

PROGRAM NOTES FOR SAN BERNARDINO SYMPHONY
View from the Stage - 24 March, 2018
Richard Giangiulio, guest conductor with Rod Gilfry, baritone
By Laurie Shulman ©2018
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This evening's program gives us a night at the opera, sampling masterpieces of the Italian, French, and German stage, with a salute to American musical theater as well. The San Bernardino Symphony is proud to welcome Metropolitan Opera superstar Rod Gilfry, in collaboration with guest maestro Rick Giangiulio for this festive program.

We begin with music of **Wolfgang Amadè Mozart (1756-1791)**. *The Marriage of Figaro* was the first of Mozart's three collaborations with the Italian poet Lorenzo da Ponte, who based his superb libretto on a controversial French play. Mozart was at the height of his powers in 1786, and there are many who rank this opera as his supreme masterpiece.

The concise **Overture to *The Marriage of Figaro*** includes no actual themes from the opera, yet it captures *Figaro's* comic, effervescent atmosphere with exquisite skill. Always a master of formal structures, Mozart wrote a tightly unified sonata form movement without an ounce of pedantry. His overture is brimful of verve and energy, sounding as spontaneous as if it were jotted down on the spur of the moment.

Mozart was generous with his operatic baritones and basses. He awarded them abundant material in his operas, painting characters generally richer than those in tenor roles. This vocal favoritism certainly carried forth in *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *The Magic Flute*. In those operas, the characters of Figaro and Count Almaviva, Leporello and Don

Giovanni, and Papageno and Sarastro have many of the most delicious arias. This evening, Mr. Gilfry treats us to three of them.

In the **Count's aria from Act III of *The Marriage of Figaro***, his character is suspicious, jealous, and angry. He guesses (correctly) that several members of his household are plotting against him, and his sense of entitlement kicks in. He is determined to assert his *droit de seigneur* over Susanna, claiming her in his bed before his servant Figaro can marry her. This recitative and aria are about indignation from a privileged aristocrat bent on asserting power and control.

Don Giovanni's *canzonetta*, "Deh, vieni alla finestra," could not be more different. This is a serenade, intended to flatter and seduce. Don Giovanni is a sophisticated sociopath, always in pursuit of his next amorous conquest. In this scene, he compels his servant Leporello to switch clothing with him. That way, Leporello can distract Donna Elvira, a lady of Burgos whom Giovanni has loved and left, while the Don attempts his seduction of Donna Elvira's maid. '*Deh, vieni alla finestra*' is his serenade to the maidservant. Mozart captures its ambience by scoring the orchestra for mandolin and pizzicato strings, imitating guitar.

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Three majestic chords open the **Overture to Mozart's *The Magic Flute***. The number three is all-important to this symbolic masterwork. From the opera's opening scene, when three ladies rescue the terrified Tamino from a dragon, it is clear that the idea of three will figure prominently. Three couples dominate the plot: The Queen of the Night and Sarastro, Tamino and Pamina, Papageno and Papagena. Three boys announce the three ordeals the lovers Tamino

and Pamina must undergo before they may be united.

In a conscious gesture of musical unity with this symbolism, Mozart cast his overture in the key of E-flat major, which has a key signature of three flats. Formally, the overture is a merger of symphonic sonata form and fugue. The chords announcing the overture herald a slow introduction, and return briefly at the beginning of the development section. The entire overture is a marvelous combination of noble sentiment and effervescent spirit, much like the opera that is intended to follow.

The baritone **Papageno** is a comic foil to the tenor hero Tamino in *The Magic Flute*. A simple bird catcher, Papageno attempts to cope with life's most basic urges: friendship, the desire for romantic love and domestic bliss, fear of danger, and joyful celebration of pleasures such as food, drink, and music. His arias are quasi-folk songs, yielding some of *The Magic Flute*'s most memorable melodies. In "**Der Vogelfänger bin ich ja**," Papageno describes his simple living, punctuating the narrative with Pan pipes. He sings of his wish to find a pretty girl to love and cherish.

