

Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth

presents

Handel Society of Dartmouth College

Filippo Ciabatti, conductor

Erma Mellinger, assistant conductor and vocal coach

with soloists

Chelsea Helm, soprano

Charles Blandy, tenor

Sumner Thompson, baritone

Wednesday, November 8, 8 pm

Rollins Chapel • Dartmouth College • 2023

Generously supported by the Gordon Russell 1955 Fund and the Friends of the Handel Society.

We thank Mrs. Selma Bornstein for her generous donation of the Petrof Concert Grand Piano, given in loving memory of her husband Dr. Murray Bornstein and used for tonight's concert.

Program

Approximate duration: 90 minutes

Carmina Burana

Carl Orff (1895–1982)

Fortune, Empress of the World

I. Spring—In the Meadow

II. In the Tavern

III. The Court of Love—Blancheflour and Helen

Fortune, Empress of the World

Program Notes

Carl Orff

***Carmina Burana* (Songs of Beuern)**

Carl Orff was born in Munich on July 10, 1895, and died on March 29, 1982, in the same city. He composed his secular cantata Carmina Burana in 1936, setting texts in Latin, Middle High German and Old French from the medieval poetry manuscript of the same name. There's a whopper of a subtitle, appended by Orff: "Cantiones profanae cantoribus et choris cantandae comitantibus instrumentis atque imaginibus magicis" ("Secular songs for singers and choruses to be sung together with instruments and magical images"). The original fully-staged work premiered on June 8, 1937, at the Oper Frankfurt. Performed tonight is Wilhelm Killmayer's 1956 concert arrangement, which Orff authorized specifically for choral societies.

The score calls for solo soprano, tenor and baritone, mixed chorus, children's chorus (performed tonight by the Handel Society sopranos) two pianos and a battery of percussion: timpani (two sets), ship's bell, xylophone, three glockenspiels, two snare drums, tubular bells, triangle, tam-tam, suspended cymbal, crash cymbals, sleigh bells, castanets, bass drum, antique cymbals, tambourine and ratchet.

In the whole choral repertoire, few passages are as forceful, as compelling, as instantly recognizable as "O Fortuna," the music which opens and closes Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*. The cantata flourishes today, in no small part thanks to that bookending earworm achieving iconic status in pop culture. Reproduction after reproduction, mediated and live, in opera houses, concert halls, sports arenas, ads, soundtracks, video games. Homage, parody, sample, bricolage, send-up, the whole postmodern nine yards. It shines in the superstar league with Bach's D minor Toccata and Fugue, Handel's Messiah, and Beethoven's Fifth and Ninth.

Still, the context of *Carmina Burana*'s composition has raised eyebrows. Of all the German music written in the hateful years 1933–1945, only Orff's cantatas survive in today's repertoire. Did the Nazi soil poison the fruit? In recent decades, several of art music's most prominent pundits have locked horns over the issue. I won't re-try Orff here, but some background is in order.

Orff was born into a prominent Munich family of military officers, scholars and musicians. Returning from the Great War, he made a name for himself among the Weimar Republic's modernist, leftist musical milieu, where he befriended Kurt Weill and collaborated briefly with Bertolt Brecht. An infectious double enthusiasm for personal mind-body wholeness and communistic participation buzzed in the Weimar air, and subcultures of vegetarianism, nudism, hiking, exercise, sing-alongs and youth movements burgeoned. Music, in these heady years, was ideally useful—as a functional instrument of personal and social cultivation. Orff's major contribution to the scene was *Schulwerk* ("School Work"), a weighty, primitivist cycle of musical exercises for children to be played in classrooms on mallet instruments Orff himself designed. Leo Kestenberg, Germany's chief music-ed reformer and a prominent Jewish socialist, noticed, and by the early 1930s, Orff was favored to take charge of the national music education system.

