

Chapel Hill

Philharmonia

3 p.m. Sunday
October 23, 2016

Kenan Music Hall
UNC-Chapel Hill

Guest Conductor
Evan Feldman

Young People's Concert

The Star Spangled Banner

L'Arlésienne Suite No. 1

by Georges Bizet

Prélude, Allegro deciso ("the March of the Kings")

Carillon, Allegro moderato

A Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra:

Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Henry Purcell

by Benjamin Britten

Guest Narrator—Chapel Hill Mayor Pam Hemminger

Star Wars Suite & Harry Potter Suite

by John Williams

Young people conducting

How many of the young people here today have ever been in a room with a live orchestra of nearly 100 musicians? Get ready to listen as our conductor Evan Feldman brings down his baton to begin the “The Star-Spangled Banner.”

“Now, there’s a sound for you! That’s a sound-and-a-half! The familiar, full-throated, incomparable sound of the modern symphony orchestra. It’s probably the grandest sound on earth, at least among man-made noises, in all its variety and mixture and splendor.”

Those ecstatic words are Leonard Bernstein’s. Many of the parents and grandparents in the room will remember him as the first great American-born orchestra conductor and a composer of wonderful music for both the concert hall and the stage and screen—he wrote the score for West Side Story. “Lenny” also was an inspired teacher, sharing his passion for music with people of all ages. From 1958 to 1972 he led the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in more than 50 Young People’s Concerts televised across the USA. In these programs he loved to ask a big question such as “What Does Music Mean?” or to dissect “The Anatomy of a Symphony Orchestra.”

L’Arlésienne Suite No. 1

Georges Bizet was born in 1838, in Paris, France. His musical gifts were apparent in early childhood. Just before his tenth birthday he entered a special school called the Paris Conservatory. There he developed into an outstanding pianist and also began to compose his own music. Had he been born in a different time and place, he could have appeared in one of Bernstein’s many Young People’s Concerts that featured brilliant performers of about the same age as the audience members.



An *Arlésienne* from the time of Daudet and Bizet by Jean-Joseph Bonaventure Laurens

Like Bernstein, Bizet excelled in writing works for the stage. He focused on operas (plays in which all the text is sung, usually accompanied by an orchestra, and the music reveals characters’ feelings more vividly than words alone). Unfortunately, he was slow to complete projects and none of his few works that reached the stage drew a large audience. However, Bizet was a man ahead of his time. His final opera, Carmen, was first performed just three months before he died at the age of 37 from heart disease. Set in Spain, it tells the tragic story of a romantic triangle involving a fiery gypsy woman loved by both a soldier and a toreador (bullfighter). Although the first production closed quickly, within another 10 years Carmen became appreciated as a work of genius. Today it is one of the most popular operas around the world.

Bizet’s legacy also lives on in orchestral suites taken from incidental music he wrote for L’Arlésienne (The Girl from Arles).

This was a *mélodrame*, the French word for a play in which some of the spoken text was set to live music. As in *Carmen*, the story centers on the infatuation of a man, the peasant Fréderi, with a woman who loves someone else. The setting is rural Provence in southern France. The object of Fréderi's desires lives in the nearby city Arles, giving the play its name, although she never appears on stage. *L'Arlésienne* closed after only a few performances. Still, the play's author Alphonse Daudet appreciated his friend Bizet's contributions, calling the production "a glittering flop with the most charming music in the world." Bizet recycled four of his best musical segments into *L'Arlésienne Suite No. 1*, first performed in November 1872. Today we play two of these selections. One of Bizet's friends later compiled a second orchestral suite from remaining bits.

Prélude (Overture in English) is the play's opening music, performed before the curtain goes up. Bizet uses Provençal folk songs to set the scene, including a Christmas carol called "*Marcho dei Rei*" ("March of the Kings"). The music includes four more repeats of this song, but with each one different from the others. In this kind of musical writing the original version is called the "theme" and the altered versions are called "variations." These may differ from the theme in many ways, such as the melody, rhythm, speed (tempo), loudness (dynamics), and the use of different instruments of the orchestra with their distinctive sounds. Listen closely and try to recognize the theme and its variations!

