

Itasca Symphony Orchestra plays Bizet

Featuring violin soloist Evgeny Zvonnikov

February 12, 2021
7:00 pm
Wilcox Theater, Reif Center

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L'Arlésienne Suite #1:

George Bizet
(1838-1875)

- I. Prélude**, *Allegro deciso (Tempo di marcia)*
- II. Minuet**, *Allegro giocoso*
- III. Adagietto**, *adagio*
- IV. Carillon**, *Allegro moderato*

Carmen Fantasy, op 25: (1882)

Bizet/ Pablo de Sarasate
(1844-1908)

- I. *Allegro moderato*
- II. *Moderato*
- III. *Lento assai*
- IV. *Allegro moderato*
- V. *Moderato*

*** **INTERMISSION** ***

L'Arlésienne Suite #2: (1879)

George Bizet
(1838-1875)

- I. Pastorale**, *Andante sostenuto*
- II. Intermezzo**, *Andante moderato*
- III. Minuet**, *Andantino*
- IV. Farandole**, *Allegro deciso (Tempo di marcia)*

Soloist

Russian violinist Evgeny Zvonnikov enjoys a varied career as a performer and educator. He is currently faculty of West Texas A & M University and has served for several years as the Associate Concertmaster of the Wichita Symphony Orchestra and Concertmaster of the Wichita Grand Opera Orchestra. Evgeny has taught masterclasses around the world and has collaborated with many acclaimed musicians, including pianists Misha Dichter, Leon Fleisher, Gilbert Kalish, and Peter Donohoe.

As a member of the Grammy nominated St. Petersburg String Quartet, Evgeny participated in many summer music festivals and concert series in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia, and performed in renowned concert halls, such as Carnegie Hall in New York. In 2021 Evgeny won the First Prize at the Golden Classical Music Awards, which included a performance at Carnegie Hall in New York City.

Program Notes

George Bizet was commissioned to provide some incidental music to accompany a new spoken-word play by his friend Alphonse Daudet, titled ***L'Arlésienne***, or "The Girl from Arles." (*Lar-lay-zee-en*). Arles is situated on the Rhône river in the South of France, on the border between the Languedoc District and Provence, near the Riviera. The region would become famous for the painters of Impressionism seeking the clear light and simple life.

Daudet's play ***L'Arlésienne*** opened in 1872 at the *Théâtre du Vaudeville* in Paris. It presents a convoluted pastoral tragedy with plenty of heartfelt monologues. The play takes place on a farmstead in the Provence, populated by cow-herds, peasants and salt-of-the-earth characters. It ends with the suicide of the hero, in despair due to the rejection by the eponymous *L'Arlésienne*.

As appropriate to the rural location far from Paris, Bizet made use of the folk styles of bucolic France. Later, for his opera ***Carmen***, he added the even more "exotic" flavor of the nearby Basque region, a style with Spanish inflections and tonalities. This came by way of friendship with the Spanish violin virtuoso Pablo de Sarasate. Of course, the music sounds "exotic" only in relation to the high-minded French-German-Italian music of the *Common Practice* style, as performed at court or church.

The incidental music to the play, ***L'Arlésienne***, consists of 27 numbers scattered throughout. The two ***L'Arlésienne Suites*** collect the more substantial sections of this music. The original music for the play featured an Overture and set pieces between the acts. There were also the usual songs and choruses within the drama, and dance opportunities wherever possible (a French specialty and audience expectation). Daudet also

needed Bizet for another prominent musical form called *mélodrame*. This is when the spoken dialogue is accompanied by instrumental music providing an atmospheric background to the mood of the text. Operatic composers of the 19th century employed *mélodrame* only occasionally for moments of heightened tension, as when the persistent singing would break off into spoken words for dramatic effect. In Daudet's spoken-word play (and others of the time), providing musical accompaniment to the unsung verbal script was quite common. Singers still sang the songs and choruses found in the play. *Mélodrame* creates both problems and opportunities when converting such music into self-sufficient orchestral Suites, and several movements in the Suites were originally set in *mélodrame*. Today the conventions of *mélodrame* live on in films and television programs which provide background music to accompany spoken dialogue.

There are several parallels between the play and the opera *Carmen*, composed three years later. They both share a contrast of two women: one good and innocent, the other an alluring *femme fatale* who serves as a lovesick obsession for the hero.

There is also the role of the hero's mother who pleads for the virtuous home-town sweetheart, and both culminate with a tragic death amid boisterous celebration at the conclusion.

