



Romantic Persia from Montclair Orchestra



Gabriella Reyes, a young soloist in the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program, will sing "Songs of Eternity" with Montclair Orchestra. COURTESY GILLIAN RIESEN

1001 Nights

Overture to "Semiramide" by G. Rossini

"Scheherazade" by Rimsky-Korsakov

"Songs of Eternity" by Behzad Ranjbaran;

Gabriella Reyes, soprano

Sunday, Sept. 22, 7 p.m.

*St. Luke's Episcopal Church
73 South Fullerton Ave.*

montclairorchestra.org

By GWEN OREL

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Gabriella Reyes didn't take her first voice lesson until she was 20 years old.

A soprano, she will solo with Montclair Orchestra on Sunday, Sept. 22, in composer Behzad Ranjbaran's "Songs of Eternity."

Now 27, Reyes is in her last year of the three-year Lindemann Young Artist Development program at the Metropolitan Opera. Lindemann artists are paid a salary, and continue to be coached. She's performed professionally, including as Musetta in Puccini's "La Bohème" at the Santa Fe Opera this past summer.

From zero to soloist in seven years is impressive.

But she has always sung. "My grandmother used to sing to me when I was 5 years old, all the Met radio broadcasts," Reyes said. "She'd hit all those notes, and never trained once. She came from Nicaragua, and was never able to study. It always stayed in my ear. I became very musical. I studied the saxophone and tuba."

She played in the orchestra at the Bible college she attended for two years before transferring to Boston Conservatory of Music.

"I was a tuba player, and I'd get up in the middle of the concert when it was time to sing my solo," she said with a laugh.

Everyone at Evangel College supported her decision to transfer, and she got into the Conservatory with a full scholarship. "That was the only way I'd be able to go," she said.

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Her family in Meriden, Conn., did not have much money. Getting that first saxophone was a result of begging

her mother for an entire summer after she saw one at an instrument “petting zoo” at her public school in fifth grade. She basically taught herself, and joined the school band, jazz band and pit orchestra.

When she transferred to music school her grandmother was very happy for her, Reyes said. Her father, a pastor, was a little startled. But when Reyes made it to the finals of the annual Metropolitan Opera Grand Finals, he understood, Reyes said.

The work she’ll perform with Montclair Orchestra, by an Iranian composer who teaches at Juilliard, is new to her. “It’s such a gorgeous piece. It talks about the duality of life and death, and of being present and enjoying the moment. It’s the way I try to live,” she said.

HEART AND SOUL

Behzad Ranjbaran’s “Songs of Eternity” uses 12th-century Farsi poems from the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, which will be read by Montclair resident Mahtab Foroughi during the concert. They’re printed in Farsi and in English in the concert program.

It’s part of a concert titled “1001 Nights,” to be performed by a 70-piece ensemble.



DAVID CHAN

Rimsky-Korsakov’s “Scheherazade” is the linchpin of the concert, Conductor David Chan said. “It’s a great display of the orchestra, and also a great story in telling ‘1001 Nights’ through music.”

It’s also a Russian piece that is also programmed with other Russian music. But Chan thought, the story has a Persian background, so why not explore a Persian background?

Chan, who teaches violin at Juilliard, knew Ranjbaran, who also teaches there, through meeting him in the halls. He wondered if he had something and even considered commissioning him to write something.

"Songs of Eternity" was written for soprano Renée Fleming in 2002. "I thought it would be a wonderful match for 'Scheherazade,'" Chan said.

To complete the program, he added Rossini's "Overture to Semiramide," an opera based on Voltaire's "Semiramis," itself based on the legend of Queen Semiramis in Assyria, or Babylon. Babylon is not Persia, but shows the expanse of that civilization, Chan said.

The programming is not making a political statement, although Iran is in the news every day right now. But, Chan said, he is happy to "celebrate the richness of the culture and sources it draws from.

"It's always a beautiful thing to highlight that people are people, and have the same values of beauty and love and kindness and compassion; they exist everywhere."

Ranjbaran's piece has a romantic style, a modern rhythmic profile with a romantic sound and orchestra, Chan said. "Audiences will find it very approachable and easy to understand." The songs are set in English.

