

Symphonie Fantastique

Saturday, October 1, 2022
8pm, Hill Auditorium

Bizet Selections from *Carmen*

Still *Romance*

Muñiz *Motown Dreams*

Berlioz *Symphonie Fantastique*

Timothy McAllister saxophone

Earl Lee conductor & music
director



Digital program notes

PROGRAM NOTES

BY KEMPER EDWARDS



Selections from “Carmen” Suites 1 and 2 (1874, 14 minutes)

Georges Bizet

BORN October 25, 1838; Paris, France

DIED June 3, 1875; Bougival, France

Good orchestral suites are like good movie trailers. Both contain highlights of the larger works from which they draw, both package the material together to entertain the audience and persuade them to seek out more, and crucially, both generally avoid spoiling the plot of the main drama. For 19th century listeners, opera was expensive entertainment and composers had to exploit every promotional angle possible in order to guarantee a string of financially viable performances. One such angle was bringing the featured music out of the opera theater and into the concert hall, where it might be enjoyed by a wider audience and generate interest in the fully staged production. The organization of the material was critical, with musical factors dictating the order of the work, rather than the demands of the plot.

The success of Bizet's *Carmen* was of the slow-burning variety. An innovative and convention-breaking journey through love, betrayal and revenge, the opera initially scandalized Parisian audiences. Performances outside of France turned the tide, and following its revival in Paris in 1883, *Carmen* swiftly gained popularity both domestically and abroad. Sadly, Bizet was not to witness this – he died suddenly in 1875, just as news of *Carmen*'s international success was beginning to reach French ears. Following his death, Bizet's close friend Ernest Guiraud gathered music from 12 numbers in *Carmen* and fashioned them into two orchestral suites, from which the A²SO is performing five movements. While the sequence order of the complete suites is reversed and does not reflect the progress of the plot, Guiraud took pains to ensure that the orchestration closely followed that of Bizet's. A gifted composer himself, Guiraud had won the celebrated Prix de Rome composition award, and counted among his friends Camille Saint-Saëns and Théodore Dubois in addition to Bizet. Today, he's best remembered as the one responsible for cementing *Carmen*'s reputation for melody, harmony, orchestration and effect of uncommon brilliance – a masterpiece that can be enjoyed without experiencing the full staging.

The story of *Carmen* left an indelible impression on audiences at its premiere, although one they professed not to appreciate. Set in the south of Spain, we witness the seduction of Don José, a soldier madly in love with Carmen, a gypsy who works in a cigarette factory. Bent on capturing her affections, Don José abandons both his military duties and Micaëla, his longtime sweetheart, running away with Carmen and her smuggler comrades. As months pass and Carmen tires of José's affections, she becomes smitten with the dashing bullfighter Escamillo. Devastated, José locates Carmen and begs her to reconsider their relationship, but she repels his advances. Enraged, he stabs her, and she dies in Escamillo's arms. Themes of hedonism, immorality, and the shocking death of the title character were deemed highly improper by contemporary critics, but broke new ground for the genre and cemented a transition between French *opéra comique* and 19th-century Italian *verismo* (realism).

Kemper Edwards was raised in London and Pittsburgh. He joined the A²SO from the Academy of Ancient Music, the leading period instrument ensemble where he was Communications and Engagement Manager. Beginning work with AAM after studying music at the University of Cambridge, he oversaw a revitalization of the orchestra's digital presence, with AAM becoming the world's most listened-to ensemble of its kind online and producing a number of critically acclaimed recordings on its in-house label, AAM Records.

A keen musician, Kemper began studying violin and piano at a young age with Viktoria Grigoreva of the Royal College of Music and Alexandra Andrievski of the Yehudi Menuhin School, before continuing his studies with Rufina Yefimova, a graduate of the Moscow Conservatory. A 2012 Pittsburgh Concert Society Young Artist Winner and recipient of the Anna and Benjamin Perlow Prize and Blackwood Music Scholarship, Kemper was selected by Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra Principal Guest Conductor Leonard Slatkin as the winner of the Pittsburgh Youth Symphony Orchestra Conducting Competition in 2010.

