



NEXT GENERATION OF CLASSICAL MUSICIANS

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 4, AT 7 PM

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 5 & 6, AT 8 PM

NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

GIANCARLO GUERRERO, *conductor*

AALIA HANIF, *flute*

BERNARD EKWUAZI, *trombone*

FRANÇOIS BORNE | ARR. NAJFAR

Fantaisie Brillante sur Carmen

12 minutes

CLASSICAL SERIES
PARTNER



LARS-ERIK LARSSON

Concertino for Trombone, Op. 45, no. 7 - **12 minutes**

1. Prelude

2. Aria

3. Finale

RICHARD STRAUSS | ARR. OCHOA

Ariadne auf Naxos Symphony-Suite - **40 minutes**

1. Prologue (Overture to the Prologue)

2. Duet (Ein Augenblick ist wenig, ein Blick ist viel)

3. Waltz (Ein Störrische zu trösten)

4. Overture (The Opera Overture – (Ein Schönes war)

5. Aria (Es gibt ein Reich)

6. Interlude

7. Finale (Gibt es kein Hinüber?)

PROGRAM SUMMARY

This concert presenting talented young performers from the Nashville Symphony's Accelerando program showcases a flutist and a trombonist in the first half. The opening *Fantaisie Brillante* by François Borne reimagines music from one of the world's best-loved operas, *Carmen* by Georges Bizet, as a kind of mini-concerto. Here, the solo flutist (Aalia Hanif) has an opportunity to impress not just with Bizet's beguiling melodies but with the dazzling variations that Borne spins around them.

Next up is a compact concerto, or concertino, for trombone by the Swedish composer Lars-Erik Larsson, written in the middle of the 20th century. The trombone only started coming into its own in classical music over the last two centuries, and there are still relatively few compositions featuring the trombone as a solo star (compared with the literature for strings, for example). Larsson's piece offers a platform to trombonist Bernard Ekwuazi to reveal the multifaceted character of an instrument we don't often have a chance to encounter in this individual role.

Another thread weaving its way through this program is opera-in-the-concert-hall. Opera, as the ultimate multi-media art, is notoriously expensive to produce. Hence, there is a long tradition of efforts to "export" its music from the opera house by arranging it for various combinations of instruments – whether in our opening piece taken from *Carmen* or the concluding "Symphony-Suite" drawn from Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*, an opera that brilliantly mixes stylistic conventions. D. Wilson Ochoa's arrangement distills the essence of this weirdly charming, outrageously beautiful tragicomedy.

.....

FRANÇOIS BORNE

Fantaisie Brillante sur Carmen

Born in 1840 in
Toulouse, France

Died in 1920 in Toulouse

Composed:
1900

**Estimated
length:**
12 minutes



First performance:

December 31, 2019, in Munich, with
Münchner Rundfunkorchester

**First Nashville Symphony
performance:**

September 11, 2008 at Schermerhorn
Symphony Center, under the direction
of Giancarlo Guerrero with James
Galway on flute

Georges Bizet's opera *Carmen* has inspired countless spinoffs and recyclings of its hit tunes — from commercials and ringtones to the skaters' ballet *Carmen on Ice*. Even before the era of mass media, the *Carmen* craze resulted in all sorts of instrumental arrangements, typically featuring a soloist (say, a violinist or pianist) who needed a display piece or something to play as an encore. These arrangements were in turn examples of a much vaster demand to enjoy a taste of operas in general that would otherwise be hard to experience in the era before recordings, radio, or YouTube made such music so easily accessible.

The French flutist and composer François Borne gave his contribution a unique twist by focusing on the flute. Surprisingly little is known about Borne himself — even his dates are uncertain — other than that he was an active player and composer who also served as a professor of flute at the Toulouse Conservatoire. But his *Fantaisie Brillante* has become part of the flute repertoire thanks to its convincing adaptation of excerpts from *Carmen* to exhibit the flute's personality to best advantage. And just as Borne's *Fantaisie* is part of a wider literature of adaptations derived from *Carmen*, his score has been

arranged by a number of composers in versions for flute and orchestra. We hear a very recent one published in 2018 by the flutist-composer Reza Najfar, who was born in Iran in 1960.

Georges Bizet (who was only two years older than Borne, if the birth year usually given for the latter is accurate) composed his operatic masterpiece *Carmen* in 1874 and died within months of its opening in 1875 — before he could enjoy his opera's overwhelming success. In fact, at first *Carmen* was not well received. It faced heavy criticism because of the story's perceived immorality and because of some of Bizet's musical innovations.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Borne's piece includes not only some of *Carmen*'s most famous melodies but a few that are less often heard outside the context of the opera. The *Fantaisie* begins in a shadowy mood with the motif that is associated in the opera with the workings of fate. The motif depends on its ominous harmonic coloring, but Borne writes elaborate, technically challenging lines for the flute that take the music in different directions.

