



# Grant Park Music Festival

Seventy-sixth Season

Grant Park Orchestra and Chorus

Carlos Kalmar, *Principal Conductor*

Christopher Bell, *Chorus Director*

**Twentieth Program:** Brahms and Bizet

**Wednesday, August 18, 2010 at 6:30 p.m.**

Jay Pritzker Pavilion

GRANT PARK ORCHESTRA

Carlos Kalmar, *Conductor*

Horacio Gutiérrez, *Piano*

SAINT-SAËNS	<i>Marche militaire française</i> , Op. 60, No. 4
BIZET	Symphony No. 1 in C major Allegro vivo Adagio Scherzo: Allegro vivace Finale: Allegro vivace
BRAHMS	Piano Concerto No. 1 in D minor, Op. 15 Maestoso Adagio Rondo: Allegro non troppo
	HORACIO GUTIÉRREZ

This concert is performed in honor of  
Commissioner Lois Weisberg  
and all of the employees at the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs.



### **MARCHE MILITAIRE FRANÇAISE, OP. 60, NO. 4 (1880)**

#### **Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)**

*The Marche militaire française is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, two cornets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion and strings. The performance time is approximately six minutes. The Grant Park Orchestra first performed the Marche militaire française on August 8, 1935, Ebba Sundstrom conducting.*

In July 1879, Saint-Saëns wrote a *Réverie Orientale* for a concert arranged by the pianist Wilhelmina Szavardy to benefit the victims of a flood in the Szégédin district of her native Hungary. The *Réverie* was a musical memento of the composer's moonlight visit to the exotic Algerian town of Blidah five years before, and in July 1880, while on a seaside holiday at Boulogne-sur-mer, he surrounded it with three other orchestral postcards to create the *Suite Algérienne*; Edouard Colonne conducted the work's premiere at the Théâtre du Châtelet on July 19, 1880. The Suite closes with a flamboyant *Marche militaire française* that speaks not only of Saint-Saëns' patriotic pride but also of the colonial domination that France had held in Algeria for the preceding three decades.



### **SYMPHONY NO. 1 IN C MAJOR (1855)**

#### **Georges Bizet (1838-1875)**

*Bizet's Symphony in C major is scored for woodwinds in pairs, four horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings. The performance time is approximately 27 minutes. The Grant Park Orchestra first performed this Symphony on July 13, 1945, Nikolai Malko conducting.*

Georges Bizet lived for only three dozen years, and each of those dozens marked an important phase of his short life. During the first twelve years, only little time was devoted to the usual activities of childhood, since Georges, the offspring of two talented musicians, was breathtakingly precocious in musical matters. He was admitted to the Paris Conservatoire at the age of nine and was winning prizes there within a year. He produced his earliest known works, two vocalises for soprano, at twelve.

The second dozen years of Bizet's life were the happiest he was to know. He studied at the Conservatoire until he was nineteen, garnering awards for piano, organ, fugue and solfeggio, and composing a variety of works, one of which was a prize-winning operetta in a competition sponsored by Jacques Offenbach. At nineteen, he won the *Prix de Rome*, which supplied him with a five-year stipend, a residency in Italy and France, and the opportunity to devote himself to composition. He did complete several works during this time, but he projected far more that came to nothing. Despite developing a throat ailment that plagued him all his life, Bizet was active enough during those years to establish a modest reputation as a composer and an excellent one as a pianist. The years of planning, composing and travel came to an end when his prize stipend expired. At the age of 24 he was faced with the perplexing reality of providing his own living.

After 1863, Bizet gave much of his time to all manner of musical hackwork: private teacher, rehearsal accompanist, music critic, but mostly to transcribing the popular pieces of the day for a variety of instruments. "It is maddening to interrupt the work I love for two days in order to write cornet solos. Still, one must live!" he lamented. He continued to plan many works for both opera house and concert hall, but had to abandon most of these because of lack of time. From these later years date the works for which he is mainly remembered: *The Pearl Fishers*, *Jeux d'enfants*, the incidental music to *L'Arlésienne* and *Carmen*. None of these pieces provided him the success he worked so hard to achieve, however, and he lived in a state of continual frustration that Winton Dean described as "settled melancholy." "We often sensed tears in his voice," a friend wrote. Bizet died before he knew that *Carmen* would make his name famous around the world.

