

PROGRAM NOTES

PRELUDE TO THE AFTERNOON OF A FAUN

**Claude Debussy
(1862 - 1918)**

Claude Debussy is regarded as one of the most influential French composers of Impression period. He was born in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France in 1862 to china shop owner Manuel-Achille Debussy and seamstress Victorine Manoury Debussy. He began taking piano lessons when he was seven years old and in 1871, Debussy gained the attention of Marie Mauté de Fleurville and took him under her wing. A year later, Debussy entered the Paris Conservatoire and spent eleven years there. During his time at the Conservatoire, he studied with many great teachers including the great César Franck. As a performer, Debussy was talented enough to have a solo career but he chose to become a composer instead. From 1880 to 1882, he lived in Russia as the music teacher to the children of Madam von Meck, the patroness of Tchaikovsky. Unfortunately, her close ties to Tchaikovsky had little impact on Debussy. In fact, Tchaikovsky's comment on Debussy's *Danse bohémienne* was, "It is a very pretty piece, but it is much too short. Not a single idea is expressed fully, the form is terribly shrivelled, and it lacks unity". In 1884, he won the Prix de Rome with his composition *L'Enfant prodigue* and received a scholarship to study at the *Académie des Beaux-Arts*. His personal life was less glamorous than his professional life. He had a number of affairs before he married Emma Bardac, the wife of a Parisian banker and had a daughter. Unfortunately, she died shortly after the death of Debussy in 1919.

"Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun" is a symphonic work inspired by the poem **"Afternoon of a fauna"** by the French poet Stephan Mallarmé. It was premiered on December 22, 1894 by the Orchestra from the National Company in Paris. In contrast to the large orchestra, it was scored for three flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, a cor anglais, two toothings-stone, two crotales (ancient cymbals) and a string quintet. His intention was to emphasize the wonderful instrumental colour and timbre. Debussy own comment about the piece is, "The music of this prelude is a very free illustration of Mallarmé's beautiful poem. By no means does it claim to be a synthesis of it, rather there is a succession of scenes through which pass the desires and dreams of the faun in the heat of the afternoon. Then, tired of pursuing the timorous flight of nymphs and naiads, he succumbs to intoxicating sleep, in which he can finally realize his dreams of possession in universal nature."

EL AMOR BRUJO

**Manuel de Falla
(1876 - 1946)**

Manuel de Falla's popular Ritual Fire Dance from his ballet *El amor brujo* (Love, the Magician) is probably his most recognized composition. Whenever it is played, it always brings the audience to their feet. Manuel de Falla, Spain's most celebrated composer, was born in Cádiz in 1876 and began studying music with his mother before he was introduced to his first piano professor at the age of 9. But this relationship did not last and from the late 1890s, he studied music in Madrid, piano with José Tragó and composition with Felipe Pedrell. It was because of Pedrell that de Falla became interested in native Spanish music, particularly Andalusian flamenco, the influence of which is obvious in many of his compositions. At the beginning of the 20th century, de Falla also spent some seven years in Paris where he met a number of prominent French composers who had an influence on his style, including Maurice Ravel, Claude Debussy and Paul Dukas. de Falla spent a long period of time in Granada and he died in Argentina in 1946.

El amor brujo (Love, the Magician) was initially commissioned in 1914-15 as a *gitanería* (gypsy piece) by Pastora Imperio, a well respected gypsy dancer, and was scored for voice, actors, and chamber orchestra. Unfortunately, it was not well received at the premiere. So, in 1925, de Falla decided to re-orchestrated it into a score for a full orchestra with three short songs for mezzo-soprano. It was this version that the music finally gained success. *El Amor brujo* tells the story of a gypsy girl named Candela, whose love for Carmelo is tormented by the ghost of her ex-lover. The work is written in the Spanish-Flamenco style with the songs in the Andalusian dialect of the Gypsies. The music is full of energy and contains numerous unforgettable melodies and remarkable display of tone colours.

"ADAGIETTO" from Symphony No. 5

**Gustav Mahler
(1860 - 1911)**

Even though Mahler has completed nine symphonies, numerous German lieder and song cycles, the fourth movement (Adagietto) of his Fifth Symphony is considered his signature composition. It was written for orchestral strings and harp but Mahler was able to express the various emotions without the accompaniment of any wind and brass instruments. The late great Austrian conductor Herbert von Karajan once said the following about this symphony, ***"When you hear Mahler's Fifth, you forget that time has passed. A great performance of the Fifth is a transforming experience. The fantastic finale almost forces you to***

hold your breath. This work was written between the summers of 1901 and 1902 at his cottage and was premiered in Cologne on October 18, 1904.

