

Program Notes

Introduction

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, p.1387: “Orpheus, son of Apollo and the muse Calliope; the earliest poet, the first singer; see also ‘Orpharion,’ ‘Orphean,’ ‘Orphéon,’ ‘Orphic,’ and ‘Orphist’.”

Ah! If dictionaries could sing! Then they’d make a song out of their various words derived from Orpheus, that figure from Greek mythology who continues to play a role in our modern sensibility. One of the words designates a musical instrument; one signifies a Gnostic society; and one term was the name given to the popular singing societies of 19th century France. (A name we’ll find again in a Latin/Swedish form when we get to the *Magic Songs* of R. Murray Schafer.)

I know well you’ve not come here for a vocabulary lesson! But really, when you’re talking songs and singing, you’re talking Orpheus. He is the mythical creator of human song. After all, someone had to be first. And this person, unlike the majority of singers and songs, has never been forgotten.

All the songs in this concert could be called “Orphic” ones. They all have the magical ability to change, alter and improve ... reality. They create (as Hollywood knows so well) our moods. They inspire us. They amuse us. And one of them has the specific task of reproducing something that Orpheus did way back when: “to make the stones sing.”

There! (or *Voilà!*) an introduction that did not mention, even once, the famous “Orpheus of Paris,” Jacques Offenbach! But one of his 1,001 songs comes first in the program, so read on!

The Prologue from *The Tales of Hoffmann* by Jacques Offenbach

Glug! Glug! Glug! I am beer!
Glug! Glug! Glug! I am wine!

Tap the keg and gold will appear!
Fill the glass and rubies will shine!
Glug! Glug! Ah, ah!
Let the world forget sorrow and regret.
We can chase away all the cares of day!
Let the spell we cast wipe away the past!
To a world of grief we can bring relief,
Sweet relief!
There's consolation always handy
In whiskey, absinthe, rum and brandy!
Let the world forget its sorrows and regret.
For we can chase away bad luck, skies of gray,
Piles of bills left to pay, all the cares of the day.
Glug! Glug! The cares of the day we chase away!

It's called a "Prologue" as operas, even mammoth 19th century ones, do better when they don't have five acts. Offenbach's most popular, most produced, most recorded work (of his 105 productions which premiered on stage in Paris, Vienna, London, and Bad Ems, Germany during his lifetime) begins and ends in a tavern, a classic German *Ratskeller*. It's there that the poet, short-story writer and composer E.T.A. Hoffmann tells the adventures of his three "Mad Loves." You know them, don't you: Olympia, the "human doll," Antonia, the doomed singer, and Giulietta, the Venetian courtesan? (And you'll all be there for the Metropolitan Opera's production when it's broadcast to us live in La Crosse at noon on Saturday, December 19th at the Marcus Theatre on Ward Avenue won't you?)

These "Tales of Hoffmann," may sound unattainably romantic, but they are really the deep human story, or a "myth of eternal return," as per Jung and Joseph Campbell, of how we all experience a series of romances before we ... settle down with the right one!

As opera enthusiasts know, the shape of Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann* keeps changing. Sometimes Act 2 is Act 3 (and vice versa). This is also the case with the opening Prologue – which isn't always the same in the recordings and productions which you might know. Many versions start right in with Hoffmann and his student admirers gath-

ered in the tavern. But “in the original,” Offenbach starts *above* the tavern. It’s an example of his playfulness that the opening song is sung “by invisible Spirits” about ... spirits – about the effect of beer and wine (and some other “hard stuff”). The Prologue introduces the first note of irony in this grand but also ironic opera: the Spirits will not inspire Hoffmann to “wipe away the past,” but instead to celebrate it.

The version the Chamber Chorale is singing is “imported” for us directly from California by Steven Fulton. It’s from the modern English production by David Scott Marley which Steven and Shauna sang in in 1999 in the Berkeley Opera production (and could have sung in again earlier this year ... if they were still living in California!) So if you have any questions about this version, ask them. But if you have any other questions about Offenbach, or if you want to donate the first \$1,000 for the “La Crosse Offenbach Festival,” please see me.

Trois Chansons Bretonnes by Henk Badings, words by Théodore Botrel

La Nuit en Mer

La brise enfle notre voile,
voici la première étoile
qui luit sur le flot
qui nous balance.
Amis, voguons en silence
dans la nuit.

