

Ukiah Symphony Orchestra – Family Concerts – February 18-19, 2023

Suite from *Pelléas and Mélisande* by Gabriel Fauré

Composed: 1898; Length: 18 minutes

The deeply brooding atmosphere of the symbolist Belgian author Maurice Maeterlinck's play *Pelléas et Mélisande* has cast its spell on composers as diverse nationally, temperamentally, and stylistically as the Frenchmen Debussy and Fauré, the Austrian Schoenberg, the Finn Sibelius, and the Englishman Cyril Scott. Interestingly, it was Gabriel's Fauré's incidental music for a production of the drama in London that was the first *Pelléas* score to be presented to the public. Although Debussy completed the vocal score of his opera in 1895, the opera was not completed and staged until 1902; Fauré's incidental music, written on commission from the celebrated actress Mrs. Patrick Campbell for a London production of the drama in an English translation, was performed in 1898. A precursor of the Debussian French music labeled Impressionism, Fauré was fastidious, serene, his works characterized by limpid melodies that float on a sea of harmonic elegance, their sails often billowed by modality, an element that conjures a soft, antique ambiance.

Fauré composed the *Pelléas* incidental music in a very short period of time, so rapidly in fact, that as each piece was finished in short score, he sent it to his pupil Charles Koechlin for orchestration. Koechlin's scoring was for a small orchestra, appropriate for the music's theatrical use. Later, when Fauré decided to extract three sections of the score to make a concert suite, he re-orchestrated these parts for larger forces. Several years later, the *Sicilienne*, now probably the best-known of the pieces, was added (in Koechlin's original orchestration) to the Suite making it the four-movement work we now know.

The opening Prelude (to Act I of the play) sets a tone of quiet mystery that suffuses the scene with subtle suggestions of the inevitable tragedy surrounding the attraction between Mélisande and Pelléas, her husband Golaud's brother. Following a restrained climax, a horn call announces Golaud's appearance. In the second movement, *Fileuse* (the spinner), a most delicate picture of Mélisande at a spinning wheel, is etched as rapid triplet figures in the violins propel the wheel while a solo oboe sings limpidly. The serenely cool, pastoral *Sicilienne* sets a solo flute against harp and pizzicato string accompaniment. In the play, the piece introduced the fountain scene where Mélisande loses her wedding ring in the water. The music for the Suite's final section, used as the prelude to the last act, finds Fauré setting the tragic mood for the death of Mélisande. As in his most affecting songs, the composer remains poised even when plumbing deep emotions. — *Orrin Howard*

Carmen Suite No. 1 by Georges Bizet

Composed: 1875

Spain has always been something of a mystery to its neighbors—so close but a world away. To the north, the Pyrenees made travel to and from France and the rest of central Europe difficult. (Hannibal and his war elephants were an historical fluke and travel by train is still a tricky proposition.) In the south, a succession of Islamic caliphates from the eighth through the fifteenth centuries, during which people circulated through the Iberian Peninsula from around the Mediterranean, made for an exciting multicultural mix. As a result of this religious, linguistic, and cultural hybridity, people farther north (particularly the French) saw Spain as not quite European. Scholars of the nineteenth century thought that climate affected the language and music of a people, so it makes sense that composers and writers imagined Spain in terms of heat—simmering, languid, or lighting hot.

The bohemian lifestyle of Carmen and others like her—transformed in Bizet’s opera into a chorus of smoking, fighting, drinking women that scandalized Parisian audiences—symbolize all that is “exotic” about the country. Similar to their literary counterparts, composers use orchestral colors, rhythms, and harmonies to suggest the music of other places. In the case of the Carmen suites (arranged by Bizet’s friend Ernest Giraud after his death) the distinctive patterns of Spanish dances help set the scene.

After a prelude, based on the ominous “fate” motive that recurs throughout the opera, we hear the driving triple time of the “Aragonaise” (named for the region in northeastern Spain), throughout which members of the string section mimic the pluck and strum of the guitar and castanets crackle.

The following intermezzo is based on the prelude to the third act and sets a nighttime scene high in the mountains. The serenity of the harp and woodwind solos belies the conflict simmering below the surface as Carmen and Don José’s love affair sours.