Bizet's Symphony in C, written in his seventeenth year, is a marvel of early musical maturation that rivals the precocity of Mozart and Mendelssohn. It is a work in which the composer exhibited his careful study of, among others, Haydn, Rossini and Gounod (Gounod was Bizet's counterpoint

teacher whose own First Symphony had appeared only a year earlier), and vitalized it with his own ebullient, youthful spirit and characteristic touches of melody, harmony and orchestration. Curiously, the work seems not to have been performed during Bizet's lifetime. The manuscript became part of his estate after his death and passed into the possession of his wife, who did not fully appreciate her husband's genius. She bequeathed it to the composer Reynaldo Hahn, and he to the Paris Conservatoire Library, where it gathered dust until Bizet's first English biographer, D.C. Parker, unearthed it in 1933. It was finally premiered on February 26, 1935 in Basle, Switzerland by Felix Weingartner.

The Symphony in C opens with a movement in traditional sonata form, with a bubbling main theme outlining chordal patterns and a contrasting legato second theme, introduced by the oboe, in longer notes. The slow second movement contains a haunting, bittersweet serenade for oboe followed by a soaring melody for strings. The movement is rounded out by the return of the oboe theme. The concluding two movements are a sprightly scherzo with a rustic-sounding trio, and a vivacious finale, cast, like the first movement, in sonata form.



### PIANO CONCERTO NO. 1 IN D MINOR, OP. 15 (1854-1859)

#### Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

*Brahms' Piano Concerto No. 1 is scored for woodwinds and trumpets in pairs, four horns, timpani and strings. The performance time is approximately 44 minutes. The Grant Park Orchestra first performed this Concerto on July 29, 1959. Theodore Bloomfield conducted, and Gary Graffman was the soloist.*

Brahms, in his philosophy and his attitude toward music, was the first modern composer. He emerged as a creator around 1850, at just the time when the signs of interest in the centuries-long history of music first became evident. During earlier generations, a composer developed his style based almost exclusively on knowledge of only his own and the immediately preceding generations, choosing either to continue composing around the same aesthetic principles or to change them in subtle or drastic ways. At no time before the 19th century was the music of earlier eras emulated, venerated or, in most cases, even known. The exceptions are few: notably, the oratorios of Handel, the contrapuntal church style of Palestrina and the *Well-Tempered Clavier* of Bach, and even the last two of these were more familiar from pedagogy than from performance. Brahms, unlike those before him, drew from the entire history of German music — from Lassus to Bach to Beethoven — and, in so doing, was the first composer to face that set of imposing questions for the creative artist about the historical flow of musical tradition: “What do I keep?” “What do I discard?” “Where do I fit in?”

The 19th century was a time of many noteworthy explorations into the past. Schliemann unearthed Troy; Champollion broke the code of the Rosetta Stone; and a determined French scholar named Coussemaker brushed away seven centuries of dust and forgetfulness to expose the earliest music of western civilization. Brahms saw himself not only as the beneficiary of this newly discovered treasure from earlier times, but also as its curator, a responsibility he accepted as a scholar as well as a composer: he was on the advisory board of the first complete edition of the works of Bach. In his compositions, Brahms forged a distinctive style from three of the great traditions of German music — the lush and luxuriant textures of Lassus and Bach, the formal techniques of Beethoven and the emotionally expressive harmony of Schumann. Brahms brought to this amalgam his own wonderful lyricism and sense of musical architecture.

