OMAHA SYMPHONY

Program Notes

2026/27 SEASON

Carmina Burana

Sunday, Nov 8 | 2 PM

Holland Performing Arts Center

Ernest Richardson, Conductor | A. Barron Breland, Chorusmaster
Maria Valdes, Soprano | Eric Barry, Tenor | Markel Reed, Baritone

CARL ORFF
CARMINA BURANA

FORTUNA IMPERATRIX MUNDI
1. O Fortuna
2. Fortune plango vulnera

I. PRIMO VERE
3. Veris leta facies
4. Omnia Sol temperat
5. Ecce gratum

UF DEM ANGER
6. Tanz
7. Floret silva
8. Chramer, gip die varwe mir
9. Reie
10. Were diu werlt alle min

II. IN TABERNA
11. Estuans interius
12. Cignus ustus cantat
13. Ego sum abbas
14. In taberna quando sumus

III. COUR D'AMOURS
15. Amor volat undique
16. Dies, nox et omnia
17. Stetit puella
18. Circa mea pectora
19. Si puer com puellula
20. Veni, veni, venias
21. In trutina
22. Tempus est iocundum
23. Dulcissime

BLANZIFLOR ET HELENA
24. Ave formosissima

FORTUNA IMPERATRIX MUNDI
25. O Fortuna

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Featured Artists

CHOIRS PERFORMING

Bellevue West High Singers
Director: A.J. Reimer
Collaborative Pianist: Joshua Miller

Bennington Concert Choir
Director: Tye Hanke
Accompanist: Jan Braden

Creighton Prep Chamber Choir
Director: Robert A. Chesire
Collaborative Artist: Beth Engel

Fremont High School Choir
Director: Dr. Mark Harman
Collaborative Pianist: Jeff Hoffman

Millard South Singers
Director: Jason Stevens
Co-Director: Amy Sweets
Accompanist: Becky Bunting

Millard North Singers
Director: Megan Swain
Assistant Director: Allie Hoffman
Collaborative Pianist: Kimberly Schott

OPS Mini Singers
Co-Director: Garrett Jackson
Co-Director: Josh McDougall
Co-Director: Benjiman Pettiford



ERNEST RICHARDSON

Ernest Richardson is in high demand as a conductor, composer, arranger, organizational leader and inspirational speaker. His versatility finds him within one season conducting Stravinsky's *Firebird* Suite or Broadway artists in the works of Leonard Bernstein, a live-to-movie production of *Harry Potter*, facilitating strategic decision-making for leading arts organizations, or training young musicians for the passionate, persistent pursuit of perfection.

He has been at the forefront of symphonic video/live music productions, conducting live-to-movie scores of the *Harry Potter* series with CineConcerts, *Indiana Jones, Jurassic Park, Back to the Future, Pirates of the Caribbean, Singin' in the Rain, Casablanca, Ratatouille, Star Trek* (2009), the Charlie Chaplin silent film *The Gold Rush,* and *Star Wars*.



A. BARRON BRELAND

With degrees in Music Theory and Choral Conducting from the University of Georgia and the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, A. Barron Breland has a diverse background in many different fields of music, and he has emerged as a conductor set apart from others by his eclectic skills, equipped to perform music from masterworks of the Baroque and Classic eras to great contemporary works of art, including repertoire in various popular styles. Recent choral performances conducted include Considering Matthew Shepard, the Mozart C-minor Mass, Mozart Requiem, and Beethoven Mass in C. Critics have praised the warmth and communicative power of his performances and choruses. Currently, he is Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs & Dean of the Graduate School at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, where he previously served as Chair of the Department of Fine & Performing Arts. Recent choral performances conducted include Considering Matthew Shepard, the Mozart C-minor Mass, Mozart Requiem, and Beethoven Mass in C.

Featured Artists

A. Barron Breland, continued

Singing from the age of 6, Breland's first exposure to professional choral music was in 1990 as a member of the Atlanta Boy Choir, where he performed with Robert Shaw and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, as well as in tours and festivals throughout Europe. Today, he is the Principal Conductor of Résonance, a semi-professional chorus whose debut album Pilgrimage was released in July 2020 on the MSR Classics label, and the Artistic Director of the River City Mixed Chorus, a 160-member community chorus that has headlined conferences and performed alongside Grammy-winning Conspirare. All of the ensembles under Breland's leadership perform regularly with the Omaha Symphony, and all have performed at state and regional ACDA and NMEA conferences.