Just as Orff seemed to find his Weimar niche, Hitler's seizure of power in 1933 shattered the whole modernist music scene and all its socialistic ambitions, simultaneously uncovering the proto-fascist tendencies that festered under the surface. By the end of March, Kestenberg, Brecht, and Weill all had fled Germany. Meanwhile, Orff stayed in his native Munich and kept his head down. To his credit, he would never join the Nazi party and counted no Nazi ideologues among his circle. But he made no effort to oppose the fascist state, nor did he seem reluctant to profit from

Program Notes *continued*

Hitler's regime. A tweak here, and his *Schulwerk* would be a perfect fit for the Hitler Youth music program (he figured). His neopagan musical theater ethos might need only an extra nationalist emphasis on German folk music, already a favorite subject of Orff's, to charm audiences and officials.

Carmina Burana, written in 1936, would be the litmus test. Here was Orff's *elementare Musik* ideal realized at the professional music-dance-drama level. He remarked to his publisher: "Everything I have written to date, and which you have, unfortunately, printed, can be destroyed. With *Carmina Burana*, my collected works begin." The primitivist cantata, with its earthy Latin texts, looping modal tunes and churning Stravinsky-inspired percussion grooves, was a far cry from Hitler's favorite Wagner operas and their racist blood-and-soil pageantry. Accordingly, its first review in the central Nazi rag was an unsparing invective. But another critic (a disciple of Joseph Goebbels) gushed over *Carmina*'s 1937 Oper Frankfurt premiere with diction befitting a fascist sloganeer, hearing in Orff's settings the "radiant, strength-filled life-joy of the folk." Middle-class Nazi theatergoers agreed; the cantata had massive popular appeal, and the party line soon shifted to conform with the masses. Orff the opportunist gained the day.

The work is a masterclass in the imitation of participatory, communal singing. Its faux-medieval modal tunes are eminently singable; ballad-style, the melody repeats to new words in each stanza till the urge to join in is irresistible. The rhythms chug along in foot-tapping foursquare, demanding all within earshot to join the chain dance. Yes, there are solo numbers; the sopranos in particular are deeply stirring. And there are passages of exquisite, ethereal harmony among the chorus as well as the accompaniment. But the predominant idiom here is unison choral singing: chilly ritual meditations, leering love lyrics, macho drink-em-ups, all sung in a village crowd where everyone knows the words and tune. The anonymity and unanimity of

Herder's Volk, distilled. The orchestration, particularly in the piano-percussion arrangement, completes the primeval dream. "Perfectly homogeneous, perfectly impersonal, and perfectly mechanical," said Stravinsky of *Les noces* (his ferocious pseudo-ethnographic ballet-cantata on a Slavic peasant theme), and the description works equally well here.

Orff grouped the *Carmina Burana* poems into three chapters, each an earthy Breugel-esque genre scene. First comes "Spring" (shortly ambling out to frolic "In the Meadow"), with its pastoral odes to the season, lively village-green dances, and increasingly uninhibited songs of erotic longing. Then, it's to the tavern, a hazy, masculinist chamber of fuddlement and fantasy. The roast swan itself rises from the table to sing a self-pitying lament at his condition, the Abbot of Cockaigne drunkenly declaims his frat-boy M.O., and soon the whole world, beggars and popes and all, is toasting and drinking along with the company. Courtship, seduction, lovesickness, desire fulfilled: the "Court of Love" rings with the bluest poetry yet. But all the while, Fortune on her ever-turning wheel gazes impassively overhead. The work begins and ends with a timorous plaint at her fickle indifference to human concern: Fate's wheel will tip, and all these pleasures are but fleeting.

Program notes © 2023 Grant Cook '19

About the Artists

Praised for his “sensitive and nuanced” musicianship and for delivering performances “with admirable sweep and tension,” **Filippo Ciabatti** is a dynamic and versatile conductor who enjoys a multifaceted career. A native of Florence, Italy, Mr. Ciabatti has appeared as a guest conductor with numerous orchestras in Europe and the Americas. He regularly serves as cover conductor for the Portland Symphony Orchestra (Maine) and will make his guest conducting debut for them in 2024. This year, he will also make his guest conducting debut with the Macon-Mercer Symphony Orchestra and the San Angelo Symphony (Texas).