Brahms did battle with the problem of creating something new without defacing the tradition he revered in every work he wrote. Nowhere is the struggle more evident, however, than in the First Symphony and this First Piano Concerto. He labored for five years on the Concerto before it was performed, and then went back and revised it some more. His original intention was to produce a symphony in D minor as his first major orchestral work, and, to that end, he sketched three movements in short score in 1854. The first movement was orchestrated, but Brahms was not satisfied with the result, and he decided to transform his short score into a sonata for two pianos. But even this did not fulfill his vision, as he noted in a letter to Joseph Joachim, violinist, conductor and

encouraging friend: “I have often played the first three movements over with Frau Schumann [the composer’s widow, and the center of Brahms’ musical and emotional existence for most of his life], but I find that I require even more than two pianos.” The ideas were too symphonic in breadth to be satisfactorily contained by just pianos, yet too pianistic in figuration to be completely divorced from the keyboard. Brahms was quite stuck.

In 1857, the composer Julius Otto Grimm, a staunch friend of Brahms, suggested that his 24-year-old colleague try his sketch as a piano concerto. Brahms thought the advice sound, and he went back to work. He selected two movements to retain for the concerto and put aside the third, which emerged ten years later as the chorus *Behold All Flesh* in the *German Requiem*. Things proceeded slowly, with Brahms soliciting the advice of Grimm, Joachim and Clara Schumann, and only after two more years did he feel the work ready for performance. Brahms himself gave the premiere on January 22, 1859 with the Orchestra of the Royal Theater, Hanover; Joseph Joachim conducted.

The Concerto’s stormy first movement is the most openly passionate and impetuous of all Brahms’ orchestral works. Joachim wrote to Max Kalbeck, the composer’s eventual biographer, that this music reflected the anguish Brahms felt over the nervous breakdown and attempted suicide of Robert Schumann just as Brahms was working on his D minor sketch. The movement may also show the impact of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, which overwhelmed Brahms when he first heard it in March of 1854. This movement follows the Classical model of double-exposition concerto form, with an extended initial presentation of much of the important thematic material by the orchestra alone (“first exposition”). The soloist enters and leads through the “second exposition,” which is augmented to include a lyrical second theme, not heard earlier, played by the unaccompanied piano. The central section of the movement begins with the tempestuous main theme, a truly Romantic motive filled with snarling trills and anguished melodic leaps. The recapitulation enters on a titanic wave of sound, as though the crest of some dark, brooding emotion were crashing onto a barren, rocky shore. The lovely second theme returns (played again by the solo piano), but eventually gives way to the foreboding mood of the main theme. Looking back over the craggy grandeur of this movement, it is not difficult to imagine what must have caused the audience at the Leipzig premiere to reject the Concerto. There is no flashy virtuoso work here, not even a cadenza, but only an equal partnership between soloist and orchestra in music that is serious in content and broad in scope.

The *Adagio* is a movement of transcendent beauty, of quiet, twilight emotions couched in a mood of gentle melancholy — of “something spiritual” in Clara Schumann’s words. Above the first line of Joachim’s score, Brahms penciled in the phrase “Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini” — “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” This reference, really an informal dedication, is to Robert Schumann, who died while Brahms was working on the Concerto. Schumann was often addressed by his friends as “Mynheer Domine.” An additional dedication may be to Schumann’s widow, the Clara so dear to Brahms during those years, because he wrote to her that he was “also painting a lovely portrait of you. It is to be the *Adagio*.” Such an overt association of his music with definite sentiments was highly unusual for Brahms, and he later crossed out the Latin phrase in the conductor’s score. The emotion of deep tranquility untouched by life’s vicissitudes, however, remains.

The finale, perhaps modeled on that of Beethoven’s C minor Piano Concerto, is a weighty rondo. Its theme is related to the lyrical second subject of the opening movement by one of those masterful strokes Brahms used to unify his large works. Among the episodes that separate the returns of the rondo theme is one employing a carefully devised fugue that grew directly from Brahms’ intensive study of the music of Bach. After a brief, restrained cadenza, the coda turns to the brighter key of D major to provide a stirring conclusion to this Concerto, a work of awesome achievement for the 26-year-old Brahms.

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