MARIA VALDES

American soprano Maria Valdes has been praised by *The New York Times* as a "first-rate singing actress," acclaimed for her interpretations of Mozart, leading operatic heroines, and a wide-ranging concert repertoire. In the 2025–2026 season, she returned to Symphony San Jose for Vaughan Williams' *Dona Nobis Pacem*, Spanish River Concerts for *Broadway to Opera*, and The Metropolitan Opera to cover Frida Image #1 in *El Último Sueño de Frida y Diego*. She also performed Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* with the Valdosta Symphony and Bellingham Festival of Music, marking her sixth appearance in the work, and made her Carnegie Hall debut singing Terre Johnson's *Te Deum* with MidAmerica Productions. Recent highlights include Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with Hawaii Symphony Orchestra, Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni* with Opera Wilmington, and frequent appearances with Hawaii Opera Theatre. Ms. Valdes joined the Metropolitan Opera roster in 2023 and is a former Adler Fellow of San Francisco Opera.



ERIC BARRY

Spanish-American tenor Eric Barry has built an international career spanning leading operatic roles, major concert stages, and acclaimed recordings. Praised by *Opera News* for his "clear timbre, evenness of projection and exceptional sensitivity," he has appeared with Pittsburgh Opera, Opera Colorado, the National Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, Pacific Symphony, Utah Symphony, and Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, with performances at venues including Carnegie Hall and Washington National Cathedral.

On the operatic stage, Barry's leading roles include Rodolfo in *La bohème* with Pittsburgh Opera, North Carolina Opera, and Opera Memphis; Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor* and Alfredo in *La traviata* with Opera Colorado; Tom Rakewell in *The Rake's Progress* with Wolf Trap Opera; Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* with Florentine Opera; and Macduff in *Macbeth* with Opera San Antonio. His repertoire also includes Canio in *Pagliacci* and Cavaradossi in *Tosca*. In concert, Barry has performed Verdi's Requiem with the Indianapolis Symphony, Beethoven's Ninth with the Utah Symphony, and Ethel Smyth's *Mass in D* at Carnegie Hall. International engagements have included the Munich Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano Giuseppe Verdi, Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, and Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra.

Barry's discography includes seven commercial opera recordings, with two receiving International Classical Music Award nominations and additional recognition from the Fryderyk Awards and Crescendo magazine. His performances have been heard on NPR and the BBC and featured in PBS productions.

Featured Artists

Eric Barry, continued

Now residing in Amarillo, TX, Barry studied at West Texas A&M University before earning both a Master of Music and Artist Diploma from the Yale School of Music. He and his wife, Ana, established a scholarship supporting exceptional young singers through the annual Eric Barry Vocal Competition.



MARKEL REED

Baritone Markel Reed "brings great articulate power and style" (*Broadway World*) and "very fine singing" (*The New York Times*) to concert, recital and opera performances throughout the U.S., Canada and Europe. At the Metropolitan Opera, Reed performed with the ensemble in productions of Terence Blanchard's *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* and sang in their 2019 GRAMMY® Award-winning production of *Porgy and Bess*.

In the 2026-27 season, Reed makes his Cincinnati Opera debut as MLK and James Lawson in *John Lewis: Good Trouble*, debuts at West Edge Opera as Thomas Eugene McKeller in Damien Geter's *American Apollo*, and stars as Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* with The Little OPERA Theatre of NY. Reed has been invited to reappear with the Omaha Symphony (Orff's *Carmina Burana*) and the Toledo Symphony (Handel's *Messiah*).

During the last two seasons, Reed sang Masetto in Opera Omaha's *Don Giovanni*, Jigger Craig in in Boston Lyric Opera's *Carousel*; and Yusef Salaam in Detroit Opera's *The Central Park Five*, Marcello in Portland Opera's *La bohème*, Eisenstein in Washington Opera Society's *Die Fledermaus*, and James Baldwin in *The Tongue & The Lash* with Opera Theater of Saint Louis.