Tous bruits viennent de se taire,
on dirait que tout sur terre
est mort:
Les humains comme les choses,
les oiseaux comme les roses
tout s’endort.

Mais la mer, c’est la vivante,
c’est l’immensité mouvante toujours
prenant d’assaut les jetées
dédaigneuse des nuitées et des jours.

Night on the Sea

The breeze fills our sail;
here is the first star
shining on the wave
that rocks us.
Friends, let us float in silence
in the night.

All is quiet.
It’s as if everything on earth
were dead:
humans as well as things,
birds as well as roses.
Everything sleeps.

But the sea is alive.
It’s the unsettled immensity
always attacking the jetties,
disdainful of nights and days.

Hormis elle rien n'existe
que le grand phare
et son triste reflet.

Beside her nothing exists
except the great lighthouse
and its sad reflection.

A la place la meilleure, mes amis,
jetons sur l'heure le filet,
puis enroulé dans nos voiles,
le front nu sous les étoiles, dormons!
Rêvons, en la paix profonde
à tous ceux,
qu'en ce bas monde nous aimons;
dormons sur nos goélettes
comme en nos berceuses d'enfants.

My friends, let us cast our net
right now, in the best place.
Let's sleep rolled up in our sails
our foreheads bare under the stars.
Let's dream, in profound peace
of all those that we love
in this earthly world.
Let's sleep on our schooners
as we did in our cradles.

Et demain à marée haute
nous rallierons à la côte
triomphants!

And tomorrow, at high tide
we will rally on the coast
triumphant!

La complainte des âmes

The lament of the souls

Vierge Marie,
ô bonne Mère de Jésus
C'est ici la complainte amère
Que chantent ceux qui ne sont plus.

Virgin Mary,
O good Mother of Jesus,
this is the bitter lament
sung by those who are no more.

Nous venons en ce soir d'automne
frapper aux portes des amis:
C'est Jésus Christ qui nous ordonne
de réveiller les endormis. Ah!

We come on this autumn evening
knocking on the doors of friends.
It is Jesus Christ who orders us
to rouse the sleepers. Ah!

Vous, qui dormez dans la nuit noire, ah!
Songez-vous de temps en temps,
qu'au feu flambant du Purgatoire
sont, peut-être, tous vos parents.

You who sleep in the black night,
does it ever occur to you
that all your ancestors are,
perhaps, in the flames of Purgatory?

Ils sont là vos pères,
vos mères,
feu par dessus, feu par dessous,

They are there, your fathers,
your mothers,
fire above, fire beneath,

espérant, en vain, les prières
qu'ils ont droit d'espérer
de vous.

hoping in vain for the prayers
that they have a right to expect
from you!

Songez-vous qu'ils disent peut-être
à tous les Chrétiens d'ici-bas;
Priez pour nous
sans nous connaître,
Puisque nos gâs ne le font pas!

Consider that they are saying
to all Christians here below,
"Pray for us,
even though you don't know us,
since our kids aren't doing it."

Dans le purgatoire on nous laisse.
Priez pour ceux qui ne prient pas!
Priez pour nous! Priez sans cesse
puisque nos gâs sont des ingrats!

We've been left in Purgatory.
Pray for those who don't pray!
Pray for us! Pray without ceasing
since our kids are ungrateful!

Soir d'été

Summer evening

Lison, ma câline,
quittons la colline,
Car le jour décline
au rouge horizon.
Avant qu'il ne meure,
profitons de l'heure:
A notre demeure viens t'en ma Lison!

Lison, my tender one,
let's leave the hill
for the day is ending
on the red horizon.
Before it dies,
let's seize the moment:
to our dwelling, come on, my Lison!

Dans la paix immense
du soir qui commence
Monte la romance
des petits grillons,
Et la plaine rase
que Phébus embrace
Savoure l'extase des derniers rayons.

In the immense peace
of the evening
we hear the love song
of the little crickets.
The mowed plain
that Phebus sets ablaze
savors the ecstasy of the last rays.

