

WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 13 February 2024
7.30pm

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet piano

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Suite bergamasque (c.1890, rev. 1905)

I. Prélude • II. Menuet • III. Clair de lune • IV. Passepied

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

Hymne de la nuit S173a/1 (1840, rev. 1847)

Schlaflos! Frage und Antwort S203 (1883)

En rêve S207 (1885)

Claude Debussy

La plus que lente (1910)

Franz Liszt

Valse-impromptu S213 (1850-2)

Jules Massenet (1842-1912)

Valse folle (1898)

Interval

Claude Debussy

Masques (1903-4)

Erik Satie (1866-1925)

Gymnopédie No. 1 (1888)

Jules Massenet

Papillons noirs (pub. 1907)

Claude Debussy

D'un cahier d'esquisses (1904)

Franz Liszt

Toccata S197a (?1879)

Jules Massenet

Toccata (pub. 1892)

Claude Debussy

Pour le piano (1894-1901)

I. Prélude • II. Sarabande • III. Toccata

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The prodigal inventiveness of **Franz Liszt** is reflected in a vast output of piano music. The short works in this programme range from music written in the 1840s to boldly experimental pieces from the end of his life. *Hymne de la nuit* was originally composed in 1840 and revised in 1847. The score is prefaced by the first verse of the eponymous poem by Alphonse de Lamartine from his 1830 collection *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, which was such a rich source of inspiration for Liszt. The *Hymne de la nuit* is a kind of pendant to the *Harmonies poétiques* cycle and is a musical evocation of the sunset and starry heavens of Tuscany as described by Lamartine. The *Valse-impromptu* S213 dates from about the same period and was first published in 1852. After a brief introduction, the delightfully idiosyncratic main theme is marked *sempre scherzando* and the playful mood is maintained apart from a brief central section marked to be played *espressivo*. The other Liszt pieces are all late works. *Schlaflos! Frage und Antwort* was written in 1883 and carries the rather misleading subtitle 'Nocturne ... after a poem by Toni Raab'. We don't expect nocturnes to be about insomnia, but that is what Liszt gives us here, the music tossing and turning uneasily, marked 'fast and passionate', and the harmonies unsettling. Eventually the mood calms and finds peace on a chord of E major. *En rêve* is another 'night' piece, from very late in Liszt's career, composed in 1885 for August Stradal (a pupil of both Liszt and Bruckner). It opens with deceptive simplicity, soon moving into stranger dream-like realms. The *Toccata* dates from about 1879. Marked *prestissimo*, its energy is incessant until fading away into delicate and inconclusive chords. Something of the same other-worldly quality seems to permeate the piano music of **Erik Satie**. The *Gymnopédie No. 1* was first published in 1888 in a wonderfully eccentric edition by Satie's father, the music printed in bright red notation. The mood reflects a poem by Satie's friend Patrice Contamine de Latour who wrote of 'amber atoms gleaming in the fire, mingling their sarabande with their gymnopédie.'

Anyone who knows **Jules Massenet** through operas like *Manon* and *Werther*, or even through his many songs, is likely to be surprised when hearing his piano music for the first time; it reveals a very different aspect of his creative nature. In the handful of works composed for his own instrument, while there's still plenty of the familiar Massenet charm, he also emerges as a composer who relished presenting players with technical challenges. The *Valse folle* was composed in 1898 for his friend Raoul Pugno who made a dazzling recording of it as early as 1903. This is virtuoso piano music written with the lightest touch, brilliantly conceived for the instrument with delicate

cascades of rapid notes. Marked *prestissimo*, the opening is frantic with activity and deliberately unstable harmonically. With only the slightest respite, the music hurtles towards a feverish close, where the instruction is to 'accelerate madly, more and more' ('en animant follement, de plus en plus'), and 'always crescendo'. In 1907, Massenet's publisher Heugel issued his *2 pièces pour piano* with a striking pictorial cover depicting large black and white butterflies against a yellowish-green background. The *Toccata* was first published in 1892, with a dedication to Marie-Aimée Roger-Niclos, the piano virtuoso to whom Saint-Saëns had dedicated his fantasia *Africa* the year before. Another flamboyant showpiece, its energy is unremitting, although there are plenty of contrasts in dynamics and register, until the music finally comes to rest on two chords.

The *Suite bergamasque* by **Claude Debussy** was published in 1905 but originated much earlier, comprising music that was almost certainly written around 1890 and subsequently revised. While making his revisions, Debussy also changed two of the four movement titles: *Clair de lune* was originally called 'Promenade sentimentale' and the *Passepied* was originally 'Pavane'. *La plus que lente* was written in 1910 and is a kind of slow, rather slinky waltz (marked *Lent, molto rubato con morbidezza*) which achieved widespread circulation when it was published in the newspaper *Le Figaro*. *Masques* dates from July 1904: a dark and rather menacing piece, possibly reflecting his personal circumstances while in the throes of a fraught separation from his first wife, Lily Texier. Whatever the inspiration was, Debussy told pianist and teacher Marguerite Long that the piece expressed 'the tragedy of existence'. *D'un cahier d'esquisses* is an exquisite, intimate piece first published in 1904 as a musical supplement in the magazine *Paris illustré*. The first known public performance was not given until 20 April 1910 at a concert of the Société musicale indépendante when the pianist was Maurice Ravel. In 1894, Debussy wrote a *Sarabande* – one of three pieces published posthumously as his *Images oubliées* – and in 1901 he reworked this as the centrepiece of his suite, *Pour le piano*. While the inspiration for all three movements – entitled *Prélude*, *Sarabande* and *Toccata* – has echoes of the French *clavicinistes* from the early 18th Century (above all François Couperin), at the same time the harmonies and kaleidoscopic piano textures are entirely Debussy's own. The first performance was given at the Salle Erard in Paris on 11 January 1902, played by Ricardo Viñes, one of Debussy's most ardent early advocates.

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