



SE SOUVENIR
JANUARY 20 & 21, 2023

PROGRAM NOTES

Liberty, Op. 263

PIERRE THILLOY (B. 1970)

Freedom is probably and most certainly the fundamental value of humanity, the one that is dearest to us, the one that gives meaning to life, the one that drives our actions, the cradle of our existence.

No wonder Auguste Bartholdi made a sculpture of it—a gift from the French people to the Americans—"as a sign of friendship." This freedom which since October 28, 1886 enlightens the world with a new thought, that of fraternity and friendship.

Visionary act also if we consider that it is the one who gives birth to the world and nourishes it, the woman, who then becomes the luminous and universal symbol for the whole

earth of the dream of freedom and who guides us towards our destiny, towards an ideal to build, towards our achievement and our completion.

These are all the reasons that most likely give New York City its strength, its character, its ideal. Like freedom, New York is a "world-city," the union of heaven and earth, archaism and technology, a city of which the famous French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir said that there's something in the air of New York that makes sleep unnecessary.

In the eyes of the whole world, New York has become the symbol of FREEDOM: a freedom that rages, a freedom whose whispers are louder than the fiercest storms, a freedom whose single cry brings the world to a standstill, a freedom that gives strength to be together, the universal realization of Martin Luther King's dream, living proof of Mark Twain's famous maxim:

They didn't know it was impossible, so they did it.

This is all that I try to express through this LIBERTY opus!

So thank you very much to everyone who made this dream possible: my family, my friend Miguel and The Chelsea

Symphony who are the voice of LIBERTY, and you, dear public, who became the ears and the receptacle of LIBERTY!

– *Pierre Thilloy*

Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Op. 22

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS (1835 - 1921)

Best described by the famous quote “beginning with Bach and ending with Offenbach,” Camille Saint-Saëns’ second piano concerto in G minor holds a special place in the piano concerto repertoire. It serves as a contrast to the trendy “concerto Brillante” of the era, with Saint-Saëns desiring that “the solo part of a concerto must be set out, and treated, like a dramatic role.” While it has all the dressings of a romantic concerto, its quicksilver shifts in temperaments and moods creates a piece that never takes itself too seriously.

Amongst Saint-Saëns’ many mutual musician friends and colleagues was the great pianist, and founder of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, Anton Rubenstein. Rubenstein was visiting Paris for a series of concerts in 1868, where Saint-Saëns conducted all eight of Rubenstein’s concerto performances with Rubenstein as soloist. Rubenstein, who was developing his reputation as a conductor, wanted to

return the favor, and in turn, also make his own conducting debut in Paris. True to his prolific nature, Saint-Saëns had three weeks to prepare something, and finished composing his second piano concerto in seventeen days. However, Saint-Saëns himself wrote that “except for the Scherzo, which was immediately well-received, [the concerto] was not a great success; everyone agreed that the first part was incoherent and the finale a complete failure.” Despite its poor reception, it is now one of the most popular piano concerti of the present day, and certainly Saint-Saëns’ most well known piano concerto.

As an early composition, one can see Saint-Saëns’ enthusiasm in championing the modern composers of his day (such as Liszt and Wagner). The second piano concerto follows a traditional form of three movements, with each movement in ternary form, but with much more romantic flexibility. While first movements are typically livelier in tempi, Saint-Saëns chooses to draw from his experience as an organist, and begins with an improvisatory piano cadenza, much like a Bach fantasia. The first theme, taken from an unfinished motet of his student, Gabriel Fauré, is full of pathos and melancholy, develops in tension, speed, and virtuosity through the middle section, and eventually returns to some more Bach-like material in the

coda. Opening with timpani, the second movement is a scherzo that demonstrates Saint-Saëns' musical wit. It is light, mercurial, and humorous, completely turning away from the first movement's drama. Returning to G minor for the finale, the final movement begins with thunderous triplets in the piano, and both soloist and orchestra take off for a swashbuckling tarantella that ends with thunderous, dazzling virtuosity.

– *Candace Chien*

Tableaux de Provence

PAULE MAURICE (1910 - 1967)

Paule Maurice's lyrical five-movement suite *Tableaux de Provence* was primarily composed between 1948 and 1955. Containing elements of dance and song forms, the work is a series of musical stories commemorating family trips to the French countryside taken by the Maurice family with saxophonist Marcel Mule and his wife. The piece is Maurice's most well known work and was dedicated to Mule, however the orchestral version presented here was premiered by Jean-Marie Londeix on December 9, 1958.

As a programmatic work, this piece was written to evoke specific personal experiences. In a letter from the composer to Londeix, Maurice shared that the fourth movement was written in two days during a period mourning the death of one of her husband's cousins. Maurice writes, "It is thanks to him that I discovered the true charm of Provence, to love the shrill song of the cicadas, to appreciate the joy of finding a drop of water beneath a rock in a country where moisture is so precious."

