

# Orchestra of the Southern Finger Lakes : May Concert : Saturday, May 6, 2017

## Notes on the Program

by Joy S. Perry

### ***Overture to Candide***

**Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990)**

Leonard Bernstein, one of the most famous musicians of the 20th century, was a composer of amazing inspiration, a conductor, author, lecturer, pianist, and proponent of radical chic. His inspiration came from whatever pleased him, be it Stravinsky, Copland, jazz, Broadway, classical, or rock. He could bridge the chasm between popular music and the classical idiom with music that is alternately fun-loving, theatrical, witty, sentimental, religious, and restless. He was among the first conductors born (Massachusetts) and educated (Boston Latin School, Harvard University, Curtis Institute of Music) in the United States to receive worldwide acclaim. His fame came from his long tenure as the music director of the New York Philharmonic (1958-1969), from conducting concerts with most of the world's leading orchestras, and from his music for numerous popular Broadway shows and ballets, along with his three symphonies and many shorter chamber and solo works. He was the first conductor to give television lectures on classical music, starting in 1954, first with the program *Omnibus*, and then starting in 1956 with the Young People's Concerts series; he continued with educational endeavors until his death.

About the time he was appointed music director of the New York Philharmonic, Bernstein composed the music for the operetta *Candide*, which was first performed in 1956 with a libretto by Lillian Hellman based on Voltaire's novella. Although unsuccessful at its premiere, *Candide* has now overcome the unenthusiastic reaction of early audiences and critics and has achieved enormous popularity. It is very popular among major music schools as a student show because of the quality of its music and the opportunities it offers to student singers. In the 60 years since its premiere, the work has undergone many revisions in an attempt to follow more closely the original novella, to satisfy audiences, to enable Bernstein to revise some of the songs, and to make it into a full opera. These efforts were met with mixed success worldwide, but the overture remains as a standard part of the orchestral repertoire.

After a successful first concert performance on January 26, 1957, by the New York Philharmonic with Bernstein directing, it quickly became popular and was performed by nearly 100 other orchestras within the next two years. It has become one of the most frequently performed orchestral compositions by a 20th century American composer and in 1987, it was the most often performed piece of concert music by Bernstein.

The overture incorporates tunes from the songs "The Best of All Possible Worlds", "Battle Music", "Oh, Happy We", and "Glitter and Be Gay" and melodies composed specifically for the overture. The work is full of the cutting main theme, a tender subsidiary theme, alarms and episodes, a huge crescendo and rousing percussion. The orchestra plays the

same theme over and over with a gradually increasing crescendo before the opening fanfare and both main themes trade off “words” to the final chord.

At a memorial concert for Bernstein in 1990, the Philharmonic paid tribute to their Laureate Conductor by performing the overture without a conductor. This practice has become a performance tradition still maintained by the Philharmonic.

### ***Adagio for Strings, Op. 11***

**Samuel Barber (1910-1981)**

Samuel Barber, a graduate of and later teacher at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, was generally a conservative in regard to compositional style of the 20th century. His passion was for the voice and his principal affinity was for vocal composition, which is apparent in the melodic lines of this work. The elegiac work is the Molto adagio opening of the second movement of his String Quartet No. 1, written in 1936, and then arranged for full strings in 1937. By the end of World War II, it was being performed everywhere, almost as a dirge for and tribute to the many young dead.

Barber’s gift for sweeping lyricism finds a graceful atmosphere through which a single meandering melody finds its way. With conjoining pitches of the scale, an accompaniment of chords, and a homogeneous tone quality, the melody is first heard in the violins. It then fades downward to the violas and cellos until each voice has had a share of the action. The reverie offers quiet spiritual reflection, with a searching quality as every upward movement is counteracted with a subsequent fall. In the center section, the double basses rest as the others create a shrill treble climax. When the basses return, the work reverses course and gently dies away.

### ***Violin Concerto in D minor***

**Robert Schumann (1810-1856)**

As did many other Romantic composers, Schumann stressed passion and imagination above reason and logic in his music. The full range of his emotions spill forth, with content, not rigid rules, molding his work. Although he is known for his piano compositions and songs, Schumann’s vast output also includes chamber works, choral music, four symphonies, and several concertos.

The violin concerto was written when Schumann had already started his decline into mental illness, the effects of which would eventually cost him his life. This concerto, long believed to be unplayable, did not receive its first performance until 1937, 81 years after the composer’s death.

