

Organ Music Notes for December 7th

Prelude: Georges Bizet: *Marche* from *L'Arlésienne*

Offertory: Georges Bizet: *Pastorale* from *L'Arlésienne*

Communion: Georges Bizet: *Élevation* and *Moderato* from *L'Arlésienne*

Postlude: Georges Bizet: *Carillon* from *L'Arlésienne*

All of the organ music in today's service comes from George Bizet's incidental music to Alphonse Daudet's play *L'Arlésienne* (The Girl from Arles). Why pick this as music for the Advent and Christmas season? First and foremost, the march that I am playing as the prelude is taken from a Provençal carol named *De matin ai rescountra lou trin*, or in English "Far away, what splendor comes this way?" It is a depiction of the march of the three Magi, and while the play itself has no connection to Christmas, Bizet found the melody evocative of the Provence region of France and used it and another traditional tune about a hobby horse as "authentic" elements of his score. Secondly, the entire score is full of dances and bells appropriate for the joy of the season; the *Élevation* also has a mystical Eastern feel reminiscent of the Magi.

The *Pastorale* comes from the beginning of the second act and begins with great peals of bells. The original orchestration then introduced a then new instrument, the alto saxophone for a more lyrical section before returning to the bells. The two movements I will play during communion are dances, but the first also appears in a score with the title of *Élevation*. In both *L'Arlésienne* and the ballet music to Bizet's opera *Carmen*, this piece is set as a "humming chorus," or at least a chorus without words, the sopranos taking the melody. (As an aside, the most famous "humming chorus" in opera is in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*). The *Moderato* is another saxophone solo over harp and strings that transfers very well to the organ.

The movement that opens the third act and that I am using as a postlude is a *Carillon*, a joyous piece with a repeating ostinato of three deep chimes and the higher clanging of small bells much like would be used by the congregants on a feast day at church. The use of bells to "ring in" occasions such as these grows out of an old pagan tradition of making loud and happy noises to scare away evil spirits; this custom is still used in some churches to accompany the lighting of candles during the Easter Vigil or at Midnight Mass, and in the Protestant tradition is found most commonly on Pentecost.

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