

## THRILL OF A LIFETIME: A SPECIAL CONCERT FOR THE FUTURE

April 15 & 16\*, 2023 • 2:00 PM / 7:30 PM

\*Sunday Classics presented by The Robbins Foundation

*Please hold your applause until the end of each piece.*

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### SARASATE

*Fantasy on Bizet's Carmen, Op.25*

(13')\*

**Edmonton Symphony Orchestra**  
**William Eddins**, conductor  
**Jacques Forestier**, violin

### MASSEY

*Symphonic Variations "Avenue House" for Orchestra and Organ*

(22')\*

*Prologue: The Mists of Time*  
*Variation 1: Play*  
*Variation 2: Service*  
*Variation 3: Trees*  
*Variation 4: Fire*  
*Variation 5: Rebirth and Epilogue*

**Edmonton Symphony Orchestra**  
**Michael Massey**, conductor

**INTERMISSION** (20 minutes)

### RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

*Scheherazade, Op.35*

(45')\*

*The Sea and Sinbad's Ship (Largo e maestoso)*  
*The Kalendar Prince (Lento)*  
*The Young Prince and the Young Princess (Andantino quasi allegretto)*  
*Festival at Baghdad – The Sea (Allegro molto)*

**Edmonton Symphony Orchestra**  
**Edmonton Youth Orchestra**  
**William Eddins**, conductor

*Program subject to change.*

\*indicates approximate performance duration

## **Fantasy on Bizet's *Carmen*, Op.25**

**Pablo de Sarasate**

(b. Pamplona, 1844 / d. Biarritz, France, 1908)

Violin and piano version published in 1882

Last ESO performance: Symphony Under the Sky 2017

Pablo de Sarasate (born Pablo Martín Melitón Sarasate y Navascuéz) was the son of a military bandmaster, and his own talent was recognized early on. Studies as a child in Madrid led to the Paris Conservatoire. It was Paris, in fact, where he made his public debut in 1860 (at 16 years old). He soon acquired a reputation for an inexhaustible facility on the violin, and in short order, the greatest composers of the age wanted to write works for him. But he also wrote a steady supply of his own music, much of which – not surprisingly – reflected his Spanish heritage and pride.

During the time Sarasate's career flourished, opera was the dominant art form in Europe. Many virtuosos wrote display works for themselves based on the popular operas of the day. Perhaps no work by Sarasate is better known than his dazzling Fantasy on Themes from Bizet's *Carmen*, which exists in versions for violin and piano, as well as with orchestral accompaniment. The opera itself is brimming with melodies which have become famous, and Sarasate's tour de force exploits many of them, but always maintaining the integrity of the music itself, while providing some of the most sensational violin fireworks ever written.

## ***Symphonic Variations "Avenue House" for Orchestra and Organ***

**Michael Massey**

(b. London, England, 1945)

This is the World Premiere of this work

Michael Massey has been a fixture in Edmonton's classical music scene for over 45 years. He has inspired thousands of young musicians as head of the Edmonton Youth Orchestra (EYO) and countless others through musical performance. An accomplished and versatile musician, Michael is a pianist, conductor, programmer, teacher, and an orchestrator – but most of all, he is a mentor and role model for young musicians in Alberta.

Massey moved to Canada at the age of 12 with his family. After earning a Bachelor of Music degree from the University of Alberta, Michael studied at Switzerland's Geneva Conservatory. On a dare, Michael successfully auditioned for the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra (ESO) on cello, which had been his second study instrument while at university. In 1977, he became Music Director of the EYO, and over the past four decades-plus, has inspired and mentored hundreds of musicians, several of whom play in the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, and many other ensembles throughout the world.

Michael Massey was inducted into Edmonton's Cultural Hall of Fame as an artist-builder and awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Medal in 2002. In 2016, he was also awarded the Alberta Order of Excellence, the highest honour the Province can bestow on a citizen. In January 2023, he was appointed to the Order of Canada.