Reed's recent concert appearances have included such varied roles, repertoires, and institutions as a Vassal in Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* with the Boston Symphony Orchestra at Tanglewood, the baritone soloist in Mozart's Requiem with the Toledo Symphony, and Handel's *Messiah* with the Utah Symphony. Markel made his Carnegie Hall debut performing Bach's *Magnificat* and Margaret Bonds' *Ballad of the Brown King* with the Cecilia Chorus of New York, and has also performed works by Shawn Okpebholo, including *Songs in Flight* and *Two Black Churches* with Arts DuPage in Chicago. Markel was thrilled to premiere Nkeiru Okoye's *Black Bottom* with the Detroit Symphony in 2020, with Thomas Wilkins on the podium.

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Program Notes

By Mathew Fuerst

Carmina Burana

Carl Orff

Born: July 10, 1895 – Munich, Germany

Died: March 29, 1982 – Munich, Germany

The Benediktbeuern Abbey was founded in 739 AD by monks in a small municipality in Bavaria, Germany. The abbey had a reputation as a leading center for research and learning, focusing particularly on botany, theology, and philosophy. In 1803, the thirty-four monks who resided there left, and the abbey was dissolved.

Working to secularize the property, an executor came across a collection of 254 poems and dramatic texts, dating all the way back to the 13th century. He decided to bring it along as reading entertainment during his travels, and upon arriving in Munich, took the collection to what would become the Bavarian State Library. Some of the poetry would be published in 1806, and more by Jacob Grimm in 1844… but it wasn't until 1847 that the entire collection would appear under one name, published by Johann Andreas Schmeller: *Carmina Burana*, or "Songs from Beneditbeuern." Schmeller attempted to divide the poems into two groups: *Scherz* (joking) and *Ernst* (serious). In 1930, publishers of the first critical edition organized it into the format used today – four groups: moral or mocking songs, love songs, drinking songs, and two longer theater pieces of a spiritual nature.

In 1934, German composer and educator Carl Orff obtained a copy of the text. As he explained: "On opening it I immediately found, on the front page, the long-famous picture of 'Fortune with her wheel', and under it the lines: O Fortuna/velut luna/statu variabilis ('O Fortune/Like the moon/You are changeable'). Picture and words seized hold of me." Orff started sketching music for what would become one of the most famous pieces of music in the Western Classical canon, "O Fortuna." From there, he would spend the next year choosing and setting twenty-three other texts to create his cantata of the same name, *Carmina Burana*.

The musical language of Orff's *Carmina Burana* is simple and direct. Orff perfectly described it: "A special feature of the style of the *Carmina Burana* music is a static construction. In its strophic structure, there is no development. A musical formulation once found…remains the same in all its repetitions. Its repeatability and effect depend on the terseness of the statement." What Orff ends up with is a fascinating score, combining music that evokes earlier times—particularly the Medieval and Renaissance periods—with Twentieth century orchestral and metric writing, clearly showing the influence of Igor Stravinsky. Although the poems are organized into four sections, the piece is organized into five.

Orff's cantata opens with an introductory section containing two movements that contemplate fate, titled **"Fortuna Imperatriz Mundi"** ("Fortune Empress of the World"). The first, and most famous movement of the cantata, **"O Fortuna"** ("O Fortune") starts with a grand introduction in which the chorus is accompanied by the entire orchestra. After a brief pause, the wheels of fate can be heard as an ostinato played by two pianos. Fortune's wheel can also be heard in the overall structure of not only this movement, but many of the others. Musical ideas are repeated multiple times – often thrice – creating a formal sense of circular motion. "O Fortuna" is followed by another contemplation of fate, **"Fortune plango vulnera"** ("I bemoan the wounds of Fortune"). Like "O, Fortuna," there are three repetitions of the music, another structural representation of a wheel turning.

With a flourish in the upper winds and piano, the mood completely changes as Orff takes us into the first large section of the cantata, **"Primo vere"** ("Spring") and **"Veris leta facies"** (The merry face of spring"). The text describes the transition from winter to spring as solemn, chant-like melodies are sung against drones in the orchestra. A love song for solo baritone, **"Omnia Sol temperat"** ("The Sun warms everything") is next.

It is a gentle piece in which the baritone is accompanied by velvety harmonies that recall Debussy. **"Ecce gratum"** ("Behold, the pleasant spring") comes after. The music seems to recall the writing of "O Fortuna," but whereas the former movement evokes relentless and impassive fate, this movement offers a more optimistic atmosphere as the choir rejoices in the brightness of spring.

