

From Carmen to Gershwin : Invitations to Travel

SATURDAY

25

JULY
7 P.M.

AMPHITHÉÂTRE
FERNAND-LINDSAY

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PROGRAM

JACQUES IBERT (1890 – 1962)

Escales — 15 min

CAMILLE SAINT- SAËNS (1835 – 1921)

Piano Concerto n° 5 in F major,
op. 103 — 28 min

- I. Allegro animato
- II. Andante
- III. Molto allegro

GEORGES BIZET (1838 – 1875)

Carmen, orchestral suite — 22 min

1. Les Toréadors
2. Prélude et Aragonaise
3. Intermezzo
4. Séguedille
5. Les dragons d'Alcala
6. Habanera
7. La garde montante
8. Danse bohème

GEORGE GERSHWIN (1898 – 1937)

An American in Paris — 19 min

INTERMISSION – 20'

ARTISTES

Orchestre symphonique de Montréal

Stéphane Denève, conductor
Jean-Yves Thibaudet, piano

NOTE DE PROGRAMME

Jacques Ibert

ESCALES

In 1919, Jacques Ibert won the prestigious Prix de Rome, which came, as it should, with a long creative residency at the Villa Medici. He set off on a Mediterranean cruise that took him to Palermo in Sicily, then to the African coast, to Tunis and Nefta, and to Valencia in Spain. Although he was lodged in the Eternal City, Ibert drew his inspiration not from the music of Ottorino Respighi, his Roman contemporary, but from the Impressionist style. The opening bars of *Escales* even allude directly to the introduction of Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* and its emblematic flute solo. In tribute to his stay in Palermo, Ibert imagines a tarantella rhythm. The second movement is composed entirely from a tune "heard in the Tunisian desert, which served me in creating musically the atmosphere and the nostalgia of the natural setting in which I had lived for several weeks," as he put it. The final movement carries us to the Spanish coast to the sound of tambourine and castanets, embellished with fiery ornamentation in the Iberian style.

Camille Saint-Saëns

PIANO CONCERTO NO. 5 IN F MAJOR, OP. 103

The second work on the programme invites us to discover another Mediterranean country. Premiered in Paris in 1896, the Fifth Concerto, known as the "Egyptian", owes its nickname to the fact that Saint-Saëns had holidayed on the banks of the Nile earlier that year, when he began writing it.

The opening of the work depicts a sunlit morning filled with small pastoral incidents. While the score belongs to the Romantic music of its time, and even includes a harmonic sequence in the classical tradition, one also notices many aquatic touches in the manner of the composer of *Le Carnaval des animaux*.

The Andante is steeped in Arab-Andalusian scales and sonorities, but also Javanese ones. The central section of this movement contains a Nubian melody, played by the flute, said to have been heard by Saint-Saëns from the mouths of boatmen on the sacred river. Later, in a cadenza, the solo piano takes on the sonorities of the gamelan, the characteristic instrument of Indonesia, like an enchanted parenthesis.

The finale, *Molto allegro*, mirrors the first movement in its virtuosity and its evocation of the marine world. The

successive rises and falls suggest quite clearly the deep swell beneath a storm.

Georges Bizet

CARMEN, ORCHESTRAL SUITE

For many French composers of the late nineteenth century, Andalusia was the first stop on the road to exoticism. In 1885 and 1887, Ernest Guiraud transposed the most popular opera of his late friend Georges Bizet into two orchestral suites. Assembled from these by conductor Stéphane Denève, the version we hear this week borrows the landmark excerpts from *Carmen*, among them the *Habanera* and the famous *Séguedille*. It follows the original orchestration closely, but does not respect chronological order, which breaks with any idea of narrative drama.

By way of an overture, we hear the *Prelude* that opens the opera, followed by the *Aragonaise*, evoking the highly charged, passionate atmosphere of the action. The *Habanera*, the *Séguedille* and the *Intermezzo* that precedes it all recall the raw eroticism that prevails between the protagonists, *Carmen* and *Don José*. The closing movement draws on yet another of the work's hits, "*Les tringles des sistres tintaient*", with oboe, clarinet and trumpet in soloistic roles.

George Gershwin

AN AMERICAN IN PARIS

To each his own exotic journey. At the end of the 1920s, also known as the *Années folles* for the collective carefree spirit then reigning over a pacified Europe, Gershwin decided to travel to Paris. Back in New York, he completed a symphonic poem born of the fusion between jazz and musical comedy, which he had taken care to pack in his suitcase, and the French art of composition. Here is the narrative outline he published in the concert programme at the work's premiere on 13 December 1928: "This piece describes an American's visit to the gay and beautiful city of Paris. We see him strolling along the Champs-Élysées, cane in hand, straw hat tilted, soaking up the surroundings and much else besides. We see the effect of French wine, which makes him homesick. And that is where the blues begins... At last he shakes off his torpor and becomes aware once more of the Parisian bustle. He listens to the taxi horns, the noise of the boulevards and the music of the French cancan, and says to himself: this is really home! But after all, this is Paris, so let's go!"

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