

“Mignon” Overture by Ambroise Thomas (1811 - 1896). Ambroise Thomas occupied the loftiest rungs of French music during the middle decades of the 19th century. He won first prize in piano and harmony as a student at the Paris Conservatoire. During his three-year Italian residency, he submitted compositions that so excited the taste of the directors of the competitions that they arranged for their immediate publication. Thomas was later elected to the French Academy in 1851, appointed professor of composition at the Paris Conservatoire five years later, and served as the school’s director from 1871 until his death in 1896. His *Mignon* of 1866 was among the favorite operas of the late 19th century, both in France and abroad. It tells of the plight of Mignon, a young woman stolen by Gypsies from her Italian home when she was a child. During the Gypsies’ wanderings in Germany, Mignon meets Lothario, a nobleman searching across the Continent for his abducted daughter, and Wilhelm Meister, a student who buys her freedom from the Gypsies. Mignon overcomes her jealousy of Wilhelm’s love for the actress Philine, and wins him for herself in the opera’s closing scene, which also shows her reconciliation with Lothario, who turns out to be her father.

Des pas sur la neige (Footsteps in the Snow) by Claude Debussy (1862 - 1918), is the sixth of his first set of preludes for piano. Debussy indicated that this prelude “..should sound like a melancholy, snow-bound landscape.” Its repeated rhythmical pattern suggests the image of footsteps fighting with deep snow while its fragmented melody and stark harmonies give an impression of a study in black and white. This piano piece was orchestrated for the Clear Lake Symphony by its Conductor and Musical Director, Dr. Charles A. Johnson.

_____ excerpts from program notes by Robert Andres

Le Chasseur Maudit (The Accursed Huntsman) by Cesar Franck (1822 - 1890). The supernatural tale is of the Count of the Rhine, who defies the Sabbath to go hunting. On a Sunday morning, as church bells summon the faithful to worship and sacred chants fill the air, the errant nobleman pursues the hunt with preternatural savagery while committing the same trespasses for which Satan was banished from Heaven—pride, sacrilege, and defiance. Pious elders plead with him to call off his expedition, but he responds contemptuously and rides roughshod through the village farms, trampling crops and applying the whip to the peasants in his way. Eventually he finds himself lost in the woods, where a stern voice from unseen heights pronounces his sentence: “Accursed hunter, be thou eternally pursued by Hell !” The Count tries to flee, but he is seized by imps and demons who condemn him to ride the skies throughout eternity. The symphonic poem was given its premiere in a concert in Paris on March 31, 1883.

_____ excerpts from program notes by Richard Freed

Pastorale d’Ete (Summer Pastoral) by Arthur Honegger (1892 - 1955) is a short symphonic poem for chamber orchestra that was inspired by Honegger’s vacation in the Swiss alps above Bern in 1920. The work is atmospheric, placid and restrained, and has been described as “a latter-day *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* by Claude Debussy.” It seems to be a musical impression of a peaceful early morning in the Swiss alps. It was first performed on February 17, 1921 in Paris. The work won a Prix Verley, a prize decided by the audience members.

_____ excerpts from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Le Boeuf sur le Toit (The Cow on the Roof) by Darius Milhaud (1892 - 1974). Composed in 1919 and intended but never used for a Charlie Chaplin film, the work was premiered on February 21, 1920 in Paris. In 1953, Milhaud published a witty autobiography in which he wrote the following: “Still haunted by my memories of Brazil [in 1919, after returning to Paris] I assembled a few popular melodies, tangos, maxixes, sambas and even a Portuguese fado, and transcribed them [into a fantasia I called] *le Boeuf sur le Toit*, the title of a Brazilian popular song.” The piece evokes the atmosphere and wild confusion of Rio de Janeiro at Carnival time, with the listener surrounded by several groups all making music at the same time.