

Pasadena Community Orchestra

Bethany Pflueger, Conductor



Friday, November 8, 2024, 8:00 pm
Pre-Concert Discussion at 7:15 pm

First Church of the Nazarene of Pasadena

Program

Overture to *The Barber of Seville* Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

Carmen Suite No. 2 Georges Bizet (1838-1875)

Marche des Contrebandiers
Habanera
Nocturne
Chanson du Toréador
La Garde Montante
Danse Bohème

Intermission

Fanfare for Brass from *La Peri* Paul Dukas (1865-1935)

Lullaby George Gershwin (1898-1937)

Capriccio Espagnol Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)

Alborada
Variazioni
Alborada
Scena e Canto Gitano
Fandango Asturiano

PROGRAM NOTES – PCO CONCERT, NOVEMBER 8, 2024

The Barber of Seville was a flop at its premiere in 1816, but it became one of the most beloved comic operas of all time, and the most famous of the more than 40 that **Gioachino Rossini** wrote. The *Overture* was recycled from an earlier opera, a common practice among composers at that time. And Rossini recycled it again for a later historical opera. It says a lot about the adaptability of Rossini's creative style that a work could serve well in very different dramatic situations.



It features some of Rossini's most creative writing, with many changes in tempo, mood, and orchestral color. It's a favorite with audiences, even when separated from the opera. Hollywood loves it also, as the soundtrack to a critically acclaimed 1950 Looney Tunes cartoon *The Rabbit of Seville*, featuring Bugs Bunny as the barber.



Georges Bizet's opera *Carmen* hasn't always been popular. For years after its premiere in 1875 in Paris, its dramatic departure from conventions shocked audiences and it was panned by the critics. French audiences were horrified by the realistic depictions of everyday people, immorality, lawlessness, and the death of the title character on stage. But it was acclaimed abroad, and after 10 years returned to Paris where it rapidly gained acceptance. So the critics were wrong, and *Carmen* has been a staple of the repertoire ever since. *Carmen* tells the story of a soldier who is seduced by the gypsy Carmen and abandons his childhood sweetheart. But he loses Carmen to a glamorous torero (bullfighter), and he kills Carmen in a jealous rage.

Set in southern Spain, the opera features Spanish-style tunes that are some of the most-recognized melodies in classical music, including the *Habanera*, the *Seguidilla*, and the *Toreador's song*. We hear a suite of six pieces compiled after the composer's death by his friend Ernest Guiraud.

Paul Dukas is known today for just a handful of works; he was very self-critical and destroyed most of his manuscripts. But his brilliantly crafted *Sorcerer's Apprentice* is played frequently, and Walt Disney ensured its fame by featuring it in the classic film *Fantasia*. Dukas lived in Paris and was friends with Camille Saint-Saëns and Claude Debussy, and became a respected teacher and composer. His music to accompany the colorfully-costumed ballet *La Peri* (The Fairy) was nearly lost, but was saved from destruction by his friends. It tells the story of a Persian prince who seeks the flower of immortality (a lotus decorated with emeralds) and falls in love with a sleeping fairy, from whom he takes the flower.



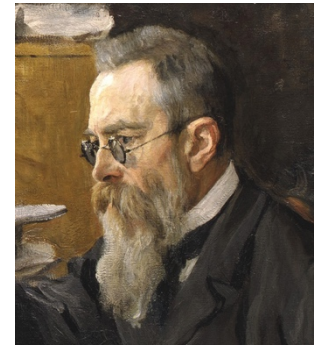
Dukas added the *Fanfare from La Peri* just before the premiere in 1912 as a prelude to the ballet. Frustrated by the typically noisy audiences, he made sure that this opening music could not possibly be ignored. This thrilling fanfare for brass instruments does exactly that!



Next, for a complete contrast, **George Gershwin's** *Lullaby*. Written as string quartet in 1919 as a student exercise, it is frequently performed in the sumptuous string orchestra version we hear this evening. Gershwin was trained in classical music theory and composition. Maurice Ravel famously declined to teach him, saying "Why be a second-rate Ravel when you can be a first-rate Gershwin?" Even before the *Lullaby*, he had written the hit song *Swanee* popularized by Al Jolson. He ultimately made his musical mark with a hugely inventive merging of jazz and classical styles epitomized in *Rhapsody in Blue* for piano and orchestra. United Airlines paid hefty royalties to Gershwin's estate to play it incessantly on its flights!

The *Lullaby* is a classical work, but its harmonies and rhythms hint of blues and ragtime. After a barely audible sustained opening, and high violin harmonics, it settles into a steadily-moving lilting melody that repeats several times with large variations in harmonic color and wide pitch intervals that add an element of surprise and a tinge of wistfulness to the main theme.

The Russian composer **Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov** is best-known as a master of orchestral composition, fully using the different timbres, pitch ranges, and dynamics of the various instruments. In addition to colorful orchestral works like *Scheherazade*, the *Russian Easter Festival Overture*, and the *Cappriccio Espanol* that we hear this evening, he wrote 15 operas and made numerous suites and arrangements from them. Not bad for a man who split his time between teaching at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory and serving as an officer in the Imperial Russian Navy. He believed in developing a distinctly nationalistic Russian style of classical music, in part by incorporating folk songs, but also by using rhythmic and harmonic elements from western parts of Asia. His stylistic influence at the end of the 19th century reached far, touching French composers like Maurice Ravel, Claude Debussy, and Paul Dukas who we heard earlier in this concert. The *Cappriccio Espanol* is typical of the composer's exuberant and colorful writing, using exotic scales and rhythms that are as much Russian as they are Spanish.

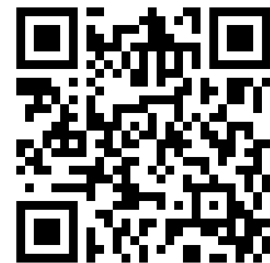


Program notes by Stephen Unwin, PCO Board member

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Be sure to attend our next concert, which features special guests the Glendale College Concert Singers under their Director, Peter Green, in Mozart's *Vespers*. Also on the program are Mozart's *Magic Flute Overture*, the *Adagio from Spartacus* by Khachaturian, and Ravel's famous *Bolero*. The concert starts at 8:00pm, but come early to join a pre-concert discussion with our Conductor, Beth Pflueger at 7:15pm.