Des voix enjôleuses sortent
des yeuses;
Ce sont des berceuses des petits oiseaux.
Et sa porte close,
la fermière Rose

Wheedling voices emerge
from the oak trees.
They are the lullabies of little birds.
With her closed door,
Rose, the farm wife

Chante même chose
entre deux berceaux.

sings the same song
between two cradles.

C'est l'heure très pure
où dans la ramure
Passe le murmure du grand vent calmé
L'heure langoureuse l'heure où l'amoureuse,
se suspend, heureuse
au bras de l'aimé;

Now is the purest hour.
The great calmed wind
murmurs through the branches.
Now is the languorous hour,
when the happy lover
holds her lover's arm.

C'est l'heure touchante
où tout nous enchante,
Où la cloche chante
l'angélus au loin.
Et c'est l'heure grise
où la douce brise
s'imprègne et se grise
de l'odeur du foin;

It is the charming hour
when everything is magic,
when the bell chimes
the Angelus in the distance.
It's the tipsy hour
when the sweet breeze
becomes full and tipsy
with the odor of hay.

C'est l'heure où tout aime,
où, las du blasphème,
Le méchant, lui même,
est un peu meilleur;
Le coeur se dépouille
de tout ce qui souille
L'ame s'agenouille devant le Seigneur!

It's the hour when everything loves,
when, weary with blasphemy,
the Evil One himself
is a bit better.
The heart cleanses itself
of all that soils it,
the soul kneels before the Lord.

Lison ma petite,
prions-le bien vite,
Pour qu'on ne se quitte
de l'éternité,
Et qu'il nous convie
à fuir cette vie
à l'heure ravie
d'un beau soir d'été.

My little Lison,
let's pray to him quickly,
so that we don't lose each other
for eternity.
And so that He will invite us
to flee this life
at the delightful hour
of a beautiful summer evening.

These three modern "Songs from Brittany" could also be labeled

serenades – for they all take place at night (or early evening). Each one is a little story or drama in itself. Each one creates a world of its own – that is, each one forms a myth.

The first, *Night on the Sea*, is a myth of fishermen going out at the end of the day. This is perhaps not exceptional. Yet they're going more to enjoy a good night's sleep than to catch fish! The myth expands into a version of the sea as Mother – who will rock them all gently to sleep.

The power and potential danger of this “Great Mother” is not completely forgotten. The “unsettled immensity” of the sea is invoked. But the myth of the sea as a nourishing mother returns: the sails of the boat become sheets; the boat itself a cradle. And instead of the long and hard labor of fishing all night, there will be peaceful sleep and refreshing dreams of loved ones. The myth is not even broken at daybreak – for the fishermen will gather (“rally”) with other boats close to the coast and show off the miraculous draught of fish which they caught that night.

The second song, *The Lament of Souls*, creates a religious myth. Here we have the opposite of the pious Christian tradition of praying for dead souls in Purgatory. Here the dead souls themselves come back and literally knock on the doors of friends' houses asking that they pray for these dearly departed ones – because their own children are not doing what they're supposed to do!

It is a strong and vivid myth. It's not quite out of Dante. It arises out of the religious fervor of the hardy people of Brittany. Are they more religious than other parts of France? Perhaps. But there's not room here to give a full answer. Mont Saint Michel is on the edge of Brittany. The great scholar Ernest Renan was from Brittany. But you really have to go there and find out for yourselves.

Summer Evening, the third song, develops a myth that is suspended between love of nature and love of God. Its central belief is that there is a time of day – dusk – that is both more romantic and more holy than all other hours. This is “the purest hour.” Yet it is also “the charm-

ing hour when everything is magic.” It is a “tipsy hour,” yet it is a powerful religious hour that makes “the Evil One himself is a bit better.” The mood is one of prayer, of kneeling “before the Lord.” Yet it’s definitely not Sunday morning!

So, what are we to make of this myth? Are Lison and the singer husband and wife? Or are they the French equivalent of Shakespeare’s “Lover and his Lass”? Is it licit pleasure the impossibly beautiful evening is inviting them to, or illicit? Is it a love song, or is it a kind of hymn? The fact that there is no one correct answer underlines its mythic, or Orphic, nature.

Magic Songs by R. Murray Schafer

There are two good reasons why I really do not have to write a program note for these eight *Magic Songs*. First, the songs have no words. Second, the composer wrote a short note right in the sheet music. But I have to do my job, and then, everyone in the audience doesn’t have a copy of the sheet music. Though maybe you should, as the novel way these songs are printed is an education in itself!

