



BIZET – L'ARLÉSIENNE

Fauré – Masques et Bergamasques

Gounod – Faust Ballet Music

Orchestre de la Suisse Romande

Kazuki Yamada

Georges Bizet (1838-1875)

L'Arlésienne

THEATRE MUSIC IN THE CONCERT HALL

Suite No. 1

1. Prélude
2. Minuetto
3. Adagietto
4. Carillon

Suite No. 2

Arranged by Ernest Guiraud

5. Pastorale
6. Intermezzo
7. Menuet
8. Farandole

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) **Masques et Bergamasques**

Suite for orchestra Op. 112

9. Overture
10. Menuet
11. Gavotte
12. Pastorale

Charles Gounod (1818-1893) **Faust Ballet Music**

13. Les Nubiennes, valse (Allegretto)
14. Adagio
15. Danse Antique (Allegretto)
16. Variations de Cléopâtre (Moderato maestoso)
17. Les Troyennes (Moderato)
18. Variations du Miroir (Allegretto)
19. Danse de Phryné (Allegro vivo)

Total playing time: **69. 56**

Orchestre de la Suisse Romande
conducted by Kazuki Yamada

Recording venue Victoria Hall, Geneva, Switzerland, February 2013

When we consider the intrinsic bond between theatre and music, though opera and ballet are what immediately come to mind, there is yet another art form that embodies this association, and which especially in the 19th century enjoyed great popularity: incidental music. In a period in which all theatres had either a pianist or a smaller or larger orchestra in their employ, stage plays were generally accompanied by music – much like in today's films. And just as a substantial part of the drama in opera unfolds in the orchestra pit, the music employed in the theatre likewise provided an additional layer of meaning, rather than mere depictions of mood. Both the overture and the entr'actes (music played between acts) had the role of preparing the audience for what was to take place on stage.

Already in 1739, the German-Danish composer and music theoretician, Johann Adolph Scheibe, voiced his opposition to the widespread use, at the time, of randomly selected overtures to open stage plays. In his view, the overture always had to be connected to the content of the drama it preceded, and to introduce the work's protagonists through musical means. "It must moreover concern itself with the entire play, while at the same time preparing its beginning, and, correspondingly, also serving as an appropriate introduction to the play's initial entrances." The entr'actes should, according to Scheibe, "address both the close of the preceding act, and the start of the following one. I.e., these interludes must connect both acts with one another, and, as it were, unnoticeably lead the audience from one emotional context to another." And for Scheibe, it was obvious that the music had to be subordinate to the text; i.e., in creating his incidental music, the composer had to follow the character and rhythm of the drama.

In the course of the 19th century, conceptions changed as to the nature and function of music. As a result, music lost its image as a subservient art, ultimately coming to be regarded as autonomous, elevated, sublime and – in the terminology of writer, composer and music critic E.T.A. Hoffmann – the most 'romantic' of all the arts. His contemporary, the influential novelist and poet Ludwig Tieck, was highly critical in respect of the function of incidental music. In his view, music should be used to conclude a stage play and, in so doing, to retell the drama and its outcome without words. Tieck used the Triumphal Symphony at the end of Beethoven's incidental music to Goethe's play, Egmont, to exemplify the task of the composer of such a concluding piece: "Here, he could retell the drama in daring tones, predict the future and accompany the poet in a most worthy manner."

Through, among other things, this paradigmatic shift with regard to the function and status of music, incidental music fell increasingly out of favour. Today, only a few works from the genre are encountered on concert programmes, frequently in abbreviated or adapted form, with their melodrama passages (music which originally accompanied certain important sections of text for the purpose of intensifying their expressive power), normally being left out, as they tend to sound empty without their original dramaturgic contexts.

The Girl from Arles

A good example of an extensive work of incidental music from which today normally only excerpts are heard, is that which Georges Bizet composed to accompany Alphonse Daudet's play, *L'Arlésienne*. Originally, 'L'Arlésienne' was in the form of a short story, published by Daudet in 1866 in the journal, *l'Événement*. Three years later, Daudet included it in the collection, 'Lettres de mon Moulin,' stories inspired by the landscape, culture and people of Provence. It was the impresario, Léon Carvalho, who, in 1872, asked Daudet to adapt the story as stage play in three acts, in which form 'L'Arlésienne' was premiered on 1 October 1872 at the Théâtre du Vaudeville (today the Gaumont-Opéra cinema) on Paris' Boulevard des Capucines, with incidental music by Bizet. The play failed to become a popular success, and closed after only 21 performances.

