

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 15 January 2023
7.30pm

Elena Urioste violin
Tom Poster piano

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Violin Sonata in G minor (1916-7)

*I. Allegro vivo • II. Intermède. Fantasque et léger •
III. Finale. Très animé*

Lili Boulanger (1893-1918)

Introduction et Cortège (1914) (*Introduction reconstructed by
Tom Poster*)

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Violin Sonata No. 2 in E minor Op. 108 (1916-7)

*I. Allegro non troppo • II. Andante •
III. Allegro non troppo*

Interval

Mel Bonis (1858-1937)

Violin Sonata in F sharp minor Op. 112 (1922)

I. Moderato • II. Presto • III. Lento • IV. Finale. Con moto

Claude Debussy

Beau soir (c.1887-8) *arranged by Jascha Heifetz*

Cécile Chaminade (1857-1944)


Sérénade espagnole Op. 150 (1895) *arranged by Fritz Kreisler*

Reynaldo Hahn (1874-1947)

L'énamourée (1892) *arranged by Elena Urioste*

Louiguy (1916-1991)

La Vie en rose (1945) *arranged by Tom Poster*

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All three Sonatas in tonight's programme date from the First World War. Interleaved between them is a tiny piece by Lili Boulanger who, had it not been for her untimely death in 1918, might have been one of the most important new musical voices after the war. The recital ends with arrangements of four songs, the last of which reminds us that, by the end of the Second World War, music had already taken quite different directions.

Debussy's Sonata for violin and piano (1916-7) was one of three sonatas he composed in a final creative flourish before his death. Long opposed to the dominance of German music, Debussy's late turn to the sonata might seem surprising, except that the tradition he had in mind was the French Baroque rather than Brahms or Beethoven.

The *Allegro vivo* makes this clear with its understated, almost tentative beginning. It presses forwards but immediately holds back, constantly playful and mercurial. An *appassionato* outburst is followed by a dreamy *dolcissimo* sidestep. This music is full of feeling, but approached tangentially, as if Debussy were determined to avoid all Romantic cliché.

The *Intermède* has a Puckish character that recalls the fairy figures explored in Debussy's piano *Préludes*. We might also recall his fondness for the characters of the *commedia dell'arte* (Pierrot and Harlequin) which inhabit his early songs.

The *Finale* is brightly animated and playful – one minute virtuosic, the next sentimental. It opens with a return of the first movement theme, before taking off in running sequences. These are contrasted with a sentimental interlude that sounds like a throwback to Debussy's earlier music. Just before its energetic ending the movement is interrupted by shockingly plain and mechanical patterns. *Chez Debussy*, the *commedia* is never far from the surface.

There is a 1930 recording of Lili Boulanger's *Introduction et Cortège* (on which her sister Nadia played the piano), allowing the lost score to the *Introduction* to be reconstructed, as here by **Tom Poster**. The gentle lullaby makes a perfect foil for the fleet-footed *Cortège*, composed while Boulanger was at the Villa Medici in Rome, the first woman to win the prestigious Prix de Rome (Debussy won it at his third attempt; Ravel never did).

Fauré was 71 when he wrote his Second Violin Sonata (1916-7) and yet it has a pervasive sense of restlessness. Over constantly busy piano textures, the violin tries to find a lyrical voice, or perhaps to *re-find* that of the composer's earlier music.

The first movement has a breathless quality, with the pianist arpeggiating furiously as if his life depended on it. The 12/8 metre, which might normally create a relaxed 'Sicilienne' effect, is agitated and never quite grounded. The *Andante* has a disarming Classical simplicity but also a nostalgic quality, with the lyrical intensity of the violin often troubled by the harmonic complexity of the piano. The third movement begins in a simpler diatonic world but soon reverts to the

restlessness of the whole Sonata. Constantly in motion, and often off the beat, the melodic line is derailed by busy accompaniment patterns. It makes for something at once contemporary and yet strangely wistful.

Mélanie Bonis (1858-1937) preferred to call herself simply **Mel Bonis** to avoid the prejudice experienced by female composers. Her story is an extraordinary one. Her family opposed her musical education (she eventually studied at the Paris Conservatoire) and then prevented her marrying a fellow student. Instead, they arranged her marriage to a businessman 22 years older, twice widowed, and already the father of five boys. She played her marital role for 35 years while not only returning successfully to composition (she wrote over 300 works) but also her fellow Conservatoire student, with whom she had a daughter.

The Violin Sonata is a relatively late work, published in 1923 when Bonis was 64. A substantial piece in four movements, it is written in the style of works like Franck's Sonata in A for violin and piano.

The opening *Moderato* is an impressive sonata-form movement: big in scale, rich in invention, and constantly changeable in its emotional temperature. The two instruments maintain a dialogue throughout, bound together in a closely knit exchange of motivic material.

The *Presto* that follows is a scherzo in all but name. Its constant waltz rhythm is agitated and frequently disrupted by missing downbeats. The *Lento* third movement, based on a traditional Greek folk theme, is mournful and melancholic, making the most of the dark tone of the violin's lowest string.

The *Finale* opens with a bright festive sound like the ringing of bells. It has a dance-like energy and optimism to it, and the two instruments are used in antiphonal exchanges in a much lighter way than in earlier movements.

The programme ends with four song arrangements. **Debussy's** 'Beau soir' sets a poem which urges us to 'relish the charm of being in this world'. **Heifetz's** arrangement fulsomely delivers the beauty evoked by Paul Bourget's lyrics.

Kreisler's arrangement of **Chaminade's** 'Sérénade espagnole' amplifies its Spanish character while fully exploiting the violin's different tone colours.

Hahn's 'L'énamourée', arranged here by **Elena Urioste**, was composed when Hahn was just 17. It's typical of his disarming simplicity and directness of expression and, like the novels of his lover, Marcel Proust, vividly recalls the past back into the present.

Most people don't remember the composer of 'La vie en rose' (known by his pen name, **Louiguy**) but everyone knows the name of the woman who wrote the words and is forever associated with its performance – Edith Piaf. Written in 1945, it offers perennially good advice: since life is short, it's best to cherish the beauty of the world, just as you do when you're in love.

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