Events of 1874 (*Carmen* composed)

- Detroit Conservatory of Music established
- Michigan state school for underprivileged children opened in Coldwater as first of its kind in the world
- Women's Christian Temperance Union formed
- Chautauqua organized, originally for Bible study and training of Sunday school teachers; now includes a world-famous music school during the summer
- First Impressionist exhibition in Paris
- Edison made the first practical quadruplex telegraph, able to send four messages at the same time
- *Far from the Madding Crowd* written by Thomas Hardy

Romance for Alto Saxophone & Orchestra (1954, 3 minutes)

William Grant Still

BORN May 11, 1895; Woodville, MS

DIED December 3, 1978; Los Angeles, CA



Beginning in 1910, overwhelmingly oppressive conditions for African Americans in the Jim Crow Deep South and the promise of new opportunities in industrialized urban centers across the United States gave rise to what became known as the Great Migration. Amounting to a second Declaration of Independence, the quest for a degree of reprieve from segregation, lynching, convict leasing, sharecropping, and overwhelming economic and political hardship drove approximately 1.6 million people to resettle in parts of the Northeast, Midwest and West between the 1910s and the 1940s. This influx brought with it a flowering of cultural and intellectual expression, demonstrated most notably in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City. At once a celebration of shared heritage as well as a newly honed, powerful voicing of the struggle for civil rights, this outpouring of art, political discourse and scholarship became known as the Harlem Renaissance. Music occupied a central role in this new renaissance, driven in part by emerging composers like William L. Dawson, Florence Price, and William Grant Still.

For Still, Harlem represented a promised land of collaboration and career advancement following the conclusion of his service in the US Navy after World War I. Born in Mississippi and raised in Little Rock, Arkansas, he'd developed his talents at the Oberlin Conservatory, augmenting studies with supplemental lessons from Edgar Varese and George Chadwick. Still's first major orchestra work, his *Afro-American Symphony*, remained for many years his defining and most famous composition. In 1931, it became the first orchestral work by an African-American composer to be performed by a major symphony orchestra (the Rochester Philharmonic under the baton of Still's close friend and champion, Howard Hanson), and until 1950 remained the most widely performed symphony written by an American composer.

Still possessed a wide and inexhaustible love for the unique and idiomatic instrument classes; a violinist by formal training, he'd also taught himself viola, cello, double bass, clarinet, oboe, clarinet — and the saxophone. In 1954, Still was approached by the prominent saxophonist Sigurd Rascher regarding a proposed commission. The work: a piece for saxophone and piano, the first of its kind ever to be composed

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by an African-American. As an influential figure in the emancipation of the saxophone as a classical instrument, Rascher was known to favor roundness of tone and timbral warmth over pure showmanship and pyrotechnics. Still took this into account, pulling from his own working knowledge of the instrument to produce an intensely idiomatic work that showcases its most striking qualities. Here, blistering tempi, dizzying runs, and stratospheric tessitura matter little; instead, the saxophone maintains placement in its distinctive middle registers, weaving a tapestry of figurations over luscious counterpoint in the supporting orchestral strings.

This tapestry becomes clearer as we progress through the work. Communication and collaboration are accomplished through the transmission of meaning, increased in efficacy through the insistent repetition of small intervals. These fragments build tension and momentum, balanced through careful moderation of tempo and dynamics that act as release mechanisms.

Concerto for Alto Saxophone & Orchestra “Motown Dreams”

(2016, 14 minutes)

Jorge Muñiz

BORN August 5, 1974; Fribourg, Switzerland



Inspired by Motown influences, *Motown Dreams* goes beyond this and takes as its subject the contributing influence itself: the burgeoning Michigan auto industry of the 1960s and '70s. Commissioned by the South Bend Youth Symphony Orchestra, *Motown Dreams* premiered in 2016 with soloist Timothy McAllister, who also joins the A²SO for tonight's performance. While the title might suggest obvious and salient Motown influences, Muñiz subsumes these features into the deeper layers of the work. To quote Smokey Robinson, “Motown sound ... is not an audible sound. It's spiritual, and it comes from the people that make it happen.” Muñiz's work treats these words as scripture, identifying and elevating the true essence of Motown in the environment and industry that forged its roots.