Central to Montclair Orchestra's mission is to connect professionals and emerging young artists. Reyes is "on the cusp of stardom," Chan said. "She is a future star about to break out. She's still at a point where for us to present her in Montclair gives the audience a chance to discover her a moment before the rest of the world discovers her."

Her voice is big and warm, but it's her emotional style that he especially loves, he said. "When she sings it goes straight to your heart. She has so much sincerity and passion. She's very young, so she will only mature and get better and better."



The Ruba'iyat of Omar Khayyam

*Although I have a handsome face and colour,
I look like the falcon, form like the cypress,
It is not clear why the Eternal Painter
Thus tricked me out for the dust-strew-bench of earth.*

*He began the creation with confusion,
By giving me life he added only confusion;
We depart reluctantly still not knowing
The aim of birth, existence, disappearance.*

*Neither you nor I know the mysteries of eternity,
Neither you nor I read this enigma;
You and I only talk this side of the veil;
When the veil falls, neither you nor I will be here.*

.....

*Oh heart since time's passing grieves you
And your pure spirit so unseasonably leaves the body
Sit on the green, spend a few days in happiness
Before the green grass springs from your dust.*

*Look, the morning breeze has torn the rose's dress,
The nightingale is in ecstasy at the rose's beauty;
Sit in the rose's shade, for many such
Have come from earth and to it returned.*

*Get up my sweetest, it is dawn,
Gently, gently sip the wine and twang the harp,
For not a soul will remain of those here,
And of those gone, none will return.*

.....

ترانه‌های حکیم عمر خیام نیشابوری

هر چند که رنگ و عاقی زیباست مرا
چون عقاب و چون سرو سبزه‌ایست مرا
دلجو ندانم که در نقاشی خداست
چنان که هر چه آفریند مرا

از اندوه زود گریزد با سرو
از روان من بخل و جانم نظاره
در هیچ کس تو گویشم نگذارد
کار آمدن و رفتن از هر چه بود

سوز دل را نه تو دانی و نه من
وین حرف نممانه تو حوائی و نه من
خست از پس برده گذشتگی من و تو
چون برده هر آنکه نه تو مانی و نه من

ای دل جو زنده من کند غمشاکت
داگه برود و تن روان پاکت
بر سزه نشی و عیوش بزنی روزگی چند
زان پیش که سزه برود از خاکت

بگر ز صبا دامن گل چاک شده
بلبل ز جمال گل طربناک شده
در سایه گل نشین که بسیار این گل
در خاک فرو رود و ما خاک شده

وقت سحر است عزیز ای ماهه ناز
زرمک باده خور و چنگ نواز
کافه که بخاید ناپاید بسی
و آنجا که شدند کس نمی آید باز

بالم که اسیر بودی و کای حسرت
بستم و بدمم و کسبم و کسبم
ایه رنگ هوایم و جام منبر
ایه دوست بد تا خم فردا خورم
این بکنم عصر را عشقت خورم
فردا که زین خم هر جا میگردم
با خفت خور سبکات من سوزم

چون بلبل حسرت را که در بستان یافت
روی گل و باغ باده را درستان یافت
آمد به زبان سائل هر گوشم گفت
درباب که عصر رفته را بتوان یافت

HAYYAM translated by Peter Avery, John Heath,
et al. (1979)

WESTERN UNIVERSITY

Poems by Omar Khayyam that accompany Behzad Ranjbaran's song cycle "Songs of Eternity" are printed in Farsi and in English in the program. COURTESY ANDREW WEKER

BUILDING COMMUNITY

Performing from the heart is Reyes' goal. While technique is important, for her, the most important thing is to stay genuine and sincere, she said.

"Music really builds community. Everywhere I go, every company I work for, I always find myself building little homes. It's such a collaborative experience," she continued. "I get to be a part of it. It's not about the sounds I make. It's about being able to tell a story, but having a whole crew to tell the story."

She always prepares by doing background work, understanding the translation, so she can really connect onstage.

Reyes never went to a single concert growing up. Her grandmother inspired her but other children may not have someone in their house like that, she said.

"I really want to see more of a Latino audience coming out. I'm hoping that through the work that I do, and outreach, I can get more people," she continued. "You never know who's out there in the audience, and what child you can leave an impression on."