Gustav Mahler was born in Bohemia in 1860 (in the former Austrian Empire) and was regarded as the most significant post-Romantic composers. He began taking piano lessons when he was six and was admitted to the Vienna Conservatoire at the age of fifteen. Ironically, Mahler began his career as an opera conductor, not a composer and had held positions in many opera houses in Europe including the Hungarian Royal Opera in Budapest, and for ten years, the directorship of the Vienna State Opera - the most revered musical position in the Austrian Empire. He also conducted the New York Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic Orchestra at the turn of the 20th. century. Mahler married Alma Schindler in March 1902 and together they had two daughters. Mahler passed away on May 18, 1911 at the age 50 due to a blood infection that he contracted in February of the same year, leaving his Tenth Symphony unfinished.

FIVE VARIANTS OF DIVES AND LAZARUS

**R. Vaughan-Williams
(1872 - 1958)**

Vaughan Williams was raised by his mother after the untimely death of his father. He attended Trinity College, Cambridge, and completed his studies at the Royal College of Music, where he worked with fellow English composers Hubert Parry and Charles Stanford. He traveled to Berlin to study with Max Bruch and Maurice Ravel shortly after he married his first wife Adeline Fisher in 1897. He later married the poet Ursula Wood (his literary advisor and personal assistant) in 1953. Although Vaughan-Williams wrote many serious compositions of all categories, he was also well known for his ability to write excellent film scores.

Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus is based the biblical story of Dives (the rich man) and Lazarus (the poor man) in the gospel of Luke 16: 19 - 31*. The melody is based on the folk tune "Dives and Lazarus", which is known by different titles according to regions in the United Kingdom: "The Star of the County Down" (Ireland), "Gilderoy" (Scotland), etc. It is scored for orchestral strings and harp and he employed the style of 'modal' tonality in this piece, a popular composition technique in early Baroque music. Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus was commissioned by the 1939 World's Fair in New York City and has its premiere at Carnegie Hall in June of 1939. Sir Adrian Boult conducted the first UK premiere in November of the same year in Bristol.

*There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's Side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 'No, Father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'

(New International Version)

ARIAS FROM "CARMEN"

**GEORGES BIZET
(1838 – 1875)**

'Habanera' and 'Seguidilla'

Georges Bizet was a French composer and pianist of the Romantic era. He is probably best known for the opera **Carmen**, among other works. He was born in 1838 and died of heart attack at the age of 36. His father Adolphe Armand Bizet was an amateur musician and his mother, Aimée Léopoldine Joséphine was the sister of a famous singing teacher François Delsarte. Like many prominent French composers, he also entered the Paris Conservatory of Music to study harmony and composition. His musical style was also influenced by Léo Delibes, Charles Gounod, Jules Massenet, Camille Saint-Saëns and the German born Jacques Offenbach. He also won the music composition scholarship of the Prix de Rome. Bizet spent his entire life in Paris and wrote more than thirty operas in his lifetime, notable ones include "The Pearl Fishers" and "Carmen".

Carmen is based on a short novel written by Prosper Mérimée in 1846. It is about a Spanish gypsy named Carmen, who is one of the girls working in a cigarette factory. She seduces a soldier Don José then dumps him for a Matador, Escamillo. This angered José and leads to eventual death of

Carman. The opera was premiered on March 3, 1875 at the Opéra-Comique in Paris with poor reviews. In fact, the theatre had to give away tickets to boost their attendance. Due to Bizet's early death, he never knew how successful Carmen had become. It was not until October of 1875 in Vienna that Carmen finally achieved the recognition it deserved. The two arias, '**Habanera**' and '**Seguidilla**', are both taken from Act I of the opera and are written for mezzo-soprano. '**Habanera**' is a very popular Cuban dance form and was a song that Carmen sang while she flirted with the young men loitering outside the cigarette factory where she worked. '**Seguidilla**' (a quick, $\frac{3}{4}$ Spanish folk song and dance form) is music which Carmen used to seduce Don José into going with her to her friend Lillias Pastina's inn.

Based on the beautiful melodies found in this opera, one wonders how many more wonderful operas Bizet would have written had he not died at such a young age.

Written by Eric D. Fahn ©