Carillon refers to Church bells ringing on a peaceful Sunday morning. In the play this comes during a happy interlude when Fréderi begins to focus his attentions on a sweet local girl. Listen for French horns repeating a three-note pattern that imitates the bells' hopeful sound. Sadly, in the end Fréderi cannot overcome his obsession with the girl from Arles and falls into madness.

A Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra

Born in a seaside town in England in the year 1913, Benjamin Britten, like Bizet, displayed remarkable talent as a child. He began to write music at age 6. By 19 he was making his living as a composer, mainly for radio and documentary films. His big break came when the conductor Serge Koussevitzky sponsored him to write a grand opera called *Peter Grimes*. It tells a dark story of a fisherman (Grimes) accused of killing a young apprentice who actually fell from a cliff during a terrible storm. When the people of the town shun him, Grimes goes mad and perishes in a shipwreck. The opera became an instant hit in England in 1945, selling out the theater and receiving "two thumbs up" from critics. Leonard Bernstein, who had studied with Koussevitzky, conducted the first American performance.

In the meantime Britten had accepted another documentary film project. The British Ministry of Education (MoE) knew that publicly funded high schools would soon open up to all of the nation's children, not only those from privileged families. The MoE wanted all kids to enjoy good things in life that previously had been restricted to the wealthy elite. High on the list was great concert music, so an educational film on the Instruments of the Orchestra became a priority. Britten seemed a perfect choice to compose the score. He



Benjamin Britten conducting a community orchestra

shared the film director's goal "to open the doors of music to children and to return to them some of the delight that it had brought to his own life." He also showed a special ability to write sophisticated music that students found exciting. Beyond that, Britten identified very closely with young people and, like Peter Pan, wished never to grow up. In his own mind he remained a perpetual 13 year-old, and even as a mature adult he liked to have friends of that age.

Britten named the music he composed for the film **A Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra**.

In 1945 England was celebrating the 250th anniversary of the life of Henry Purcell (1659-1695), generally considered the finest composer in the country's history. Britten honored his predecessor by building **A Young Person's Guide** around a tune composed by Purcell. As in Bizet's *L'Arlésienne Suites*, the source was incidental music written for a stage drama, in this case Abdelazer; or, The Moor's Revenge by the female writer (and spy) Aphra Behn. Britten uses this tune as a Theme and presents a series of 13 ingenious Variations, each designed to spotlight one of the instruments in the orchestra.

Britten thought of the orchestra's four main sections as teams of members related by how they are made and produce sound. More grandly, I like to consider the orchestra as a galaxy of stars (the instruments) held together by a kind of musical gravity. Whether you imagine a scorecard to keep track of the players of a sports club, or a catalog of celestial objects, here is Britten's plan for **A Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra**:

THEME - Purcell's tune played by the orchestra and its main sections

- A. Full orchestra
- B. Woodwind section: Blown wooden instruments with reeds, and metal flutes
- C. Brass section: Blown long, twisted metal tubes controlled with valves or slides
- D. String section: Wood boxes with strings scraped by horsehair set in wood bows
- E. Percussion section: Drums, triangles, cymbals, xylophone, other "bangables"
- F. Full orchestra

VARIATIONS - each featured instrument shows off its special character

WOODWINDS VARIATIONS

1. Piccolo and flutes: straight tubes played sideways, air blown across a hole
2. Oboes: Wooden tubes, sensuous sound of air blown to vibrate a double reed

3. Clarinets: Wooden tubes with the mellower sound of air vibrating a single reed
4. Bassoons: Bigger double-reeded sibling of the oboe with a jolly, deeper sound

STRINGS VARIATIONS

5. Violins: Smallest, highest, most agile members of the “scraping” family
6. Violas: One size larger, with a mellower, deeper sound
7. Cellos: Bigger yet, with a still deeper, melodious voice, held between the legs
8. Double basses: Gruff deepest-voiced grandparents of the family, played upright
9. Harp: 47 strings plucked angelically with the fingers of both hands

