

A SYMPHONIC DIALOGUE

begins

by Linda Wright



Just imagine a discussion between Bernstein and Beethoven. Wouldn't that be a collegial conversation made in heaven? Perhaps divine intervention defying time and geography is not a realistic expectation in arranging colloquies among great composers, but do not yield to resigned pessimism, dear reader. Michelle Merrill, the new Coastal Symphony of Geor-

gia's Music Director and Conductor, will work her own magical transport across time and space as she opens the 2018-19 season.

On October 1, the 20th Century meets the 19th in an intriguing program of contemporary and classical compositions. Leonard Bernstein starts the dialogue with his 1956 Overture to *Candide* and keeps the lyrical messages flowing

with *Symphonic Dances from West Side Story*. After intermission, Ludwig von Beethoven replies, as one might expect this Classical master would do, with the heart-stopping and perennial favorite, *Symphony No. 5 in C Minor*, making it abundantly clear that Bernstein's Sharks and Jets better get their acts together. Fortunately, these two symphonic titans appear to get along like lifelong friends: no (*continues*)

ruffled feathers or bruised egos that need diplomatic intervention or group therapy.

Harmonious discourse continues on December 17 when Conductor Merrill introduces two early 20th Century composers to a century ago musical ancestor, as all three bear celebratory gifts honoring a legacy of both music and art. Sergei Prokofiev (of *Peter and the Wolf* fame) goes first in this unexpected triumvirate with *Symphony No. 1 in D Major*. The metaphorical baton is then tossed to Ottorino Respighi, who introduces his colleagues (and us) to Botticelli masterpieces of art rendered as musical compositions in *Trittico Botticelliano*. Not to be outdone, Franz Schubert then offers a concluding strand of the conversation with *Symphony No. 5 in B flat major*, (no trumpets or drums) but laced with “magical notes” derived from the strong influence of his idol, Mozart. All three composers seem happy with their newfound connections and wonder if dear Wolfgang should be included next time.

Well, apparently networking is a powerful tool even for fictitious friendships, a fact Merrill understands very well. So, who do you suppose opens the February 11 concert? Oh yes! Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart leads the way with a universally beloved friend, Overture to *The Magic Flute*, followed by soloist appearances by Aurica Duca and Clinton Dewing, a husband and wife duo, who helps keep the musical dialogue going in Mozart’s *Concertone for Two Violins in C major*. So see, friends of friends are also welcome in symphonic conversation. Peter Illich Tchaikovsky joins the gathering to close the program with *Symphony No. 4 in F minor*. He explained his musical finale in these words, “If you have no pleasure in yourself, look about you. Go to the people. See how they can enjoy life and give themselves up entirely to festivity.”

With that sage advice in mind, Michelle Merrill “goes to the people” with an April 8 pro-

gram that features American composers exclusively. Whimsical, sophisticated, uplifting, and jazzy: this program presents the essence of musical connectivity and affirms who we are as a country and as citizens who embrace both differences and commonality in the quilt of American experience. Conor Brown’s *How to Relax with Origami* (yes, really, that’s the title) will surprise and amuse while Samuel Barber’s *Violin Concerto* provides a showcase



for solo violin, performed by Sarah Crocker Vonsattel of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, as well as for a hauntingly beautiful melody, continued with solo oboe, in an orchestral setting. After intermission, Aaron Copland joins the discourse with his stirring *Fanfare for the Common Man*, followed by the familiar *Appalachian Spring Suite*. And guess who closes this concert season’s conversation loop? Leonard Bernstein, of course, who brings us back from whence we came. His *Three Dance Episodes from On the Town: Times Square 1944* sends us home with warm hearts and rhythm in our shoes.

So thank you, Michelle Merrill. We welcome you as the Music Director and Conductor of the Coastal Symphony of Georgia. We can hardly wait to join the conversation!

The mission of the Coastal Symphony of Georgia is to engage, enrich, and inspire the community through artistically vibrant musical performances. For more information, visit coastalsymphonyofgeorgia.org.