s, he resorted to teaching the piano and creating arrangements and transcriptions of other composers' music to earn a living.

In 1872, Bizet was engaged to write incidental music for *L'Arlésienne* (*The Girl from Arles*), a new play by Alphonse Daudet. The play ran for only twenty-one performances, and Daudet is quoted as saying that the production was "a dazzling failure, with the most charming music in the world." Bizet created a suite comprising four selections from *L'Arlésienne* that quickly found success in the concert hall, and in 1879, four years after Bizet's death, Ernest Guiraud assimilated and arranged a second suite of music that included three selections from *L'Arlésienne* and one, the *Menuet*, from *La Jolie Fille de Perth*, an earlier opera composed by Bizet in 1866. The *Pastorale* includes music from *L'Arlésienne's* second act as well as a reworking of an off-stage choral selection. The *Farandole* is Guiraud's ingenious re-combination of the Provençal line dance music from Act 3 of the play the play and *The March of the Kings*, a tune taken from a collection of folk music published by Vidal of Aix in 1864 that Bizet incorporated into *L'Arlésienne's* overture.

Bizet's final work, *Carmen*, was given its premiere at Paris' Opéra-Comique on March 3rd, 1875. The critics were generally disappointed, and following the first performance, the opera often played to half-empty houses. Bizet died of a heart attack on June 3rd, the morning after the opera's thirty-third performance, convinced that *Carmen* was a failure. He was 36 years old. *Carmen* was given fifteen additional performances at the Opéra-Comique, the last being on February 15, 1876. It was another seven years before the opera was presented again in Paris. However, a Viennese production that opened in October of 1875, with the spoken dialogue replaced by accompanied recitatives composed by Ernest Guiraud, was a stunning success. Richard Wagner became a fan of the work, and Johannes Brahms viewed the opera twenty times, remarking that he would have "gone to the ends of the earth to embrace Bizet." *Carmen* was the world's second-most-performed opera in the 2017-2018 season.

Guiraud created two suites of selections from *Carmen*, adjusting Bizet's orchestration to enable the music to be performed without singers. The *Prélude* serves to introduce the motive associated with Carmen and her tragic fate. Guiraud links it to the *Aragonaise*, the brilliant rhythmic music that opens the final act of the opera. The *Intermezzo* is the introductory music to *Carmen's* third act, and the *Séguédille* is a transcription of Carmen's seductive aria from Act 1. *Les Toréadors* is the first music heard in *Carmen's* overture, establishing the opera's setting in Seville and anticipating the excitement of the crowd inside and outside of the bullring in the final act.

Stephen Heinemann (b. 1952) is Professor Emeritus of Music at Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois, where he taught composition, music theory, and clarinet and directed the new music ensemble Peoria Lunaire. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees from San Francisco State University and his doctorate from the University of Washington. His writings deal with aspects of the music of Pierre Boulez and Elliott Carter, and with the clarinet music of Paul Hindemith. He is a member of the Council on Undergraduate Research and was an editor of its journal.

Dr. Heinemann is a clarinetist with the Peoria Symphony Orchestra and alto saxophonist with the Central Illinois Jazz Orchestra and the Todd Kelly Quintet, for which he has written a number of pieces. He has performed at the jazz festivals of Vienne (France), Montreux and Brienz (Switzerland), and Umbria and Tuscany (Italy). He composed *Metropassacaglia* in October 2009. The work was commissioned by the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra to celebrate William Schrickel's tenth season as the MSO's Music Director. The composer provided the following program note for the premiere performance:

My longtime friend William Schrickel is an eminent bassist, and I elected to honor his decade with the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra by designing this composition with his own instrument's role at its core. In conversation last year, I was very impressed by Bill's comment that his primary goal as a bassist in recent times has been, simply, "to make a beautiful sound." I have tried to do the same in *Metropassacaglia*.