BRASSES VARIATIONS

10. French horns: Large & noble, harking back to hunting in the forest
11. Trumpets: Most martial of the brass, calling to action
12. Trombones & tuba: Very large & very deep — think brontosaurus

PERCUSSION VARIATION

13. Timpani, cymbals, bass drum; snare drum, Chinese block, tambourine, triangle; xylophone; castanets, gong, whip – bang on a can or whatever comes to hand

CONCLUDING SECTION - FUGUE

After all the sections have played the original Purcell Theme, Britten uses the Variations to show the “personalities” of the various instruments, from the piccolo and flutes all the way through to the percussion family members. As you listen, try to understand how each Variation derives from the Theme. You may find that this is a tougher puzzle than for the Bizet piece we played earlier.

Britten now changes course. Having taken the orchestra apart, he does what all the King’s horses and all the King’s men could not do for Humpty Dumpty—he puts it back together again. Starting once more with the piccolo, he introduces a lively new tune of his own (yet still related to the Theme). Groups of instruments enter one after another, in each instance with a statement of the lively tune: woodwinds; bowed strings; harp; trumpets; percussion. These sequential entrances define a **Fugue**, a musical form that dates back to Purcell’s time and has been used by composers up to the present day.

But listen! With each entrance, the music gets wilder as the counterpoint of lines becomes more and more complex. Our reconstructed orchestral galaxy threatens to spin out of control. Will it shatter again and send fragments whirling off into deep space? No! Suddenly, Benjamin Britten transfigures into Albus Dumbledore! He flicks a wand and conjures magic. The trombones and tuba enter in their turn. But they do not play the expected lively tune. Instead, as all the other instruments continue with the Fugue, the low brass sings out a profound statement of Purcell’s Theme. Amazingly, everything now fits together. Our

galaxy of musical instruments has regained its order. David Hemmings, who sang in one of Britten's operas at age 12 and was among the composer's favorite young pals (later becoming a movie star), called this merger of Theme and Fugue the "champagne moment." Britten was a mighty wizard, indeed.

Star Wars Suite & Harry Potter Suite

The appearance 90 years ago of the first "talkie" films created a new market for original music. A number of the world's best composers, like Benjamin Britten, have written fine movie scores. Some, such as John Williams, work almost exclusively in this genre. Williams, now 84 years old, may be the greatest and is certainly the most honored film composer in history. He has received 5 Academy Awards and 50 nominations (second only to Walt Disney's lifetime total of 59), 4 Golden Globe Awards, and 22 Grammy Awards. In 2005 the American Film Institute named his music for **Star Wars** the best ever American film score.



Star Wars (1977)

Williams uses the instruments of the orchestra for movie sound tracks as skillfully as any composer for the concert hall. He pioneered the use of specific themes closely associated with particular film characters, most notably in the original **Star Wars** score. In opera such a sound bite that always identifies a character, place or situation is called a leitmotif. This is a key feature in the music of Richard Wagner and all who followed him.

Williams used leitmotifs to help link the first six films in the initial **Star Wars** series, and brought them back in Star Wars: The Force Awakens (2015). Similarly, he composed thematic musical signatures for important characters, even the owl Hedwig, in his scores for the first three **Harry Potter** films. Other composers retained the same leitmotifs in the later films in the series. Throughout the **Star Wars** and **Harry Potter** movies variations on these themes foreshadow plot twists and add emotional color. Some of Williams's leitmotifs are now embedded more deeply in our collective cultural conscience than the best known examples in the music of Mozart or Bach, or even the iconic DOT-DOT-DOT-DASH (Morse code "V" for Victory) fate motif from Beethoven's 5th Symphony.

Listen for familiar leitmotifs and recall variations you may have heard in the movies as the Chapel Hill Philharmonia closes this afternoon's program with two suites containing many of the main themes from John Williams's scores for the original **Star Wars** and **Harry Potter** films. Baton-wielding young persons from the audience will be encouraged to assist Maestro Feldman at the podium. May the Force be with you.