Of his work, *Symphonic Variations “Avenue House,”* Mr. Massey wrote this, in July 2020: When I was a young boy, living in Finchley (a suburb of London, England), my brother and I would play in a wonderful park at the end of the road on which we lived. For me it was a magical place – open spaces to play cricket – a quiet pond with fish – a big, stately mansion with structures we used as forts – a playground with a round-about and see-saws – a concession where we could buy an ice cream when we had sixpence – and, above all the magnificent trees of all sizes, shapes and colours. At that time, I had no idea how and why those trees were there. After our family immigrated to Canada, the images and feelings that the park had instilled in me remained and will remain with me for the rest of my life.

In later years, I discovered more of the history of “Avenue House,” from its beginnings as Templar lands – to its finally arriving into the hands of the Stephens family in the nineteenth century – the garden design of Robert Marnock – the political life of Henry “Inky” Stephens – the fire of 1989 and its subsequent rebuild. These were some of the images that inspired me to compose the *Symphonic Variations “Avenue House.”*

**Prologue “The Mists of Time”** - states two medieval-sounding themes, one original and the second an alleluia from Templar times, and a third theme which is already a variation of the first original theme. These three themes inform the following variations.

**Variation 1 “Play”** - evokes memories of a carefree childhood

**Variation 2 “Service”** - reflects the political life of Henry Stephens

**Variation 3 “Trees”** - built on one complete augmented statement of the original medieval theme over which leaves rustle and birds sing

**Variation 4 “Fire”** - a passacaglia on a fragment of the third theme

**Variation 5 “Rebirth and Epilogue”** - life-affirming continuity and reminiscence

Although motivated by specific images and ideas relating to Avenue House, it is hoped that the music evokes universal sentiments embodied in the titles of each variation, especially in this time of the burning of Notre Dame Cathedral, political chaos, the struggle for human rights and equality, and the COVID 19 pandemic.

Learn more about Avenue House (now known as Stephens House and Gardens) at [stephenshouseandgardens.com](http://stephenshouseandgardens.com).

## ***Scheherazade, Op.35***

**Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov**

(b. Tikhvin, Novgorod, 1844 / d. St. Petersburg, 1908)

First performed: November 3, 1888, in St. Petersburg

Last ESO performance: June 2019

Based on the *Thousand and One Nights*, Rimsky-Korsakov's sweeping four-movement suite was one of many Russian works inspired by the exotic East. The composer himself vacillated as to whether or not he wished for specific stories to be suggested by the music; at one point, he considered publishing the four movements simply as Prelude, Ballade, Adagio, and Finale. In the end, he decided on more colourful descriptors, but more as suggestion than storytelling.

Two recurring themes are central to the work. The strong opening chords form the basis of the theme of the stern and draconian Sultan, who condemns each of his wives to death following their wedding night. The second theme, first heard in an extended and beautiful solo for violin accompanied by harp is that of Scheherazade herself – the latest wife of the Sultan, who would have surely have shared her predecessors' fate, had she not staved off her execution night after night by spinning wonderful tales for her husband. After a thousand and one nights of stories, the Sultan was so in love with Scheherazade, he abandoned his deadly practice.

The first movement begins with the two thematic ideas stated above, then transitions into its tale, titled "The Sea and Sinbad's Ship." The voyage undertaken is sweeping and not without drama, with grand climaxes evoking waves and strong winds – but all built around a relatively simple melodic idea that takes flight from Scheherazade's theme. The second movement brings us the Kalendar Prince, who disguises himself as a beggar in order to seek knowledge. An oboe takes the lead in introducing the Kalendar theme, which is presented in a number of orchestral guises and moods. A dark, central section illustrates a threatening episode, but following this brief tempest, we are swept along once again on the Prince's journey for enlightenment.

The third movement, "The Young Prince and the Young Princess," is a lush, romantic idyll. Their theme is a languorous unison melody in the strings, answered by undulating woodwinds. A central section brings back the Scheherazade theme for solo violin. The finale is an exciting whirlwind of events, and an orchestral tour de force that begins with the strongly stated Sultan theme, answered by Scheherazade's theme, this time in double stops. Next comes a glittering and vibrant festival in Baghdad, which transitions to one of the most powerfully depicted storms at sea ever given to an orchestra. Finally, Scheherazade is given the final say, with the violin reaching its topmost register and most delicate pianissimo, disappearing on a whisper.

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