

QUINCY SYMPHONY CHORUS
PROGRAM NOTES
British Invasion ~ March 9, 2019
Dr. Carol Mathieson

Andrew Lloyd Webber relaunched musical theatre in the 1960's in ways that welcomed electronic technology and rock music without allowing ephemeral fads to hijack well-crafted composition. And audiences responded, with younger aficionados swelling the general flock to the theatres. Tonight's medley follows chronologically from earliest efforts with Tim Rice to turn *Jesus Christ, Superstar*— a scripture story recast in rock, produced as a concept album with basic plot, all the songs, and minimal dialog—into a stage show, opening in London's West End. It was a mega-hit. Soon after came *Evita* about the Perón dictatorship in Argentina. Rice did not feel comfortable remolding established writing into lyrics, so for *Cats*, Lloyd Webber went directly to T.S. Eliot's poetry. *Song and Dance* is a short musical play with lyrics by Don Black, paired with a short ballet with music Lloyd Webber wrote for his cellist brother Julien as variations on a Paganini caprice. However, *Phantom of the Opera*, with Charles Hart lyrics, was back to high drama. *Phantom* smashed attendance records in both London and New York, running for decades. Tonight's medley opens and closes with songs from that iconic show.

Nineteenth-century English musical theatre consisted of cheerful song and dance revues or badly translated, risqué French burlesques until **Gilbert and Sullivan** brought satirical, silly Savoy Operas to a family-friendly stage. QSC sings highlights from the first and the final masterpieces of these saviors of both the English and American musical stage. The title *H.M.S. Pinafore* betrays the essence of G&S topsy-turvy— absolutely realistic portrayal of completely ridiculous situations: the fierce warship is named for a little girl's frock...its admiral sings utter nonsense with perfect diction. *The Gondoliers* was Gilbert and Sullivan's last great hit together, for although it gave Sullivan expanded musical breadth, his tastes and royal patronage moved him firmly away from topsy-turvy.

Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me appeared in many versions and covers besides Elton John's smash hit, perhaps the most successful coming from a 1985 Live Aid concert as his duet with George Michael. It also appeared in the 1987 soundtrack of the film *The Lost Boys*.

Downtown celebrates the sing-able nature of '60's British pop music. While producer Tony Hatch was stopped at a crosswalk on his first visit to New York City, a snatch of tune with the iconic refrain "downtown" drifted into his head. When he played the fragment for Petula Clark, she insisted that he finish the song...which he did, moments before she recorded it.

The Best of Bond features eponymous songs composed for film adaptations of Ian Fleming's James Bond spy thrillers. The medley starts with Monty Norman's signature motif written for the first movie, *Dr. No*, but transformed by John Barry into the driving theme that subsequently characterized the entire Bond franchise. Considered the "Bond composer," Barry oversaw the scoring of 10 more of the 14 adaptations, including songs the QSC sings from *Goldfinger*, *You Only Live Twice*, and *Diamonds are Forever*. Barry was not available for the production of *Live and Let Die*, so producers invited Paul and Linda McCartney to write the opener, the first rock song ever used as part of a Bond movie. With Barry tax-exiled for the production of *For Your Eyes Only*, Bill Conti composed the music using a disco-heavy sound.

Pinball Wizard came from the 1968 rock opera *Tommy* by Pete Townshend of The Who, but it also received a lot of play as a single... it even inspired an actual pinball machine design. A *rock opera* comes to the public as a concept album rather than a stage production, and each song exists concurrently as a singles release. Plot existed as minimal dialog connecting the songs, but the effect was more suite than dramatic entity. The Who performed *Tommy* live on tour with great commercial success, which was good because their performance hook was smashing guitars and drums and they were in debt. In the 1975 film with a strengthened through-

story, Elton John sang *Pinball Wizard* in a fantastical costume which then graced the label of the newly created *Captain Fantastic* pinball game.

Based on E.R. Braithwaite's autobiographical novel about teaching in an atmosphere of social unrest and racial tension in London slums, the song in the eponymous 1967 movie *To Sir, with Love* was British rock singer Lulu's film debut. Sidney Poitier reprised his moving portrayal of the idealistic teacher nearly thirty years later in a television version that also referenced the song. Tonight's arrangement appeared on the popular television show *Glee*.

I Want to Hold Your Hand gets credit for starting the British Invasion...a popular cultural movement that swept British rock music across North America and made the Beatles into cult idols.

Love is All You Need: A Tribute to the Beatles takes a sampler tour through the great hits John Lennon and Paul McCartney wrote in the 1960's, "eyeball to eyeball" in a tiny basement on a single piano with oboe lessons going on next door, adding '70's singles by Harrison by Lennon alone. Though familiar nowadays, Beatles melody-driven songs had a subtly richer harmonic structure supporting them than did the music rock and roll crowds were familiar with. That new sound drove fans into paroxysms of adoration. In the US, such writers as Bob Dylan and the Beachboys recognized that the Beatles had upped the game for the entire scene. Even though the "Fab Four" experimented with psychedelic and non-Western nuance in later decades, the enhanced tunefulness of their '60's hits set the pace for them to be the best-selling band of all time in the popular music genre.

Tonight's songs by Sir Elton John showcase his antics, benevolence, and collaborations. His first hit single was *Your Song*, written with long-time collaborator Bernie Taupin for Three Dog Night in 1970. Beatles' John Lennon was impressed, saying "...that's the first new thing that's happened since we happened." In 1980, he sang it live in Central Park dressed as Donald Duck. In 2002, John recorded *Your Song* as a duet with opera star Alessandro Safina for a gala charity telethon. *Your Song* was covered by Ewan McGregor in the movie musical *Moulin Rouge!*

Although *Son-of-a-Preacher Man* was written for Aretha Franklin, she couldn't use it for her album then in progress. Therefore, American writers Hurley and Wilkins gave the song to British singer Dusty Springfield, who recorded it in a style called blue-eyed soul. Although many artists, including Franklin herself, subsequently recorded the song for albums or for films such as *Pulp Fiction*, Springfield's version remains the most popular.

What happened when an astrophysicist, a dental student, a graphic artist, and an engineer got together to make music? They made history, as highlighted in *A Tribute to Queen*. Driving rhythm and shouts of victorious unity in Brian May's *We Will Rock You* and Freddie Mercury's *We Are the Champions* have made those songs quintessential stadium anthems for millions of sports fans on both sides of the Atlantic. John Deacon's *Another One Bites the Dust* was the band's overall best-selling single in their more than 30-year career together, and Mercury's *Bohemian Rhapsody* was the first true music video ever produced, appearing 7 years before MTV even went on the air.