A *passacaglia* is a bass line that is repeated to form a structural underpinning for continuous variations. In *Metropassacaglia*, a solo bassist first states the thematic bass line, an eponymic ennead, after which this

line is greatly expanded—its next three statements constitute most of the rest of the piece. The line appears in many guises in other parts of the orchestral texture, where it retains some abstract elements (such as contour) but is otherwise fragmented, reformed, recombined, and finally reassembled. The work's harmonic language is that of postmodern tonality, as traditional triadic chord structures are connected by a network of common tones defined by the underlying bass, and various scales or modes are associated and developed with these chords.

Metropassacaglia is dedicated to William Schrickel and the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra and is scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, trumpets and trombones, four horns, timpani, and strings.

Dominick Argento (1927-2019) was the Composer Laureate of the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra. He passed away this past February 20th, and this afternoon's performance of *Royal Invitation (Homage to the Queen of Tonga)* is lovingly dedicated to his memory. Argento lived in Minneapolis and taught composition at the University of Minnesota for forty years. He was the first recipient of the McKnight Distinguished Artist Award, given in recognition of his lifelong contribution to the arts in Minnesota. He won a Pulitzer Prize for Music in 1975 for *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, a song cycle written for Dame Janet Baker, and he received a Grammy Award in 2004 for *Casa Guidi*. Argento's *Ode to the West Wind* was given its first public performance by soprano Maria Jette and the MSO under William Schrickel's direction in October of 2014.

Royal Invitation was originally conceived by Argento to be a ballet score, but the music was premiered as a concert suite by the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra under the direction of Leopold Sipe at St. Paul's Central High School on March 20th, 1964. Argento chose to create a work using the same instrumental forces for which Haydn would have written: strings with one flute and pairs of oboes, bassoons, and horns. The ballet's scenario was created by John Olon-Scrymgeour and was based on newspaper accounts of the attendance of Tonga's Queen Sālote Tupou III at Queen Elizabeth's coronation at London's Westminster Abbey in June of 1953. (Tonga, now a Polynesian sovereign state 1100 miles from New Zealand, was a British protectorate from 1900 to 1970.) Queen Sālote was a distinctively large woman (she stood 6'3" tall and reportedly weighed 300 pounds), and she charmed the tens of thousands of cheering Londoners crowding the streets to watch the procession of dignitaries returning from the coronation ceremony when she refused to employ the protective rain hood on

her open horse-drawn carriage during a torrential rainstorm, choosing instead to wave and smile and greet the throngs of adoring well-wishers while getting a good soaking.

Part 1 of Argento's *Royal Invitation* depicts the excitement and bustle around the palace as preparations are made to dispatch envoys to deliver personal invitations to guests all over the world. In Part 2, the British emissaries distribute the royal invitations to recipients in various foreign capitals. Pizzicato strings and a pair of horns portray the pomp-filled departure of the messengers. The flute delivers a virtuosic polonaise, the solo oboe intones a dreamy, lyrical fantasia/cadenza, and jocular pairs of horns, bassoons, and oboes parade themselves with flashy bravura. A royal fanfare ushers in Part 3, wherein Sālote receives her invitation. She is grateful to the envoy, but concerned because she wants to make sure she will be able to meet one **very** important Western expectation; she needs to learn how to dance the foxtrot! The lesson is given, the royal fanfare recedes, and the music and action turn to Part 4 and the pre-coronation excitement bubbling back in London. As the glittering spectacle builds and martial musical iterations multiply, another royal fanfare interrupts the proceedings: Sālote appears, strong and tall and dressed in leopard skins. Her arrival at the festivities is accompanied by an edgy, violent fugue in the pizzicato strings. Recovering from their initial shock, the hosts immediately realize that the formidable Tongan queen is in fact charming, warm and friendly. Part 5 wittily depicts the collision of British and Tongan cultures in the course of the coronation. *Rule, Britannia!* (in the strings) bumps up its soothing tonality against joke-like 12-tone interjections in the winds that become more and more elaborate and complicated until another familiar musical tune gradually emerges and wraps itself in perfect counterpoint around the British anthem: the foxtrot, being danced by Queen Sālote! With one more pronouncement of the royal fanfare, followed by a short reprise of the music heard in the very first bars of the ballet, the score fizzes to its ebullient close, leaving the unmistakable conclusion that all's well that ends well.