'L'Arlésienne' tells the story of two brothers, Frédéric and Janet, who, because of his intellectual handicap, is referred to as 'the innocent.' Frédéric is desperately in love with a girl from the nearby town of Arles (interestingly enough, although the title of the play refers to her, this 'girl from Arles' never appears on stage), but learns that his beloved is already the mistress of another man. In a flurry of despair, Frédéric decides to marry any girl his mother chooses for him. On his wedding day, Frédéric meets his rival and commits suicide by jumping off a balcony. As a result of the incident, however, Janet is instantly cured of his handicap, with the result that the mother loses one son and gets the other back.

The stifling atmosphere of the play, whose characters are locked into an oppressive world and mental state, inspired Bizet to compose 27 in the main short movements (in addition to an overture and entr'actes, the music also includes choral and dance pieces and numerous passages of melodrama), which not only contribute a great deal of *couleur locale*, but great emotional intensity, as well. The orchestral resources at Bizet's disposal were however limited. The orchestra of 26 featured the following instruments: 2 flutes, an oboe (English horn), a clarinet, 2 bassoons, an alto saxophone, 2 horns, timpani and a tambourin provençal, 7 violins, a viola, 5 cellos, 2 string basses and a piano. Further, a harmonium was located behind the stage, played by Bizet himself at the premiere.

While the play had been a failure with the public, Bizet was nevertheless aware of the quality of the music he had composed for it. Shortly following the premiere, he therefore arranged a suite comprised of a selection of the most beautiful orchestral portions of the incidental music. Bizet orchestrated the suite for a standard orchestra, plus a part for alto saxophone. The premiere of this *L'Arlésienne Suite* took place in Paris on 10 November 1872, under the baton of Jules Pasdeloup.

For the suite's first movement, Bizet used the overture to the incidental music. Like the overture to his opera, *Carmen*, it consists of three sections, whose original function was to introduce the play's locale and its two protagonists. The first section sets the tone with a march based on a popular Provençal Christmas tune: the 'Marche des Rois' (or 'March of the Kings'), which, under the title, 'Marche de Turenne' (or 'Turenne March'), is attributed to the baroque composer, Jean-Baptiste Lully. The melody in turn serves as the theme for a short series of variations. The overture's second section features the serene saxophone melody associated in the play with 'the Innocent.' The third section presents the music which, in the incidental music, depicts Frédéric's passion for the girl from Arles. The overture is followed by a Minuet which, in the play, serves as a connection between the second and third acts. The movement's trio section ends with a written-out *diminuendo*, in which the strings stop playing, one for one. The minuet section then returns, but now played *pianissimo*. The tranquil *Adagietto* was originally used to accompany the melancholy conversation between the shepherd, Balthazar, and *Mère Renaud*. For the concluding *Carillon*, Bizet expanded the *entr'acte* preceding Act III of the play by inserting, as a middle section, music from the melodrama passages which, in the incidental music, had preceded and followed the *Adagietto*.

The success enjoyed by the suite prompted Ernest Guiraud, Bizet's friend and the composer of amongst other things, the recitatives for the 1875 Vienna production of *Carmen*, to arrange, after Bizet's death, a second *Arlésienne Suite*. Published in 1879, it opens with the *Pastorale* which, in the incidental music, precedes the play's second act. To it, Guiraud added a middle section employing the music from the textless choral section at the end of the original incidental music.

The second movement is an *intermezzo*. The Minuet is not from the incidental music to *L'Arlésienne* at all, but from Bizet's opera, *La jolie fille de Perth* (or *The Fair Maid of Perth*) dating from 1866, with the vocal parts being replaced by solos for harp, flute and saxophone, respectively. The finale, *Farandole*, was taken from the incidental music for the third act and is, like the above-mentioned 'Marche des Rois,' based on a Provençal folk tune. The melody is in turn combined with that of the 'Marche des Rois,' with which Bizet's own *Suite* opens.

Gabriel Fauré is today primarily known as a composer of songs and piano works. But this in fact represents only one side of his oeuvre. Fauré was also very active in the theatrical domain and composed, in addition to the operas *Prométhée* and *Pénélope*, incidental music for such plays as *Caligula* (Dumas), *Shylock* (Haraucourt, after Shakespeare), *La Passion* (Haraucourt), *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* (Molière), *Pelléas et Mélisande* (Maeterlinck), *Le voile du bonheur* (Clemenceau) and his own *Masques et bergamasques* (or *Masks and Bergamasks*). The latter work, the result of a commission from Prince Albert I of Monaco for which Camille Saint-Saëns had recommended Fauré, is not a stage play, but in fact a hybrid. Fauré's aim with *Masques et bergamasques* was to revive the genre of the *divertissement comique*, a theatrical entertainment with music and dance, typically of a pastoral or allegorical character, popular in the 17th and 18th centuries at the royal court of France. Yet another criterion was that the piece should evoke the atmosphere of the paintings of Watteau.

