

CARMINA BURANA

Saturday, May 9, 2015 – 8pm at The VETS, Providence
Amica Rush Hour Concert – Friday, May 8, 6:30pm

Larry Rachleff, *conductor*

Andriana Chuchman, *soprano*

Donald George, *tenor*

Hugh Russell, *bass*

The Providence Singers, Christine Noel, *artistic director*

JALBERT	World Premiere, in honor of the RI Philharmonic's 70 th Anniversary
RESPIGHI	<i>Ancient Airs and Dances: Suite 1, P 138</i>
ORFF	<i>Carmina Burana</i>

Ancient Airs and Dances, Suite No.1

Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936)

There are only a few 20th-century masters of colorful orchestration. Leading composers among this select group, such as Respighi, worked in a musical style that was a holdover from the Romantic 19th century. Respighi received his advanced training in orchestration directly from one of the world's most coloristic orchestrators, Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov, while playing violin in the St. Petersburg Imperial Opera Orchestra. The master's influence is felt throughout Respighi's symphonic poems, notably the famous *Fountains of Rome* (1916) and *Pines of Rome* (1924).

Respighi was also interested in editing and arranging music of the past. He once wrote, *The Italian genius is for melody and clarity. Today there is a noticeable return to the less sophisticated music of the past — in harmony with the church modes and in form with the dance suite.*

Holding to this philosophy, the composer arranged three sets of *Ancient Airs and Dances* from Italian and French lute and Baroque guitar music of the 16th and 17th centuries. The sources for most of these were the editions published by his countryman, musicologist Oscar Chilesotti (1848-1916). Respighi's Suite No. 1 (1917) and Suite No. 2 (1924) were for full orchestra, and Suite No. 3 (1932) was for strings only.

Suite No. 1 begins with Simone Molinaro's "Ballo detto il Conte Orlando," a popular piece from around the turn of the 17th century. Noble, masculine rhythmic gestures in the opening and closing sections are answered by a reflective feminine mood in the center.

The composer of the second movement, "Gagliarda," was Vincenzo Galilei, father of the famous astronomer. The piece's original title was "Polymnia," after one of the muses of song. For a central section, Respighi inserts an anonymous dance with a drone bass.

As a slow movement, Respighi chose an anonymous *Villanella*, usually a light piece. This particular song, however, was originally a setting of the dying words of a character in Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*. The sadness of this music is only briefly relieved by a slightly faster *Italiana* in the middle.

The finale is a clever alternation of two anonymous dances of the late 16th century: several variations on a *passa mezzo* with interpolations of a *mascherada*. The suite thus arrives at a brilliant finish with the *mascherada's* fanfare theme.

Carmina Burana

Carl Orff (1895-1982)

"You can now delete all that I have written before and that you have unfortunately published. With *Carmina Burana* my 'collected works' begin." So wrote Carl Orff to his publisher following the 1937 world premiere of the work that would make him world famous. His earlier music, tinged with Debussy, Strauss and Schoenberg, was now laid to rest in the wake of this sensational new approach to combining music and theater. *Carmina Burana* was the first in a trilogy of what Orff termed "scenic cantatas" or *Trionfi* (Triumphs). The later additions were *Catulli Carmina* (1943) and *Trionfo di Afrodite* (1953).

Orff gives few stage directions for these works, but the original intent is for the chorus and soloists to be unseen, leaving the stage open for dancers. Unstaged concert presentations are equally legitimate, however. *Carmina Burana* and the other scenic cantatas require a large orchestra augmented chiefly by percussion instruments. (For *Carmina Burana*, five percussion players are required.) This aspect of Orff's orchestration also tells us something of the nature of his music: Rhythm is its most important element.

Where did the title and text of *Carmina Burana* originate? The title means "songs of Buren," referring to the Monastery of Benediktbeuern in Bavaria. There, during the 19th century, researchers discovered a manuscript containing a rich collection of 13th-century song texts (only a few with accompanying music). These were songs of the Goliards, medieval scholars and clerics who wandered about Europe from university to university. Their Latin verses richly depicted life in the Middle Ages. In 1847, the texts of the *Carmina Burana* were edited and published in book form. Then, in 1935, Orff encountered the book. It so sparked the composer's imagination that he immediately struck out in a new direction of musical and theatrical style, which, in the words of Henry Pleasants, returned "to the fundamentals of song and dance, to a music more closely related to speech and gesture and situation."

The very dynamic opening chorus, *O Fortuna*, and the choral number that follows it suggest that much in life depends on luck. This is the prologue to the cantata proper. The first major section, *Primo vere* (*In Springtime*), expresses wonder and joy upon the return of spring. In No. 4, the baritone solo appears for the first time. The last three numbers of *Primo vere* form a little German peasant play, *Uf dem Anger* (*On the Green*), beginning with a dance followed by a celebration of spring, the song of a young lady looking for a young man, general dancing and a chorus.

In Taberna (In the Tavern), the second major section, features baritone and tenor solos against the male chorus. These drinking songs, while containing a general cynicism, project a panoply of moods capped by a lengthy chanted male chorus.

The innocent sound of a boys' chorus opens the third major section, *Cour d'Amours (Courtly Love)*, and the soprano solo appears for the first time as well. This section is the longest, comprising ten numbers. The joys and disappointments of love are the central subject. Among the love songs, however, there are interwoven vignettes: for example, the picture of the innocent girl standing in a red shift (No. 17). A soprano recitative (No. 23) leads to the section's epilogue, *Blazinflor et Helena*, which extols the glory and beauty of the world's love goddesses. Without a break comes a literal reprise of the opening chorus, *O Fortuna*, completing a massive and colorful frame for a 20th-century masterpiece that so vividly paints aspects of life in the Middle Ages.

Program Notes by Dr. Michael Fink