Neither the original play with Bizet's music, nor the original version of the opera *Carmen* succeeded beyond a few performances. Other than the stylistic challenge of exoticism, critics of the play complained that the "Girl" herself never appears in the play, but remains only a mysterious phantasm! (Playing it safe!) With *Carmen*, however, proper society would be further scandalized at the *Opéra-Comique* in Paris with a Spanish Gypsy as leading character. An additional problem with the premier of *Carmen* may have been due to the fact that the state-sponsored *Opéra-Comique* actually required only spoken dialogue between songs, duets, choruses, and dance in its operatic productions. Hence the recourse to *mélodrame* provided a more replete theatrical experience with musical enhancement to the words. Richard Wagner was advocating and demonstrating this

ACTE I
(LE GASTELLET)

N^o 2 MÉLODRAME

REPRIQUE
FRANGET Rose ne voulait pas que je t'en parle avant que tout fut terminé, mais tout pas

Entre nous il ne peut pas y avoir de mystère. L'INNOCENT (*dans une débauche et un peu égaré*) Dis, berges FRANGET Plus, tu comprends, dans une grosse affaire

(p. 63)

Andante

pp sans corde

Ped

comme celle-là, je n'ai pas tûché en quinze ans un peu l'air de mon air. L'INNOCENT Dis, berges, quel est ce qui t'a fait le coup à la cheville de M^lle S...om^e FRANGET Encore, mon innocent, laisse

Ped

Piano reduction from the full orchestra, with spoken dialog for one of the mélodrame.

principle at the time in his own operatic stage works which he deemed the "Music of the Future." The theater's arbitrary restriction was soon abandoned in favor of emotionally realistic continuous singing in these freely dramatic passages that link the contemplative arias composed in set musical forms. These transitions could be as simple recitative, or sung as an expansive free-form with orchestral accompaniment. ***Carmen*** succeeded only when the spoken word with *mélodrame* was employed only rarely for the most dramatic moments, and not dominating the whole. Of course, music that enhanced and depicted non-verbal stage action and scenario—a battle, a storm, or a love scene—has never left the stage.

"L'Arlésienne," one of the most exquisite of Daudet's shorter works, is an impassioned fairy-tale of Southern France,—a drama of love, whose scene was a farm on the plains of the Camargue. It was presented magnificently at the Vaudeville Theatre, with profusion of silk and velvet, and with ancient carols and antique marches, in the delightful music of the composer Bizet. Yet it failed of success as a theatrical production, because Paris, volatile, self-centred, egotistical, had no regard for the simple beauty of this provincial pastoral.

From a contemporary review of Daudet's play.

Undaunted by the failure of the play, Bizet reassembled the best parts of the incidental music into a Suite for full orchestra. The Second ***L'Arlésienne Suite*** was arranged by his friend Ernest Guiraud after the composer's untimely death at age 36. These Suites eventually became quite popular, leading to the revival of the play itself, with its many *mélodrames* retained. The flute solo found in the Minuet from the Second Suite is particularly famous as an independent piece, and remains an essential part of the flute repertory.

Bizet took advantage of the new wind instrument invented by Adolphe Sax in his **L'Arlésienne** music. This is one of the earliest uses of the saxophone in orchestral music. The incidental music from the play, together with the Suites, provides several extended solos and duets for the saxophone, usually associated with the hero's dim-witted brother (no offence to sax players!). We hear the saxophone in the First Suite's Prelude which opens with variations on the traditional "March of the Kings," followed later by the brother's theme with sax, and then the hero's theme to conclude. The continued appeal of the music from the **L'Arlésienne Suites** can be found in jazz and rock arrangements, TV shows and commercials, and even a military march for a 20th century Albanian dictator, which repurposed the "March of the Kings."

Perhaps the most interesting legacy of **L'Arlésienne** comes from the third movement of the First Suite, named "Adagietto." In musical parlance, this word indicates a tempo marking, just a little faster than *adagio*. However, this is not a tempo marking, but the actual title of the movement; the tempo is simply *adagio*. Gustav Mahler, as a well-versed conductor, surely would have performed these popular Suites. While much shorter in length, Bizet's Adagietto anticipates many of the qualities found in the similarly titled Adagietto from Mahler's expansive **Fifth Symphony**. For Mahler too, the title is not the tempo, which is marked *sehr langsam* (*molto adagio*). Both are set in F major. The Adagietto scene in the play is a *mélodrame* in which two elderly lovers dwell in sentimental nostalgia over the lost past, an atmosphere also evoked by Mahler's movement. A new musical genre was born, with more to come from Barber, Elgar, and even retrospectively Albinoni's Adagio in G minor, from the Baroque period (1710s). Although not necessarily titled "Adagietto," all are associated with the loss of what might have been, and often performed during periods of mourning. Please listen carefully for Bizet's beautiful but brief Adagietto, set for strings only.

A child prodigy of Spanish origin, Pablo de Sarasate was born in the Basque town of Pamplona in 1844, just a few years younger than Bizet.



