

WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 20 October 2021 7.30pm

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet piano

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Danse bohémienne (1880)

Images oubliées (1894)

Lent (mélancolique et doux) • Souvenir du Louvre • Quelques aspects de 'Nous n'irons plus au bois' parce qu'il fait un temps insupportable

Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

Prelude from *Tristan und Isolde* (1857-9) arranged by Zoltán Kocsis

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

Isoldes Liebestod from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* S447 (1867)

Interval

Franz Liszt

Sposalizio from *Années de pèlerinage, deuxième année, Italie* S161 (1838-61)

Claude Debussy

Arabesque No. 1 (c.1890)

Maurice Ohana

12 Etudes d'interprétation (1982-5)

Etude No. 5 'Quintes' • Etude No. 4 'Main gauche seule'

Claude Debussy

Images, Series 1 (1901-5)

Reflets dans l'eau • Hommage à Rameau • Mouvement

L'isle joyeuse (1903-4)

Welcome back to Wigmore Hall

We are grateful to our Friends and donors for their generosity as we rebuild a full series of concerts in 2021/22 and reinforce our efforts to reach audiences everywhere through our broadcasts. To help us present inspirational concerts and support our community of artists, please make a donation by visiting our website:

[Wigmore-hall.org.uk/donate](https://www.wigmore-hall.org.uk/donate). Every gift is making a difference. Thank you.

Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management.

In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions.

Disabled Access and Facilities - full details from 020 7935 2141.

Wigmore Hall is equipped with a 'Loop' to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.



Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • [Wigmore-hall.org.uk](https://www.wigmore-hall.org.uk) • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG

Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Kohn Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND



Piano music by **Claude Debussy** anchors this recital, ranging from his first surviving piano piece to some of his mature masterpieces. The *Danse bohémienne* was composed in the summer of 1880 when the 18-year-old Debussy was working for Tchaikovsky's patron, Nadezhda von Meck. He joined the von Meck family at Interlaken in Switzerland before moving to Arcachon. That September, von Meck sent the *Danse bohémienne* to Tchaikovsky who declared that it was 'a nice piece, but too short, with themes that never get anywhere and a form that lacks unity'. In spite of these shortcomings, the music has considerable charm, and it's fascinating to hear Debussy's earliest composition for his own instrument. The First Arabesque dates from a decade later, and already demonstrates a flair for imaginative piano writing and the emergence of a distinctive style. This evolution continues in the *Images oubliées* of 1894 (originally called just 'Images') which were unpublished until 1977, the manuscript having been for many years in the collection of the pianist Alfred Cortot. Debussy dedicated them to Yvonne Lerolle and noted on the manuscript that 'these pieces will not do well in brightly-lit salons where people who don't like music go to hear it. They are conversations between the piano and one's self. Moreover, it is not forbidden to apply a little sensibility to them on nice rainy days.'

Between 1903 and 1905, Debussy not only finished *La mer* for orchestra, but also wrote some of his most memorable piano music to date. The first set of *Images* was published in 1905, though 'Reflets dans l'eau' and 'Mouvement' already existed in 1901 when Debussy played them to his friend Ricardo Viñes. The central movement, 'Hommage à Rameau' may have been inspired by a performance of Rameau's *Castor et Pollux* that Debussy attended in 1903. 'Hommage' has a sense of quiet monumentality, while the other pieces explore the colours and sonorities of the piano with astonishing imagination, whether in the refined watery world of 'Reflets dans l'eau' or the harsher, more energetic 'Mouvement'.

Composed in 1903–4 and first performed by Debussy's friend Ricardo Viñes in February 1905, *L'isle joyeuse* is one of Debussy's most flamboyant piano pieces. The composer told a correspondent that the piece had some links with Watteau's painting *L'embarquement pour Cythère*, noting that 'you will find the masks of the *commedia dell'arte*, young women singing and dancing, everything culminating in the glory of the setting sun.' It's quite a culmination, as the broad chordal theme first heard near the start of the piece is transformed at the end with a grandeur worthy of Liszt at his best while remaining unmistakably Debussy.

Debussy always had an ambiguous relationship with **Wagner's** music. but in 1887 he declared that *Tristan und Isolde* was 'the most beautiful thing I know in terms of the profundity of the emotion'. He later became more detached from Wagner, famously parodying the start of the *Tristan* prelude in *Children's Corner*. In 1867, **Liszt's** personal relationships with Wagner were particularly strained, but that year he took enormous care over the transcription of the final scene from the opera, reworking it brilliantly for the piano and also coining the name 'Liebestod' for it (with Wagner's approval). More than a century later, in 1978, the Hungarian pianist Zoltán Kocsis published a transcription of the opera's *Prelude* to serve as a companion.

The Italian book of Liszt's *Années de pèlerinage* was composed between the late 1830s and 1849. *Sposalizio*, the first of the set, was one of the first to be written, probably in 1838, then extensively revised before publication. Like *L'isle joyeuse*, it was partly inspired by a painting, but instead of Debussy's celebration of Watteau's hedonistic pleasures, Liszt's inspiration was Raphael's *Lo Sposalizio* (usually known in English as *The Marriage of the Virgin*), depicting the marriage of Mary and Joseph. The result is a stirring musical manifestation of Liszt's devotion to the Virgin Mary. But there's still an intriguing link to Debussy: not only is it in the same key as the First Arabesque (E major), but the falling figure in the coda of *Lo Sposalizio* is eerily similar to a recurring phrase in Debussy's piece.

After growing up in Morocco and Biarritz, **Maurice Ohana** moved to Paris in 1932 to study the piano at the Conservatoire. He gave his first recital at the Salle Pleyel in Paris in February 1936 and the programme included Debussy's *L'isle joyeuse* and *Poissons d'or*, reflecting his lifelong enthusiasm for Debussy. Ohana subsequently devoted himself entirely to composition and the *12 Etudes d'interprétation* were written between 1982 and 1985. 'Quintes' is based on the musical interval of a fifth, and as well as exploiting the distinctive sonority of this interval, it is also a study in *legato* playing. The harmonies and indeed the atmosphere of this piece recall the soundworld of Debussy's 'Etude pour les quartes'. 'Main gauche seule' is a study for the left hand, dedicated to the memory of Maurice Ravel. Beginning and ending in the piano's lowest register, Ohana exploits the whole keyboard in a piece dominated by an agitated *ostinato* figure.

© Nigel Simeone 2021

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.