

Emmanuel Villaume, the third: The Dallas Opera's new maestro shares his vision

Written by By TERRY MATHEWS, News-Telegram Arts Editor
Saturday, 19 October 2013 09:56



When Emmanuel Villaume takes the podium on opening night of Bizet's "Carmen," he'll be making a historic debut. The French born conductor will be only the third musical director in The Dallas Opera's illustrious 56-year history.

Since arriving in Dallas to prepare for the season, Villaume has been rehearsing with the company, making a few personal appearances and trying to figure out where to live. The maestro hopes to split his time between Dallas and Paris.

"People have been so warm and welcoming," he said in delightfully accented, but impeccable English. "The plan is to immerse myself in the community. If you want to do good work within an institution, you need to be present. "

Villaume appreciates the stability of TDO, both artistically and financially.

"In the United States, besides the Met [Metropolitan Opera in New York] and [Lyric Opera of] Chicago, which are special animals in a special category, TDO is the only company that has a really balanced budget," he explained. "So that is something that is very important."

Along with an appreciation for a sound financial foundation, the maestro is also high on his current cast.



"We have the chance to have an absolutely ideal cast with a wonderful Don José [sung by Brandon Jovanovich on Oct. 25, 27 and 30 and by Bruno Riberio on Nov. 2, 8 and 10] and a young Carmen [Clémentine Margaine] who is a revelation. In my opinion, she is going to be the Carmen of choice for opera companies for many years to come. She is really, really wonderful."

Villaume, who holds degrees in literature, philosophy and musicology, has conducted "Carmen" on many occasions, finding something new each time.

"This is an absolute masterpiece that has so many angles and so many possibilities," he carefully explained. "Every time you do it, you see something new you haven't seen before. You discover new areas and possibilities."

In addition to having a marvelous cast and score, Villaume is also discovering the possibilities contained in the glorious Winspear Opera House, opened in 2009 to critical and popular acclaim. The great hall was made possible by Margot and Bill Winspear's initial gift of \$42 million and funds raised from the private sector. Sleek and modern on the outside, the hall's near-perfect acoustics enhance the warm, intimate feel of the interior space.

"The acoustics are important, but also the size of the hall provides for contact between the performers and the audience that is very special," he noted. "You can go to a poetical dimension and spiritual dimension of music making and for that you need great talent and a great hall."

The new maestro is aware of the solid community support Dallas has always provided to

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TDO.

"You need a community that supports you and is engaged in your institution and that's the case, too," he acknowledged. "We have a perfect storm brewing."?

When asked who influenced his conducting style, Villahume says he learned his craft and received "great inspiration" from Spiros Argiris, who died in 1996, and Seiji Ozawa.

"Spiro Argiris was the director of the Spoleto Festival both in Italy and the United States," he explained. "I learned a lot from him. He was a great person."

Of Ozawa, who has served as music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and as principal conductor of the Vienna State Opera, Villaume says, "He has unique musical instincts and techniques that are unsurpassed."

Villaume began his conducting career in ballet.

"It's a great school because, you have no real room for negotiation in terms of tempo," he carefully explained. "The body goes up and has to come down at a specific time."

If you're a good conductor, Villaume says, "You have to learn to make music under circumstances which are not geared toward making music at first. But if you are good, you are able – within all those parameters – to make a musical phrase sound logical although it's half the tempo that you were expecting from first looking at the music."

He also developed a great appreciation for ballet dancers.

"They work so hard for so little, at least financial restitution," he said. "I learned flexibility, serving another purpose but still defending what you think is important musically from them."

While conducting ballet, he also realized the importance of the connection between artist and maestro, a skill he put to good use when he began working with some of the most famous opera stars of our time.

"Early on in my career, I did a lot of shows with Placido Domingo," he noted. "I also worked with Renata Scotto several times and I'm working a lot with Anna Netrebko. These are all artists at such a level that you learn something every time you work with them."

Clearly, Villaume has all the tools necessary to lead the TDO into the future. Just look at his resume below. His vision for the company is quite clear, too.

"We're trying to connect the glory of the past, which is really exceptional, with a future that will bring opera to audiences that maybe were not connecting with it before," he said. "The spirits are high and the energy is really, really up. Now, we just need an audience."

Maestro Emmanuel Villaume has appeared with the Metropolitan Opera for *Madama Butterfly*, *Samson et Dalila* and *Carmen*
; with the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden for *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* and *La Rondine*;
the Lyric Opera of Chicago for *Samson et Dalila*, *Manon* and *The Merry Widow*
; the Washington National Opera for *La Rondine*, *Norma*, *Le Cid*, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*
; San Francisco Opera for *Madama Butterfly* and *Werther*
; Los Angeles Opera for

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Les Contes d'Hoffmann, La Rondine and Grande Duchesse

; Santa Fe Opera for

Carmen

; Dallas Opera for

Faust and Le Nozze di Figaro

; Montreal Opera for

La Vie Parisienne

; Opera Theatre of Saint Louis for

La Rondine and Faust

; Bastille Opera for

Rigoletto

; Toulouse Opera for

Mignon

; Opéra Marseilles for

Pelléas et Mélisande, Samson, Carmen and Norma

; Nice Opera for

Faust

; Monte Carlo Opera for

La Périochole

and

Werther

; La Fenice in Venice for

Thaïs and Il Crociato

; Torino Teatro Regio for

Ariane et Barbe Bleue and Hoffmann

; Martina Franca Opera for

La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein

; Deutsche Oper Berlin for

Tosca

; Cologne Opera for

La Bohème and Werther

; Hamburg Staatsoper with

Der Fliegende Holländer

; Bonn Opera for

La Fanciulla del West

; Teatro Real in Madrid for

Hoffmann and Werther

; Teatro Colon for

Pelléas

; Tokyo Bunka Kaikan for

Der Rosenkavalier

; Bayerische Staatsoper Munich for

Hoffmann

, and the Klangbogen Festival in Vienna for

Don Quichotte

and Menotti's

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Goya

with Plácido Domingo.

He has led the Montreal Symphony in Montreal and at Carnegie Hall; the Chicago Symphony; the Boston Symphony at Symphony Hall and Tanglewood; the Los Angeles, San Francisco, Houston, Indianapolis, St. Louis, Detroit, Utah, Quebec and Oregon Symphonies; the Minnesota Orchestra; Juilliard orchestra; Orchestre de Paris; Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France; Beethovenhalle Orchestra of Bonn; Münchner Rundfunkorchester; Duisburger Philharmoniker; Orchestre symphonique National du Danemark, Orchestre de la Radio norvégienne; Kungliga Filharmonikerna and the Prague Philharmonic; the Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane symphonies; Orchestra Sinfonica Siciliana, Orchestra Verdi di Milano; and, in concert, the orchestras of the Bastille Opera, Monte Carlo Philharmonic, Teatro alla Scala, the NHK Orchestra in Tokyo, the Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, La Fenice orchestra, the latter in a concert performance of Berlioz' *Les Troyens* and the China National Opera Orchestra for three concerts during the Olympic Games of 2008.

Tickets for "Carmen" are on sale now, starting at just \$19, through the Dallas Opera Ticket Services Office at 214-443-1000 or online at www.dallasopera.org.

To watch Maestro Villaume conduct the prelude to the fourth act of "Carmen," visit <http://youtu.be/fUtNRdXFijU>