Legend long maintained that the concerto was problematic, partly because of the tempo of the third movement, “Lively but not fast.” Many artists considered the tempo too slow to showcase their virtuosity, as is usually done in third movements. In addition, per-

formers played the second movement very slowly and then the third as rapidly as possible, again to show their abilities. However, practice is now to play the movement as Schumann wrote it, an integrated part of the entire composition.

I. In kräftigem, nicht zu schnellem Tempo. The opening theme is distinctive with the fall of an octave and then dotted rhythms. The violin plays with the same material poetically, weaving a soaring and elegant line throughout the movement. The mood is somber and the first theme played by the violin is treated with fantasy and vigor in the development and recapitulation sections.

II. Langsam. In the beautiful, lyrical middle movement, a solo cello has a duet with the violin as both glide slowly through a sensuous, passionate melody. The syncopated cello music and the lyrical violin descant carry on a subdued dialogue. Toward the end, the violin melody reappears in minor, a deeply moving transformation. This syncopated cello line urges a speeding up that carries into the finale without pause.

III. Lebhaft, doch nicht schnell. Using the remaining strains of the solo of the second movement, the third movement opens with an emphatic, almost march-like strain. The violin becomes light and somewhat fanciful, with the orchestra sustained underneath. The orchestra then takes over the light, airy melody, with the violin cavorting above. The rhythmic march-like motif reappears before the violin again has thrilling solo sequences and cadenza-like passages. The movement ends with the violin rising above the rigid, rhythmic orchestral passages.

### ***Prelude to Act I from La Traviata***

**Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)**

La Traviata (The Fallen Woman) is one of the most performed and beloved of all operas by Verdi and in the operatic repertoire. It was written in 1851 and first performed in March 1853 at the opera house in Venice. The premiere was not a resounding success, thought mainly because of the poor quality of the soprano and her age (38) and size. She did not give the appearance of a young woman dying of consumption nor did her voice do anything for Verdi's glorious music. The next day, Verdi wrote to a good friend in what is now his most famous letter: "La traviata last night a failure. Was the fault mine or the singers'? Time will tell." Revisions and better casting of the main roles led to great successes at performances in 1854 and 1855. Today, it is considered a masterpiece.

The story centers on Violetta, a Parisian courtesan with a reputation for parties and the attention of many suitors. Alfredo, who visited her every day when she was ill, then declares his love for her at a wild party. She dismisses his attention, then reconsiders, and the story moves from there. His father asks her to "break up" with Alfredo because her presence in their lives will affect his daughter's ability to wed a proper gentleman. She does but then within a few months she is dying of tuberculosis and Alfredo's father has told him the truth about his involvement in the decision Violetta made. Alfredo rushes to her side, but it is al-

most too late. The opera ends with a glorious duet as they declare their love for one another and their plans to move from the country to Paris. Her last words are "Oh, joy!" before she succumbs and Alfredo is prostrate in grief.

The prelude to the opera is a magnificent piece of poignancy and beauty, a harbinger of the pathos to come.

### ***Intermezzo from Cavalleria Rusticana***

**Pietro Mascagni** (1863-1945)

Mascagni was born in Livorno, Tuscany. He began his musical studies at an early age and had a long career as a successful and admired composer and conductor. He is most noted for his 15 operas, operetta, several orchestral and vocal works, along with songs and piano music.

*Cavalleria Rusticana* (rustic chivalry) caused one of the greatest sensations in opera history and single-handedly ushered in the verismo movement in Italian dramatic music. The work was adapted from a play and short story by Giovanni Verga and had its premiere in May 1890 in Rome. Since 1893, it has been performed most often in a double bill with *Pagliacci* by Leoncavallo, another one-act opera.

The verismo movement, taken from the Italian *vero*, meaning realism or true, was a post-Romantic operatic tradition associated with its origins in an Italian literary movement by the same name. It was related to the international literary movement of Naturalism that sought to portray the world with greater realism. Rather than centering on gods, mythological creatures, or kings and queen, the verismo operas focused on the average contemporary man and woman and their problems, usually of a sexual, romantic, or violent nature. The genre reached a peak in the early 1900s and lasted into the 1920s.

