

Oakville Symphony Program Notes

May 6 & 7, 2023 at the Oakville Centre

Kevin Lau (b. 1982): *For Home* (2016)

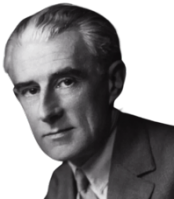


For Home is my musical tribute to Canada. Before writing this piece, I devoted considerable thought to the question of what it meant to be Canadian; I pondered its history, its culture, and in particular my own experience as a young immigrant adjusting to life in a new world. The simple, folk-like melody which recurs throughout the brief course of this work represents my best attempt at capturing feelings too complex for words.

While composing this piece, it became clear to me that I could not convey my sense of gratitude for something so abstract without drawing on the particular. And so I drew upon my experience of meeting and falling in love with the woman who would eventually become my wife. The D major middle section of this brief work quotes from a piece of music I composed specifically for her; for us, and for our home.

by Kevin Lau

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937): *Piano Concerto in G major* (1931)



I. Allegramente II. Adagio assai III. Presto

This work is all about energy from the outset, interspersed with tranquil moments in its central movement. Influenced by musical trends in the 1920's Paris, the concerto abounds with elements of jazz, such as in some prominent *glissandi* by the trombones.

At the very beginning, we hear the unusual use of a whip-crack, followed by an intricate piccolo solo, and then a sparkling trumpet solo. The second movement provides a complete contrast, with a simple piano melody giving way to a subdued flute solo. Based on the slow movement of Mozart's Clarinet Quintet, this is one of the outstanding slow movements in the entire concerto literature.

In the final movement, hyper-speed energy is re-ignited, with some remarkable interjections by the brass and woodwinds (including a noteworthy solo in the bassoons), all this happening against driving syncopations in the solo part.

Ravel himself conducted the first performance in 1933, but he was unable to play the solo part because of declining health. He had hoped to take this work on a world tour thereafter, but this turned out to be impossible.

by Stephen Walter ©

Georges Bizet (1838-75): *Carmen*, Suite No. 1 (1874)



I. Prélude II. Aragonaise III. Intermezzo IV. Seguedille V. Les Dagens d'Alcala VI. Les Toréadors

First performed in 1875 (and only three months before Bizet's sudden death at age 36), *Carmen* was seen as a French counterpoint to the influence of German music, and especially to Wagnerian opera. There are two orchestral Suites based on some of the most significant moments in the opera, although in a substantially different order from that in the opera itself.

The *Prelude* (to Act 1) introduces the fateful theme heard at the very end of the opera, when Carmen is murdered by Don José outside the bullring. The *Aragonaise*, which acts as a prelude to the last act, suggests the pre-bullfight excitement in the main square in Seville. The *Intermezzo*, a prelude to Act 3, provides a moment of solitude before Don José's dissatisfaction with Carmen is revealed: it includes a haunting melody introduced by the flute and developed by other woodwinds. The *Seguedille* occurs in Act 1, as Carmen tries to bewitch Don José, who is supposed to be guarding her. *Les Dragons d'Alcala* (Dragoon cavalry soldiers, not dragons!) forms a prelude to Act II. The final piece, *Toréadors*, actually begins Act 1 in the opera; Escamillo and the other bullfighters march in, accompanied by this music.

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Esteban Fioroni, arr. (b. 1991): *Fantasia Tango Argentino* (2023)



I. *Mi Buenos Aires Querido* (Carlos Gardel) II. *La Cumparsita* (Gerardo Matos Rodríguez) III. *La Yumba & Recuerdo* (Osvaldo Pugliese) IV. *Libertango* (Astor Piazzolla)

Fantasia Tango Argentino, pays tribute to the history and traditions of tango in Argentina. Esteban Fioroni's arrangement of some of our most emblematic songs was written specially for the Oakville Symphony displaying our wonderful musicians while we explore what makes a traditional tango sound authentic—as heard in the milongas of Buenos Aires. With an epic start by the full orchestra, we instantly hear the English horn emulating Carlos Gardel's famous nostalgic line of *Mi Buenos Aires Querido* which translates to, "My dear Buenos Aires, when I see you again there will be no more pain and oblivion." Suddenly the rhythmic drive of the milonga overtakes the music with the chorus of *La Cumparsita* where the strings and the snare drums are prominent.

After a reprise of the opening, the mood becomes hazy with lower strings playing the signature rhythm of *La Yumba* over muted trumpets. *Recuerdo* follows with the melody in the flutes with accompaniment of the rest of the woodwinds. The typical cadenza of tango ends this section and leads directly to the harp solo which serves as an introduction to the illustrious *Libertango*. It gains steam slowly with the addition of each family until the culmination with the full orchestra displaying Astor Piazzolla's typical power. The orchestration of the tangos is

respectful of traditions in each of these different styles of tango starting with Gardel in 1934 and culminating with Nuevo Tango at the end of the century.

by Lorenzo Guggenheim

Alberto Ginastera (1916 – 1983): *Suite from the Ballet Estancia, Op. 8 (1941)*



I. *Los trabajadores agrícolas* (The Land Workers) II. *Danza del trigo* (Wheat Dance) III. *Los peones de hacienda* (The Cattle Men) IV. *Danza Final – Malambo* (Final Dance)

The ballet on which this work is based depicts life on a ranch (or estancia) in Ginastera's native Argentina. The action takes place from dawn until the dawn of the following day. A city boy, who is working on the ranch and trying to compete with the cowboys (the gauchos), falls in love with a local girl, who is attracted to him once he has demonstrated his skill in horse taming.

Much of Ginastera's music suggests the tuning and style of a *gaucho's* guitar. The opening movement is in robust triple rhythms and depicts the grinding work of the farm labourers. In contrast, the *danza del trigo*, beginning with a flute solo, conveys the blossoming romance. In *Peones de hacienda*, we revert to stronger but less predictable rhythms. Unison French horns introduce the main theme, and the movement also features a timpani solo against low brass playing fragments of the main theme.

In the *Malambo* folk dance, the city boy and the locals compete to demonstrate their abilities and manliness. There is a series of "rounds" in which the men try to out-do one another, at night before the camp fire. A fast trumpet solo is heard periodically, while the accompaniment becomes ever more elaborated. A tambourine riff depicts the awakening cicadas, and flutes twitter the bird's chorus for a new day.

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