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Maestro Giangiulio concludes the first half of this program with a popular favorite from the 1950s. **Leonard Bernstein's tuneful overture to *West Side Story*** is a familiar medley hinting at the drama about to unfold. We hear the jazzy, dangerous music of the rival gangs, "Tonight," "There's a Place for Us," and the rumble.

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For those of us who grew up on the memorable songs of *West Side Story*, it is difficult to imagine a world in which **Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990)** is not a household name. In the early 1940s, however, he was not yet famous. One of his big breaks came when the exciting young choreographer Jerome Robbins asked him to collaborate on a wartime ballet entitled *Fancy Free*.

The ballet's plot concerns three sailors on shore leave in New York City in pursuit of the perfect girl. Bernstein's sophisticated, jazzy dance score was a big success at its 1944 premiere. He was soon at work with gifted collaborators adapting it into a full-fledged Broadway musical. *On the Town* opened in December 1944 and ran for nearly 500 performances. Purely escape theater, the upbeat show was a natural for a nation weary of war and hungry for lighthearted diversion.

On the Town's music is more sophisticated than most other contemporary musicals, perhaps because New York City's vibrant pulse courses through its music, bringing to life its diversity and humanity. Gabey is the romantic among the three sailors. "**Lucky to Be Me**" encapsulates Gabey's positive attitude toward life, while in "**Lonely Town**" he shows his sensitive side, noting that New York is emotionally empty without someone to love.

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Georges Bizet (1838-1875) is justly celebrated for his immortal opera *Carmen*. Many of his other compositions attest to his skill as a melodist and orchestrator. High on the list is his

incidental music to Alphonse Daudet's *L'arlésienne* [The Young Woman of Arles].

Daudet's drama – a pastoral tragedy that delves into the character and customs of Provence -- originated as a novella. Daudet rewrote it as a three act play. Composer and playwright collaborated on *L'arlésienne* with unusual warmth and mutual admiration. Daudet loved music and the two men got along splendidly.

Bizet used many traditional Provençal folk tunes in his music, of which *Farandole* is the most famous. It was known in the 18th century as the *Marche de Turenne*, and is associated with Christmas and the journey of the three kings to Bethlehem. Its origins are probably French military music.

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When Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis approached **Leonard Bernstein** in the late 1960s about a new work, she suggested a theatrical setting of the Roman Catholic Mass that would deal with the loss of faith in our time. The project was formally commissioned by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C. to inaugurate its opening in September, 1971.

Bernstein developed the concept as a theater piece. He and librettist Steven Schwartz (of *Godspell* fame) added other texts to the Roman Catholic Mass, both sacred and secular. These interpolations, called tropes, appear in an eclectic mix of musical styles, including rock, Broadway pop, brass marching band, and rhythm & blues, as well as a modernist classical idiom.

Near the beginning of **Mass**, we are introduced to a young man with a guitar who sings “**A Simple Song**.” He evolves into the central role of the Celebrant, and it is his crisis of faith that constitutes the pivotal dramatic thrust of the work.

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There is a saying among musicians that no one writes better Spanish music than the French. Georges Bizet is surely the premier example, and *Carmen* his most compelling proof. The entire opera exudes the vibrant, exotic colors of Spanish and Gypsy culture. We hear three selections from *Carmen*. The opera’s **Prelude** introduces the ominous ‘Fate’ theme, foretelling Carmen’s doom, and segues without pause to an *Aragonaise*, a lively Spanish dance in triple time.

Bizet used the music from “**Les Toréadors**” twice in *Carmen*. Initially it appears as part of the opera’s Prelude. In the last act, it returns for chorus as the crowd greets the bullfighters approaching the ring. The middle section introduces a theme from Escamillo’s famous aria. As anticipation builds, the excitement is contagious.

Mr. Gilfry closes the evening with the immortal “**Toreador Song**.” The celebrated bullfighter Escamillo swaggers onto the stage, confident that his *machismo* will prove irresistible to women - especially to the sultry Carmen. Bizet paints a brilliant portrait of this arrogant, self-assured character, with unforgettable music.