The last three movements of the suite are essentially portraits of the opera’s love triangle, with “Les dragons de Alcalá” parodying the regimented military background of Don José and the hot-blooded “Les Toréadors” matching the bravura of the bullfighter Escamillo. At the center of it all, though, is Carmen herself and the “Séguedilla” she sings to seduce José. This is another iconic Spanish dance, tinged with its typical Phrygian cadences and also with chromatic twists that are all Bizet—the harmonic loopholes that let Carmen slip out of our grasp at every turn.

Critics and audiences at the opera’s premiere were shocked by the onstage death of its heroine at the hands of her lover José (the Opéra-Comique was a “family” institution) but the resulting reputation made for a long run in Paris and then international fame. The beauty of its melodies, the warmth of its timbres, and its fascinating rhythms (all preserved in Giraud’s orchestration) have ensured that Carmen and the sonic Spanish landscape Bizet conjured remain a favorite of today’s opera companies and orchestras. — *Katherine Baber*

The Composer is Dead by Nathaniel Stookey with text by Lemony Snicket

Composed: 2006

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Composer’s Note from Nathaniel Stookey:

I hope I’m not giving away too much by saying that The Composer is Dead ends with a funeral march...Classical composers have always had a preoccupation with death, partly because we are human, like you, partly because we grapple with the mysteries of the universe, partly because death sells records and always has...Someday you’ll be able to tell your grandchildren that you appreciated a living composer before that living composer became, like all composers, dead.

Librettist’s Note from Lemony Snicket:

I have been asked if I might say a word or two about the text of The Composer Is Dead, and the one or two words are “Boo hoo.” The story — which, as far as I know, is absolutely true — is so heartbreakingly glum that I cannot imagine that you will be able to listen to it without dabbing at your tears with a nearby handkerchief.

Orchestra Personnel - Feb 18-19

Violin 1

Margie Rice, Concertmaster
Jeremy Clay
Colyn Fischer
Kyle Craft
Katherine Wang
Izzy Akin-Paz

Violin 2

Becky Kuntz, Principal
Margaret Arner
Dan Kristianson
Yvonne Kramer
Jessica Reid
Amy McHenry

Viola

Jeff Ives, Principal
Alyssa Boge
Kathy Wright

Cello

Clovice Lewis, Principal
Elizabeth Oliver
Kathy Vast
Jean Craig
Sophia Becket

Double Bass

Larry Ames, Principal
Richard Chang

Flutes

Debra Scheuerman, Principal
Leslie Lind

Oboes

Jeff Champion, Principal
Beth Aiken, English Horn

Clarinets

Nick Xenelis, Principal
Carla Schoenthal, Bass Clarinet

Bassoons

Juliana Matteucci, Principal
Mary Ann Sacksteder, Contra Bassoon

Horns

Kelsey Wiley, Principal
Adrian Zarco Gutierrez
Ruth Wilson
Bruce Blaikie

Trumpets

Gary Miller, Principal
Jason McDonald

Trombones

Jeff Barnard, Principal
Emmett Ely
Daniel Cech

Tuba

Audrey McCombs

Harp

Kristin Lloyd

Timpani

Randy Hood

Percussion

Kendal Blum
Victor Hall
Divesh Karamchandani

SPECIAL THANK YOU TO:

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- Renee Vinyard
- Ilene Weeks

Refreshments for orchestra personnel:

- Heidi Peterman
- Alyssa Boge

Front of House Staff Manager:

- Gina Henebury

Our Ukiah Symphony Association Board Members and Volunteers

Orchestra Personnel - Feb 16 - School Concerts

Violin 1

Margie Rice, Concertmaster
Katherine Wang
Izzy Akin-Paz
Bob Williams

Violin 2

Dan Kristianson, Principal
Margaret Arner
Yvonne Kramer

Viola

Jeff Ives, Principal

Cello

Clovice Lewis, Principal
Elizabeth Oliver
Jean Craig

Double Bass

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Horns

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Adrian Zarco Gutierrez
Ruth Wilson
Bruce Blaikie

Trumpets

Gary Miller, Principal
Jason McDonald

Trombones

Jeff Barnard, Principal
Emmett Ely

Keyboards

Tom Aiken ("Tuba")
Janice Timm ("Harp")

Timpani

Randy Hood

Percussion

Kendal Blum
Victor Hall
Justin Sokol