Three movements take as their titles the names of three classic cars: *1964 Ford Mustang*, *1970 Pontiac GTO*, and *1973 Chevrolet Corvette*. As Muñiz relates, “The contrasting personalities of these cars and their engines are part of the musical fabric of each movement,” and the writing comprises a reflection on the driving experience produced behind the wheel of each vehicle. This was a golden age of American automobile manufacturing, with automakers catering to consumer demand for bigger, faster, more viscerally thrilling cars. For many, the allure of the track was hamstrung by the limitations of the wallet, and the emergence of the muscle car gave drivers the thrill of the raceway on public roads in one simple, affordable, purpose-built package, and a relatively affordable one at that. Stick the largest engine you can find in the lightest chassis you can find – for many years, this remained the unspoken credo. As competition grew fiercer with each new four-wheeled offering to hit the market, automakers raced to produce distinctive, striking designs that remain icons of the era. In *Motown Dreams*, you hear the souls of three of the most distinctive examples.



While the work stops short of overt references to Motown hits of the age, there's plenty of discernable substance. Soul, R&B, pop, funk; all contribute towards and influence Muñiz's writing. "There's no specific reference to a particular song, but there are stylistic elements the audience can recognize," Muñiz says. "The slow movement might bring to mind a slow song by the Isley Brothers. There's also a sense of funk that you can hear, especially in the first movement." Out of these dynamic, rhythmically organic textures rises the saxophone, itself a defining instrument of the style and one that pairs beautifully with the supporting orchestral forces. Exuberant exploration is the operative theme here; the incisive, pungent qualities of the alto sax set it apart from the more muted textures of the ensemble. Exuberance never gives way to shallow excess, however. While virtuosic in range and rhythmic quality, the soloist remains endearingly expressive and authentic throughout, a nod to the industrial character that defined the muscle car experience and gave the age its homegrown, resonant personality. Getting behind the wheel of *Motown Dreams* feels like a trip down memory lane — perhaps less a lane than a highway in all of its burnt-rubber, exhaust-straining, cylinder-firing glory.

Symphonie fantastique: Épisode de la vie d'un artiste ... en cinq parties, Op. 14 (Fantastical Symphony: Episode in the Life of an Artist ... in Five Sections) (1830, 49 minutes)

Hector Berlioz

BORN December 11, 1803; La Côte-Saint-André, France

DIED March 8, 1869; Paris, France



The tortured, yet heroic artist — a staple of the Romantic era; this subject fascinated composers in the early 1800s. The post-Napoleonic period was a fresh, new, and terrifying time to work. The shadow of Beethoven would be felt for some time yet, even with his death in 1827, and composers struggled to determine new directions for the established forms that had been so thoroughly explored, some would say completed, at the hands of the master from Bonn.

One such direction that bore potential was the field of programmatic music. While baroque composers had experimented with vivid "tone painting" (see Vivaldi's *Le quattro stagioni* (*The Four Seasons*), or Carl Heinrich Biber's *Battalia a 10*), the Classical era saw composers retreat from overt descriptive techniques and focus on the establishment and perfection of abstract forms. Barking dogs, singing birds, thundering cannons, and the like featured few and far between — music for music's sake and enlightenment ideals of human accomplishment were preferred instead. The Romantic era once more reversed this approach and brought us full circle; vivid, immersive realism drew the listener into the artist's world and convinced them of the ultimate mission of the creative hero. This new art could now speak to the everyman. Rather than music being the exclusive recreation of the nobility, the dawn of the new industrial age meant that the concerto, symphony, and opera could now be experienced by a broader audience than ever before; an audience that appreciated immediacy over opaque complexity.

