

THE
**CLEVELAND
ORCHESTRA**
FRANZ WELSER-MÖST

CARMEN-SUITE

1.6 In Focus Season 1 Episode No. 6

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THE CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA
Franz Welser-Möst, conductor

RODION SHCHEDRIN (b. 1932)
Carmen-Suite

Ballet score based on Bizet's opera *Carmen*
(for string orchestra and percussion)

1. Introduction
2. Dance
3. Intermezzo
4. Changing of the Guard
5. Carmen's Entrance and Habanera
6. Scene
7. Intermezzo II
8. Boléro
9. Toreador
10. Toreador and Carmen
11. Adagio
12. Fortune Telling
13. Finale

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CONCERT OVERVIEW

BIZET'S COLORFUL and flamboyant opera *Carmen*, with its eye-popping portrayal of on-the-street living filled with smoking, fighting, and drinking women, scandalized Parisian audiences when it first premiered in 1874. Yet this stagework quickly became wildly famous for its music and emotional intensity — becoming one of the most-loved and well-known operas ever written.

For this episode of *In Focus*, Franz Welser-Möst offers a different look at this beloved work through a brilliant arrangement for string orchestra and percussion, created as a ballet score by Russian composer Rodion Shchedrin for his dancer wife, prima ballerina Maya Plisetskaya. The intense passions of this famously tune-filled opera are revealed in unexpected detail across thirteen movements, just begging you to dance.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

CARMEN-SUITE

freely arranged for strings and percussion after Bizet's opera
by **Rodion Shchedrin** (b. 1932)

Composed: 1967

Scored for: string orchestra, timpani, and percussion (4 players)

Percussion Player 1: marimba, vibraphone, castanets, three cowbells, four bongos, tubular bells, snare drum, guiro

Percussion Player 2: vibraphone, marimba, snare drum, tambourine, two wood-blocks, claves, triangle, guiro

Percussion Player 3: glockenspiel, crotales, maracas, whip, snare drum, choclo, guiro, three temple blocks, bass drum, tam-tam, snare drum, triangle

Percussion Player 4: cymbals, bass drum, tam-tam, hi-hat, triangle, tambourine, five tom-toms

Duration: about 45 minutes

THIS UNUSUAL arrangement of music from Bizet's *Carmen* emerged in 1967 from a collaboration between Maya Plisetskaya, prima ballerina of the Moscow Bolshoi Ballet, and the Cuban choreographer Alberto Alonso. Wanting to present the dramatic storyline of *Carmen* as a ballet, they approached first Shostakovich and then Khachaturian, neither of whom were keen to be simply arranging Bizet's well-known score for ballet. So Plisetskaya turned to her husband, Rodion Shchedrin, and he responded enthusiastically with something that proved to be much more than an arrangement.

His idea was to use Bizet's melodies but to give them a totally new flavor by scoring them with no winds and lots of percussion. He did not hesitate to score freely for the strings, and to switch registers and even rhythms when he felt inclined. Sometimes this is done with humor, as for example when part of the melody of the Toreador's song is suddenly missing, or when the soldiers changing the guard in Act I seem to trip up on their own maneuvers.

The presence of percussion throughout most of the score gives the music a great deal of fresh excitement and color. Along with one timpanist, Shchedrin calls for four more players, each of whom has an array of different instruments, occasionally borrowing an instrument from the next player, or having two players beating out the exciting bullfight music (best known from the overture) on the same xylophone. The castanets are here, as they are in the original, but also a woodblock, bongos, cowbells, a guiro, and so on.

It's a carnival for percussion, and it would be hard to think of any other opera that would survive such treatment so well.

One of the liveliest movements is not from *Carmen* at all, it's the Farandole from Bizet's *L'Arlésienne* suite. But since Bizet died so soon after the premiere of *Carmen*, his publishers had no scruple about building up the ballet section in the last act with pieces drawn from other works. (It is more than likely that Shchedrin used the standard score quite unaware that this movement was not part of the original opera.)

The part of Micaela, with her wonderfully tender music, was omitted from the ballet, but the critical triangle of Don José-Carmen-Escamillo is preserved. The ominous "fate" motif recurs at critical points in the action, and a wonderfully dramatic effect is achieved having the Habanera recalled at the end, played on distant bells, just as it had been at the very beginning.

The ballet was staged at the Bolshoi in 1967, but ran into recurrent objections from the Soviet regime, who attacked it first for indecency (even though the opera had been standard repertoire in the Soviet Union for years), and then for damaging Bizet's authorial integrity. A ban on its performance was imposed, then lifted only when Shostakovich intervened with the opinion that it was a masterly score and superb ballet music.

A plan to take it to the Toronto World Expo in 1968 was similarly attacked by the Minister of Culture, Yekaterina Furtseva, on the grounds that Plivetskaya's costume was too scanty. In the event, the dancer became seriously ill, so the tour never happened. The regime relented, and *Carmen-Suite* became one of the Bolshoi's most successful ballets both at home and abroad.

Shchedrin has lived a long life and composed an immense amount of music in all genres. He successfully negotiated the fall of the Soviet Union (who had widely honored him, in addition to criticizing some of his work) and has continued to garner praise and success since that time. His wife, Maya Plivetskaya, who inspired the *Carmen-Suite*, died in 2015.

—program note by Hugh Macdonald © 2021

In addition to the concert performance, each episode of our In Focus broadcasts this season includes behind-the-scenes features about the music and musicmaking. Learn more by going to www.Adella.live or by downloading the Adella app. Each In Focus broadcast presentation is generally available for viewing for three months from its premiere.