Mr. Ciabatti has collaborated with artists including Philadelphia Orchestra concertmaster David Kim, baritone Nathan Gunn, cellist Gabriel Cabezas, pianist Sally Pinkas, flutist Luciano Tristaino and mandolinist Carlo Aonzo. An advocate for contemporary music and collaborations between musical genres, he premiered a secular oratorio composed by renowned jazz composer Taylor Ho Bynum, and commissioned a cello concerto by composer Noah Luna that was aired on NPR's *From the Top*.

Starting in October 2023, he will serve as Assistant Conductor of Boston Baroque. He is the founding Artistic Director of Upper Valley Baroque.

Also at ease on the opera stage, Mr. Ciabatti has recently been named Music Director of the Opera Company of Middlebury and has also conducted many full operatic productions while serving as guest conductor at Opera North (New Hampshire) and Lyric Theatre at Illinois.

Mr. Ciabatti is the Director of Orchestral and Choral Programs at the Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth College. Since the beginning of his tenure, he has been invested in working on innovative and cross-disciplinary projects that provide exceptional opportunities for both students and audiences.

As a collaborative pianist and vocal coach, Mr. Ciabatti has been on the faculty of Camerata de' Bardi in New York City, and Scuola Italia per Giovani Cantanti Lirici in Sant'Angelo in Vado (Italy). He is currently on faculty at the summer opera program Opera Viva! in Verona (Italy).

Mr. Ciabatti holds advanced degrees in piano, choral conducting and orchestral conducting from Italy and the United States. He is the winner of the 2021 American Prize in Conducting (college/university division). In 2018, he served as a Conducting Fellow at the Aurora Music Festival (Sweden), under the direction of Jukka-Pekka Saraste.

Mezzo-soprano **Erma Gattie Mellinger** has been a principal artist with many opera companies across the United States including the Cleveland Opera, the Florida Grand Opera (Miami), the Dallas Opera, the Pittsburgh Opera Theater, the Fresno International Grand Opera, Opera Maine and the Chautauqua Opera. Her roles, in over 30 operas, include Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*, Dorabella in *Così Fan Tutte*, Cherubino in *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, Ottavia in *L'incoronazione Di Poppea*, and Preziosilla in *La Forza Del Destino*.

Hailed for her “rich, vibrant, creamy voice,” Ms. Mellinger is also at home on the concert stage appearing as soloist with the Vermont Symphony Orchestra, the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, the Monterey Symphony and the Florida Symphony Orchestra. Ms. Mellinger appeared as soloist with the Handel Society of Dartmouth College in tours of England, France, Germany and Italy, performing in venues including Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris and St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Ms. Mellinger has been a member of the Dartmouth College faculty since 1996. In addition to her duties as Voice Instructor, she serves as the Assistant Director and Vocal Coach of the Handel Society and the Glee Club. Ms. Mellinger presents solo recitals

About the Artists *continued*

and chamber music concerts on campus through the ChamberWorks series. Ms. Mellinger earned her Bachelor of Music Degree with Highest Distinction (First in Class) from Northwestern University. She received the Performer's Certificate and the Opera Certificate as well as a Teaching Excellence Award while at the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester where she earned her Master of Music Degree and began her Doctor of Music Arts Degree.

Charles Blandy has been praised as “a versatile tenor with agility, endless breath, and vigorous high notes” (*Goldberg*); “breathtaking” (*Boston Globe*); and “fearless” (*New York Times*). He makes his Boston Symphony Orchestra and Carnegie Hall debut this year in Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. He has been soloist Bach's B Minor Mass with Orchestra Iowa and the American Classical Orchestra (NYC). He has sung Handel's *Messiah* with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Portland Baroque Orchestra and American Bach Soloists. With Emmanuel Music, he has appeared in John Harbison's *The Great Gatsby*, Stravinsky's *Rake's Progress* and Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*, and he regularly performs in their weekly cantata series. He has also appeared with the Tanglewood Festival of Contemporary Music, Boston Early Music Festival, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Bach Choir of Bethlehem and Handel and Haydn Society. He studied at Tanglewood, Indiana University and Oberlin College. He is originally from Troy, New York. charlesblandy.com