Young Hector Berlioz was one such audience member at a Parisian performance of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* at the Odéon Theater in 1827 (pivotal, the same year as Beethoven's death). There he observed the young Irish actress Harriet Smithson, whose stage presence and charisma instantly captured his heart. Romantic-era affairs of the heart were not to be internalized, and Berlioz lost little time in dashing off a number of passionate love letters to Smithson, each met with silence. This one-way stream of infatuation continued for two years, at which point Smithson left Paris without having once replied to or otherwise made contact with the composer. Brokenhearted, Berlioz resolved to harness his unrequited affections and threw himself into a creation of monstrous proportions: a five-movement *fantastic symphony* for a large orchestra that ends with a macabre witch's bacchanale.

Berlioz provided his own preface and program notes for each movement of the work. The central theme is one of languish: the troubled artist, haunted by recurring visions of the perfect woman that eludes his grasp, turns to opium in an attempt to alleviate the sufferings of the heart. Throughout the work, the "fixed

idea" (*idée fixe*) represents the Beloved, its fusion of aspiration and desolation binding the symphony together in a journey through infatuation, obsession, and ultimate madness.

The first movement introduces the listener to the protagonist, the young musician beset with an obsession for the woman of his dreams. He cannot achieve her, he cannot prove himself worthy of her; it is as if a magnetic force repels the two whenever he believes himself close to securing her affections. The *idée fixe* represents this exhausting pursuit of the unachievable, with a symmetrical rise in intensity matched by a deflating regression back down into the depths of the orchestra. Berlioz matches this microstructure in the way he constructs the movement as a whole: like a giant arch, the home key returns in the closing bars as we complete the circle, dejected and thwarted yet again.

The spirits of our hero take a happy turn in the second movement. Here we witness a sumptuous ball in full swing. Glittering gowns, graceful footsteps and tremulous stomachs make themselves known to the ear. The *idée fixe* is transformed into a sweeping dance melody, imbued with potent sensuality and lush harmonic richness. Twin harps take center stage, a bold instrumentation decision and one that would cause the composer much consternation when it came to arranging for the staging and performance of the work in later years (skilled harpists were hard to come by, even more so than tuned harps). The third movement allows us to catch our breath. A quiet pastoral scene fills the senses, and a pair of shepherds engage in dialogue across a windswept plain. Peace and serenity are the order of the day, and the duet-at-a-distance is performed by English horn and an off-stage oboe as the late-afternoon breeze tussles the grass. Hope and optimism form the interlude, after which point the English horn attempts to restart the duet. There's no answer. Timpani sounds an ominous roll of thunder, and the air turns chill. All is not well.

An apocalyptic scene greets the ear at the outset of the fourth movement. Convinced of his eternal solitude, our protagonist overdoses on opioids and falls into a deep yet fitful sleep. Intense nightmares fill his senses, as he imagines that he's murdered his beloved and has been condemned to the scaffold. Somber percussion and grotesque brass instruments accompany the grim procession, drawing closer with each heavy footfall. Imperious officialdom from the bassoon, forced gaiety from the strings, and guttural death rattles from the trombones haunt the place of execution. For one brief moment, the clarinet rises from the ashes to sound the *idée fixe*. Tragically, it's only an apparition – the blade falls and the assembled crowd jeers contemptuously.

A witch's sabbath forms the final movement. A cast of characters are introduced to the scene, all equally repulsive. Ghosts, ghouls, monsters, and sorcerers leap about in growing states of frenzy as they await a special guest. The now-familiar *idée fixe* announces the arrival of the Beloved, yet one possessed by demons. What was once a noble, wistful melody is now an ugly, trivial dance tune. The Dies Irae sequence from the Latin Mass for the Dead sounds its unsettling toll, as innovative effects from the ensemble depict the creatures of the night. Strings turn their bows upside down and become agents of the percussion section; woodwinds tie themselves in knots with incessant trilling. Driving syncopation from the bass drum thrusts the macabre orgy into its finale and the work closes at a whirlwind tempo as we lose sight of our hero in the din.

The innovative yet controversial techniques and subject matter of *Symphonie fantastique* made Berlioz a sensation, and when its inspiration heard the work two years after its premiere, she recognized the genius of the composer. Berlioz and Harriet Smithson wed in 1833, but as the saying would have it, life imitates art. The passions of the senses eventually proved to be hollow pursuits of the ideal, and ultimate incompatibility eventually forced the couple to separate.