The well-known Canadian composer and author R. Murray Schafer not only wrote a “note,” but he added two facts which connect his work with a specific place in Ontario and with a specific choir in Uppsala, Sweden. This is the choir which commissioned the piece. Their name combines Latin and Swedish – which adds another element of magic. They are called “Children of Orpheus” (*Orphei Dranger*). And the place where Schafer composed these songs is “Indian River, Ontario,” a town located almost midway between Toronto and Ottawa, up north in “southern Ontario.”

For the chants do come from a place where there are wolves, bears and other hunted animals; where bees need to be kept warm in order to survive the winters; where the fences need to come down; where the water both needs to be clear and is clear; and where, Orpheus-like, the stones sing. And where else could this be but Canada?

Here is Schafer's note to his *Magic Songs*:

The aim of these songs with their magic texts in a language spoken by no human, is to restore aspects of nature which have been destroyed or neglected by humanity. They lead us back to the era of 'tone magic' – when the purpose of singing was not merely to give pleasure, but was intended to bring about a desired effect in the physical world. To the extent that the performers and the audience believe in them, they will be successful.

Program notes certainly do not need a P.S. but I need to add that I was greatly pleased to learn that Schafer wrote a 1975 study of *Hoffmann and Music*. So, wish me success on his answering the letter I just wrote to him asking about any ... mythical connections he might have with Offenbach.

Randall Thompson's *Alleluia*

Alleluia. Amen.

This well-known piece will evoke different musical memories from all of us who have heard it before. I can still remember the choir which sang it the first time I heard it. Can you?

The Chamber Chorale has performed it on several occasions over the last 20 years. The work itself will turn seventy years old in July 2010. It was composed over five days in July 1940 for the opening of the Berkshire Music Center whose Director, Serge Koussevitsky, had commissioned it. It premiered on July 8, 1940. Among all the mythic elements in it, one can hear Thompson's lament over the defeat of France in June 1940.

The deep magical or Orphic element here is of course found in the two Hebrew words which comprise the piece: *Alleluia* (repeated over and over) and the concluding *Amen*. In addition to being so sonorous when sung, the words themselves carry both specific and wide-ranging meanings. The literal Hebrew significance of "Alleluia" is "Praise the

LORD – even though the LORD’s name is unspeakable! And “Amen” is related to the Hebrew word for “Truth.” But it always means more than “So be it!”

V. *Knock, Knock* by P. D. Q. Bach (Drollly edited by Prof. Peter Schickele; Resuscitation completed July 19, 1985; revised in light of more recent scholarship April 5, 1990.)

Recitative and Chorus:

Knock, knock.

Who’s there?

Ida.

Ida who?

I duh-ream of Jeanie with the light brown hair.

Recitative and Chorus:

How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb?

One, but the light bulb has to really want to change.

Recitative and Chorus:

What is the question to which the answer is: Washington Irving?

What was the name of our first president, Seymour?

What is the question to which the answer is: 9W?

Do you spell your name with a “V,” Mister Wagner?

What is the question to which the answer is: Chicken Teriyaki?

What is the name of the only living kamikaze pilot?

What is the question to which the answer is: Doctor Livingston, I presume?

What is your full name, Doctor Presume?

Recitative and Chorus:

So this guy who works at an aquarium gets summoned by his boss, who’s looking very worried, and she says to him, “I just walked by the dolphin tank, and they’re feeling very amorous; they’re doing all sorts

of things to each other, and the trouble is, in less than an hour we've got three busloads of second graders coming – we can't have them watching those naughty dolphins behaving as if they were in a porno flick. Now there's only one thing that acts as an anti-aphrodisiac for dolphins, and that's the meat of baby seagulls, so I want you to go down to the seashore, catch yourself some baby seagulls, put them in this bag and hurry back. But be careful; a lion escaped from the zoo this morning, and though he was heavily sedated, he still just might be dangerous. Okay, get going, and make it snappy."