With spirit and sensitivity, soprano **Chelsea Helm** brings a versatile voice to the concert stage. An active choral artist, Ms. Helm appears regularly with Seraphic Fire, the Santa Fe Desert Chorale, True Concord Voices & Orchestra, The Thirteen and Conspirare. She has also performed with the Concordia Chamber Players, Cincinnati Vocal Arts Ensemble, Kinnara, the Carmel Bach Festival, the American Soloists Ensemble, Voices of Ascension, Spire Chamber Ensemble and Upper Valley Baroque.

As a concert soloist, recent appearances include Vaughan Williams' *A Sea Symphony*, the Haydn *Creation*, the Bach B Minor Mass, the Brahms *Requiem* and Orff's *Carmina Burana*. This season she will be heard as the soprano soloist for performances of Handel's *Messiah* with the Tucson and Johnstown Symphony Orchestras, and the Mozart C Minor Mass with True Concord. Also an avid recitalist, she has presented chamber recitals in Texas, New Mexico, Virginia and Utah. chelseahelmsoprano.com

Sumner Thompson is widely regarded as one of the finest interpreters of concert repertoire of his generation, and performs repertoire ranging from medieval to modern, with emphasis on the music of J.S. Bach, Benjamin Britten and Claudio Monteverdi. He has appeared on four continents with ensembles including the Orchestra of St. Luke's, Tafelmusik, Handel and Haydn Society, Blue Heron, Gli Angeli Genève, L'Harmonie des Saisons, Boston Early Music Festival, Theatre of Voices, the Hague Philharmonic and the orchestras of Charlotte, Victoria, Memphis and Indianapolis. His operatic highlights include Dr. Caius in Vaughan Williams' *Sir John in Love* with Odyssey Opera, The Count in *Le Nozze di Figaro* with the Commonwealth Opera and the title role in Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* with Contemporary Opera Denmark. He appears as a bassist and vocalist on multiple albums including *In Motian* by avant-garde jazz bassist Andrew Dow. He is also an avid instrument builder, specializing in electric bass guitars.

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Soprano

Jennifer Bates GC
Susan Cancio-Bello +
Katina Christensen '25
Melissa Dillier
Jennifer Eastman
JuanLi Gao
Julianne J. Harden
Melissa Herman
Erin Hogan GC
Qiana Johnson
Katie Kalata Rusch
Elizabeth U. Keeley
Astrid Olsen '27
Janet Poisson GC
Gerri Smith
Janet Stone GC

Alto

Emma Ambrogi
Carol Barr
Lynda Butler
Kate Chamberlin
Kathy Christie
Christina English GC
Anne Felde +
Linda C. Fowler
Mary Gerbi GC
Mardy High
Alicia Hodges
Erica J. Ko
Patty Ko
Rebecca Maggi
Irene Schaperdoth
Jo Shute

Tenor

Enzo La Hoz Calassara '27
Brian Clancy +
Scot Drysdale
Jon R. Felde
Ed Felstead
Edward Ferran GC
Marcus Huber GC
Greg Johnson
Joel Lazar
Ryan Matos GC
Robert Maurer
Fausto Miro GC
Rick Read
Cole Seagroves '25
Corey Shotwell GC
Hunter Wells

Bass

James Anderson
Gregory Bazylewicz
Alan J. Bergeron
Sammy Bonasso '24 *
Jacob Cooper GC
Daniel Fridley GC
Stephan Griffin GC
Tyler P. Harwell
David Hoffer
Joseph Kuester '27
Wesley Liao '24
Colby Lish '25
Will Prapestis GC
Christopher Smith
Thomas Valle-Hoag GC
Allan Wieman +

Piano

Evan Allen
Samantha Angstman

Percussion

Sam Budish
Joseph DeMarco
Mike Laven
Greg Simonds
Jared Soldiviero

Timpani

Nicola Cannizzaro

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