In the third movement, Maurice depicts an annual festival and pilgrimage of the Romani people that dates back to the Middle Ages and is still celebrated in France today. Although common at the time the piece was composed, some of the cultural representations appear somewhat broad by today's standards. Ideally, the piece can be performed with the integrity the composer intended, alongside a thoughtful consideration of our modern understanding of how language (both words and musical themes) reflects culture and power dynamics.

The composer provided the following movement descriptions in a 1966 letter to Marshall Taylor, a saxophonist and student of Marcel Mule.

- *Farandoulo di Chatouno* means Farandole of the Girls. The farandole is a Provençal round of a joyous and very rhythmic character, always with the accompaniment of a tabor [small drum]...
- *Cansoun per ma mio* (Song for my Ladylove) is a serenade and the introduction is established on the open strings of the guitar.
- *La Boumiano* (The Gypsy Woman), a very rhythmic dance, underlines the characters of the gypsies [Romani people] who go on pilgrimage to Saintes-Maries-de-la Mer.
- *Dis Alyscamps l'amo souspire* (The Soul of Alyscamps sighs) expresses the complaint of the souls soaring over the cemetery of Alyscamps (in Arles), nostalgia, sadness, regrets.
- *Lou cabridan* (The Bumblebee). In Provence the cabridan is a sort of large bumblebee, turning, going and coming rapidly and resting at times on the flowers, then continuing its flight and departing.”

– **Rob Wilkerson**

Sonata in C# for Alto Saxophone (or Viola) and Orchestra

FERNANDE BREILH DECRUCK (1896 - 1954)

Fernande Decruck was a 20th century French composer and organ recitalist. Her contemporaries included Darius Milhaud, Jacques Ibert, and Olivier Messiaen. She studied composition and organ at the Paris Conservatory. In 1928, Decruck followed her husband to New York City, where she became known as an improvising organist marvel.

Decruck dedicated Sonata in C# (1943) to noted saxophonist Marcel Mule, and included a viola alternative with the publication. While the piece is more commonly performed by saxophonists, it is still debated whether the piece was originally composed for saxophone or viola. There are musical discrepancies in both parts between the original manuscripts and publications. For example, some melodic lines drop or raise the octave to accommodate the register of the instrument, and some breaks are included to provide breathing time for the saxophone. This inconsistency provides the musician with a flexibility to personalize or transform the piece, which is very much in the improvisational style of Decruck.

The first movement is called *Très modéré, expressif* which translates to very moderate and expressive. It starts with a mysterious introduction, and continues with a pastoral melody that is passed between soloist and orchestra. The dramatic changes in tempo add to the expressive nature of this movement. The musical theme of *Noël* is simple and tuneful, and references a traditional French Christmas carol. The warmth and sweetness of the melody creates a nostalgic and childlike character. The third movement is titled *Fileuse*, which translates to spinner. The passages of fast running notes create the illusion of a spinning sewing machine. The final movement contains two parts: *Nocturne et Rondel*, Night and Rondo. As the title suggests, the music starts calm and quiet, like a funeral march, leading into the grand heroic finale.

– *Mitsuru Kubo*

Roland Furieux

AUGUSTA HOLMÈS (1847 - 1903)

An important figure in the XIX century French musical scene, Augusta Holmès is only now starting to be widely played by modern performers. Her importance may be measured by the fact that she was one of the few female composers to have an

opera staged by the Paris Opéra during the 1800s. However, historical judgment has not been, until recently, fair to this creative and revolutionary composer. An accomplished pianist and organist, she composed in many styles and genres, not limiting herself to keyboard music. Among her works are cantatas, operas, and orchestral works, mainly symphonic poems.

The work presented tonight has the form of a programmatic symphony. It is divided in three movements, like a regular symphony might be, but each movement has a descriptive character made more evident by their subtitles, each one referring to a different moment of the plot of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516). In the first movement, Roland is riding the world looking for his true love, Angelica, a princess that was so beautiful she was forced to constantly flee her suitors. The attentive listener may recognize Wagner's influence and make an instant connection between Roland's riding rhythms and those of the Valkyries'. The second movement shows Holmès at her best: the incredible penmanship she had for slow, lyrical movements. Her gift for melodious writing, so stark in this movement, can be rivaled only by that of "La Nuit et l'Amour", one of Holmès most often played pieces today. The movement describes the love of Angelica and Médor in

the forest. This leads Roland to fury and madness, as described in the third movement, aptly marked “Allegro Feroce.”

Orlando Furioso was such an influential work that many composers throughout the centuries set it to music. Handel alone composed three operas derived from the subject. Joining him in this list are such notables as Haydn, Lully, Rameau and other composers lesser known to today's audiences. It is noteworthy that the work presented tonight harks back and builds an interesting link to another female composer and historical fact. Also based on *Orlando Furioso*, Francesca Caccini composed what is regarded as the first ever opera by a woman in 1625.

In an attempted criticism of Holmès' work, Saint-Saëns wrote that she composed with “Flamboyant orchestration in which the brass explodes like fireworks.” It is precisely these fireworks that I invite you to enjoy tonight!

– ***Miguel Campos Neto***