As the work's librettist, Fauré obtained the collaboration of René Fauchois, who had already supplied the libretto for Pénélope. Fauchois created a libretto in which figures from the commedia dell'arte – Harlequin, Gilles and Colombine – are spectators of a fête galante on the island of Cythera. I.e., while it is normally the noble lords and ladies who followed the actions of such actors, it is they themselves who are now in the 'spotlight.' The work's title came from Paul Verlaine's poem, 'Clair de lune,' which Fauré had already used for a song, and which he again used in *Masques et bergamasques*, but now in orchestral garb:

*Votre âme est un paysage choisi
Que vont charmant masques et bergamasques
Jouant du luth et dansant et quasi
Tristes sous leurs déguisements fantasques.*

*Your soul is a chosen landscape
Where charming masqueraders and bergamaskers go. Playing the lute
and dancing and almost. Sad beneath their fanciful disguises*

(The term *bergamasques* originally referred to a traditional Italian dance from Bergamo and environs.)

The setting of 'Clair de lune' was incidentally not the only music which Fauré recycled for *Masques et bergamasques*. In fact, most of the incidental music comes from earlier compositions. Three movements came from a symphony which Fauré had written around 1869, but had discarded as 'immature.' The madrigal for choir and orchestra, with a text by Armand Silvestre, had already been composed in 1884 and, in addition to the song, 'Clair de lune,' Fauré employed yet another of his, namely: 'Le plus doux chemin' (or 'A Road most agreeable'), whose text is likewise by Silvestre. The Pavane, with which the work concludes, is Fauré's well-known work of the same name dating from 1887. Indeed the only portion of *Masques et Bergamasques* especially composed for it was the Pastorale. The premiere of *Masques et bergamasques* took place in Monte Carlo on 10 April 1919. Due to its great success, it was also performed on 4 March of the following year at Paris' Opéra-Comique. Directly following the Monte Carlo premiere, Fauré produced an orchestral suite based on the work, in which, undoubtedly for practical reasons, he entirely eliminated the vocal parts. The Pavane, too, was left out, presumably because it had already been published

as a separate work. As a result, the suite consists of the following movements: Overture, Minuet, Gavotte and Pastorale. It would be the composer's last orchestral work.

Faust and mythological beauties

Charles Gounod completed his opera *Faust* in 1858. Its libretto, by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, is based on Part One of Goethe's play of the same name. Gounod originally had wanted to have the work premiered at the Opéra de Paris, but the work was rejected, as it was considered to be insufficiently attractive. Further, the popularity of a melodrama by Adolphe d'Ennery based on the same material ensured that, initially, no theatre was willing to risk presenting Gounod's *Faust*, and the premiere would not take place until the following year, on 19 March 1859, at the Théâtre-Lyrique on Paris's Boulevard du Temple. The theatre's manager, the above-mentioned Léon Carvalho, who would subsequently play an important role in the coming about of Bizet's *L'Arlésienne*, insisted, prior to the premiere, on substantial cuts, as well as on his wife, the soprano, Marie Miolan-Carvalho, singing the opera's leading female role. Gounod was not very happy with the first performance. Nor did the public react very enthusiastically. The situation first changed when the Opéra de Paris as yet expressed interest in the work, scheduling a new production of it for 1869. Gounod now subjected the opera to a drastic reworking. He replaced the spoken dialogue with recitatives and also added a number of new scenes. One of these was a large-scale ballet number for Act 5, as part of the *Walpurgisnacht* (or *Walpurgis Night*), in which Mephisto tries to seduce Faust by conjuring up the most beautiful women from classical antiquity. Successively, Cleopatra and her Nubian slave girls, Helen of Troy, the Trojan Women and the Greek courtesan, Phryne, pass in review. The number was almost not written – at least not by Gounod himself. He initially saw little in it and even asked his colleague, Camille Saint-Saëns, to take on the task, who indeed accepted it, but on condition that Gounod would at all times have the option to replace his music, should he himself decide to compose it. According to Saint-Saëns himself, he in fact never wrote a note of the ballet, and never heard another thing about the project. And the music which Gounod himself ultimately composed would come to be regarded as one of the absolute jewels of the opera literature.

The ballet music is organised in seven sections. Despite the simplicity of its melodic material, Gounod succeeded in conjuring up, in its harmonies and orchestration, an astoundingly sensual sound world, at times reminiscent of the Bacchanal from the Paris version of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* (1861). No wonder that his *Faust* has remained a staple of the opera repertoire and is also regularly performed in concert form. Having choreographed the ballet for a number of opera houses, George Balanchine in 1980 removed it from its operatic context, creating a production of it as an independent work with his New York City Ballet.

Ronald Vermeulen
Translation: Nicholas Lakides