The second large section, **"Uf dem anger"** ("In the Meadow"), opens with a joyous orchestral dance that evokes the energy of Stravinsky's music through changing meters. **"Floret silva"** ("The noble woods are burgeoning") follows: a celebration of spring sung by the chorus. The music then becomes more gentle as the sopranos and altos depict the yearning of the poet's lover who is not with them. Suddenly, the music shifts gears as a galloping rhythm depicts the lover riding off, sung by the men in the chorus. As this music disappears, the women in the chorus sing "Who will love me now?" This movement leads immediately into the next, **"Chramer, gip die varwe mir"** ("Shopkeeper, give me color"), a comical song that describes a woman trying to woo young men. An elegant orchestral Round Dance follows that flows directly into a wild song about people dancing. In the middle of this song, a calmer section depicts the longing for the narrator's love before the wild dance returns. The final song of this section is **"Were diu werlt alle min"** ("If all the world were mine"), triumphantly filled with fanfare and optimism.

The next section, **"In Taberna"** ("In the Tavern"), consists of four songs that depict various scenes from the titular tavern. The first three of these features a vocal soloist. **"Estuans interius"** ("Burning inside") is for solo baritone and is a passionate song in which the narrator discusses how their desires overtake their soul, stating at the end "my soul is dead, so I shall look after the flesh." The music for this song is completely different from anything we have heard at this point. Orff moves from the hybrid of older music and Stravinsky's musical language to music that could easily be mistaken for an aria from a Verdi opera. **"Olim lacus colueram"** ("Once I lived in a lake") is an infamous movement for a solo tenor who is instructed to sing ironically. The tenor is joined periodically by a male chorus. Depicting a roasting swan, lamenting its life as it is about to be consumed, it is the tenor's sole feature of the entire cantata. Another baritone solo follows with **"Ego sum abbas"** ("I am the abbot"). This abbot is the head of Cockaigne, a mythical land that was a parody of paradise, embracing gluttony over all else. The chorus cries out "Wafna!" ("Woe!") in response. The section ends with a men's chorus, **"In taberna quando sumus"** ("When we are in the tavern"). They sing of all the various people who drink in the tavern. The music returns to a more Stravinsky-inspired musical language to conclude.

The final section of the cantata, consisting of eleven movements that are played without pause, is titled **"Cour d'amours"** ("Court of Love"). The gentle first movement, **"Amor volt undique"** ("Cupid flies everywhere"), features a boys' choir singing about Cupid coupling young men and women, musically depicted by two flutes playing together. The mood soon changes as solo soprano sings of a lonely girl, bitter that she is without a lover. **"Dies, nox et omnia"** ("Day, night, and everywhere") is a song for solo baritone who sings about the narrator who desires a kiss from his beloved. **"Stetit putella"** ("A girl stood") is for solo soprano. Against light harmonics in the strings, the soprano describes a beautiful girl. The mood suddenly changes in the movement **"Circa mea pectora"** ("In my heart") for baritone and choir. The music becomes bolder as the vocalists sing of longing for their lover. **"Si puer cum puellula"** ("If a boy with a girl") continues the bold musical language, but this time with the male singers a cappella. The song describes an intimate scene between two people. The cantata's music continues to drive forward with **"Veni, veni, venias"** ("Come, come, o come") as the choir sings about the beauty of the narrator's beloved. The energy of this movement is contrasted by the beautiful and serene **"In trutina"** ("In the balance"). A solo soprano sings about the passion of first love against lush harmonies in the strings. Two flutes, perhaps a nod to the couples in **"Amor volt unidigue,"** play a short, gentle passage symbolizing a loving couple. **"Tempus est iocundum"** ("This is the joyful time") for choir and orchestra describes the excitement of first love and the anticipation of consummation of that love. **"Dulcissime"** ("Sweetest one") is a short virtuosic movement for solo soprano that acts as a bridge to the penultimate movement, **"Blanziflor et Helena"** ("Blancheflour and Helena") which sings of the beauty of Blancheflour and Helen of Troy. Blancheflour, a character from a popular story from the Middle Ages, is spared from death with her lover because of the purity of their devotion. This leads directly to a reprise of **"O Fortuna,"** representing a complete rotation of the Wheel of Fortune, bringing the cantata to completion.

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