CONDUCTOR: FRANZ WELSER-MÖST

Music Director, Kelvin Smith Family Endowed Chair, The Cleveland Orchestra

Franz Welser-Möst is among today's most distinguished conductors. The 2020-21 season marks his nineteenth year as music director of The Cleveland Orchestra, with the future of their acclaimed partnership extended to 2027, making him the longest-serving musical leader in the ensemble's history. The *New York Times* has declared Cleveland under Welser-Möst's direction to be "America's most brilliant orchestra," praising its virtuosity, elegance of sound, variety of color, and chamber-like musical cohesion.

With Welser-Möst, The Cleveland Orchestra has been praised for its inventive programming, its ongoing support for new musical works, and for its innovative work in presenting semi-staged and staged operas. An imaginative approach to juxtaposing newer and older works has opened new dialogue and fresh insights for musicians and audiences alike. The Orchestra has also been hugely successful in building up a new and, notably, a young audience. To date, the Orchestra and Welser-Möst have been showcased around the world in nineteen international tours together. In 2020, they launched the ensemble's own recording label and a brand-new digital streaming platform to continue and extend sharing their artistry globally; the 2020-21 season is also inaugurating an original digital concert series titled *In Focus*, for viewing worldwide.

As a guest conductor, Mr. Welser-Möst enjoys a particularly close and productive relationship with the Vienna Philharmonic. He has twice appeared on the podium for their celebrated New Year's Concert, and regularly conducts the orchestra in subscription concerts in Vienna, as well as on tours in Japan, China, Australia, and the United States. Highlights of recent and upcoming guest conducting appearances include performances of Strauss's *Die Aegyptische Helena* at Teatro alla Scala and *Elektra* at the Vienna State Opera, and concerts with the New York Philharmonic, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Amsterdam's Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic. He is a regular guest at the Salzburg Festival, where his work leading a series of opera performances has been widely acclaimed. These have included *Rusalka*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Fidelio*, *Die Liebe der Danae*, Aribert Reimann's *Lear*, and Strauss's *Salome* and *Elektra*. The success of both *Salome* and *Rosenkavalier* led the Festival to schedule encore performances in subsequent years.

From 2010 to 2014, Franz Welser-Möst served as general music director of the Vienna State Opera. His partnership with the company included a wide-ranging repertoire, including a series of critically-praised new productions. Mr. Welser-Möst had earlier led the Zurich Opera across a decade-long tenure, conducting more than forty new productions.

During the 2020 Salzburg Festival, Mr. Welser-Möst was awarded the festival ruby pin and the Salzburg Badge of Honor. In 2019, he was awarded the Gold Medal in the Arts by the Kennedy Center International Committee on the Arts in recognition of his long-lasting impact on the international arts community. Other honors include the Vienna Philharmonic's "Ring of Honor" for his longstanding personal and artistic relationship with the ensemble, recognition from the Western Law Center for Disability Rights, honorary membership in the Vienna Singverein, and the Kilenyi Medal from the Bruckner Society of America.

THE CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA

ONE OF THE FEW major American orchestra's founded by a woman, The Cleveland Orchestra's inaugural concert took place in December 1918, at a time of renewed optimism and progressive community ideas. By the middle of the century, with its own concert hall, the decades of growth and sustained effort had turned the ensemble into one of the most-admired around the world. Under the leadership of Franz Welser-Möst since 2002, The Cleveland Orchestra has extended its artistry and musical abilities and remains one of the most sought-after performing ensembles in the world — year after year setting standards of extraordinary artistic excellence, creative programming, and community engagement. In recent years, the *New York Times* has called it “the best in America” for its virtuosity, elegance of sound, variety of color, and chamber-like musical cohesion, “virtually flawless,” and “one of the finest ensembles in the country (if not the world).”

The partnership with Franz Welser-Möst, begun in 2002 and entering its 19th year with the 2020-21 season, has earned The Cleveland Orchestra unprecedented residencies in the U.S. and around the world, including one at the Musikverein in Vienna, the first of its kind by an American orchestra. It also performs regularly at important European summer festivals. The Orchestra's 100th season in 2017-18 featured two international tours, concluding with the presentation on three continents of Welser-Möst's *Prometheus Project* featuring Beethoven Symphonies and overtures; these Beethoven concerts were presented in May and June 2018, at home in Cleveland, in Vienna's Musikverein, and in Tokyo's Suntory Hall.

The Cleveland Orchestra has a long and distinguished recording and broadcast history. A series of DVDs (available through Clasart Classics) and CD recordings under the direction of Mr. Welser-Möst continues to add to an extensive and widely praised catalog of audio recordings made during the tenures of the ensemble's earlier music directors. In addition, Cleveland Orchestra concerts are heard in syndication each season on radio stations throughout North America and Europe.

From 2020 forward, a number of new digital media initiatives are being launched to share and extend the ensemble's artistry globally. These include debut releases on the Orchestra's own recording label, an ongoing series of podcasts titled “On A Personal Note,” a new digital streaming platform named Adella (after the Orchestra's founder Adella Prentiss Hughes), and a series of premium concert broadcasts created from the 2020-21 season titled *In Focus*.

For more information, visit: www.clevelandorchestra.com.

The Cleveland Orchestra is grateful to these organizations for their ongoing generous support of The Cleveland Orchestra:

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The Cleveland Orchestra is proud of its long-term partnership with Kent State University, made possible in part through generous funding from the State of Ohio.

The Cleveland Orchestra is proud to have its home, Severance Hall, located on the campus of Case Western Reserve University, with whom it has a long history of collaboration and partnership.