Events of 1830 (*Symphonie fantastique* composed)

- Population of Detroit is 2,222
- First railroad charter in Michigan granted to Detroit and Pontiac Railroad
- Microscope invented
- Chicago is founded
- *Mary had a Little Lamb* written by Sarah Josepha Buell Hale
- *Birds of America* published by Audubon
- First bananas arrive in New York
- World population reaches one billion



Enigma Variations

Friday, November 11, 2022
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TIMOTHY McALLISTER



Described as “an exemplary soloist” by Gramophone Magazine and “a titan of contemporary music and the instrument, in general” (The Cleveland Plain Dealer), acclaimed saxophonist Timothy McAllister is one of today’s leading solo artists and a member of the GRAMMY® winning PRISM Quartet, with over 50 recordings and 200 premières of new compositions by eminent and emerging composers worldwide. McAllister has appeared with more than 40 of the world’s most prominent orchestras and ensembles in over 20 countries.

His rise to international recognition began with his world premiere performances of John Adams’s Saxophone Concerto in 2013 with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra under the baton of the composer in the Sydney Opera House, and his recordings of both the composer’s *City Noir* and the Concerto with the St. Louis Symphony and conductor David Robertson garnered a 2015 GRAMMY® Award for “Best Orchestral Performance.” His subsequent appearance as one of the rare saxophone soloists to appear at the 2014 BBC Proms with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Marin Alsop was met with widespread critical acclaim.

His 2018 recordings of Kenneth Fuchs’s Saxophone Concerto *Rush* with JoAnn Falletta and the London Symphony Orchestra and *City Noir* with the Berlin Philharmonic under Gustavo Dudamel both appeared on 2019 GRAMMY® Nominated albums, with the Fuchs winning in the “Best Classical Compendium” category. Recent performances also include the China Premiere of the Adams Concerto with Edo de Waart and the Hong Kong Philharmonic as well as the Belgium Premiere of Guillaume Connesson’s Saxophone Concerto *A Kind of Trane* under Stéphane Denève and the Brussels Philharmonic, recorded for Deutsche Grammophon.

This past season, in addition to a debut solo performance with the Lucerne Festival Contemporary Orchestra featuring MacArthur Foundation “Genius” Fellow and virtuoso performer/composer Tyshawn Sorey’s *Adagio (For Wadada Leo Smith)*, he presented the world premiere of John Corigliano’s saxophone concerto, *Triathlon*, with the San Francisco Symphony. Recent and forthcoming engagements include the Albany Symphony, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, Buffalo Philharmonic, Grand Rapids Symphony, Seattle Symphony, National Orchestral Institute Festival, among numerous other solo projects and chamber music collaborations.

Just released, his next solo album, *Project Encore*, with acclaimed pianist Liz Ames brings together today’s most exciting and diverse voices, including Matthew Evan Taylor, Corey Dundee, Nina Shekhar, Gonzalo Garrido-Lecca, Griffin Candey, Jennifer Jolley, Zoe Cutler, Armando Bayolo, Karalyn Schubring, SirWick Hughes, Andre Myers, Jim Territo, Marianne Ploger, and Andres Eloy Rodriguez.

A widely-revered teacher of his instrument, McAllister is Professor of Saxophone at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre and Dance, and he appears at summer festivals and academies worldwide. He also holds degrees, including the Doctor of Musical Arts, from the University of Michigan, where he studied with legendary saxophonist Donald Sinta. He played solo recitals at Carnegie’s Zankell Hall and London’s Wigmore Hall and reunited for a European tour with his frequent recital partner, cellist Alisa Weilerstein.

Passionate about contemporary music, he has commissioned and performed works by many living composers, premiering pieces by Thomas Adès, Sebastian Currier, Avner Dorman, and Andrew Norman, among many others.

This is Timothy McAllister’s first appearance with the orchestra, although he was a soloist for the A²SO KinderConcerts in the past.

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