

# WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 3 February 2022 7.30pm

In Memory of Marcel Proust

Pavel Kolesnikov piano

**Franz Schubert** (1797-1828)

From Fantasy Sonata in G D894 (1826)

*I. Molto moderato e cantabile*

**Louis Couperin** (1626-1661)

Unmeasured Prelude in G minor

**Reynaldo Hahn** (1874-1947)

Les deux écharpes from *Le rossignol éperdu* (1902-10)

**Franz Schubert**

Atzenbrugger Tanz in A D365 No. 30 (1816-21)

**Reynaldo Hahn**

From *Premières valse* (1897)

Ninette • Valse noble

**Franz Schubert**

Waltz in B minor D145 No. 6 (1815-21)

**Reynaldo Hahn**

La Feuille from *Premières valse*

**Franz Schubert**

Atzenbrugger Tanz in A D365 No. 30

**Reynaldo Hahn**

Narghilé from *Le rossignol éperdu*

**Gabriel Fauré** (1845-1924)

Nocturne No. 12 in E minor Op. 107 (1915)

**Louis Couperin**

Sarabande in A minor

Interval

**César Franck** (1822-1890)

Prélude, choral et fugue (1884)

*I. Prélude. Moderato • II. Choral. Poco più lento • III. Fugue. Tempo I*

**Reynaldo Hahn**

Ouranos from *Le rossignol éperdu*

**Franz Schubert**

From Fantasy Sonata in G D894

*II. Andante • III. Menuetto. Allegro moderato - Trio • IV. Allegretto*

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This evening's concert invites us into an early 20th-century French musical salon and is conceived as an homage to the French novelist Marcel Proust (1871–1922) in the centenary year of his death. The programme is unusually structured according to a rhythm of departures and returns. This structure is partly inspired by salon culture of Proust's day, which had a different concept of the musical work and did not share our inclination towards completeness and totality in concert programming. It was not unusual to hear isolated movements from larger works, nor to encounter a reliance on piano transcriptions of music originally composed for other instruments. (In Proust's novel *A la recherche du temps perdu*, both phenomena are observable as regards the treatment of the fictional sonata for piano and violin by the imaginary composer Vinteuil.) The structure of this concert is also more profoundly inspired by Proust's novel in this very rhythm of loss and rediscovery...

**Schubert's** Fantasy Sonata in G frames the concert, its four movements separated into two parts. The only explicit mention of Schubert in Proust's novel is in relation to the protagonist singing a song erroneously though traditionally identified as Schubert's 'Adieu'. Proust seems to have appreciated Schumann more than Schubert, and this preference was probably inspired by Hahn, according to whom Schumann's music has charm whereas Schubert's does not. Pavel Kolesnikov suggests, nonetheless, that Schubert and Proust 'merge miraculously' in their 'art of stretching time and communicating poignant intensity through what is intimate and even minuscule'. The Fantasy Sonata was the last sonata published in Schubert's lifetime, and it has been variously characterized as 'spacious', 'meditative' and 'serene'.

The first movement of Schubert's sonata is followed by an 'Unmeasured Prelude' in G minor by the 17th-century French composer **Louis Couperin**. There was a notable vogue for early music amongst salon hosts and their guests at the turn of the century. Music by contemporary composers – such as Hahn and Fauré, who might even have been present and among the performers – was often programmed alongside works of older composers who were being newly rediscovered. Some of this interest was motivated by a more or less nationalistic quest for 'the French Bach', an honour typically accorded to Jean-Philippe Rameau. The majority of the compositions of Louis Couperin (uncle to the more famous François) are for harpsichord and survive in the Bauyn Manuscript, an anthology compiled after Couperin's death. The ordering of the various preludes and dances is therefore an open question, which Kolesnikov answers here in an anachronistic way by inserting two short pieces by Couperin into a sequence of pieces for piano by Schubert, Hahn, and Fauré. In this manner we hear dance music for keyboard across several centuries, from older dance forms such as the sarabande and Schubert's folk-infused *Atzenbrugger Tanz* to the modern waltz as imagined by Hahn, in three of his *Premières valse*s.

**Hahn** and Proust met at the salon of the painter Madeleine Lemaire in May 1894. They began a romantic relationship which lasted two years before developing into a lifelong friendly intimacy. They shared a love of composers including Schumann, Chopin and Fauré, but disagreed over Wagner and Debussy, whom Proust loved and Hahn disliked. Published in 1912, Hahn's *Le rossignol éperdu* ('The distraught nightingale' – though the adjective 'éperdu' may also be interpreted less negatively as wild, ecstatic, boundless...) consists in its totality of 53 short pieces for solo piano written over the previous decade. Often compared to Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte* ('Songs without words'), we will hear three pieces from this collection. Proust described Hahn as a 'literary musician', and the pieces that make up *Le rossignol éperdu* are appropriately subtitled 'poèmes pour piano'. 'Les deux écharpes' ('The two scarves') has two epigraphs from Verlaine: the first from *Il bacio* ('The kiss'), a poem which includes a description of kissing as a form of 'Lively accompaniment on the keyboard of teeth'; the second from Verlaine's 1874 collection *Romances sans paroles* ('Romances without words'). The other 'poems' are 'Narghilé' ('Hookah') and 'Ouranos' ('Uranus'). The former is part of a set entitled 'Orient'; the latter has an epigraph from Voltaire's *Zadig*, 'on the immutable Order of the Universe' (incidentally, Hahn had a basset hound called Zadig to whom Proust once addressed an affectionate letter).

Hahn and Proust were united in their admiration of **Fauré**. Proust once wrote to Fauré declaring himself to be not only in love with Fauré's music but even so familiar with it as to be able to write a 300-page book about it. Hahn described Fauré as the heir and often the equal of Chopin, and Chopin is certainly one of the sources of inspiration for Fauré's 13 nocturnes. The penultimate nocturne (from 1915) is in ternary form and marked by daring chromaticism and dissonance.

The second half opens with **Franck's** *Prélude, choral et fugue* for solo piano, composed in 1884. Saint-Saëns's damning verdict on this work was that 'the chorale is not a chorale and the fugue is not a fugue'. Yet, as Stephen Hough explains in Franck's defence, 'the forms here have become symbolic'. Franck's characteristic recourse to cyclic form resonates with the structure of Proust's narrative and its meditation on memory. Listen out for musical intertexts in this work ranging from Bach to Wagner.

We return, finally, to the remaining movements of Schubert's Fantasy Sonata, enriched and disorientated by the intervening musical experiences. Proust writes beautifully in praise of the work of memory as we listen to music, describing memory as 'like a labourer toiling to establish lasting foundations amidst the waves'. May our memories do justice to this same task as we return to Schubert and seek to piece together the scattered musical fragments we have heard.

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