After this lengthy meditation on the fate idea, the piece lands on what is perhaps the

score's most famous moment: the Habanera that serves as the title heroine's entrance aria. Though Bizet himself never traveled to Spain, he was intent on investing his opera, set in Seville, with authentic local color. Against this alluring dance rhythm (imported from Cuba and wildly popular in Europe at the time), Carmen explains her philosophy that love is a force that resists being tamed. The flute plays and then varies Carmen's seductive melody, which Bizet adapted from one of the Basque composer Sebastián Yradier's habaneras — mistakenly believing it was a folk tune free of copyright restrictions.

Borne segues into a scene where Carmen performs an impromptu dance with her

Roma friends in front of a group of soldiers at a disreputable tavern. The flamenco dance gradually accelerates into a frenzy — an apt metaphor for Carmen's irresistible effect on those around her. The Fantaisie ends with a flourish on the "Toreador Song," the signature of the popular bullfighter who is rival to Don José. His fight in the bull ring serves as the ironic backdrop at the end of the opera, when Carmen's jealous lover, Don José, tracks her down for their fatal last encounter.

Along with solo flute, scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, and trumpets; timpani; glockenspiel; castanets; harps; and strings

LARS-ERIK LARSSON

Concertino for Trombone, Op. 45, no. 7

Born on MAY 15, 1908,
in Åkarp, Sweden

Died on December 26, 1986,
in Helsingborg, Sweden

Composed:
1955

**Estimated
length:**
12 minutes



First performance:
November 29, 1955

**First Nashville Symphony
performance:**
These are the first Nashville
Symphony performances.

The Swedish composer Lars-Erik Larsson was born into the working class and showed musical promise at a young age, entering the Stockholm Conservatory in his teens. He headed to Vienna in his early twenties to spend a year studying with Arnold Schoenberg's associate Alban Berg and was the first to import their radically innovative style to Sweden in the early 1930s. But Larson was also rooted in the Romanticism of Scandinavia, and he absorbed the transparent neoclassicism that became fashionable in that period. This

third aspect of the eclectic Larsson's musical style comes to the fore in the Concertino for Trombone.

Along with composing, Larsson's career combined conducting, producing, and teaching. He wrote works in the traditional concert hall forms as well as music for theater, film, and radio. One of his experiments while working for Swedish Radio in the 1940s involved pairing readings of poetry with music he composed for that purpose. One of his pieces was adapted and used by the Norwegian resistance against

the Nazi occupation.

The Concertino for Trombone originated as one of a set of a dozen short concertos written between 1955 and 1957. Its companion concertinos (for woodwinds, trumpet, violin, viola, cello, double bass, and piano) are similarly scored for soloist and string orchestra. These were intended to be used widely by skilled non-professional performers.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Larsson uses the tried-and-true three-movement concerto design — in the order fast-slow-fast — that has stood the test of time. At the same time, all three movements are unified through subtle transformations of shared thematic material. The first movement (slightly longer than the others) carries the somewhat unusual designation *Preludium: Allegro pomposo*, meaning an *Allegro* to be played in a “grand and dignified manner.” The musical character is indeed lofty and

serious — brief passages from the strings alternate with more extended solo statements by the trombone. Larsson effectively uses the instrument’s expressive range — oracular in the lower depths and eloquently pleading in its higher notes.

The second movement, nocturnal in spirit, is titled *Aria* and calls for sustained, singing tones from the trombone. A long-held high note played by the soloist gives way to the finale movement, marked *Allegro giocoso*. This is the Concertino’s most playful music, as solemnity and melancholy yield to more lively spirits. But the theme is a speeded-up version of ideas heard earlier. (Not to worry, for some of a certain age, if it brings the theme song of *The Jetsons* to mind.) The tempo slows for a reprise of music from the first movement — which is the source of the finale’s theme, simply in different guise — before the more cheerful outlook of the *Allegro giocoso* is given the final say.

Scored for solo trombone and string orchestra.



RICHARD STRAUSS

Symphony No. 1 in C major, Op. 21

Born on June 11, 1864,
in Munich, Germany

Died on September 8, 1949, in
Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany

Composed:
1799-1800

**Estimated
length:**
40 minutes



First performance:

The revised version of *Ariadne auf Naxos*, which has become standard, premiered in Vienna on October 4, 1916.