Pamplona is the town famous for the Festival of the Running of the Bulls. Having attended the *Paris Conservatoire* at age 12, Sarasate headquartered mostly in Paris when he was not on tour concertizing all over Europe and the Americas. He enthralled his audiences with his "bi-coastal" concert tours to Paris, London, New York City and Buenos Aires. Always impeccably dressed and traveling in style,

his cross-ocean voyages turned Sarasate into an international celebrity. He even made appearances in works of fiction by Edith Wharton and Arthur Conan Doyle, where characters in the story attend his London concerts! Given that the ***Carmen Fantasy*** was Sarasate's signature specialty, it is likely that Sherlock Holmes would have heard it performed more than once.

Sarasate's solo concerts most often featured virtuosic potpourris and fantasies based on current operas, an audience favorite at the time. Pianist Franz Liszt also made this new genre a specialty, with his Hungarian Rhapsody exoticism. Sarasate's playing was said to be of pure tone and passion without sentimental overreach, the emphasis on technical perfection. He composed many original works for his own use, but his true legacy was bringing his idiomatic Spanish styles into the mainstream, with influence on many contemporary composers and younger violin players. Indeed, Bizet's own composition of the opera ***Carmen*** owed a large debt to Sarasate, with its setting and tragic climax centered around bullfighting. (The violinist never failed to return to Pamplona for the Running, together with his own personal jubilee as home town celebrity). The ***Carmen Fantasy*** redoubles Sarasate's seminal importance to the Carmen Project, that continuous flow of performances, films, arrangements, dances, potpourris, fantasies, and musical covers of every kind, continuing to this day.



Like the second ***L'Arlés Suite***, the ***Carmen Fantasy*** appeared only as a posthumous homage to the late composer's greatest work. By then the opera ***Carmen*** had become all the rage in its new all-sung revision for the public theaters. The "exotic" Gypsy music was now the excitement, rather than the inexcusable. The ***Fantasy*** provides a showcase of virtuosic techniques and effects on the violin. These include trills, *glissando* (sliding chromatically up and down), *flageolet* (use of harmonics for an ethereal, whistle-like sound), fast arpeggios from top to bottom, double stops, tempo accelerations or sudden changes of mood, momentary cadenzas, *pizzicato* (plucking the strings) and more. The five sections of the ***Carmen Fantasy*** do not follow their order in the opera, but you will recognize the main themes within a self-sufficient and equally dramatic composition. The ***Carmen Fantasy*** is considered one of the most difficult violin showcases.

Program notes by Tom Nelson

Itasca Symphony Orchestra Personnel

1st Violin

Mary LaPlant
concertmaster
Kolton Graf
Olga Chernyshev
Steve Highland
Tara Lorenz

2nd Violin

Amanda Wirta
Cheryl Louis
Jean Leibfried
Rebecca Peterson
Kristin Sande

Viola

Pedro Oviedo
Jesse Davis
Kevin Hoeschen
Ron Kari

Cello

Magdalena Sas
Byron Klimek
Mark Solie

Bass

Tom Nelson
Vincent Osborn

Flute

Aaron Swanson
Kirsten Siegle
Lila Dezelske
piccolo

Oboe

Amber Bolstad
Kristen Rought

Clarinet

Chris Bolstad
Jessica Polacheck

Bassoon

Suzanne Allen
Mack Swanson

Saxophone

Zachary Truong

French Horn

Heidi Wick
Deena Skaja
Brianna Roberts
Deb Rausch

Trumpet

Dan Carlson
Carmen Heinecke
Cassie Thuen

Trombone

Thomas Patnaude
David Grosland

Timpani

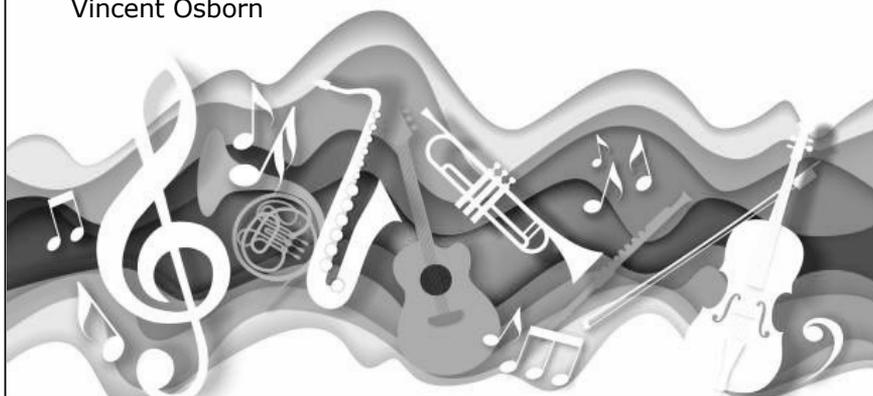
Peter Kneeland

Percussion

Connor Swanson

Harp

Janell Lamire



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