So the guy takes a shortcut through the forest to the seashore, he fills the bag with baby sea gulls, and he's walking back through the forest, when he sees the lion, and it is lying across the path directly in front of him! It's too late to run away, and the feline *does* seem very placid, so, summoning up all his courage, he steps across the lion. Nothing happens, and so, with much relief the guy begins to resume his journey, when all of a sudden a policeman steps out of the forest; he grabs the guy by the arm, and says to him, "You're under arrest." The guy can't believe it; he says, "Tell me, Officer, what's the charge?" And the policeman says, "Transporting young gulls across a staid lion for immoral porpoises."

* * *

This "drolly edited" cantata has no connection at all with the funniest musician of the 19th century – unless you want to connect it to the musical doormat I have in front of my office (thanks to Charlie and Sue Miller): "Back Later. Offenbach Sooner."

It is fun to make fun of old Johann Sebastian Bach. It's doubly fun to connect him with stand-up comedians of late 20th century America. (And then there is the additional, almost personal pleasure of the fact that New York State Route 9W was the main highway my friend Ken Buckland and I took on our bicycle trip from New Jersey to Québec in the summer of 1968.)

The myth here illustrates the mutability of both nature and language. And then it shares with what Mozart and Rossini knew well: that you

can make music out of anything. Rossini once boasted that he could make a great song out of a laundry list!

So, don't forget to read the mini-joke book above – I mean the texts! You can laugh a little, cry a little, until the clouds roll by a little. For that's the glory of, that's the story of ... P. D. Q. Bach!

That Old Black Magic, words by Johnny Mercer, music by Harold Arlen, from the 1943 Paramount Picture, *Star Spangled Rhythm*.

The Way You Look Tonight, words by Dorothy Fields, music by Jerome Kern, from the 1936 movie *Swing Time*.

Seventy-Six Trombones, words and music by Meredith Wilson, from *The Music Man*.

What? Offenbach and Badings and Schafer and Thompson and (P. D. Q.) Bach aren't popular? The soft answer is: "Well they're potentially popular. They just haven't been used in Academy-award-winning movies ... yet." Although Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's 1951 movie of *The Tales of Hoffmann* won a "Special Jury Prize" at the Cannes Film Festival!

As with Thompson's *Alleluia*, almost all of us will have specific memories of when we heard these three "popular" songs for the first time.

For *That Old Black Magic*, it might have been when Marilyn Monroe sings it in *Bus Stop* or when Sammy Davis Jr. sings it in an *I Dream of Jeannie* episode. It was first released in 1942. It became a Number One Hit in 1943, the year it also was featured in a patriotic Hollywood musical named *Star-Spangled Rhythm*.

For *The Way You Look Tonight*, it has to be the classic 1936 Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers film, *Swing Time* – for that's the year it won the Academy Award for "Best Original Song."

And then for *Seventy-Six Trombones*, – well, there are really too many

possibilities, too many musical and theatrical mutations and myths. But let's pause for one moment of silent mutual recognition and say, "It's really amazing, isn't it, that we all know this same song!"

And, "Yes, Virginia, there is an Offenbach connection here." It's found with two of the famous band leaders who all (by the power of myth and music!) somehow come to the same town on the same day: Patrick Gilmore and John Philip Sousa. Offenbach met both of them when he was in America from Friday, May 5th to Sunday, July 9th, 1876 to help us celebrate our Centennial. This is not a myth. It's true. "You can look it up!"

– Program notes by Rev. Donald H. Fox, Staff Chaplain at the La Crosse campus of Franciscan Skemp Healthcare and Pastor of Lower Coon Valley Lutheran Church

A Magic Made By Melody

The La Crosse Chamber Chorale
Dr. Paul Rusterholz, Conductor

The World Beloved

Saturday, February 6, 2010 ♦ 7:30 pm

Sunday, February 7, 2010 ♦ 3:00 pm

Mary of the Angels Chapel ♦ La Crosse

Sponsor: Coulee Bank

O Great Mystery –

The Advent Hymn Sing

Sunday, Dec. 20, 2009 ♦ 7:00 pm

Christ Episcopal Church ♦ La Crosse

Sponsor: Mid-West Family Broadcasting
La Crosse

Come, Creator Spirit

Saturday, April 10, 2010 ♦ 7:30 pm

First Lutheran Church ♦ Onalaska

Sunday, April 11, 2010 ♦ 3:00 pm

First Presbyterian Church ♦ La Crosse

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