



LYRIC
FEST

DOMINICK
ARGENTO
TURNS
90

with
Jessica Lennick,
soprano

Claire Shackleton,
mezzo soprano

and

Laura Ward,
at the piano

Friday, October 27, 2017 at 6PM at the Ethical Society, Rittenhouse Square
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

DOMINICK ARGENTO

"I have gone on record as saying my whole purpose in writing music is to communicate with an audience, to move them, to make them laugh or weep – that is the fundamental aspect of music."

Happy Birthday to Dominick Argento who is 90 years old today. Lyric Fest is celebrating the enormous contribution this composer has made to American music, and to American art song in particular.

Argento grew up in York, Pennsylvania, and wrote his first song "around the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor," as he likes to say. He was drafted by the army and served as a cryptographer. The GI Bill enabled him to attend Peabody Conservatory, and once there, he won a Fulbright to study in Florence, Italy (thus finding his home away from home). After a second degree from Peabody came a Ph.D in composition from the Eastman School of Music, and then a Guggenheim Fellowship. He has been awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1975 for *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf* premiered by, and written for, Dame Janet Baker, and a Grammy for Best Classical Contemporary Composition, "*Casa Guidi*," written for, and performed by, Frederica von Stade. He has also created works for Håkan Hagegård.

It is important to say that early along the way, Argento met and married his "muse," soprano Carolyn Bailey, and not coincidentally, he began to focus most of his composing energies on writing glorious music for the voice. "I have a love-affair with singers," he once said.

When Argento was 31, he made the last big move of his life, accepting the only teaching job offered him – in Minnesota. There he stayed and flourished for the next 60 years of his life, but for spending several months of each one of those years in Florence, Italy, the city where he did much of his composing.

Minnesota was very good to him. He has enjoyed a lifetime of fulfilling commissions from musical organizations there, and it was in Minneapolis-St.Paul where he premiered over 60 new works. "Early on, it started to dawn on me that living here I was able to do exactly what I lived for." His philosophy was simple: "I've told every composition student I had for 40 years that after you get your degree, do what a dentist does — look for a community that needs you."

As for his life as a creative, we will let the composer speak for himself:
(excerpted from his *Catalogue Raisonné as Memoir: A Composer's Life*)

When asked how he composed, Benjamin Britten replied, "I simply choose a starting note and then the rest just naturally follows." [...]Strange as it may seem, trying to trace the progression of ideas and thoughts throughout the creative act, at least in my own experience, is virtually impossible...

While the first few minutes of music are being composed, I feel very much in command. But as the composition grows, that control is gradually usurped and the opening material begins to dictate its own continuation. The music frequently wants to go places or do things I never envisioned in the planning. ...I feel as though I am entering a separate world, an all-consuming and private world, where the usual environment ceases to exist. The mind is concentrated exclusively and intensively on music. Diurnal concerns and problems vanish; meals are missed, appointments forgotten; time assumes a most unclocklike behavior...

Once a work is completed, the origin of details, the weighing of choices, the constant decision making, false starts, happy surprises, doubts – all these things quickly fade from memory. ...When I emerge I feel as if I'm awakening from a trance or an anesthetic. A day or two later as I make large or small alterations to the completed sections of the music, I view the previous production almost as if it were the work of a different composer.

...Why does the composer choose (or invent) and then cultivate a particular musical language, style, manner or idiom? In all candor, I must admit, I don't know.



Dominick Argento Turns 90

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PROGRAM

Five songs from ***Six Elizabethan Songs***

Jessica Lennick

1. Spring
2. Sleep
3. Winter
4. Dirge
5. Diaphenia

Three songs from ***From The Diary of Virginia Woolf***

Claire Shackleton

5. Rome (May, 1935)
7. Parents (December, 1940)
2. Anxiety (October, 1920)

Two songs from ***Songs about Spring***

Jessica Lennick

- II. Spring is like a perhaps hand
- V. When faces called flowers float out of the ground

Three songs from ***Miss Manners on Music***

Claire Shackleton

- V. Manners at a Church Recital
- VI. Manners at the Opera
- VII. Envoi