

Saturday, September 21, at 8 p.m.

SEASON OPENING GALA WITH RENÉE FLEMING

Nashville Symphony

Giancarlo Guerrero, *conductor*

Renée Fleming, *soprano*

ANTONIN DVORÁK

Carnival Overture, Op. 92

RICHARD STRAUSS

Vier Letzte Lieder [Four Last Songs]

Frühling [Spring] (text: Hermann Hesse)

September (text: Hermann Hesse)

Bein Schlafengehen [Going to Sleep]

(text: Hermann Hesse)

Im Abendrot [At Sunset]

(text: Joseph von Eichendorff)

INTERMISSION

FRANZ VON SUPPÉ

Light Cavalry Overture

TRADITIONAL, arr. ANTONIO DEFEO

lyrics: Frederic Edward Weatherly

Danny Boy

JEAN RITCHIE

arr. J. Todd Frazier

Wild Horses

J. TODD FRAZIER

text: Thomas Jefferson

We Hold These Truths

PIETRO MASCAGNI

Intermezzo from *Cavalleria rusticana*

LICINIO REFICE

Ombra di Nube

GIACOMO PUCCINI

“O mio babbino caro” from *Gianni Schicchi*

AARON COPLAND

Variations on a Shaker Melody

RICHARD RODGERS

lyrics: Oscar Hammerstein II

“The Sound of Music” from

The Sound of Music

“A Wonderful Guy” from *South Pacific*

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“While it’s a fact that a voice begins with natural talent,” writes Renée Fleming in her engaging memoir, *The Inner Voice*, “any talent must be nurtured, cajoled, wrestled with, pampered, challenged, and, at every

turn, examined.” Indeed, it’s through unwavering dedication to the art of singing in all its facets that Fleming, a four-time GRAMMY® winner, has developed her innate gift into one of the most remarkable musical careers on the international stage today. She has performed at such global events as the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee at Buckingham Palace in 2012 and the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. Also in 2008, Fleming was the first woman in the history of the Metropolitan Opera (where she made her debut in 1991 in Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro*) to open the company’s season with a solo showcase gala.

Just two months ago, Fleming received the ultra-prestigious National Medal of the Arts from President Obama, a fitting tribute to a singer known as “the people’s diva.” The core of her artistic personality, which is evident across the range of styles and pieces she has selected for this evening’s program, is a voice whose radiance and warmth are immediately recognizable.

Following Antonín Dvořák’s **Carnival Overture** — a concert appetizer from 1891 in which the Czech composer depicts an onlooker arriving in a new city and observing, with almost cinematic vividness, a scene of unrestrained festivity — Fleming begins with one of the best-loved works of Richard Strauss. Her own sound is intimately associated with the work of this composer. The **Four Last Songs**, created in 1948 (shortly before Strauss’s death), distill the serene and wistful wisdom of Strauss’s final years. They also require ultimate interpretive skills from the soloist. It’s not enough to float the long, silken, ecstatic threads of Straussian melody; the singer’s phrasing, too, must be attuned to the shadings of the words. Fleming also points to the importance of the pacing and “the quality of the orchestral playing” in shaping an audience’s experience of this cycle of songs.

Launching the program’s second half is Franz von Suppé’s **Light Cavalry Overture** (1866). While the Viennese operettas in which this composer specialized have largely been forgotten, this curtain raiser has taken on a separate life in the concert hall thanks to its rousing fanfares and instrumental depiction of battle and victory.

The versatility of Fleming’s interests as a singer can be gleaned from the selections that follow. **“Danny Boy,”** a setting of the traditional “Londonderry Air” to lyrics that were published only a century ago (timeless as they seem), is here sung in a custom arrangement made by Antonio DeFeo. Houston composer J. Todd Frazier wrote **We Hold These Truths** (2005) — his setting of the Declaration of Independence — to explore the role of music as “a handmaiden to the creation of this extraordinary document,” as the composer puts it. Later this became the opening moment of Frazier’s full-scale oratorio based on the life and writings of Thomas Jefferson.

After the instrumental **Intermezzo** from Pietro Mascagni’s *Cavalleria Rusticana* (a landmark of the raw, hot-blooded style that took root in Italian opera post-Verdi, to which Fleming has paid tribute in her 2010 CD *Verismo*) the focus remains on Italy with **“Ombra di Nube”** (“Shadow of Cloud”). The composer and priest Licinio Refice wrote this unforgettable stand-alone song in 1935, a year after his sacred opera *Saint Cecilia* triumphed, for the golden age soprano Claudia Muzio. Here Fleming tips her hat to the seamless continuity of singers and tradition. “My voice carries in it the generations before me,” she writes, “generations of my family, of brilliant singers I have admired, of dear friends.” Though it’s hard to guess the context from the aria’s transcendentally simple purity of line, Giacomo Puccini’s **“O mio babbino caro”** (“O My Beloved Father”) actually comes from a comic opera, *Gianni Schicchi* (1918), one of the three one-act pieces Puccini devised as part of a full-length trilogy, *Il Trittico*.

Variations on a Shaker Melody, the best-known section of Aaron Copland’s iconic ballet score *Appalachian Spring*, provides our segue into the program’s final set. Along with her spectrum of operatic roles, Fleming has also ventured outside classical music in various projects. In

fact, at an early stage she had to decide whether to devote her career to opera or jazz, and at President Obama's 2009 Inaugural celebration she sang "You'll Never Walk Alone" from *Carousel*, the early Rodgers and Hammerstein musical. Fleming concludes our program with two other numbers by that quintessentially American musical partnership.

— *Thomas May is the Nashville Symphony's program annotator.*

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Soprano Renée Fleming captivates audiences with her sumptuous voice and compelling stage presence. Her busy concert calendar in the past year has included galas at the San Diego Opera, Providence Performing Arts Center and the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, as well as appearances with the Seattle, Vancouver, San Antonio, Baltimore and Cincinnati Symphony orchestras. Her recital schedule took her to Rio de Janeiro, Paris, Geneva, London, Vienna, Hong Kong, Beijing and Taipei.

Fleming began the 2012-2013 season as

Desdemona in *Otello* at the Metropolitan Opera, conducted by Semyon Bychkov and broadcast around the world via the Met Opera Live in HD. 2013 has taken her to Carnegie Hall and Lyric Opera of Chicago in André Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, playing Blanche DuBois, and in June she returned to Vienna as the Countess in Strauss's *Capriccio*, conducted by Christoph Eschenbach.

Fleming won her fourth GRAMMY® this year, a Best Classical Vocal Solo award for a collection of 20th-Century French music, *Poèmes* (Decca, 2012). Other recent DVD releases include Handel's *Rodelinda*, Massenet's *Thaïs* and Rossini's *Armida*. In February 2012, she received the *Victoire d'Honneur*, the highest award conveyed by the French Victoires de la Musique.

Among her numerous awards are the Fulbright Lifetime Achievement Medal, France's Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur, and honorary doctorates from Carnegie Mellon University, the Eastman School of Music and The Juilliard School. In 2010, she was named the first Creative Consultant at Lyric Opera of Chicago.

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