First Nashville Symphony performance:

October 6, 2011 with
Giancarlo Guerrero
conducting

Fresh from the triumph of their collaboration on *Der Rosenkavalier* in 1911, which represented their fresh take on Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, Richard Strauss and his librettist Hugo von Hofmannsthal — one of the most artistically successful combos in the history of opera — settled on an idea they thought would offer a lightweight diversion.

Strauss composed the first version of *Ariadne auf Naxos* in 1911-12 but then made a radical overhaul. He added a completely new Prologue and introduced what has become the repertory version of this one-act opera in 1916. The idea behind *Ariadne auf Naxos* was to intermingle the heroic, tragic figures from 18th-century operas based on classical mythology with the comic stock characters and clowning of the Italian *commedia dell'arte* tradition. This concept of a mash-up between “high culture” and entertaining antics turned out to be remarkably innovative and inspired a magical combination of the silly with the serene, the prosaic with the transcendent. It anticipates the emergence of neoclassicism in the 1920s and even looks forward to the postmodern melange of separate styles from different eras.

Ariadne auf Naxos begins with a Prologue

in which an idealistic young Composer (a “trousers role” for mezzo) discovers to his horror that the serious opera he was commissioned to write will have to be played simultaneously with the evening's clown show: tragedy and comedy pitted together, like an operatic Reese's Peanut Butter Cup. His patron has the money but lacks any passion for art. What he wants is more time for the fireworks intended as the evening's climax. The creative team is thus forced to accomplish frantic last-minute tailoring so the show can go on.

The rest is staged as an opera-within-an-opera: the work resulting from the turmoil displayed in the “reality show” Prologue. This is the source of the title, since the opera involves Ariadne from classical Greek mythology and her situation after she has been abandoned by Theseus on the island of Naxos. Ariadne longs for death and luxuriates in despair. But in comes Zerbinetta, the flirty soprano star of the comic troupe, to try to cheer her up with practical advice on how to deal with men. At the opera's climax, the god Bacchus arrives, and the two sing an ecstatic duet about love's transformation, just in time for the fireworks to go off as planned.

D. Wilson Ochoa, formerly a professional French horn player who served for years as the Nashville Symphony's librarian and now holds the same post with the Boston Symphony, prepared his Symphony-Suite in 2010 for Giancarlo Guerrero and the Nashville Symphony (to whom he dedicated the score). Ochoa recalls that his love of Strauss had been centered on the orchestral tone poems, which include much marvelous music spotlighting his own instrument, the horn. When he later became a fan of *Ariadne auf Naxos*, he was surprised to discover that no suite suitable for the concert hall yet existed and thus set about fashioning one.

Ochoa's arrangement retains Strauss's original instrumentation, which is acclaimed for its resourceful use of what is, by Straussian standards, a chamber orchestra (supplemented by the enchanting sound of harmonium). However, Ochoa has the second oboe double on English horn, which he regards as "an ideal instrument for some of the vocal quotes." There is also "added orchestration of lines originally cast for voice," he explains, and he has "attempted to create seamless, logical transitions between the excerpts."

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The Symphony-Suite consists of seven sections, starting with the music from Strauss's Overture to the Prologue — in this context, it functions like a symphonic exposition to introduce the major themes. The next section is from the duet between the Composer and Zerbinetta, when the frantic antics of the Prologue suddenly segue into music of transcendent lyrical beauty. Next comes "Waltz," Ochoa's instrumental arrangement of the absurdly difficult coloratura aria Zerbinetta sings to brighten Ariadne's mood. Strauss's second overture follows — the music that changes the scene from the behind-the-scenes Prologue to the staged offering.

Ochoa's new context positions it as a "slow middle movement."

The opera's moment of tragic intensity comes with Ariadne's serene aria meditating on death-as-release, but this is juxtaposed with an interlude Ochoa has taken from the rare first (1912) version of *Ariadne auf Naxos*. The longest section, Finale, presents Strauss's music for the magical transformation Ariadne undergoes in the last scene upon the arrival of her new love. In the opera, Zerbinetta sings in an aside during their encounter: "When a newer god approaches, we surrender without a word." Strauss's music gives us an unforgettable taste of that god's arrival.

Scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes (2nd doubling English horn), 2 clarinets (2nd doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons, 2 horns, trumpet, trombone, timpani, cymbals, snare drum, tambourine, triangle, glockenspiel, celesta, harmonium, 2 harps, piano, and strings.

— *Thomas May is the Nashville Symphony's program annotator.*