



## Julia Bullock, *soprano*

### The New York Times

#### Travels to the Far Corners of the Canon

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The classical repertory is endowed with enough masterpieces to provide a lifetime's worth of listening. But how safe, predictable and dull life would be if we couldn't occasionally stray from the tried and true for a bit of offbeat enlightenment. Fortunately, we have the American Symphony Orchestra, whose music director and principal conductor, Leon Botstein, specializes in unearthing the fascinating and often edifying also-rans that cluster around the outskirts of the canon.

In a way, the concert the orchestra presented at Carnegie Hall on Friday night also served as a prelude to this year's Bard Music Festival, Saint-Saëns and His World, to be presented in August under Mr. Botstein's stewardship. The program here, "Orientalism in France," opened with a Saint-Saëns rarity: "Orient et Occident," composed for an 1870 gala and probably forgotten soon after.

Initially scored for military band and later revised in the orchestral version heard here, the piece ably represents the kind of merry utility and colorful charm that typifies much of Saint-Saëns's output: a characterization Mr. Botstein and his festival colleagues presumably mean to challenge in August. Anything is possible.

Two works benefited from outstanding soloists. Julia Bullock, a striking soprano, gave a ravishingly visceral account of Maurice Delage's seductive "Poèmes Hindous," abetted by Ah Ling Neu's throaty viola obbligato. And the pianist Julia Zilberquit marshaled playing of steely brilliance in "Les Djinns," a teapot-scale tempest by Franck.

The second half of the program brought the evening's most tantalizing obscurity: Bizet's "Djamileh," a one-act opéra-comique from 1872. The libretto, by Louis Gallet, tells of Haroun, an Egyptian playboy who demands a new consort each month, and Djamileh, a harem girl who contrives with Splendiano, Haroun's right-hand man, to linger past her expiration date. Complicating matters, Splendiano wants Djamileh for himself.

The Collegiate Chorale Singers, prepared by James Bagwell, were consistently outstanding, and Mr. Botstein drew playing of alluring effervescence from the orchestra. If no one is likely to argue that "Djamileh" deserves the same regard as "Carmen" or even Bizet's second-tier gem "The Pearl Fishers," this account proved a succinct charmer well worth excavating.



**American Symphony Orchestra** The soprano Julia Bullock in Delage's "Poèmes Hindous" at Carnegie Hall.

Photo: Hiroyuki Ito