In *Cavalleria*, the action involves Turiddu, a young villager who returns from military service to find that his fiancée, Lola, had married Alfio while he was away. In revenge, Turiddu seduced Santuzza, a young villager. As the opera opens, the action takes place in the main square of the village on Easter. Lola, overcome by her jealousy of Santuzza, has begun an adulterous affair with Turiddu. Santuzza suspects that Turiddu has betrayed her, Alfio appears, and various conversations lead to everyone discovering the betrayals and affairs. When Alfio learns from Santuzza that his wife has betrayed him with Turiddu, he swears to take revenge. At this point the square is empty as most of the villagers are in church; the orchestra plays the famous Intermezzo, a gloriously melodic respite from the present anger and violence to come. The strings soar in now-famous phrases, with the woodwinds and brass providing and underlying support. It closes with a quietness in complete contrast to the subsequent stage action when Alfio and Turiddu duel and Turiddu is murdered.

Ennio Morricone is an Italian composer, orchestrator, conductor, and former trumpet player. He composes in a wide range of music styles, making him one of the most versatile, experimental, and influential composers of all time, working in any medium. Since 1946, he has written more than 500 scores for cinema and television, as well as more than 100 classical works. His work in films has included over 70 award-winning movies. During the 1940s, he played trumpet in jazz bands and later became a studio arranger for RCA, and in 1955 he began ghost writing for film and theatre. From 1960 to 1975, Morricone gained international fame by composing the music to many westerns produced during those years. His music has been used in many TV series and in 2016 received an Academy Award for his score for Quentin Tarantino's film, *The Hateful Eight*. He has also received three Grammy Awards, three Golden Globes, six BAFTAs, 10 David Di Donatello, 11 Nastro d'Argento, two European Film Awards, the Golden Lion Honorary Award, and Polar Music Prize.

His acclaimed soundtrack and Golden Globe-winning score for *The Mission* combines liturgical chorales, native drumming, and Spanish-influenced guitars, often in the same track, in an attempt to capture the varying cultures depicted in the film. The main theme, "Falls," is one of his most memorable pieces and has been used in numerous commercials since its original release. The Italian song "Nella Fantasia" ("In My Fantasy") is based on the theme "Gabriel's Oboe" and has been recorded by multiple artists.

In the film, the theme is most prominently used when the protagonist, the Jesuit Father Gabriel, walks up to a waterfall and starts playing his oboe, hoping to befriend the natives with his music so he can carry his missionary work in the New World. The native Guaraní tribesmen, who have been stalking him from a distance, approach Gabriel for the first time, puzzled by the sounds of the unknown instrument. The chief of the tribe, however, is displeased by this, and breaks Gabriel's oboe. This marks the beginning of the relationship between Father Gabriel and the Guaraní natives.

***Pini di Roma (Pines of Rome)*****Ottorino Respighi** (1879-1936)

Although Respighi was a talented composer, his works might have disappeared from the repertoire but for his three tone poems on Roman themes: *Fountains of Rome*, *Pines of Rome*, and *Roman Festivals*. All are widely popular for their evoked images, sights, and senses. *Pines of Rome*, completed in 1924, uses nature as the point of departure to recall memories and visions. The work views Roman pine trees in four sections to form one four-part tone poem.

I. *The Pines of the Villa Borghese* (*Allegretto vivace*). Children play in the pine grove of the villa, dancing, mimicking soldiers and battles, and chirping with excitement. Even a rude

noise on a trumpet presumes a child's off-pitch toy instrument. But suddenly the mood changes...

II. The Pines Near a Catacomb (Lento). The shadows of the pines overhang the entrance to the catacomb. A distant trumpet against slow-moving strings paints the scene. From the depths rises a chant that echoes solemnly, like a hymn, until it mysteriously dies away.

III. The Pines of the Janiculum (Lento). A brief piano cadenza opens the movement as we stand on the hill, seeing the pines in the moonlight. A tremor hangs in the air and a nightingale sings.

IV. The Pines of the Appian Way (Tempo di marcia). This is classical Rome in its glory, heard in the tramping of a ghost army, with plaints on the English horn and military signals in the brass. Solitary pines guard the tragic campaign and the unceasing rhythm of countless steps. A vision of past glories appears with trumpets blaring and the army advancing brilliantly in the grandeur of the risen sun toward the Sacred Way, mounting triumphantly on the Capitoline Hill.